



Barn owl (*Tyto alba*)

Habitat

Barn owls prefer a mixed farming habitat with spinneys, ditches, rough pastures and well-managed field margins. Grassland makes good hunting ground, along with hay meadows. They are often found around farm buildings, barns and the edge of villages. A breeding pair of barn owls needs around 1.5 hectares of rough grass.

Food

Short-tailed field voles are the preferred prey species, making up to 60% of their diet. Barn owls will also hunt for mice, shrews, small rats and birds.

Nesting

Barn owls will breed from April to August, and a second brood may be reared when food sources are high. A breeding pair will use the same nest site year after year if undisturbed. The female lays four to seven white eggs in an unlined hole of a tree or barn. They will nest in good owl boxes that are a sufficient size, in a good habitat location and draught-free.

Song/call

“Shreeee” - a shrill, hoarse shriek, often repeated. The begging call of young is more wheezy.

Beneficial management

- Maintaining and creating field margins will provide good hunting areas. Areas of uncut grass for a year or more will hold good numbers of prey species.
- Unfertilised grass, buffer strips and rough grazing will also provide excellent hunting grounds.
- Retaining old, mature trees will provide prime nesting opportunities, also consider putting up nest boxes in prominent trees or farm buildings.
- Barn owls can be vulnerable to poisoning from rodenticides, therefore care must be taken when baiting.

