

## Baby owls halt campus construction

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Bright, golden-yellow eyes and horn-like ear tufts of feathers peep among the trees near Mullen Park on UNC Asheville's campus, causing a temporary pause on construction.

A family of Great Horned owls hatched two young fledglings who are now able to move independently. The discovery of the young owls caused campus construction of new residence halls and Highsmith Student Union to be held until they could fly without the assistance of their parents.

"To put the construction on a pause was really a group decision that was made by university leadership, including Chancellor Grant, that we really all felt collectively, that we were close enough to the fledglings becoming independent that we needed to make this work for all parties involved," said Bill Haggard, vice chancellor of student affairs.

Haggard said he was first notified about the Great Horned owls nesting in mid-March.

According to North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Great Horned owls are the largest owl species in North Carolina. While these owls are not endangered, they are protected by federal and state laws. It is illegal to injure, harass or kill a bird of prey, which includes the harming or removal of a nest.

"They are naturally rare because they're an apex predator and large apex predators are at the top of the food chain," said Andrew Laughlin, assistant professor for environmental studies. "Top of the food chain predators are just naturally going to be rare in the environment than lower level trophic organisms. They are not endangered. They are not threatened. They are not even a species of concern."

A family of Great Horned owls discovered nesting in a tree, halted campus construction until the fledglings in the nest were at the point in their development where they could fly away.

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