



# Irish Owls



## Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*



**Irish name:**  
**Ceann cait**

Long-eared Owls are the commonest owl in Ireland, with a scattered range throughout the country. They are found in woods, copses and coniferous plantations adjacent to open grassland where they hunt mice, rats, shrews and Bank Voles.



**Long-eared Owl**

Long-eared Owls typically lay 3-5 white eggs from late March onwards and these are incubated for 25-30 days. The chicks typically hatch out over a period of 10 to 12 days and fledge at about five weeks. They remain dependent on their parents until about two months old.

In Ireland local populations of Long-eared Owls can be threatened by loss of rough grassland, and increased pesticide use which may reduce prey numbers. The felling of conifer plantations during the breeding season should also be avoided. However as a breeding species the Long-eared Owl is generally doing well and is not listed as being of conservation concern.

They get their name from their long ear tufts, which are located above the facial disc, giving them a cat-like appearance. These are raised when the owl is alarmed or curious but lie flat when the owl is relaxed or flying.

They have a handsome mottled brown coloured plumage (feathers) over most of the body and are well camouflaged. The eyes are a fiery orange, encircled by black feathers set into an orange facial disc. The forehead and lores are a mottled grey-white and the bill is black.

They are a medium sized owl averaging 35 - 40 cm in length and a maximum of 350g (females are heavier than males).



### **Did you know?**

Long-eared Owls sometimes gather in large numbers in winter to roost together. One such gathering in Germany had 50 owls.

The actual numbers of Long-eared Owls in Ireland is unknown - they are extremely difficult to survey as they are strongly nocturnal and usually very quiet when hunting. You can hear them calling for a mate in early spring with a low-pitched 'hoo'. The young can often be very noisy when calling for food later in the year - their calls sound like a squeaky gate being opened.

Long-eared Owls nest almost exclusively in the old stick nests of crows, magpies, ravens and sparrowhawks or in a squirrels' drey. They have an impressive nest defence display - lowering the head, spreading the wings out widely and flaring the flight feathers - this doubles or triples their apparent size, and may be accompanied by hisses or bill snapping.





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