

100 Barn Owl Facts

Ages 9+ and grown-ups · Fun facts about barn owls



What They Look Like

- 1 Barn owls have a white, heart-shaped face.
- 2 Barn owls are white underneath, with golden-brown backs and wings.
- 3 Female barn owls are usually a little bigger and darker than males, with more spots.
- 4 A barn owl weighs only about 250 to 350 grams, less than a tin of baked beans!
- 5 With its wings spread out, a barn owl measures about 80 to 95 centimetres across. That's about three times as long as this sheet of paper!
- 6 Barn owls don't have ear tufts, the feathery 'ears' some owls have.
- 7 A barn owl's feathers are so soft and fluffy that it looks much bigger than it really is.
- 8 Barn owls have dark, almost black eyes.
- 9 A male barn owl can look almost completely white when flying overhead.
- 10 The golden feathers on a barn owl's back are covered in tiny grey, black and white speckles.
- 11 Barn owls are very light for their size, which helps them fly slowly without falling.
- 12 A barn owl's middle claw has a comb-like edge, which it uses to tidy its feathers.

100 Barn Owl Facts (continued)



Super Senses

- 13 Barn owls fly so quietly that you can't hear them coming.
- 14 A barn owl can hear a tiny vole moving under the grass.
- 15 One of a barn owl's ears is higher than the other. This helps it work out exactly where a sound is coming from.
- 16 Barn owls can't move their eyes, so they turn their heads instead, up to about 270 degrees.
- 17 A barn owl's heart-shaped face works like a satellite dish, collecting sounds and sending them to its ears.
- 18 Barn owls can catch food in total darkness, using their hearing alone.
- 19 Soft, fluffy feathers with comb-like edges let barn owls fly almost silently.
- 20 Barn owls can see well in low light, but they rely more on their amazing hearing.
- 21 A barn owl can tell where a sound is coming from to within a degree or two. That's amazingly accurate!
- 22 Barn owls bob and sway their heads to help judge how far away something is.
- 23 The front edge of a barn owl's main wing feathers has tiny comb-like teeth that break up the sound of the air.
- 24 Owls have about twice as many neck bones as we do, which is why they can twist their heads so far.
- 25 Barn owls blink with their top eyelid, but close their bottom eyelid to sleep.
- 26 Barn owls have a poor sense of smell. They rely on their hearing and eyesight instead.

100 Barn Owl Facts (continued)



Hunting & Food

- 27 Barn owls mostly hunt at night.
- 28 Their favourite food is the field vole, a small furry animal like a mouse.
- 29 Barn owls swallow their food whole!
- 30 Barn owls catch their food with their feet, using sharp, curved claws.
- 31 A barn owl eats around three to five small animals every night.
- 32 Barn owls fly slowly back and forth over fields, close to the ground. This is called quartering.
- 33 A barn owl often hovers in the air before dropping onto its food, feet first.
- 34 A barn owl's sharp, curved claws are called talons.
- 35 A barn owl's outer toe can turn backwards, giving it a better grip.
- 36 As well as voles, barn owls eat shrews, mice and sometimes young rats and small birds.
- 37 In cold weather, barn owls often hunt from fence posts to save energy.
- 38 When there's plenty of food, barn owls store spare food in the nest for later.
- 39 Barn owls with owlets may need to bring a dozen or more animals to the nest every night.
- 40 A family of barn owls can eat thousands of small animals in a year.
- 41 Barn owls swallow small animals head first, so the fur slides down the right way.

100 Barn Owl Facts (continued)



42 When they're hunting, barn owls fly slowly, often at less than 25 kilometres per hour, so they can listen for food.

43 Barn owls need to eat every night, so a few nights of bad weather can leave them very hungry.

Owl Pellets

44 Barn owls cough up the fur and bones they can't digest. These are called pellets.

45 A barn owl usually coughs up one or two pellets a day.

46 Scientists and schoolchildren take pellets apart to find tiny bones and see what the owl has eaten.

47 Fresh pellets are black and shiny. Old ones turn grey.

Eggs & Owlets

48 Baby barn owls are called owlets.

49 A barn owl usually lays four to six white eggs.

50 Young owlets are covered in fluffy white down.

51 Barn owls don't build nests. They lay their eggs on the bare floor or on old pellets.

52 The female sits on the eggs to keep them warm, and the male brings her food.

53 Barn owl eggs take about a month to hatch.

54 The eggs are laid a few days apart, so the owlets hatch at different times and are all different sizes.

55 Hungry owlets make a loud hissing, snoring noise to beg for food.

100 Barn Owl Facts (continued)



- 56 Young barn owls take their first flights when they're about 8 to 10 weeks old.
- 57 A barn owl egg is about 4 centimetres long, a little smaller than a hen's egg.
- 58 In years with lots of voles, barn owls lay more eggs and may even raise two families.
- 59 At first, the mother tears up food into tiny pieces for her owlets.
- 60 Older owlets flap their wings in the nest to build up their muscles before they fly.
- 61 A group of eggs is called a clutch, and a family of owlets is called a brood.
- 62 At their heaviest, owlets can weigh more than their parents!
- 63 In autumn, young barn owls leave home to find a place of their own, often 5 to 15 kilometres away.
- 64 Owlets use a tiny, hard 'egg tooth' on the tip of their beak to crack their way out of the egg.
- 65 Newly hatched owlets weigh only about 15 grams, and their eyes are closed.

Daily Life

- 66 Barn owls screech. They don't hoot! It's tawny owls that hoot.
- 67 Barn owls live in old barns, hollow trees and nest boxes.
- 68 Barn owl feathers aren't waterproof, so they don't like hunting in the rain.
- 69 Barn owls usually stay with the same partner for life.
- 70 In spring, a male barn owl brings food to the female as a present.

100 Barn Owl Facts (continued)



- 71 Barn owls spend the day resting in a quiet, dry place called a roost.
- 72 Barn owls love rough, tussocky grassland, where lots of voles live.
- 73 Snowy winters are hard for barn owls, because voles hide in tunnels under the snow.
- 74 When a barn owl feels threatened, it hisses, sways its head and spreads its wings. If it's cornered, it may even flip onto its back and show its talons!
- 75 Barn owls often sleep standing on one leg.
- 76 Barn owls often use the same nest site year after year.
- 77 Barn owls sometimes hunt in daylight, especially in winter or when they have hungry owlets.
- 78 Many wild barn owls live for about four years, but some live much longer.
- 79 Some wild barn owls have lived for over 15 years.
- 80 Jackdaws, stock doves and tawny owls sometimes try to take over barn owl nest sites.

Barn Owls & People

- 81 Barn owls are protected by law in the UK, so their nests must never be disturbed.
- 82 Busy roads are dangerous for barn owls, which often hunt along grassy roadsides.
- 83 Barn owls have lots of nicknames, including ghost owl, church owl, white owl and screech owl.
- 84 Farmers like barn owls because they eat lots of mice and rats.
- 85 Barn owl numbers in Britain fell during the last century, and nest boxes have helped them recover.

100 Barn Owl Facts (continued)



- 86 Many British barn owls now raise their families in nest boxes.
- 87 A barn owl nest box should be at least 46 centimetres deep below the hole, so owlets can't fall out before they can fly.
- 88 You can help barn owls by leaving areas of long, rough grass for voles to live in.
- 89 Rat poison can harm barn owls that eat poisoned mice or rats.
- 90 Long ago, people thought barn owls were spooky because of their white faces and screeching calls.
- 91 Watching barn owls on a nest camera lets you see them without disturbing them.
- 92 Buster is a barn owl you can watch live on the Barn Owl Live nest camera in the Peak District.
- 93 Buster has raised a family of owlets every year for three years in a row.

Around the World

- 94 Barn owls live on every continent except Antarctica.
- 95 The barn owl's scientific name is *Tyto alba*. Alba means white.
- 96 Barn owls don't migrate. British barn owls stay in the same area all year round.
- 97 Barn owls belong to a different family from most other owls.
- 98 Barn owls are one of the most widespread land birds in the world.
- 99 Barn owls in the Americas are now usually treated as a separate species from ours.
- 100 A darker, orange-breasted kind of barn owl lives in Europe and sometimes turns up in Britain.