

Ptilopsis leucotis

Northern White Faced Scops Owl

Class: Aves. **Order:** Strigiformes. **Family:** Strigidae.

Other names: Scops owl

Physical Description: Northern White Face Scops Owls are medium sized owls with prominent ear tufts and white faces, edged with black. They have a mostly gray body, marked with black and underneath a paler gray with black streaks. They have fine vermiculations on their underside which are wavelike markings. They have bright orange eyes. They have a height of 7-10" and weigh between 6-7oz.



Diet in the Wild: insects, like moths, crickets, beetles, scorpions, and spiders. They also hunt small birds and reptiles, as well as rodents and shrews

Diet at the Zoo: mice, crickets

Habitat & Range: Dry woodland forest, savannah with scattered trees in Northern and Central Africa

Life Span: Up to 30 years

Perils in the wild: Larger birds of prey, pesticide use, and habitat loss

Physical Adaptations:

- To protect their eyes, Owls are equipped with 3 eyelids. They have a normal upper and lower eyelid, the upper closing when the owl blinks, and the lower closing up when the Owl is asleep. The third eyelid is called a nictitating membrane, and is a thin layer of tissue that closes diagonally across the eye, from the inside to the outside. This cleans, protects, and moistens the surface of the eye
- An Owl cannot move its eyes, it can only look straight ahead. Owls make up for this by being able to turn its head 270° around, and almost upside-down. It is able to achieve this by having a long and very flexible neck. An owl's neck has 14 vertebrae; twice as many as humans.
- Owls use of parallax is facilitated by eyes and ears that are widely separated and forward facing; one of the most distinctive features of this family of birds.
- Facial disc collects sounds and concentrates the sounds to the ear, allowing the owl to gauge direction and distance of possible prey.
- The openings of the White-faced Scops Owl's ears are twice as large as those of any comparable scops owl. Their huge ears suggest they rely largely on hearing to detect prey in darkness.
- Owls have broad wings with large surface areas that help them to float through the air without flapping too much. Less flapping makes less noise.
- On both the primary and secondary feathers, there are comb-like structures at the edge of the feather that are responsible for muffling the sound of the air going over the wing – this essentially makes an owl silent when they fly. Also, an owl's feathers can separate from each other on the same wing; therefore, the air flows over each of the individual feathers and their comb-like

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structures, which maximizes how silently an owl flies. Almost-silent flight enables the birds to hear the tiny sounds produced by their small mammal prey and approach them undetected.

- All owls possess a zygodactyl fourth digit (the ability to reverse the fourth digit on its foot so that the talon either points forward or backwards as needed).

Behavioral Adaptations:

- Nocturnal
- Live in pairs or solitarily
- White-faced scops owls are territorial, and can be aggressive when outsiders intrude near their nests.
- To camouflage themselves from predators much larger than their body size, white-faced scops owls pull their feathers inwards (even a wing across their chest to cover their lighter feathers), elongates its body, narrows its eyes to thin slits, and may even lean slightly so as to better blend in with their surroundings on the tree trunks they perch against and look like a branch.
- To defend themselves from predators smaller or only slightly larger than their body size, white-faced scops owls flare their wings to appear two to three times larger in hopes of frightening the predator away.

Reproduction and Development:

- The female will lay 2 or 4 eggs in abandoned stick nests of other small birds or in tree holes. Females incubate the eggs for 30 days, but sometimes the male may assist. Young chicks will start to fly at roughly 33 days old,
- Both parents continue to care for the young for at least 2 weeks after they fledge and then leave their nests shortly after. Chicks are completely independent by 6 weeks.

Additional Information:

- The White-Scops owl is such a distinct species that it is given its own genus, *Ptilopsis*.
- A member of this species named "Popo-chan" was the subject of a Japanese television show
- A group of owls is called a parliament or a wisdom

Conservation Status: (IUCN Status) Least Concern

Conservation Efforts:

Sources:

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