

Barn Owl

Tyto alba

Ghostly pale and strictly nocturnal, Barn Owls are silent predators of the night world. Lanky, with a whitish face, chest, and belly, and buffy upperparts, this owl roosts in hidden, quiet places during the day. By night, they hunt on buoyant wingbeats in open fields and meadows. You can find them by listening for their eerie, raspy calls, quite unlike the hoots of other owls. Despite a worldwide distribution, Barn Owls are declining in parts of their range due to habitat loss.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

These medium-sized owls have long, rounded wings and short tails, which combine with a buoyant, loping flight to give them a distinctive flight style. The legs are long and the head is smoothly rounded, without ear tufts.

Color Pattern

Barn Owls are pale overall with dark eyes. They have a mix of buff and gray on the head, back, and upperwings, and are white on the face, body, and underwings. When seen at night they can appear all white.

Behavior

Barn Owls nest and roost in cavities, abandoned barns and other buildings, and dense trees. At night, Barn Owls hunt by flying low, back and forth over open habitats, searching for small rodents primarily by sound.

Habitat

Barn Owls require large areas of open land over which to hunt. This can either be marsh, grasslands, or mixed agricultural fields. For nesting and roosting, they prefer quiet cavities, either in trees or man-made structures such as barns or silos.

Cool Facts

- Barn Owls swallow their prey whole—skin, bones, and all. About twice a day, they cough up pellets instead of passing all that material through their digestive tracts. The pellets make a great record of what the owls have eaten, and scientists study them to learn more about the owls and the ecosystems they live in.
- The Barn Owl has excellent low-light vision, and can easily find prey at night by sight. But its ability to locate prey by sound alone is the best of any animal that has ever been tested. It can catch mice in complete darkness in the lab, or hidden by vegetation or snow out in the real world.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 12.6 - 15.7 inches
- Wingspan - 39.4 - 49.2 inches
- Weight - 14.1 - 24.7 ounces

