

Barn Owl

Tyto alba

The only member in BC of the family Tytonidae ("barn owls") and genus *Tyto*, this species is one of the most widely distributed globally but has limited distribution in BC. The scientific name literally means "white owl". Of all the owl species it may have the greatest number of common name variations including Demon Owl, Monkey-faced Owl, Hissing Owl, Hobgoblin or Hobby Owl.



Adult Marie O'Shaughnessy



Nestlings ("owlets") Lorraine
Andrusiak



Nestlings ("owlets") Wikipedia



Adult Wikipedia



Adult Caroline Astley

Characteristics

Length 30-37 cm, Wingspan 104-120 cm. A slender owl with tawny to golden-brown dorsal plumage with varying amounts of gray. Breast and belly plumage ranges from white to buff and is sparsely to heavily speckled with small black spots. The head lacks ear tufts and has relatively small dark eyes and a distinctive heart-shaped, white to buff facial disk. The legs are long and sparsely feathered, wings long and rounded with a short rounded tail. As with many raptors, sexes differ with females being larger and heavier. As well females are darker, and more heavily speckled than males. Owlets are covered in fluffy snow-white down which becomes similar to adult plumage as they mature.

Status

Global Status:	G5
Provincial Status:	S2?
SARA Status:	Special Concern
BC List Status:	Red (Candidates for- Extirpated, Endangered, or Threatened status)

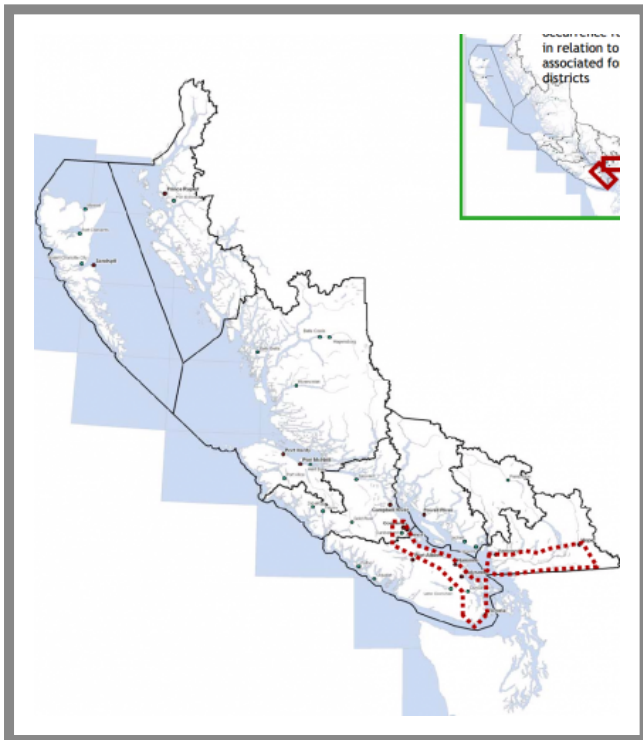
Similar Species



Barred Owl in meadow D. Noel
Short-eared Owl in field Corey Melchor

Barn Owl overlaps in distribution and habitat preferences with several other owls on the South Coast including Short-eared Owl and Barred Owl. In the agricultural and old-field habitats of the South Coast (e.g. Colony Farm Regional Park, Burnaby lowlands, Delta and south Surrey), Barn Owls can be found co-occurring quite extensively with Short-eared Owls. The overall pale, buff/golden coloured plumage with little or no dark spotting or barring, and the white, heart shaped facial disk distinguish Barn Owl from these other species.

Range



Ecology

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), known occurrence range for the Coast Region Coast Region. Barn Owls occur at the lowest elevations available within their range in British Columbia. On the Coast Region this species is thought to have originated from a central colonization point in the Fraser estuary in the early 1900's. Mild winters and expanding agricultural land use contributed to its spread through the Fraser Lowlands to Hope from the 1940's to the 1980's.

Habitat

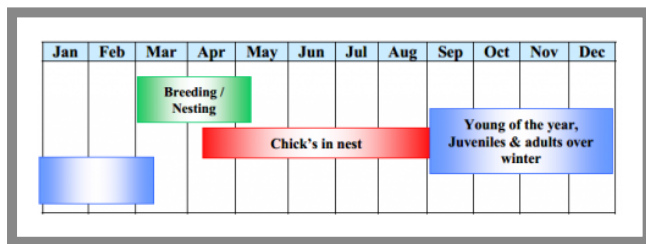
Preferred breeding, foraging and over-wintering areas include fields of dense grass, marsh, lightly grazed pasture and hayfields, often around human habitation. Nesting occurs in buildings (church steeples, attics, platforms in silos and barns, wooden water

tanks) as well as caves, crevices on cliffs, burrows, and hollow trees (though rarely in trees with dense foliage). This species will readily exploit nest boxes. Reproductive success generally is higher in a properly placed and maintained nest box than in a natural nest cavity. Intensively cultivated habitats are of less value in general because they support reduced prey species diversity, of low prey populations. Quantity and quality of dense grass habitats are significantly correlated with nest activity. Nests are most often located in man-made structures. The most common nests are on platforms high in old wooden barns. Loss of these features combined with conversion of adjacent foraging areas to greenhouses or urban land uses effects population viability and recovery. Barn Owl expansion into BC is somewhat related to the expansion and clearing of agricultural lands in the early part of the 20th century. This species earns its name from its adaptability to man-made structures associated with these land uses.

Diet

Barn Owl are effective predators on introduced and native rodents especially Townsend's Vole (63-85% of diet). In urban areas introduced species such as Norwegian and Black Rat and House Mouse may provide a surrogate food source. Bird species are taken when small mammals are scarce. This species is dependent on access and availability of key prey sources making them susceptible to starvation during prolonged periods of snow cover.

Life Cycle



Breeding begins in spring, with multiple clutches possible through the summer depending on prey availability and abundance.

Threats

- Distribution coincides with areas undergoing significant urbanization and natural habitat loss including draining and infilling of wetlands and industrialization/conversion of limited farmland foraging habitats.
- Development and fragmentation of habitats inevitably results in lower population numbers which can be exacerbated by severe winters, a significant source of mortality for British Columbia populations.
- Vole species, a primary prey species, are also susceptible to large population fluctuations and vulnerable to land use changes and changes to grassland habitats from spread of invasive grass species (e.g. non-native reed canary grass species).
- Vehicle collisions and road mortality will likely increase with expanded road and highway development.
- The use of rodenticides for the control of rodents in agricultural and urban areas has resulted in direct mortality as well as sub-lethal effects and impacts to prey abundance.

Conservation and Management

Apply conservation and management objectives as set out in provincial recovery plan for the Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) in British Columbia (2014). Apply "Best Management Practices for Raptor Conservation during Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia". Investigate complimentary conservation measures as recommended in the "Draft Recovery Strategy for the Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) in Ontario". Assess, inventory and monitor using methodology set out in the RISC standards # 11 Inventory Methods for Raptors (Version 2.0). This species is subject to protections and prohibitions under the Federal Species at Risk Act (SARA) as well as the BC Wildlife Act and is Identified Wildlife under the Forest and Range Practices Act. Habitat for this species may also be governed under provincial and federal regulations including the Fish Protection Act and Federal Fisheries Act as well as Regional and local municipal bylaws.

Resources

[Anticoagulant Rodenticides in Three Owl Species from Western Canada, 1988–2003](#)

[FARMING WITH BARN OWLS IN BC - BEST LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES](#)

[Nesting and Roosting Habitat and Breeding Biology of the Barn Owl \(*Tyto alba*\) in the Lower Mainland of BC](#)

Roberts Bank Terminal 2 Technical Data Report

Terrestrial Wildlife and Vegetation Barn Owl Habitat Suitability, Habitat Use, Site Occupancy and Collision Study

Urban development reduces fledging success of Barn Owls in British Columbia Canada

For further information see

BC Species and Ecosystems Explorer: Species and Ecosystems Search

A source for authoritative conservation information on thousands of plants and animals and hundreds of ecological communities in BC. From here connect to all provincial and federal recovery plans (including the SARA Registry), COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada), Identified Wildlife guidance and conservation requirements for specific species and ecological communities of conservation concern impacted by forestry activities) and links to E-Flora and E-Fauna (the Electronic Atlas of the Plants and Wildlife of British Columbia).

British Columbia's Coast Region Species & Ecosystems of Conservation Concern

A joint venture resource providing comprehensive information on a range of species and ecological communities specific to the Coast Region of BC (including the South, Central and North Coast, Vancouver Island and Haida Gwaii).

Develop With Care Guidelines (see specific BMP's for raptors)

Environmental guidelines for urban and rural land development in BC.

Species at Risk & Local Governments a Primer for BC

Learn what species are at risk in your area, search by name, habitat type, regional district and forest district.

Sources

Albert, Courtney A. et al 2009. [Internet]. Anticoagulant Rodenticides in Three Owl Species from Western Canada, 1988–2003. Arch Environ Contam Toxicol DOI 10.1007/s00244-009-9402-z.

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Proulx, Gilbert et al. 2003. A Field Guide to Species at Risk in the Coast Forest Region of British Columbia. Published by International Forest Products and BC Ministry of Environment. Victoria (BC).

Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia. 2010. [Internet] [Updated October 12 2010]. Barn Owl.

Credits

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Content updated by Pamela Zevit April 2017

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Source URL: <http://sccp.ca/species-habitat/barn-owl>

Links

[1] <http://sccp.ca/printpdf/65>

[2] http://sccp.ca/sites/default/files/factsheets/similar/barred%20owl%20danielle%20noel_0.JPG

[3] http://sccp.ca/sites/default/files/factsheets/similar/seowl_corey%20melchor.JPG

[4] http://sccp.ca/sites/default/files/factsheets/range-map/distribution%20graphic_0.png

[5] http://sccp.ca/sites/default/files/factsheets/life-cycle/life%20cycle%20graphic_1.png

[6] http://sccp.ca/sites/default/files/species-habitat/documents/anti%20coagulatn%20rodenticides%20in%20three%20owl%20species-western%20canada_a%20albert%20et%20al%202009.pdf

[7] http://sccp.ca/sites/default/files/species-habitat/documents/Farming%20with%20Barn%20Owls%20in%20BC%20_May%2020.pdf

[8] <http://sccp.ca/sites/default/files/species-habitat/documents/nesting%20and%20roosting%20habitat%20and%20breeding%20biology%20of%20the%20barn%20owl%20lmr%20b>

[9] <http://sccp.ca/sites/default/files/species-habitat/documents/RBT2-Barn-Owl-Habitat-Suitability-Habitat-Use-Site-Occupancy-and-Collision-Study-TDR.pdf>

[10] <http://sccp.ca/sites/default/files/species-habitat/documents/Urban%20development%20reduces%20fledging%20success%20of%20Barn%20Owls%20in%20British%20Columbia>

[11] <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/conservation-data-centre/explore-cdc-data/species-and-ecosystems-explorer>

[12] <http://www.geog.ubc.ca/biodiversity/factsheets/>

[13] <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/natural-resource-standards-and-guidance/best-management-practices>

[14] <http://www.speciesatrisk.bc.ca/>

[15] <http://www.sfiprogram.org/>

[16] <mailto:info@sccp.ca>