



## Barn Owls

With their characteristic heart-shaped face, jet black eyes, pure white under parts and a dappled gold and grey back, the barn owl is one of Britain's most recognisable wild birds.

### Hunting

Barn owls use their incredible sense of hearing to hunt small rodents like field voles and mice, which they swallow whole, regurgitating the indigestible parts in large, smooth blackish pellets. The feathers on the edge of the barn owl's heart-shaped face create a disc to focus and trap sound, whilst their asymmetrical ears allow barn owls to pin point sounds, helping them to locate their prey with absolute accuracy. Barn owls are usually active in the evening, early morning or at night, but in times of hard frost or snowfall, individuals may be forced to hunt for longer periods and may be seen in the day.

### Breeding

Barn owls are usually monogamous, staying with the same partner throughout their life. Courtship begins in February, with the male bringing the female food. Barn



Barn owl in field - Credit Jon Hawkins

owls use holes in trees, in undisturbed buildings or nest boxes to create an unlined nest, and then in April or May they lay 4 to 7 eggs which are incubated for 30-31 days. The eggs are laid at 2 to 3 day intervals. Often the males are kicked out of the nest when eggs are laid and have to find a nearby spot to roost. However, the young are cared for by both parents, with the male bringing the majority of the food during the earlier stages. The young remain in the nest for up to 80 days, at which point they are ready to fledge. In good years, where prey is abundant, barn owls may have a second brood.

### Habitat

The best habitat for barn owls is rough tussocky grassland which supports an abundance of small mammals such as field voles. Other good habitats where barn owls can hunt include marshland or along watercourses, wide rough grasses margins or ditches and, whilst barn owls are not woodland birds, along woodland edges and wide clearings.



Owlet - Credit Steve Edwards



## Why are barn owls in trouble?

The barn owl is one of the most wide-ranging birds in the world, found in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas and Australasia. However, from the middle of the 19th Century, the beautiful barn owl began to decline in Britain. The original decline in the 19th Century is thought to have been the result of an increase in persecution. The decline continued between the 1930s and 1990s as a result of agricultural intensification, poor winter weather, traffic deaths, pesticide use and a loss of hunting and nesting sites. In the early 2000s barn owl numbers did seem to be improving, but the bad winters of the late 2000s has seemingly wiped out any increase in the numbers. 2013 was one of the worst breeding seasons for barn owls due to the heavy snowfall of March 2013, just before the breeding season.

## Thank you for your support

Your support as a member is helping Yorkshire Wildlife Trust create new habitat for barn owls, from rough grassland to wetland grassland and to care for existing permanent grasslands, such as traditional haymeadows, that provide good hunting grounds for barn owls. You are also helping the Trust to put up barn owls boxes, in pairs, in areas of good habitat and areas where barn owls



Barn owl - Credit Elliott Neep (elliottneep.com)



Barn owl in flight - Credit Elliott Neep (elliottneep.com)

are known to frequent. Your support is helping the Trust to respond quickly to development proposals where barn owls are threatened.

## Find out more

If you are not a member then find out more about Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and how to become a member, plus more about the work we do for barn owls by contacting us in the following ways:

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