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## ABOUT THE BARN OWL

*(Tyto alba)*

### *A Few Facts*

The **Common Barn Owl** is the most [widely distributed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmopolitan_distribution) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmopolitan\\_distribution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmopolitan_distribution)) species of owl (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Owl>),

and one of the most widespread of all birds. Because it is an expert rodent hunter that minimizes need for pesticides, farmers have begun encouraging their presence by providing snug, dark cavity and well positioned nesting sites. While the food supply remains dependable, the owls will return season after season.

#### **Description**

A pale, long-winged, long-legged owl with a short squarish tail, measure up to 18" in height, with a wingspan up to 44". White heart shaped face with black eyes and bill resembling a nose. Head and upper body are light brown with dark gray feathers.

#### **Habits**

Generally nocturnal; may emerge at dusk or may be active at dawn, occasionally seen in flight during full daylight. Flight is noiseless with wingbeats interrupted by gliding.

#### **Voice**

Usual call is a drawn-out rasping screech. Courtship call of male is shrill repetitive twittering. Adults returning to nest may give low, frog-like croak. When surprised in its nest, makes hissing, rasping and snapping sounds made by clicking the tongue.

**Hunting & Food**

Barn Owl is the most efficient hunter of small ground mammals: gophers, voles, field mice, ground squirrels, shrews and rats. Other prey may include baby rabbits, bats, frogs, lizards, birds and insects. It hunts by flying low and listening for emerging prey. Family of Barn Owls may consume up to 3,000 rodents in one year!

**Breeding**

Will breed any time during the year depending on food supply; may breed twice with an average brood of 3.5 chicks. Classically breed in winter months, October – February. Lay 3 to 6 eggs at 2 day intervals. Eggs incubated for 30 to 34 days. Chicks are fledged in 50 to 55 days. Will remain in the vicinity for a week or so to learn hunting skills and then disperse. Young birds are able to breed at about 10 months.

**Habitats**

Traditional nests: Tree hollows, old buildings, caves and well shafts are disappearing. However, if safe homes are provided and food is available, the population can grow rapidly.

**Mortality**

**Unfortunately**, average life expectancy is 18-24 months. About 60% die in their first year of life. Among the causes: poor choice of nests – chicks fall out or predators can access. Modern obstacles also include power wires, and moving objects like vehicles, railroad cars, etc.

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