

# About Barn Owls

The Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) is the most widespread of owls, occurring on every continent except Antarctica.

Barn Owls are about 16 inches long with a 40-inch wingspan and weigh about 20 ounces. They are tawny on their backs and white below. Their pale faces are heart shaped with stark black eyes.

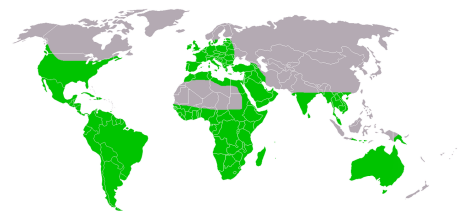
Barn Owls are monogamous until one of a pair dies. Females lay clutches of 5-10 eggs at daily intervals, incubating them from the first egg. Incubation lasts 4-5 weeks and the last chicks that hatch are at a distinct disadvantage unless there is a plentiful food supply. The female does all of the incubation and tends the chicks after they are born. The male does all of the hunting for the family. He will need to catch 1000-2000 voles, mice, and shrews to feed his family during the three month nesting period.

Barn Owls are exceptional hunters relying on their keen hearing to detect the movement of their prey as they scurry along the ground beneath the grass.

Weight for weight, Barn Owls consume more rodents—often regarded as pests by humans—than possibly any other creature. This makes the Barn Owl one of the most economically valuable wildlife animals for agriculture. Farmers often find these owls more effective than poison in keeping down rodent pests, and they can encourage Barn Owl habitation by providing nest sites.

The wide distribution of Barn Owls gives them extensive protection from local threats, and conservationists list them as a bird of Least Concern. However, in Connecticut because of loss of habitat Barn Owls are listed as Endangered. Barn Owls have never been abundant in Connecticut. The decrease in the number of farms in the state has reduced their foraging area and their numbers. There are other threats to Barn Owls.

The use of rodenticides has resulted in the poisoning of many Barn Owls. Hunting owls are so fixed on listening for the sounds of prey that they don't watch where they are going and the height at which they fly while hunting can lead them into the path of highway traffic and to their deaths. Predation by raccoons and Great Horned Owls are other causes of mortality.



*Barn Owls are found on all the Earth's continents except for Antarctica.*

## Menunkatuck Audubon Society's Barn Owl Nest Box Project

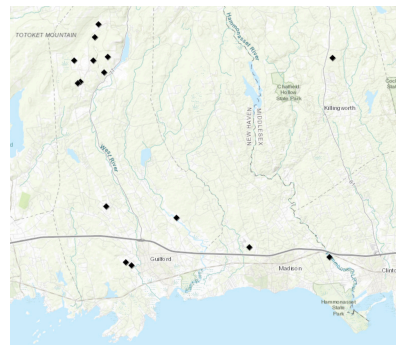
In order to help increase the number of Barn Owls in the area, Menunkatuck Audubon Society started a Barn Owl nest box project. We have partnered with local landowners who have suitable forage area to install Barn Owl boxes. Our goal is that with suitable nest sites in a larger area we can increase the Barn Owl population in southern Connecticut. Guilford High School's woodworking classes built the nest boxes according to our design recommendations with material that Menunkatuck supplied.



*Guilford High School students helped with building and installing Barn Owl nest boxes.*

Barn Owls require open fields, meadows, and marshland over which they can glide and listen for prey. To support a growing family an area of 10-20 acres is needed. Because Barn Owls are not territorial an area of 50 acres with a good supply of rodents can support five or six pairs.

Nest boxes can be installed on the side of a building or on a free-standing post away from regular human disturbance. The nest box does not need to be installed in the foraging area. Barn Owls will fly up to a mile from the nest site to find prey.



*Barn Owl nest boxes are in Guilford, Madison, and Killingworth.*



Menunkatuck Audubon Society is a chapter of National Audubon Society serving the towns of West Haven, New Haven, East Haven, Branford, Guilford, and Madison.



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