

Barn Owl Tyto Alba

Description:	<p>Barn owls are common throughout the world. They are distinguished by the heart shaped disc of feathers on their faces. Beige with speckles, the male and female have similar coloring, except the male's chest is white. Females are slightly larger than males.</p> <p>They have asymmetrical ears. This combined with their facial feathers (shaped like a satellite dish to funnel sound) help them triangulate the location of their prey and find it even in complete darkness.</p> <p>Often known to make hissing, popping, screeching and screaming noises. They do not make the traditional "who" noises.</p> <p>Their wings have serrated edges for soundless flight. Their eyesight is very acute, but contrary to common belief they cannot see in total darkness, instead they will rely on their hearing.</p>
Size:	<p>Females – 15" tall, 43" wingspan and weigh 20oz Males – 15" tall, 42" wingspan and weigh 16oz</p>
Habitat:	<p>Found on 6 continents. Nest in tree cavities, old buildings or caves. Nest areas will be close to open grasslands or woodlands.</p>
Range:	<p>They are found throughout almost the entire US except some northern states. Other species are found throughout the world.</p>
Predators:	<p>Great horned owls commonly take them as prey. Snakes, foxes, skunks and opossum sometimes prey on barn owls.</p>
Diet/Prey:	<p>Most commonly eat voles, but will also consume many vole sized rodents. Will also occasionally eat snakes, lizards, frogs, fish and other birds. Can be cannibalistic if food supplies are low. Use excellent sense of hearing to locate scurrying prey, snatch it with their talons and consume.</p> <p>Hunts at night just after dusk or 2 hours before sunrise. Seeks prey by flying low over fields.</p>
Aquarium Diet:	<p>Mice</p>
Reproduction:	<p>Nest in tree cavities, caves, barns or other abandoned buildings. They do not build a traditional nest however. Males perform display flights and loud wing claps, and then feed the female.</p> <p>Females lay 3-12 eggs, and possibly 3 broods per year. Incubation is by the female only and last about a month. The male brings food to the female.</p>

Owlets hatch and remain with the parents for the first few weeks. The mother will then also begin to hunt and bring back food. Owlets take their first flight after about 2 months. Young will remain by the nest until they have learned adequate hunting skills.

Fun Facts:

- Common conservation projects now encourage “nest boxes”. Placed high in a tree at the edge of a field the boxes will usually have occupants within the year.
- Unlike humans that can only tell the direction of sound as left or right, owls use their asymmetrical ears to triangulate the sounds and can determine not only horizontal but also vertical position.
- In an area with few males, one male could be the father and primary food gatherer for two different nests up to a mile apart.
- Collisions of young owls with cars, fences, trucks and trains are common.
- There are many myths about barn owls...most stemming from them nesting in church steeples. Some claim them an omen of death.
- A barn owl reaching the age of 10 (only 1%) is considered extremely lucky.
- They are not territorial.

Conservation
Connection:

Most deaths occur by collisions with fencing, cars, trucks, and trains. Pesticides affecting their food sources, is also leading to starvation. Reducing pesticide use on farm fields is one conservation measure.

The most common measure is the placement of nest boxes near homes and fields. The boxes, which are easy to construct, provide a stable and safe place to nest, and are also easy for humans to monitor and clean.

Ecology:

Very helpful for rodent control, that maintains stable populations and will discourage damage to vegetation.

Status in SC:

Resident, breeding; semi-sparse

References:

Owl Pages. www.owlpages.com

Kaufman, Ken. Lives of North American Birds.
Houghton Mifflin. 1996.