

Barn Owl 101

Habitat

- Old buildings and tall trees
- They need somewhere to roost, somewhere high above the ground for safety and somewhere to nest
- Near to suitable habitat: rough grassland is their ideal habitat

Diet

- They mainly eat small mammals like voles, mice and shrews
- Being nocturnal, a barn owl will only hunt at night, eating on average four small mammals a night
- The prey are swallowed whole and the indigestible parts are regurgitated back up as an owl pellet
- You can tell which species has created a pellet by its colour and size - barn owl pellets are dark
- Pellets can be analysed to find out what the owl has been feeding on



Reproduction

- Baby owls are called owlets
- Barn owls do not create nests. They like a flat surface so the owlets do not fall out
- The clutch size can vary: four to seven is normal, but up to fourteen have been recorded
- Owlets hatch after thirty days of incubation
- Owlets will first fly at around fifty days old

Adaptations

- Excellent hearing. Their heart shaped face gathers sound
- Ears are placed one higher than the other. During flight the left ear picks up sounds from below whilst the right ear picks up sounds from above.
- A light body and soft feathers to allow it to fly silently
- Long legs allow it to dive into long grass
- Sharp talons allow it to grasp prey
- Very good eyesight means it can see movement in dim light
- Camouflage. From above the brown colours look like grass and from below the white is hard to see against the light of the sky



Threats

- Agriculture can be responsible for habitat loss
- Bad weather. The feathers are not waterproof and so they can not hunt in the rain, nor in the snow as prey is often buried underneath
- Collisions with vehicles when they fly low

Conservation

- Barn owls are protected by law – it is illegal to disturb or kill one
- The Barn Owl Trust carries out surveys and help conserve them