

How to Tell a Male Barn Owl from a Female

A free factsheet on sexing Barn Owls by sight

QUICK FACTS

Average male weight: about 300 grams

Average female weight: about 360 grams, around a fifth heavier

No single clue is certain on its own

Best method: add several clues together

Why it is tricky

Male and female Barn Owls look far more alike than most birds. There is no single clue that always works, so the best approach is to look for several signs together and see where most of them point.

The clues to look for

- **Size and weight.** females are around a fifth heavier, at about 360g against 300g, though this is hard to judge unless a pair is stood side by side.
- **The facial rim.** a female often has a slightly darker brown edge around her face.
- **The throat.** a female's throat is often buff coloured, where a male's is whiter. It shows best in natural daylight.
- **Spots.** females tend to have small flecks down the flanks and sometimes across the chest, while males are usually plainer white.
- **Overall colour.** females are usually a touch darker and richer overall, with slightly darker tail feathers.
- **Behaviour.** in courtship, the female usually does more of the preening, and once eggs are laid, the bird sitting on the nest is always the female.

A REAL EXAMPLE

I once watched two females with almost no spots on their chests at all. What gave them away was a few flecks on the flanks, a buff throat and a slightly darker look, plus how much they fussed over a smaller male. When eggs turned up in the box, that settled it.