

# Living the HIGH LIFE

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PHOTOS BY MICHAEL QUINTON

**This feathery mom welcomes you to watch her family grow.**

**LOOK OUT!** It's a female *great gray owl*, coming in for a landing. She's Mama Owl, flying in to tend to her newly laid eggs. The nest is *waaaaay* up high, near the top of a tall aspen tree. Mom and her mate didn't bother making their own nest. They just moved into this one, left behind by a hawk family.

Up here in Alaska, a spring snowstorm isn't unusual. Mama Owl sticks to her job of keeping her eggs warm and safe (**circle**). These owls are tough birds! They're right at home in frosty northern forests all across the globe (see map).





1

MOM SITS. DAD NEVER QUILTS!

Meal  
delivery.Thanks! Ooh, I  
think an egg is  
hatching!**HAPPY  
HATCH DAY!**

The chicks take about a month to develop inside the eggs. It's mostly Mom that tends to the eggs. But don't feel sorry for her, because her helpful mate is never far away.

Papa Owl keeps watch and delivers food regularly, so Mom stays well fed. Great grays are very large owls—the world's tallest. They can easily catch and eat prey as big as snowshoe hares. But smaller prey—voles, baby squirrels, or chicks

nabbed from the nests of other birds—make good meals, too. Once the eggs hatch, Papa increases his delivery service—by a LOT! And Mom stays busy feeding herself and her hungry little ones.

What about  
ME?!

2

HUNGRY HATCHLINGS.

It's getting  
crowded in  
here!

4

FIRST TO HATCH, FIRST TO LEAVE?



The young owls, or *owlets*, don't stay little for long. Within another month, grown-up feathers are sprouting through

their thick, white, fuzzy down. And pretty soon, the owlets are taking up all the space in the nest. Time to step

out? Sure! No worries . . . the parents continue their duties, even outside the nest.

Sorry...this  
table is taken!

3

BIGGER AND FLUFFIER!

Did you  
grab me  
some grub,  
Dad?

5

NO MORE NEST! IT'S TIME FOR EATING OUT!



What now?  
My wings  
don't work  
yet!



WATCH IT!



My wings *do*  
help me climb,  
though!

### NEXT STEPS

Come summer, the owlets begin testing the world outside their nest. They can't fly at first. And they might end up on the ground. There, they can strut and hop around. But it's not the safest place to stay for long. There's no way they could defend themselves against a hungry bear or wild cat.

For their first week or two out of the nest, the owlets use their wings, beaks, and the sharp *talons* on their toes to climb back up into the trees. Mom is still around, watching.

And Dad is still bringing them meals. But as summer comes to an end, the youngsters are ready to make their own ways in the world. 🦉

## Who Took These Pix? And How?

Wildlife photographer Michael Quinton captured these amazing photos. He did so by understanding the habits of the owls. And, of course, he uses excellent equipment—and has plenty of patience!



Michael first discovered the nest while wandering in this forest and hearing the hoots of a great gray owl. But see **above** how high up the nest is? There's no way to get a view like the ones in this story from down below. So, Michael secured a ladder against a nearby tree and a hideout—called a *blind*—at the very top. From that position above the

nest, Michael could quietly wait and watch for any activity he wanted to capture. And he could come and go as needed to record the family story, from eggs to first flight. Easy-peasy? No way!