How do owls fly so quietly?

Flap, flap, flap! When a pigeon flies away, you can hear its wings. But an owl can fly right over your head at night, and you won't hear a thing. How do owls fly so quietly?



Why?

1. **Comb edges.**
   The first feather on the front edge of an owl's wing has tiny teeth, like a comb! The comb splits the air into lots of tiny streams, so it can't make big noisy swirls.
2. **Frilly edges and velvet fuzz.**
   The back edge of the feathers is soft and frilly, like the fringe on a scarf, so the air slips away gently. And the feathers are covered in soft fuzz, like velvet, that keeps them quiet.
3. **Big wings, slow flaps.**
   Owls have big wings for their little bodies, so they don't need to flap hard or fast. They can glide, slow and smooth. And slow flaps make less noise.

Try it! Paper or scarf?

You need: a piece of stiff paper and a soft, fuzzy scarf

1. Wave the stiff paper fast through the air. Do you hear a whoosh?
2. Now wave the fuzzy scarf the same way.
3. Which one is quieter?

What happened? That's the owl's velvet trick!

Video + more questions:
whywhywhykids.com/owlfly

scan with a grown-up