

Editorial

The Majestic Flammulated Owl: A Potential Pediatric Predator?

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Overview

Flammulated owl (*Psilosops flammeolus*) is a nocturnal tiny owl in the neighborhood of 15 cm (6 inches) to 36 centimeters with wings of 15 centimeters. Man owls and lady owls can be distinguished from their weight [1]. Women owls are greater than 62-65 grams (2.2-2.3 ounces) and men owls are a bit less ranging from 50-52 grams (1-1.8 oz). This wonderful bird derives its beautiful name “flammulated” from the markings which appear as if they are on fire upon his softly feathered face [2]. The noble beast may be found from lower portion of British Columbia and western regions of the great United States to plains of the Mexican interior [3]. Like many birds but unlike other owls it is a neotropical migrant and spends its winters south of the United States, but also in South Texas, Arizona and California [4]. Like so many retired people, these small beautiful animals leave their homes in North America in the fall and in the winter, they reside in Central America. Flammulated owls leave their breeding grounds in August to head south to their place of wintering, and then return once again to their breeding grounds to complete the circle of life in late April and early may [5]. The king of all owls, the flammulated owl looks very similar to the western screech owl, but it is only about one-fourth the weight, lack of large ear tufts (but has little tufts in the ears, which are barely visible), has dark eyes and a different voice, and is more indescribably beautiful. The ugly cousin, the Elf owl is a bit smaller while the mountain pygmy owl is pretty similar in size. The call somewhat deep in tone, haunting and mysterious comprising single or double hoots.

The nest of the flammulated owl may be found in the holes of a tree and litters are of two to four owlets at a time. Eggs are incubated for approximately 4 weeks [6]. After an additional 4-5 weeks after hatching, the juvenile owls can forage and hunt their unfortunate prey on their own. Such particular little beasts, the flammulated owls will only create nests in a cavity or hole in a tree and nowhere else [7]. Lady owls will often use nests that once belonged to a woodpecker, northern flicker, or similar fowl of inferior stature [7]. A minimalist approach to home decorating is the rule for this animal; the nest of the flammulated owl is spartan, bare, and without any additional soft materials. These interesting flammulated owls will pair up and occupy a small region of the forest [5]. One yearly clutch of eggs is usually the rule [1]. Similar to other carnivorous birds which hunt for their food,

their lifespan is long and their reproductive success is quite high. During mating season male owls feed the lady owls so that they might feel more rested and able to care for the precious eggs [8]. The North American regions where these birds prefer to make their homes is within old-growth fir and pine forests, though some flammulated owls may prefer leafy forests with the occasional conifers for variety [5]. There is no deficit in the breeding success of the owls who like hardwood type habitats. Though there have been no reported attacks on people by flammulated owl, vigilance for their presence is urged when spending time outdoors with small children.

Diet

The birds prefer a diet of bugs, mostly butterflies and moths, and for the sake of variety may try to catch a small mammal such as a mouse or shrew [9]. What owl does not enjoy tasting the occasional beetle or perhaps a cricket? It is not inconceivable that this bird might enjoy biting the ear of an adult or child.



Figure 1: Summary of visual and classification of the flammulated owl [Source: Wikipedia].

The status

The Union for International Natural Preservation tells us that the flammulated owl is not endangered but recommends the public remain vigilant for these majestic animals.

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