

## **Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)**

### **Field Marks:**

- length: 16 in, wingspan: 42 in.
- heart-shaped facial disk with tan outline and no ear tufts
- black eyes, pupils indistinguishable
- light tan, yellow, and brown feathers on the back
- brown or black speckling on the breast
- white, pink or light-colored beak



### **Breeding Range:**

Barn Owls occur in most of the United States except at the northernmost latitudes. Their range extends south into all of Central America, east into Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the surrounding islands, and west into Hawaii. Barn Owls are found worldwide, except for Antarctica.

### **Wintering Range:**

The wintering range is almost identical to the breeding range except for the northernmost populations.

### **Habitat Preferences:**

Barn Owls prefer low elevations and open habitats such as grassland, desert, marshland, and agricultural fields. Cavity availability is an important factor in nest site selection. Proximity to humans does not appear to be a factor in habitat selection, although manmade structures do provide additional nesting sites.

### **Nesting:**

These owls are usually monogamous and form lifelong pairs. There have, however, been instances of two females fledging a single clutch with one male. Nests are usually sited in large tree cavities and manmade structures such as barns, church steeples, and nest boxes, although burrows along soft river banks may also be used. If there is enough prey, Barn Owls lay large clutches of 3-6 eggs. Eggs are incubated for approximately 30 days, and the young begin flying 55 days after hatching. During this time, there is low aggression among nest mates, and older nestlings may feed and warm younger nestlings. Young fledge 60 days after hatching and are independent of the adults when young are 76-86 days old.

### **Feeding:**

Hearing is crucial for Barn Owls. They make more successful kills due to sound alone than any other owl. Food is captured by the feet and talons and typically killed by a quick bite to the neck. Barn Owls prey primarily on mammals, although small birds are also taken. Barn Owls have proportionally large mouths compared to the rest of their body, enabling mammalian prey to be swallowed whole.

### **Conservation Status:**

Barn Owls are listed as an endangered species in six of the Midwest states, and nine other states consider them as a species of special concern. A general population decline throughout most of the Barn Owl's range may cause the Barn Owl to be listed by more states in the future. Increased nest box construction and release of captive-raised birds may offset population declines in some areas.