



Barn Owl *Tyto alba*



Irish name:
Scréachóg
reilige

The Barn Owl is the most threatened

species of owl in Ireland and has recently been 'Red-listed' in the 'Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland'. They are thinly distributed in most low-lying



areas of Ireland.

They are a very distinctive species - honey coloured above and very white below, with a beautiful heart-shaped face, long legs, relatively small blackish eyes and no ear tufts. They are slightly larger than a Woodpigeon with an average length of 34 cm and a weight of 300 to 350 g. Barn Owls utter a long, harsh screech in flight, females and young beg for food with snoring sounds, and adults emit a series of metallic clicking sounds when feeding their young.

They are birds of low-lying open farmland and woodland edge, requiring rough, unimproved pasture, ditches and hedgerows that are likely to harbour prey. Fields with tillage crops and stored animal feed areas are also of importance. Barn Owls are often found

close to human settlements.

They are generally seen only at dusk or at night when they hunt a variety of small mammals such as Field Mice, House Mice, Bank Voles and Brown Rats - and sometimes even birds and frogs.

Barn Owls are a sedentary species and require a home range of approximately 20 acres over which to hunt. Barn Owls most frequently use barns, chimneys and attics of old buildings, or churches as nest and roost sites and will readily use artificial nest boxes made from wood or plastic barrels. They are also found nesting in tree holes and occasionally rock crevices. A roost or nesting site is often revealed by pellets or splashing on the ground below.

The Barn Owl Survey in 1995-96

A Barn Owl awareness campaign survey was carried out in Ireland in 1995 and 1996 resulted in proof of nesting in at least 130 sites around the country. A nationwide census needs to be carried out to accurately determine the true population of Barn Owls in Ireland, but it has been estimated at between 400 - 800 pairs.

Barn Owls often pair for life and lay a clutch of 4 -7 eggs in April to early May, which hatch after about 33 days. The males feed the young and they fledge after 9 - 12 weeks gradually gaining independence from their parents. In a year with abundant mice and voles Barn Owls may raise two or even three clutches.

The Barn Owl in Danger



Did you know?

The Barn Owl is the most widespread land bird in the world, found in the Americas, across Europe and Africa, Asia and Australia.

Barn Owls in Ireland are threatened by a wide variety of factors including:

- Loss of nesting sites in barns or old buildings.
- Loss of rough unimproved grassland habitat and hedgerows.
- Being hit by cars and trains.
- Drowning in water troughs.
- Loss of prey species through increased use of pesticides.
- Poisoning from pesticide contaminated prey.
- Loss of winter food through improved grain harvesting and storage facilities, which in turn reduces prey populations.



Barn Owl



ENFO
17 St. Andrew Street, Dublin 2.
LoCall: 1890 200 191
Tel: (01) 888 3911 / (01) 888 3933
Email: info@enfo.ie
Web: www.enfo.ie

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17 Sráid San Aindrias, Baile Atha Cliath 2.
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R.phost: info@enfo.ie
Gréasán: www.enfo.ie





Irish Owls



Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*



Irish name:
Ceann cait

Long-eared Owls are the commonest owl in Ireland, with a scattered

range throughout the country. They are found in woods, copses and coniferous plantations adjacent to open grassland where they hunt mice, rats, shrews and Bank Voles.

They get their name from their long ear tufts, which are located above the facial disc, giving them a cat-like appearance. These are raised when the owl is alarmed or curious but lie flat when the owl is relaxed or flying.

They have a handsome mottled brown coloured plumage (feathers) over most of the body and are well camouflaged. The eyes are a fiery orange, encircled by black feathers set into an orange facial disc. The forehead and lores are a mottled grey-white and the bill is black.

They are a medium sized owl averaging 35 - 40 cm in length and a maximum of 350g (females are heavier than males).



Did you know?

Long-eared Owls sometimes gather in large numbers in winter to roost together. One such gathering in Germany had 50 owls.



Long-eared Owl

Long-eared Owls typically lay 3-5 white eggs from late March onwards and these are incubated for 25-30 days. The chicks typically hatch out over a period of 10 to 12 days and fledge at about five weeks. They remain dependent on their parents until about two months old.

In Ireland local populations of Long-eared Owls can be threatened by loss of rough grassland, and increased pesticide use which may reduce prey numbers. The felling of conifer plantations during the breeding season should also be avoided. However as a breeding species the Long-eared Owl is generally doing well and is not listed as being of conservation concern.

The actual numbers of Long-eared Owls in Ireland is unknown - they are extremely difficult to survey as they are strongly nocturnal and usually very quiet when hunting. You can hear them calling for a mate in early spring with a low-pitched 'hooo'. The young can often be very noisy when calling for food later in the year - their calls sound like a squeaky gate being opened.

Long-eared Owls nest almost exclusively in the old stick nests of crows, magpies, ravens and sparrowhawks or in a squirrels' drey. They have an impressive nest defence display - lowering the head, spreading the wings out widely and flaring the flight feathers - this doubles or triples their apparent size, and may be accompanied by hisses or bill snapping.



Long-eared Owl



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Irish Owls



Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*



Irish name:
Ulchabhán réisc

The Short-eared Owl occurs in Ireland mainly in winter, on rough grassland, coastal marshes and sand dunes, especially on the east and south coasts, though they can occur anywhere in Ireland. In summer they are more likely to inhabit heather moorland, with young forestry utilised for breeding.

The northern European populations winter as far south as the Mediterranean and North Africa.



They usually occur singly, but sometimes parties of up to ten birds gather, depending on prey availability. They are a rare and occasional breeder in Ireland, mainly in the west and south west. The absence of Bank Voles from many areas may be a limiting factor.

They are diurnal, that is they are active by day. They rely on small rodents, birds and even insects for food. They hunt low over the ground and swoop down on prey. They also use posts as lookout points.

They are a relatively quiet species, though they can make a range of sounds, including a long "hoooo" like an old steam engine. Bill snapping, barking, hissing and squealing noises are made when the nest is threatened.

How to identify Long-eared & Short-eared Owls

Short-eared Owls often hunt by day, unlike Long-eared and Barn Owls

The 'ear-tufts' on Short-eared Owl are small and difficult to see

2 to 3 black bands on primary tips

Short-eared Owl has yellow iris

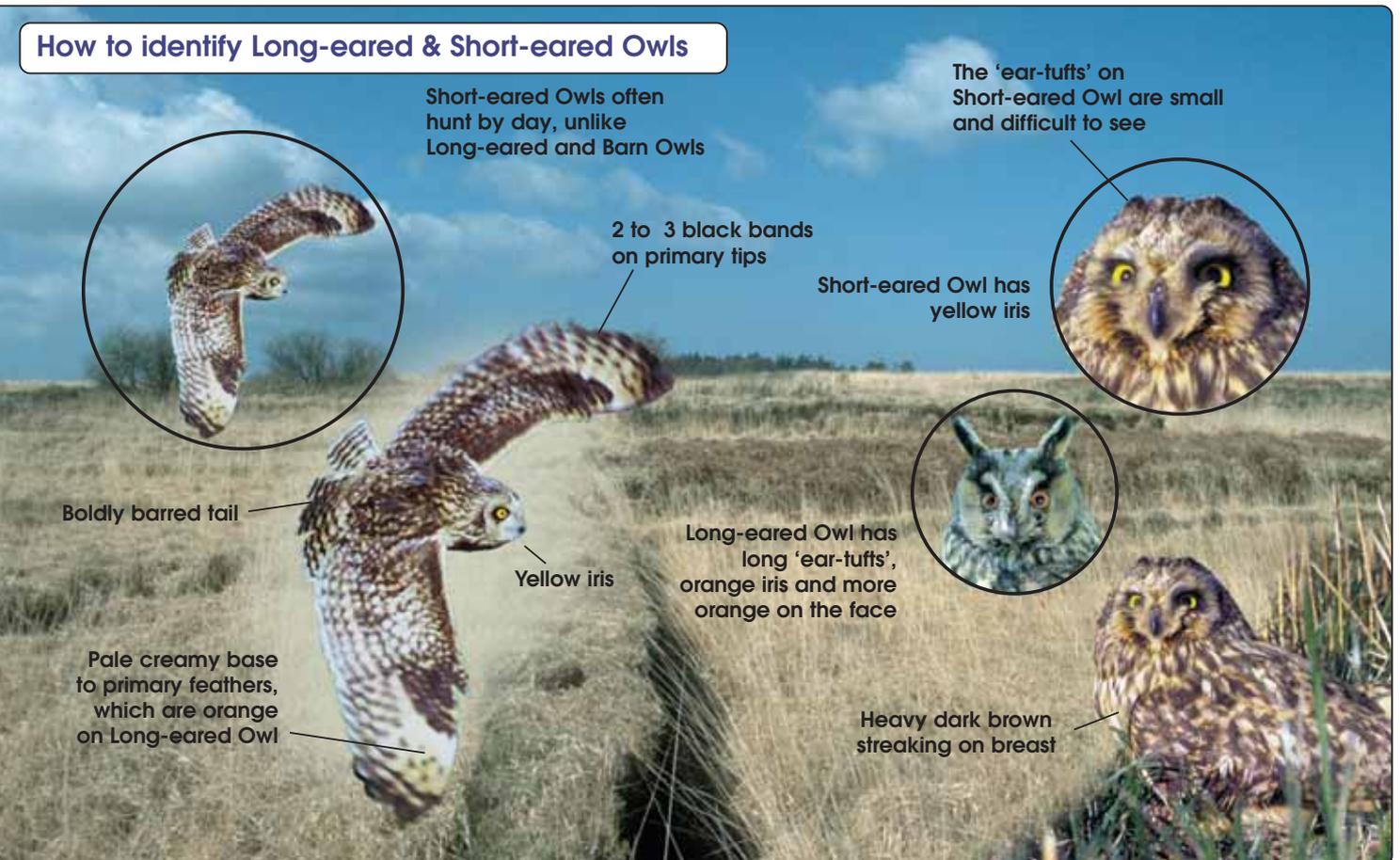
Boldly barred tail

Yellow iris

Long-eared Owl has long 'ear-tufts', orange iris and more orange on the face

Pale creamy base to primary feathers, which are orange on Long-eared Owl

Heavy dark brown streaking on breast



Short-eared Owl



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Iolar Fíréam Golden Eagle



Did you know?

The eyesight of the Golden Eagle is 8 times better than human eyesight.

Birds of Prey are birds that eat or prey upon other birds, animals, fish or even insects. Therefore birds of prey are carnivores. Birds of prey have powerful talons with sharp claws for grasping their prey, a sharp hooked beak for tearing at flesh and large eyes giving excellent vision. Most birds of prey hunt during the day, birds of prey that hunt during the night are called Owls.

Since the last Ice Age in Ireland, 10,000 years ago, Golden Eagles have been near or at the head of the food chain in Ireland. In the past Ireland had two different types of eagles. Golden Eagles were found especially among our mountains and White-tailed Eagles were common along our coasts and big loughs. Golden Eagles became extinct in Ireland in 1912, as a result of changes to the landscape and persecution such as shooting, poisoning and egg collecting.

BASIC FACTS ABOUT Golden Eagles:

- ◊ The Irish name for Golden Eagle is IOLAR FÍRÉAN.
- ◊ Whenever possible, they like to SOAR and GLIDE.
- ◊ They became extinct in Ireland in 1912.
- ◊ Their nest is called an EYRIE.
- ◊ They can live 20-30 years.
- ◊ Golden Eagles lay 2 eggs.
- ◊ They incubate their eggs for 6 weeks.
- ◊ Their toes are called TALONS.
- ◊ They catch and eat rabbits, hares, crows, duck, gulls etc.
- ◊ They have a 2 metre wingspan.
- ◊ They also eat carrion (meat from dead animals).
- ◊ The eagle in ancient Egyptian picture writing (hieroglyphs) developed into the letter a.
- ◊ Golden Eagles are found throughout the northern hemisphere, from Japan to Russia, across Europe and in North America.
- ◊ Ireland is the only country known to have lost its Golden Eagle population in recent times.



The Reintroduction of the Golden Eagle into Ireland

Ireland has at least 6 extinct bird of prey species. The reintroduction of the Golden Eagle to Ireland began in 2001, in an effort to help restore the Golden Eagle to Irish skies once more. The project involves bringing young eaglets from Scotland and releasing them in Glenveagh National Park, County Donegal. It is hoped to release 60-75 birds in Glenveagh NP over a five-year period. As in all wild eagle populations, it is expected that only a third of the released birds will survive till they are mature enough to breed at four or five years of age. Therefore hopefully 6-8 pairs of Golden Eagles may be breeding in Donegal by 2010. Each released bird will be fitted with a wing tag and a small radio transmitter in order to monitor their movements.

Soaring and gliding Golden Eagles in hills of Donegal are unlikely to be confused with many birds apart from the increasing Buzzard population, which are more associated with woodland and farmland. Golden Eagles have a two metre wingspan and are usually seen from mountain roads or when hill walking. Adult eagles are mostly dark brown with a golden /yellowish brown nape and head. Young eagles have white patches in their tail, underwing and upperwing that decreases with age until they are 4-5.

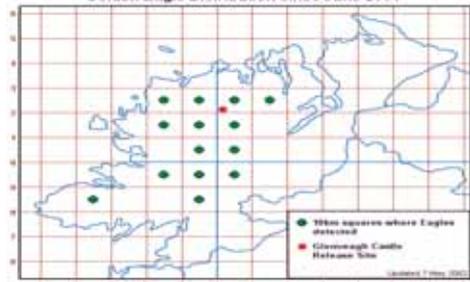
Did you know?

Ireland is the only country known to have lost its Golden Eagle population in recent times!

If you would like to find out more about Irish birds of prey or the Golden Eagle project, why not look at www.goldeneagle.ie

An exciting Golden Eagle schools pack, in English or Irish, can be found and downloaded from the web page in the Information Centre section under Information for Schools.

Golden Eagle Distribution since June 2001



Visit the ENFO website at www.enfo.ie

Golden Eagle *Iolan Fíreán*



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