

Where Barn Owls Live in the UK

A free factsheet on habitat, home ranges and roosts

QUICK FACTS

Hunting ground: rough, tussocky grassland

Nesting sites: barns, hollow trees, church towers, nest boxes

Home range in the breeding season: usually within 1 to 2km of the nest

In winter: may travel 3 to 4km, sometimes further, to hunt

Birds of open country

Barn Owls hunt over rough, tussocky grassland, field margins, hedgerows, ditches, riverbanks and marshes. They roost and nest in barns, old buildings, hollow trees and nest boxes. A well placed nest has a clear view over the rough grass where the owl hunts, with an entrance sheltered from the prevailing wind and rain.

Not territorial in the usual sense

Many people assume a Barn Owl guards a patch of land the way some animals do, but it is a much more relaxed neighbour. Barn Owls do not defend territories. Their home ranges are large and overlap a great deal with their neighbours.

During the breeding season, most hunting happens within a kilometre or two of the nest. In winter, when food is harder to find, owls may travel three or four kilometres, and sometimes further, to find enough to eat.

Creatures of habit

Once an adult Barn Owl settles somewhere, it usually stays. They do not migrate, and they will often use the same nest and roost sites for life. That familiarity pays off: a bird that already knows exactly where the voles are, and which routes are safe on a dark, foggy night, uses far less energy than one starting again in strange country.

Roosting by day

Barn Owls rest out of sight during the day, which is why they are rarely seen in daylight. They roost in trees, but much prefer the safety of a nest box, an old building, or a high, dry ledge offering shelter and privacy, usually at least three metres off the ground.

DID YOU KNOW?

On Paul's own land in the Peak District, nest boxes with the entrance facing northwest have worked best, since that keeps the worst of the weather out. In other parts of the UK, northeast is often recommended instead, so local shelter matters more than a single fixed rule.

A free factsheet from BarnOwl.live, live Barn Owl, Tawny Owl and badger cameras from the Peak District.

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