

# “Hoo” Goes There? Great Horned Owls in Forest Park, Saint Louis

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## Why study urban owls?

Great horned owls are apex – or top – predators. Just like lions and wolves, their actions have cascading effects on the rest of the food web.

We are studying Astrid and Edward, two great horned owls living in Forest Park, to learn how their movement patterns and dietary habits differ from those of rural owls. As human development reaches deeper into wild spaces, the ecology of these areas is sure to change, but in what ways?

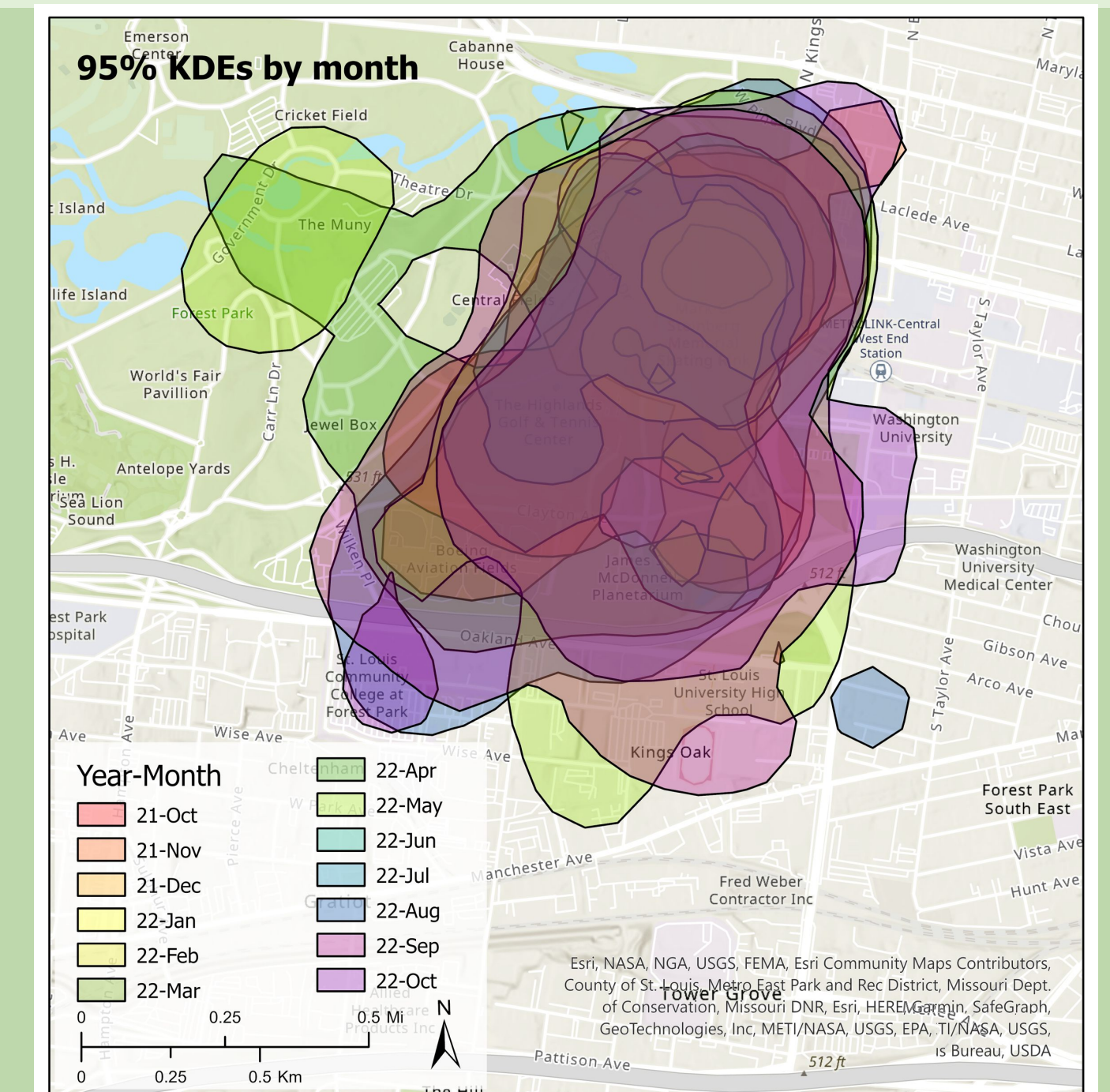
With this research, we seek to answer questions about how the ecology of these avian predators could change with growing urbanization and what effects these changes could have on the rest of the ecosystem.



## Astrid takes flight!

Astrid was fitted with a specially designed GPS tracker in October 2021. By wearing the tracker, Astrid has helped us collect data on her movement and behavior, revealing which parts of the park she relies on. This includes:

- Steinberg Skating Rink
- Prairie Boardwalk
- Jefferson Lake
- Highlands Golf Course
- Boeing Aviation Fields
- Barnes Jewish Hospital
- Saint Louis Community College



Kernel Density Estimates (KDEs) show which areas are used most often by a tracked animal.

## The science of “pellet-ology”

Great horned owls will prey on anything they can get their talons on and fly away with! Just like other raptors, great horned owls produce pellets as a byproduct of digestion. By dissecting pellets from Astrid and Edward and identifying the bones, we can estimate the seasonal diet of these urban predators:

- Mice (*Mus*)
- Voles (*Microtus*)
- Rats (*Rattus*)
- Squirrels (*Sciuridae*)
- Rabbits (*Sylvilagus*)
- Small birds (*Aves*)

