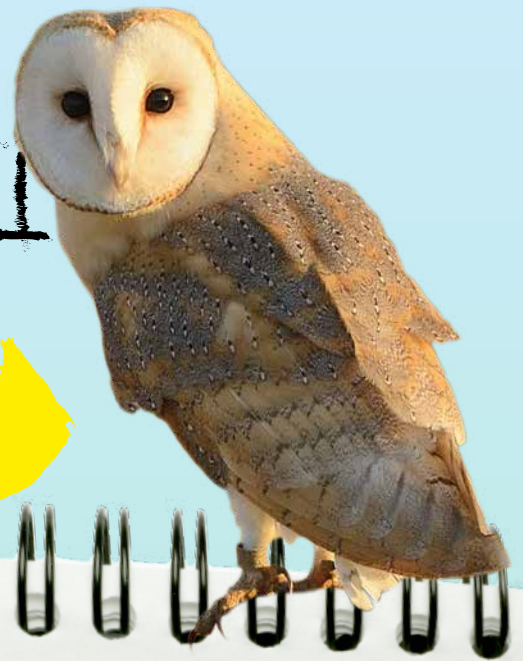




giving  
nature  
a home

**Name:**

**Barn owl**



## History

The barn owl's scientific name literally means "white owl" and comes from the Greek word "tyto" meaning "owl" and the Latin "alba" meaning "white".

As nocturnal birds, barn owls are difficult to study, but scientists think they declined in the 20th century because of changes to farming that destroyed their habitat and made it difficult for them to hunt. Many birds also died after eating rats and mice that had been poisoned – something that sadly still happens today.

Thanks to the efforts of many people, for example putting up nest boxes to replace nesting habitat that has been lost, barn owls have gradually recovered.

## What is special about this bird?

Barn owls have exceptionally good hearing and can find their prey by sound alone – even in complete darkness! Their specially shaped wing feathers are very soft, helping them to fly silently and catch their prey by surprise.

## General info

**Scientific name:** *Tyto alba*

**Size:** Up to 35cm long with a wingspan of 85–93cm (the average armspan of a 9-year-old child is 1.3m).

**Weight:** 280–420g.

**Where they live:** Barn owls live in most areas of the UK, but there are fewer in Northern Ireland because they prefer a drier climate. Look for them in open countryside, along field edges, riverbanks and roadside verges.

**How long they live:** Barn owls usually live four years – but the oldest wild barn owl ever recorded lived to 15.

**What they eat:** Barn owls mostly eat small mammals, including voles (which make up 45% of their diet), shrews and mice. They eat their prey whole, but can't digest fur and bone, so they cough this up in the form of a pellet. Barn owls usually hunt at night, but in winter, when food is hard to find, you might see them out in daylight.

**Conservation status:** Because barn owls have recovered from historic declines and seem to be doing well, they are on the Green List of birds we are least concerned about.

## Fascinating fact

Barn owls live on every continent except Antarctica, which makes them one of the most widely distributed land birds in the world.