



Introduction

A unique population of great gray owls was discovered in the Blue Mountains in the 1980s in an area called Spring Creek. This population is unique because of the high density of birds (at least eight pairs in 4 square miles) and because they have nested every year, except one, since 1982.

The Spring Creek area was logged in the 1970s leaving open, parklike stands of ponderosa pine with islands of denser stands of Douglas-fir. The owls hunt in the open stands of pine and nest in the dense Douglas-fir habitats, which provide shade and protection from avian predators, such as ravens and great horned owls.

Originally the owls nested on vacant northern goshawk nests. Most of the owls now nest on artificial platforms, however, because the stick nests have disintegrated, and large snags, also used for nests, are not present. The artificial platforms are about 2 feet square and are placed 30-50 feet off the ground in large trees. The La Grande Ranger District of the USDA Forest Service, which manages Spring Creek area, has an ongoing program to provide nest platforms for great gray owls.



Nesting

Great grays begin courtship in February and are quite vocal. Courtship occurs at night and is a series of food-begging calls consisting of a series of whistles.

Incubation starts from mid-March and lasts 30 days. The birds are present at this time. The female incubates the young, and the male brings food. After the young hatch, they remain in the nest. During the week before they fledge, the young become quite vocal. They normally remain near the nest for several weeks after they fledge.

Time to Visit

The best time to observe the Spring Creek area is between mid-June and mid-August. At this time, the young are leaving the nest and are very vocal during the early evening hours. The adults hunt during these times.

To find the birds, search the map in the early evening. Listen for the calls and adult hoots, and watch for the birds.

Photos

Top right: Female great gray owl on a nest on top of a dead tree trunk.

Middle: Great gray owl on an artificial nest platform.

Bottom: Juvenile great gray owl.

Top left: Unlogged old-growth forest with a great gray owl nest.

Background: Partially logged forest used for foraging.

Great Gray Owl

MANAGEMENT AREA



Authors

EVELYN L. BULL is a research wildlife biologist, USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, 1401 Gekeler Lane, La Grande, Oregon 97850; and ARLENE K. BLUMTON is a wildlife biologist, USDA Forest Service, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, La Grande Ranger District, 3502 Hwy. 30, La Grande, Oregon 97850.

Cooperators

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
 Pacific Northwest Research Station
 Blue Mountain Audubon Society
 Grande Ronde Bird Club

For Additional Information

Contact the La Grande Ranger District, 3502 Hwy. 30, La Grande, Oregon 97850. Phone (541) 963-7186.



Pacific Northwest Research Station
 P.O. Box 3890
 Portland, OR 97208

United States
 Department of
 Agriculture

Forest Service
 June 1993

PREPARED BY
 Pacific Northwest
 Research Station

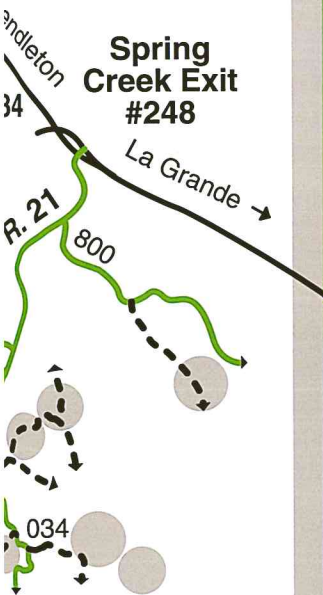
Responsible Viewing

Although great gray owls are typically docile, they defend their young fiercely. Young should not be approached closely or handled under any circumstances. In addition, keep far away from nests to avoid disturbing nesting adults. Adults flushed from nests will leave eggs or young vulnerable to ever watchful avian predators.

Observe road closure signs, which often are posted on National Forest roads. Closures give animals space to move about without being disturbed or threatened by vehicular traffic. Keep pets leashed; do not allow them to chase or harass wildlife.

Camping is permitted in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, Spring Creek area. Campers are encouraged to keep camps clean and establish sites away from streams.

Great gray owl nesting on a vacant northern goshawk nest.



Great Gray Owls

Spring Creek

... west of La Grande and 43
 Take the Spring Creek exit off
 Forest Road 21 South for
 road numbers until you
 see the map. The circled areas
 are seen and are usually a
 road. The roads marked
 and passable with cars. The
 closed roads or dirt roads not
 g. Spring Creek is also a big
 portions of the area are closed
 until April. The area normally
 after because of snow.