

## **ANIMAL SECTION - BIRDS**

### **BARN OWL**

#### **ABOUT**

The Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) is the only member of the family *Tytonidae* (one of two families of owl) found in the United States. Usually 14 inches long (35.56 cm) with a wingspan just over 3.5 ft (1.09 m), this owl is nocturnal (coming out at night) when it hunts for small rodents, especially meadow voles, mice, shrews, bats, skunks, and various birds. The Barn owl is easily distinguished from other owls by its white, heart-shaped face surrounded by a dark border. This species has a tawny beige and gray upper body with small black and white spots and a white underside with scattered dark spots. It has long, strong, feathered legs with powerful talons for hunting. Males and females are distinguished by a difference in color and weight: the female is slightly larger and heavier than the male. This owl needs open areas with cavities for nesting, like natural tree cavities or human-made structures such as church steeples, barns, abandoned buildings, or even nesting boxes. In winter, Barn Owls sometimes roost in dense conifer trees. Adults rarely live beyond 3-4 years and there is a high mortality rate in the first year of life. Barn Owls mate for life and are sexually mature at one year of age. Because they have such a short lifespan, they only breed once or twice. An average of 4-6 eggs are laid every other day and the female incubates them for 30-34 days. Hatching happens in the same order the eggs were laid, and in times of scarce food, the older and stronger young have a better chance of survival. Both parents feed the young for about 2 months, but the adult male does most of the hunting and feeding.

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

The Barn Owl is found on every continent except Antarctica. In America it is considered partly migratory in the northeast, although many remain throughout the winter. This owl is endangered in many states and threatened or vulnerable in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, and Maryland. The change of land-use for development and agricultural practices has led to a decline in the Barn Owl population. The shift from pasture to row crops and loss of nesting sites are the greatest threats to this species, especially since these changes affect the availability of rodents, its main source of food. Any human disturbance near a nesting site will cause nest abandonment, and being eaten by raccoons is a common cause of death for young owls. Despite the Barn Owl being secure globally, it is in trouble in many parts of the United States.

For more detailed information visit: [www.ct.gov](http://www.ct.gov) or [www.naturalheritage.state.pa.us](http://www.naturalheritage.state.pa.us) or [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

#### **TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

Which is the only continent where the Barn Owl is not found?

- a) Africa
- b) North America
- c) Australasia
- d) Antarctica

Answer is D

