

Cambridge Primary Checkpoint

ENGLISH

0058/01

Paper 1 Non-fiction

May 2026

INSERT

1 hour

INFORMATION

- This insert contains the reading text.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.



This document has **4** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

Text for **Section A****What an Owl Knows**

I once had the chance to meet a Great Grey Owl up close. Percy was the male in a pair of Great Greys at a zoo in Sweden. The zookeeper let me into the spacious aviary¹ and told me to stand quietly by a railing.



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At first the big bird stayed in a far corner of the enclosure. But when the zookeeper brought out a bowl of frozen mice, Percy launched into the air. With slow, quiet wingbeats he flew over to the railing and landed soundlessly just two or three feet from me. He looked enormous, and his massive head turned towards me until the whole round dish of his humanlike face stared straight at me. The zookeeper gave him a frozen mouse, which he wolfed down. Then another, and another, swallowing them whole.

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Great Grey Owls don't usually get their meals given out like this in daylight. They rely on their skills as night hunters. No other bird hunts mammals and other birds at night the way owls do.

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Some years ago, two naturalists in Canada observed Great Grey Owls on dark winter nights. They saw how the owls would move from tree to tree until they reached a spot where they seemed to sense something beneath the snow.

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'The bird would stop looking around and would stare down at one spot,' the naturalists wrote. 'It appeared almost hypnotised² by the spot below. Although we were often observing them very closely, we rarely saw anything. Yet the owls would almost always capture prey after plunging into what looked like bare snow.'

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Locating invisible prey? What sort of magical power is that?

How does a bird do this? With a head designed for listening, like Percy's. The flat, grey facial disk of a Great Grey Owl is like a huge ear, like a feathered satellite dish collecting sound.

The facial disk in owls that hunt mostly by sound is outlined with a ring of feathers. This captures sound waves and directs them towards the ears, like people cupping their hands around their ears.

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An owl's ears are just openings in each side of the head, well covered with feathers that allow sound to pass through. The size of an owl's ears varies from species to species, depending not just on whether they hunt in daylight or darkness, but on the invisibility of their prey.

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And Percy's prey? In the wild anyway, it's often buried deep in snow, which hides everything visually.

A Great Grey Owl is listening, always listening. Its ears are so sensitive, it can hear the faint footfall of a shrew in the forest, the wingbeat of a Canada Jay, the muffled rustle of a vole³ tunnelling deep beneath the snow. It will fly to the spot, hover over it, head facing down toward the sound. Then, just before hitting the ground, it will thrust its legs forward and punch through the snow more than half a metre deep to grab its prey.

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Glossary

¹aviary: a large cage or enclosure for birds

²to hypnotise: to totally capture somebody's attention

³shrews and voles: small (mouse-like) mammals

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