

American Barn Owl (*Tyto furcata*)

Description: Barn Owls are found in almost all continents except Antarctica. Barn owls are primarily cinnamon to golden-brown in coloration. They have a heart-shaped face that is white, with golden-brown feathers, creating a line around the face shape. Their undersides are usually white, but occasionally they are of a golden color like their back sides. Their backs and upper wings are typically a mix of buff and gray. The females often have a more reddish and more heavily spotted chest. They have short tails and long, rounded wings. When hunting, barn owls fly low across open areas such as fields and marshes with deep, silent wingbeats. The only way to really know if an owl in the area is by listening for its high pitched, raspy screeching sound.



Photo by Sue Griffin

Trends: Declining locally

Habitat: Woodlands, groves, farms, barns, towns, cliffs. The American Barn Owl is typically found in open or semi-open country in lowlands where it can hunt for small mammals. May nest in forests or cities if the nearby area has good open foraging territory. They are a cavity nesting species but may also use abandoned sheds, barns, or silos.

Ways You can help with Conservation: Populations are declining due to loss of habitat (e.g. agricultural intensification, development, natural succession to forest), loss of nesting cavities, rodenticide poisoning, and vehicle collisions.

Don't use rodenticides which are dangerous to all owls, hawks, and raptors. When rodents are poisoned, they often become less fearful, making them easy prey for raptors which then become poisoned after eating the rodent.

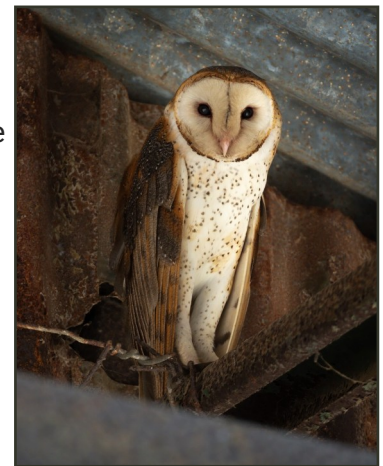


Photo by Bill Marson

If you own or manage a large tract of land, consider managing it as grassland or meadow. The shift towards more intense, monoculture farming practices has reduced the available habitat for American Barn Owls and many other grassland birds. Traditional, diverse farming practices that include areas of fallow fields and natural buffers can support a wide diversity of wildlife.



Photo by Deborah Smith

If you see a barn owl, report it to the NC Wildlife Commission and consider installing a nest box (if it is on your property). NHBA installed a number of Barn owl boxes in the Piedmont in hopes of luring Barn owls to nest locally. After a number of years the project was turned over to the NC Wildlife Commission. [See the Piedmont Barn Owl Initiative](#) for more details.