

Barn Owl



Barn Owl Facts

The barn owl was the most common owl in Britain during the 18th and 19th centuries. The population began to decline in the latter half of the 1800s, and by 1932 there were estimated to be some 12,000 pairs in England and Wales. Intensive farming and the use of pesticides after WW2 reduced the figure to around 3,800.

Barn owls can be found on mixed farmland with hedges, copses and areas of rough grassland. Organic farms where pesticides aren't used are good places for barn owls.

Barn owls have amazing hearing and hunt by sound rather than by sight. They have a concave heart-shaped facial disc that acts like a radar dish, funnelling sound towards the ears. These are asymmetric, meaning one ear is higher



than the other, and this allows barn owls to detect the location of their prey with pinpoint accuracy.

Owls eat their prey whole, but regurgitate the bones, fur and other indigestible bits as owl pellets. You may find these in your owl box or in a barn that owls are using. You can pull the pellets apart and try and identify the bones to find out what's been eaten (usually voles, mice and shrews).



The Box

To give the best chance of success, your nest box should be put up by November, although there are no guarantees that it will be used in the next breeding year. You can put it in an old barn, on isolated farmland trees or on the edge of a wooded area, overlooking open land where they can hunt. They need a clear flight path to and from the box.

Boxes should ideally be placed around 15 feet high (to avoid vandalism) and face south-east, but more importantly, facing away from prevailing wind and rain.

To find out more about barn owls and where you can see them, go to www.barnowl.co.uk. Useful books are *Barn Owls in Britain* by Jeff Martin published by Whittet Books, and *Analysis of Owl Pellets* by Derek Yalden published by The Mammal Society



Did you know...

Because barn owls hunt at night, are pure white underneath and fly silently, they are sometimes known as

Ghost Owls. Oh, and they don't hoot, they screech. Spooky!

cubs



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