

inSTALLations

February 2008

Creature Feature Great Horned Owl

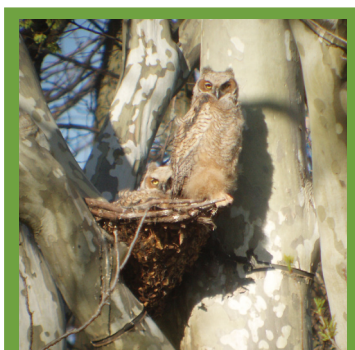


Female on a nesting platform installed by Michigan State University researchers on Nature Center property.

While many other birds wait for warmer weather to raise their young, Great Horned Owls begin nesting in February. Females incubate the eggs and can keep them near 98 degrees even when the air temperature is below zero. The male defends the nesting territory and feeds his mate while she sits on the nest.

About 6 weeks after hatching, young owlets will perch on the branches around the nest. By 7 weeks, short flights are completed. The young birds will remain close to their parents through the summer, while they learn to hunt effectively.

Great Horned Owls do not build their own nests. Abandoned American Crow or Red-tailed Hawk nests, dead trees, and human-made nest platforms all work well. When you are out on the trails, look for nesting platforms that have been constructed by Michigan State University researchers. Let us know if you find an occupied platform!



Two owlets in the nest across the Chippewa River.

Nature Nuggets

Great Horned Owls are at the top of the food chain. Other than people, only large predatory birds like Goshawks pose them any real danger.

Voles spend the winter in the *subnivean* layer or the space between the surface of the



ground and the bottom of the snow layer. Even hidden beneath the snow they can fall victim to a listening owl.

In the winter, **Eastern Cottontails** eat twigs and bark. They may hide in an abandoned woodchuck burrow, a hollow log,



or a low spot under a shrub or evergreen. If there is snow on the ground, their brown fur makes them a very visible target for hungry Great Horned Owls.

Visit the Information Desk for program information.