

The Owls of Arlington

By David Howell, author and photographer

Regardless of whether it is true that owls are as wise as folklore suggests, their presence in urban areas enhances the biophilic experience for people who share their space.

Most owls are nocturnal hunters, filling the nighttime with and their calls. By day they are largely concealed, which makes it difficult for many residents to see them or even be aware they exist. Although, residents can be alerted to their presence by the daytime chatter from birds such as crows and jays when they discover an owl in their territory.

A healthy natural habitat is important to support resident owls in any city. Sustaining owls with suitable living spaces can involve conservation, restoration

and even extension of biodiverse places into the built environment. Parks and natural spaces in Arlington, Virginia represent less than five percent of the county's total area of 26 square miles, but these spaces contain a mixed forest ecology supported by good stewardship that extends into some residential areas.

Arlington provides viable habitat for three species of resident owls, including nesting habitat: the Great-horned; the Eastern screech; and the most commonly seen Barred. The Barred owl can be seen and heard in many parks and wooded neighborhoods throughout the year. Great-horned and Barred owls are found more broadly than the tiny Eastern Screech owl, which shuns competition and favors smaller

spaces. These images show both adults of each species and unfledged owlets, months away from supporting themselves.

Images

Lower left: Eastern Screech with owlets

Lower right: napping Barred

Opp. top left: Eastern Screech

Opp. top right: Great Horned Owl

Opp. lower left: Great Horned owlets waiting for lunch

Opp. lower right: Barred with owlet in nest

