



Barn Owl © EYE Project



*Working with Wildlife*

## Barn Owl (*Tyto Alba*) Species Action Plan

Plan Co-ordinator	Urban Group
Plan Author	Ian Graham
Plan Lead	RSPB
Latest version	January 2008

### Conservation Status

Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 1  
 Birds of Conservation Concern: Amber Conservation Status  
 Red Data Birds in Britain 1990  
 Red Data Book for Northumberland 1998

### Description

The barn owl is a medium sized owl with a distinctive golden-brown back, white heart shaped face and white under parts. An average barn owl is 35 centimetres in length, with a wingspan of 90 centimetres. They can weigh up to 400 grams depending on the time of year and are believed to live for 3 to 4 years although much older owls have been recorded.

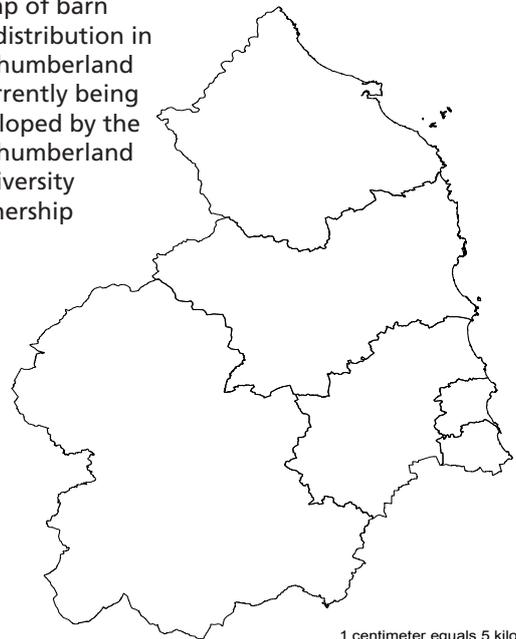
The diet of the barn owl consists mainly of small mammals such as field voles, common shrew, wood mouse and brown rats. They hunt low in flight over rough grassland but are often seen hunting from exposed perches such as fence posts. Their exceptional hearing and almost silent flight enables them to locate prey by sound alone and approach them undetected. Prey is usually swallowed whole and the parts that can't be digested such as bones, teeth and fur are regurgitated as a dark, smooth, cylindrical pellet.

The barn owl is a UK resident and is typically found in low intensity agricultural areas, field margins, mature rough grassland, banks of watercourses, along woodland edges, young tree plantations, hedgerows, fencerows and coastal saltmarsh. Recent studies suggest that a pair of owls require about 20-25 square kilometres of habitat with several suitable roosting sites, such as quiet buildings, tree cavities/hollows or nest boxes. The female will lay between four and seven eggs and incubate them for a month. The young birds will fly at 50 days and are fully grown from 10 weeks old. Breeding success depends on the availability of the main prey species which causes significant year to year variation in performance. It is estimated that 75% of young die in the first year.

### Current Extent in Northumberland

Recent survey work in a specific section of the county identified 53 breeding pairs over 109 locations, with only 9 successfully rearing young. (British Trust for Ornithology, 2005). In Britain the barn owl is on the extreme northern fringe of its world breeding territory and is highly sensitive to even small changes in climate. The RSPB estimates that there are 4,400 breeding pairs nationally.

A map of barn owl distribution in Northumberland is currently being developed by the Northumberland Biodiversity Partnership



1 centimeter equals 5 kilometers

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### Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Climatic changes causing lying snow or prolonged rainfall which dramatically affects ability to feed
- Loss of prey rich habitat as a result of agricultural intensification
- Reduction in winter food source through mechanical harvesting and hygienic grain storage which affects the small rodent population
- Secondary poisoning from rodenticides
- Loss of hunting habitat to large housing and industrial estates
- Loss of suitable nest and roost sites due to loss of mature trees, hedgerow clearance, conversion/ demolition of old farm buildings and human disturbance
- Increased road traffic collisions caused by severe pruning of hedgerows allowing owls to fly low over roads and use of road verges for hunting due to loss of other suitable habitat

### Associated Action Plans

Built Environment

Coastal Saltmarsh

Lowland Meadows and Pastures

Rivers & Streams

Trees and Hedges

### Further Information

The Barn Owl Trust website -

<http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/index.html>

RSPB website - <http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/b/barnowl>

The Hawk and Owl Trust website -

<http://www.hawkandowl.org>

The Population Status of Birds in the UK - Birds of Conservation Concern: 2002-2007, RSPB.

### Targets

**Maintain the current population of breeding barn owls in Northumberland by 2010**

**Maintain the current range of barn owls in Northumberland by 2010**

**Increase the population of breeding barn owls in Northumberland by 2015**

**Increase the range of barn owls in Northumberland by 2015**

Code	Priority Actions	Date
BO A01	Continue to establish baseline population and distribution data by encouraging the reporting of sightings and locating and monitoring breeding pairs	2010
BO A02	Ring known breeding pairs and juveniles	ongoing
BO A03	Use survey data to quantify targets for maintaining and increasing barn owl population and range in Northumberland	2010
BO A04	Identify suitable habitat for feeding and nesting, particularly around known nest sites	2010
BO A05	Encourage landowners and managers to undertake appropriate habitat enhancement works in identified suitable areas	2010
BO A06	Install 20 nest boxes in areas of suitable habitat where natural nest sites are in short supply	2010
BO A07	Highlight the particular problem of loss of nesting sites from farm building conversions to local authority planning officers and seek specific policy on rural building change of use	2010
BO A08	Promote a planning design guide for barn owl box construction in building conversions	2008
BO A09	Promote the importance of veteran trees as potential nest and roost sites	ongoing
BO A10	Promote the barn owl as a flagship species for conservation and management of wet grassland and meadows in Northumberland	ongoing