All about barn owls

Norfolk Wildlife Trust

The beautiful barn owl is well known for its heart-shaped face, pure white feathers, and ghostly silent flight. They fly low over fields and hedgerows at dawn and dusk. You can see barn owls year-round in Norfolk.

Habitats

Barn owls need suitable habitats for nesting, roosting, and hunting. You'll often find them near rough grassland, fens, meadows, farmland, and roadside verges, where there is plenty of prey and space to fly over the ground in search of their next meal. As their name suggests, barn owls often nest and roost in buildings such as barns and churches.



© Ferenc Szoradi

Diet

Barn owls are birds of prey. They mainly hunt small mammals like field voles, shrews, and mice. Their sensitive hearing and ability to spot movement in low light allows them to hunt at night. A barn owl will typically eat three to four pieces of prey a night.

Barn owls eat entire prey items but cannot digest fur or bone. This is regurgitated in the form of a pellet.

Take a look at the barn owl pellet photo.



© Dave Kilbey

What do you think the barn owl has eaten?

Owlets

Baby barn owls are called owlets. A pair of barn owls will usually lay four to six eggs, although not every egg will hatch. After around 31 days, the eggs hatch, with the female staying in the nest to incubate the owlets and the male will bring prey back to the nest. At around eight to nine weeks old, the young owls begin making their first short flights. As they grow in confidence, the owlets will venture further, practicing hunting, and by thirteen weeks they will leave to find their own home range.



© Russell Savory

Conservation efforts & threats

Norfolk Wildlife Trust works to support barn owls and wildlife across Norfolk. Our management of wet grassland and fen provides habitat for barn owls where they can find the food and shelter they need to survive.

Barn owls have faced population decline as a result of reduced food supply. The loss of old barns and increased road deaths are also significant in many areas.



© Peter Harris

Spotting barn owls in Norfolk



© Josh Gowen

NWT Upton Broad

NWT Cley Marshes, NWT Hickling Broad and Marshes, NWT Upton Broad and NWT Holme Dunes are some of our nature reserves where barn owl sightings are frequent. Why not visit and see if you can spot one?

Barn owls feed almost entirely on small mammals and as half of their diet is made up of field voles, your best chance of sightings is in areas of rough grassland; a vole's favourite habitat. Like many owls, barn owls find it harder to hunt in windy conditions, so still evenings are best to try and spot them.

The barn owl is usually spotted at dawn or dusk, seen 'quartering' over farmland and grassland, flying back and forth as it searches for prey.



© Andy Rouse

Did you know...?

- **Barn owl's light, soft feathers help them fly silently.**
- **Their flexible neck allows them to turn their head over 180 degrees each way.**
- **Barn owls have extremely sensitive hearing which helps them to hunt, and their heart shaped face collects sound.**
- **Barn owls do not hoot, but they can hiss, click, and make blood curdling screeches!**
- **Their sharp talons can grip and hold onto small mammals securely during flight.**

The Wildlife Trusts

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