



How to Help

Barn Owls

Barn Owls are widespread residents of the lower 48 States and Hawaii, where they occupy a wide range of open areas. They nest in cavities and buildings, including tree cavities, cliffs, caves, river banks, church steeples, barn lofts, haystacks, and nest boxes. Barn Owls eat mostly small rodents, and can be helped by maintaining open hunting areas and by placing nest boxes in appropriate habitat, especially away from roadways where they are often struck by vehicles.

What Barn Owls Need

Food: Barn Owls hunt for rodents and other small mammals in open areas including fields, grasslands, marshes, and deserts. They usually need a large home range of 500-2000 acres in order to find enough food. They hunt at night by flying low over fields and listening for prey. Uses low posts and other perches in hunting area while not in flight.

Nesting: Barn Owls nest near hunting areas in sheltered locations, including tree cavities, caves, and open buildings. Nest sites are often reused for many years, but commonly see high turnover and may be used by different birds each year. Barn Owls can raise two or more broods per year and can also breed year-round where the climate permits.

Shelter: Roosts by day in nest area, trees, or other dense low vegetation.

Other: Barn Owls are often struck by vehicles when the birds fly low across roadways while foraging.

How You Can Help

- Maintain large open fields and other areas as hunting areas.
- Individual owners of large property tracts, as well as municipalities, and land managers should include green belts and fields and open spaces as part of their landscape planning.
- Install fence posts for hunting perches adjacent to large fields.
- Avoid use of pesticides that may both reduce available prey and directly poison owls. Since owls are effective rodent hunters, encourage their hunting activities as part of an Integrated Pest Management plan.
- Install nest boxes in rafters of open barns, on or in other open outbuildings, or on poles in open areas.
- Boxes should be large—36 x 24 x 24 inches, with a 10 x 8 inch square opening, and an adjacent ledge for young to roost on as they mature.
- Leave barn or other roost buildings open for easy access by roosting owls. Avoid disturbing owls in known roost locations.
- Maintain trees along hedgerows or in shelterbelts.
- Consider planting trees along busy roadways through owl hunting territories to discourage them from making low foraging flights across the roadway.