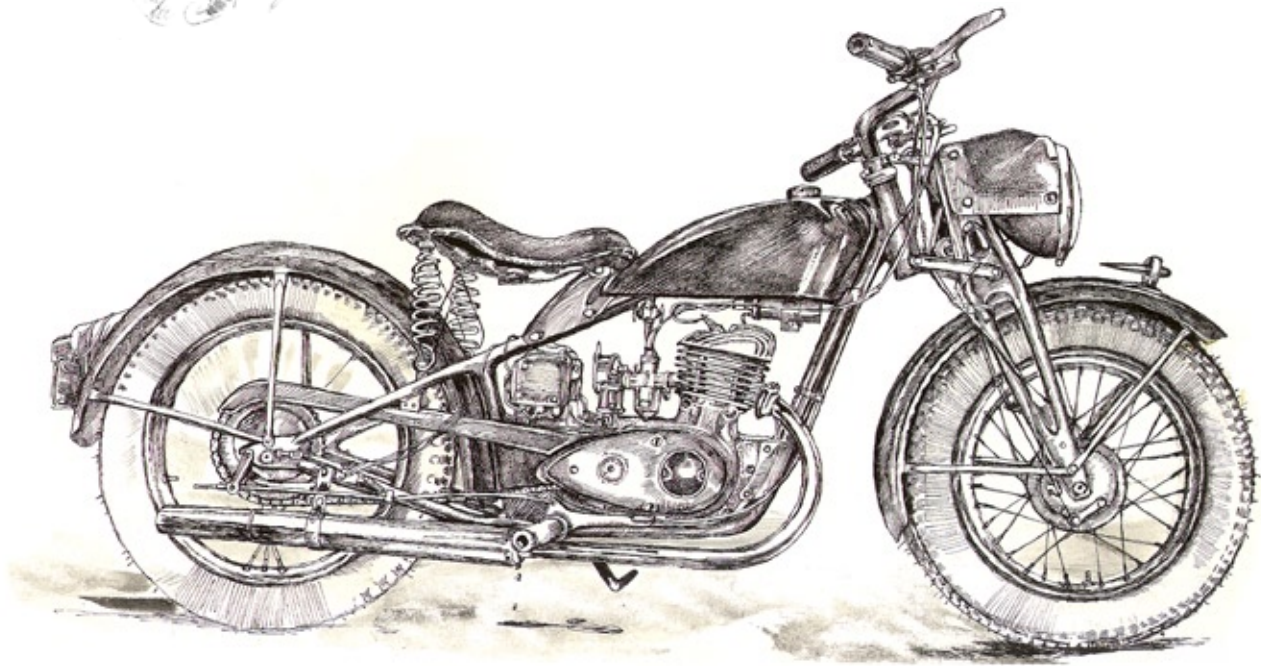


DEEPWOOD + STUDIO
ILLUSTRATION



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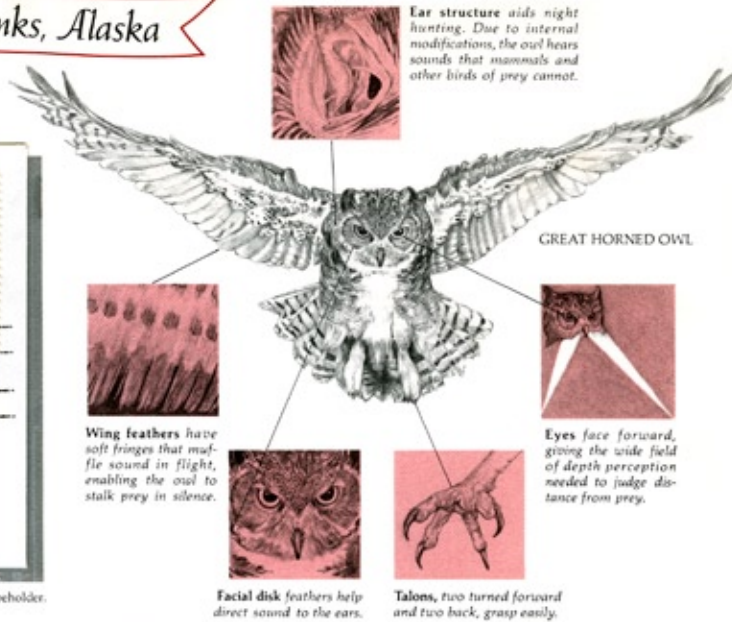
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Place of issue *Fairbanks, Alaska*

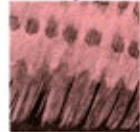


with unblinking gaze into the eyes of the beholder.

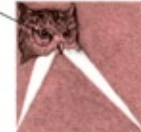


Ear structure aids night hunting. Due to internal modifications, the owl hears sounds that mammals and other birds of prey cannot.

GREAT HORNED OWL



Wing feathers have soft fringes that muffle sound in flight, enabling the owl to stalk prey in silence.



Eyes face forward, giving the wide field of depth perception needed to judge distance from prey.



Facial disk feathers help direct sound to the ears.



Talons, two turned forward and two back, grasp easily.



Hunting in total darkness, the Barn Owl fixes the position of its prey by the sound waves it hears; then silently flapping its wings, it descends on its catch. Until the last moment, the owl keeps its head zeroed in on the prey—then thrusts out its talons.

When there is enough light, the Barn Owl does not have to rely solely on hearing. It homes in on its prey in a decisive glide.

THE FASCINATING PHYSIOLOGY OF OWLS

vision is 180 degrees. His binocular vision—the areas seen by both eyes at the same time—is 140 degrees.) In contrast, the eyes of birds that are preyed upon are set at the sides of the head, affording a wide field of vision but little binocular sight. The homing pigeon's visual field, for example, is 340 degrees, but its binocular sight extends over a mere 24 degrees.

The owl's relatively narrow visual field is due not only to the forward position of its eyes but also to the fact that the eyeballs are fixed in their sockets. Unable to rotate its eyeballs, the owl cannot see out of the sides of its eyes. But here, as anyone who has circled around a perching owl can attest, nature has provided a remarkable compensation. As its eyes follow the circling bird-watcher (or an object of prey), the owl seems to make a full swing of its head. In truth, the owl's head can make a full three-quarter turn, or 270 degrees; what seems like a complete rotation is an illusion. The bird swivels its head first in one direction, then in the other, with such speed that it appears as if its head is making a full 360-degree revolution.

Another Keen Sense

Perhaps even more amazing than the owl's eyesight is the bird's hearing. For nearly a century it has been known that the ears on the left and right sides differ from each other, sometimes in size, sometimes in placement and structure. The type of asymmetry varies from species to species. This curious morphology is not simply external but continues within the skull itself. Examination of the skull of a Boreal Owl, for example, reveals that the kidney-shaped ear opening in the skull on the right side is placed well above the dissimilar and rather elongated opening of the left ear.

The Commemorative Stamp

The Barred Owl commemorative is one of a block of four designed by Frank J. Waslick and issued August 26, 1978, in Fairbanks, Alaska, as part of the Wildlife Conservation series. The other three commemoratives featured a Saw-whet, a Great Gray, and a Great Horned owl. Printed by offset-intaglio, the vertical, standard-size 15-cent commemoratives were printed in panes of 50. Five offset colors (yellow, orange, light blue, dark blue, and gray) and three intaglio colors (brown, blue, and black) were used. Each pane bore one plate number.

By Angus Cameron, coauthor of *The Nightwatchers*



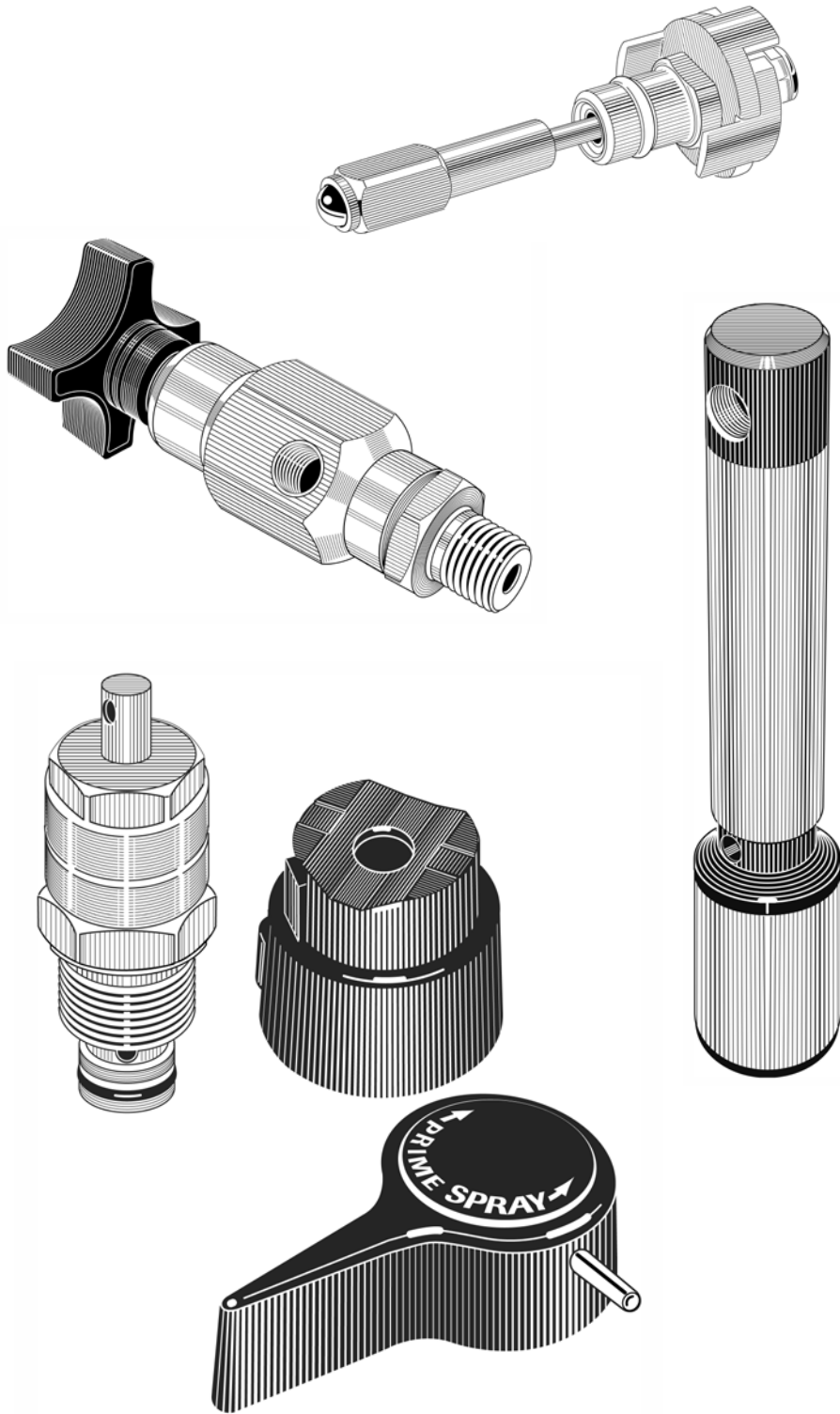
Extraordinary postures, such as the one assumed by this Short-eared Owl, gave rise to the speculation that an owl might inadvertently "swing its own neck" by turning its head a full 360°. However, flexible as it is, the owl's neck permits the head to turn a mere 270°.



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