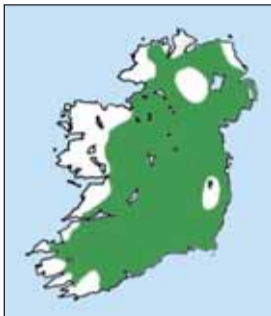




Irish Owls



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 350g. 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.

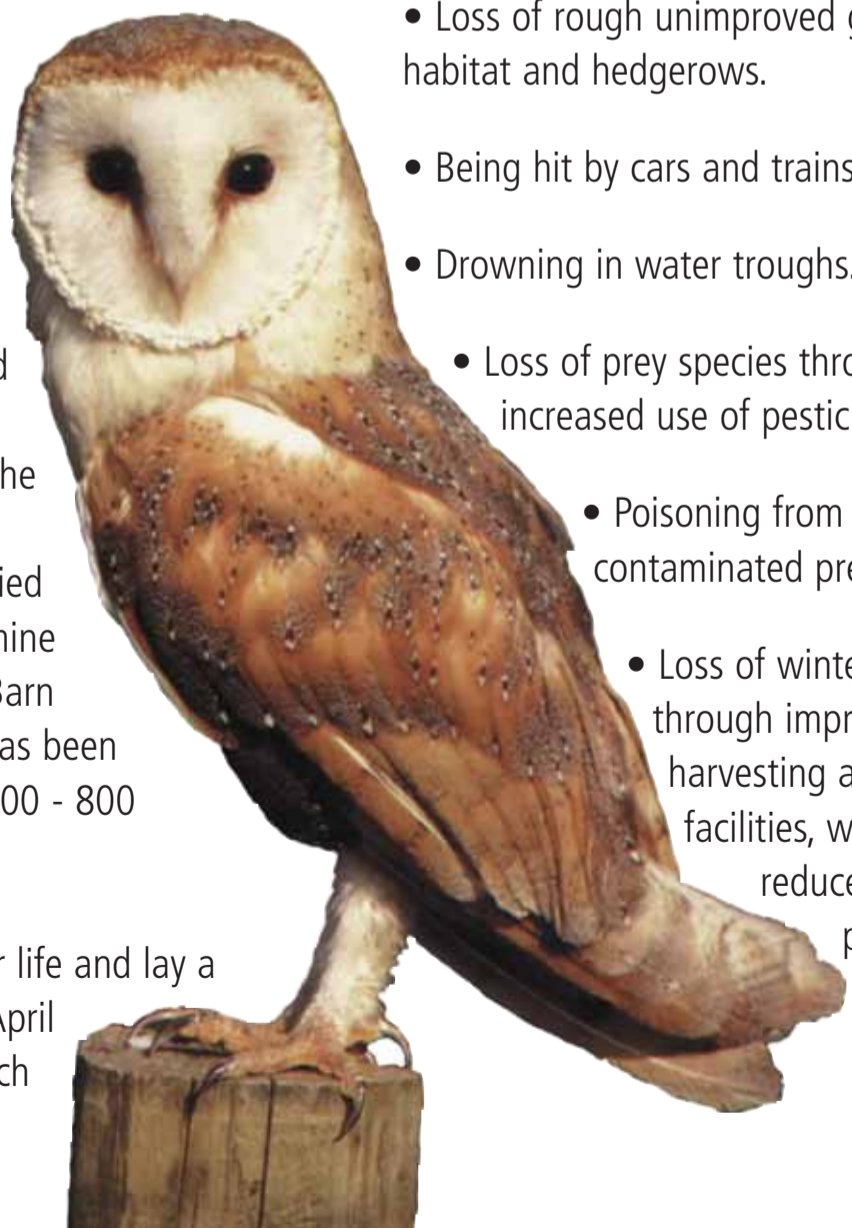
They are generally seen only at dusk or at night when they hunt a variety of small mammals such as Field Mice, House Mice, Bank Voles and Brown Rats – and sometimes even birds and frogs.

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 splashings 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.



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.

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

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



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