



BARN OWL

Strigiformes
Family: Tytonidae
Genus: *Tyto*
Species: *alba*



Range: Widely distributed throughout the world. Not found in desert or polar regions, parts of Asia and some Pacific islands.

Habitat: open country, farmlands or grasslands. Prefers to hunt along the edge of woods

Niche: Nocturnal, arboreal, and carnivorous

Wild diet: Mostly mammals especially rodents, some amphibians and invertebrates

Zoo diet:

Life Span: (Wild) up to 12 years
(Captivity) 25+ years

Sexual dimorphism: Females are larger. Males tend to be less spotted on the underside.

Location in SF Zoo: Children's Zoo – Animal Resource Center, Hawk Hill

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

The Barn Owl is a pale, long-winged, long-legged owl with a short squarish tail. The head and upper body vary between a light brown and a light color and dark grey. The under-parts are white with a few black spots, occasionally none. The head is large and rounded without ear tufts. It is a heart-shaped facial disk with black eyes.

They have asymmetrical ears positioned at about eye level, just behind the ridge of facial feathers providing accurate determination of distance and sound location. Its beak is off-white and the feet are yellowish-white to brownish. Barn owls have rounded wings and a short tail that is covered with white or light brown, downy feathers. Males and females are similar in size and color, females and juveniles are generally more densely spotted.

Weight:	F 20 ozs
	M 15.5 ozs
Length:	F 13.5-15.5 inches
	M 12.5-15 inches
Wingspan:	F 43 inches
	M 42 inches

Barn owls have rounded wings and a short tail that is covered with white or light brown, downy feathers. Tail shape is a way of distinguishing the Barn Owl from true owls when seen in flight, as are the wavering motions and the open dangling feathered legs. Barn owl's long wingspan coupled with soft, fringed feathers that don't "swoosh" as they move, is an adaptation for slow silent flight while hunting.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Due in part to the use of DDT, they are common but local in parts of its range. Populations in Midwest and inland East dropped dramatically during 1970-2000. Though it has been listed as Endangered in some states nest box programs have helped increase populations in some areas.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

The Barn Owl calls infrequently, the usual call being a drawn-out rasping screech. Barn owls don't hoot, but instead give a shriek-like call. The courtship call of male at nest is a shrill repetitive twittering. Adults returning to a nest may give a low, frog-like croak. When surprised in its roosting hollow or nest, it makes hissing and rasping noises and snapping sounds that are often called bill snapping, but possibly made by clicking the tongue.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Barn Owls will breed any time during the year, depending on food supply. In a good year, a pair may breed twice. Rodent plagues permit Barn Owl numbers to increase dramatically. During courting, males may circle near the nest tree, giving short screeches and chattering calls. The majority of nests are in tree hollows up to 20 meters high. They will also nest in old buildings, caves and well shafts. Eggs are laid at 2 day intervals until clutch size is reached. After the chicks leave the nest, they will remain in the vicinity for a week or so to learn hunting skills and then rapidly disperse from the nest area.

Incubation: 30 -34 days	Sexual Maturity: 10 months
# of eggs: 3 - 6	Fledging: 50 -55 days

MISCELLANEOUS

These pale, nearly worldwide, birds are closely associated with man through their traditional use in the Old World of barn lofts and church steeples as nesting sites. Although widely known beforehand, it was in 1769 when the Barn Owl was first officially described by Giovanni Scopoli, an Italian naturalist. The species name "*alba*" also refers to the color white. Other names for the Barn Owl have included Monkey-faced Owl, Ghost Owl, Church Owl, Death Owl, Hissing Owl, Hobgoblin or Hobby Owl, Golden Owl, Silver Owl, White Owl, Night Owl, Rat Owl, Scritch Owl, Screech Owl, Straw Owl, Barnyard Owl and Delicate Owl.

The Barn Owl is one of the most widely distributed birds in the world, found on all continents except Antarctica, and on many oceanic islands as well. It has been introduced by people to some of the few places it did not already occur, namely Hawaii, the Seychelles Islands, and Lord Howe Island.

Sources:

Handbook of Birds of the World Vol 5 © 1999 Lynx Edicions, p 71-72.

New Larousse Encyclopedia of Animal Life © 1980 Maurice Burton, p 425 - 429

The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Birds of the World © 2005 David Alderton, p 171

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu>

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Updated 5/07, 8/11