

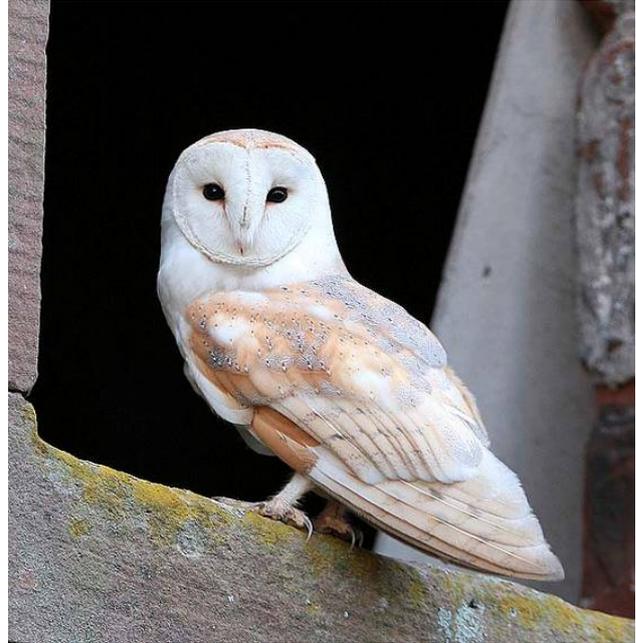
# BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

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Barn Owls, their nests and eggs are protected by UK legislation. The greatest threats to Barn Owl populations in Cumbria are loss of suitable nest sites through barn conversions etc, and lack or loss of feeding habitat through agricultural intensification.

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Barn Owl © David Hickson

## Legal & Conservation status

- UK Protected Species
- Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan species

### ***The Barn Owl is protected under:***

- Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

All birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law under Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Barn Owls are listed on Schedule 1 which gives them special protection.

### ***It is an offence to:***

- Intentionally kill, injure, or take (handle) any wild Barn Owl.
- Intentionally take, damage or destroy any wild Barn Owl nest whilst in use or being 'built' (Barn Owls do not 'build' a nest but may make a nest scrape).
- Intentionally take or destroy a wild Barn Owl egg.
- Have in one's possession or control a wild Barn Owl (dead or alive), or egg.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild Barn Owl whilst 'building' a nest or whilst in, on, or near a nest containing eggs or young.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb any dependent young of wild Barn Owls.

(This summarizes the main points of the law.)

## Habitat

Barn Owls hunt over areas of rough grassland, roadside verges, woodland-edge and wide arable field margins/conservation headlands, where small mammals are plentiful. Where all these features occur at an altitude of less than 200 metres there is a reasonable expectancy that Barn Owls should occur.

### ***Cumbria Key Habitats that are particularly important for Barn Owls include:***

Wood Pasture & Parkland	Calcareous Grassland
Hedgerows	Hay Meadows & Pastures
Lowland Dry Acid Grassland	Arable Field Margins (no habitat statement)

## Ecology

The Barn Owl is largely nocturnal, although it is often active at dusk and can be seen hunting along the edges of fields and along roadside verges. 90% of their diet is made up of voles, mice, rats and shrews.

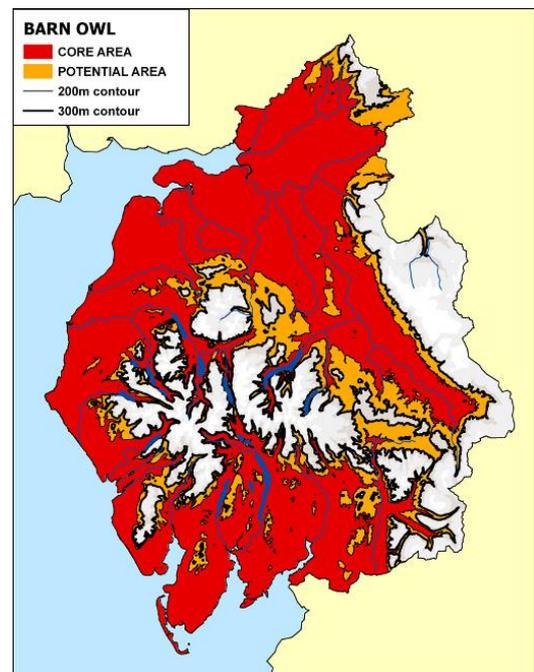
The adults usually remain as a pair throughout winter and, provided there is enough prey for them to reach breeding condition, the main breeding season begins in March and ends as late as October. Although nesting has been recorded in every month of the year, the eggs are usually laid in April and larger clutches can occur in areas where prey is especially abundant. Occasionally, two clutches are laid.

## Distribution

Current strongholds are in north and west Cumbria: the western Border Uplands, the Solway Basin, the lower Eden Valley, the northern portion of the West Cumbria Coastal Plain and the western edge of the Lake District Fells and Dales. Small numbers are found in the south of the county. The species appears to be scarce within the Lake District.

The majority of breeding sites are below 200m but they can breed up to 300m. In the early 1980s the Cumbria population was estimated to be 120 pairs (5000 nationally), a decline of 84% in the county since the 1930s). This has since recovered to 300-350 pairs.

The Barn Owl is listed as an amber species on the list of Birds of Conservation Concern.



## Conservation Issues

Overall, loss of suitable habitat has probably had the most significant effect upon Barn Owl populations. This includes the impacts of intensive agriculture, decrease in hedgerows, loss of nest and roost sites through barn conversions and the general decay of agricultural buildings, coupled with the loss of mature trees. Toxic pesticides and secondary poisoning due to eating poisoned prey have had a significant impact in the recent past. Increased road construction and traffic lead to increased road deaths.

## Planning Considerations

- Part IV of ODPM Circular 06/2005: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation sets out the wide range of legislative provisions for conservation of species protected by national and international law. It emphasizes the need for ecological surveys to establish the presence of protected species and for protection measures to be in place through conditions and/or planning obligations before planning permission is granted. It also advises that local authorities should consult Natural England before the planning decision is made.
- The re-use of rural buildings has significantly contributed to the population decline of Barn Owls in Cumbria. However, if properly planned and implemented, the redevelopment of such buildings can retain, protect, and enhance resting and breeding opportunities for the species.
- Active Barn Owl nests are afforded protection against disturbance, as are breeding adults and dependent young whilst at or near the nest. Nesting has been recorded in every month of the year.
- Any proposed development affecting barns and outbuildings, and other buildings with undisturbed roof voids with direct access to open countryside, should trigger a survey for Barn Owls.
- Any development that would impact upon Barn Owls would require adequate protection and mitigation measures.
- Development during the breeding season should be avoided where there is any evidence of occupation by Barn Owls. In cases where a roosting-only site is affected it is entirely possible that the development may have a detrimental 'knock on' effect if the Barn Owl has a nest nearby.

## Enhancement Opportunities

- Incorporation of Barn Owl boxes and other suitable structures within buildings in appropriate locations, especially barn conversions. Barn Owls will also use externally mounted boxes.
- Provision of rough grassland and woodland edge habitat for foraging, in particular linking to existing habitat.
- Promotion of the above through appropriate planning conditions.

## Further Information

[Barn owls on site A guide for developers and planners](#), English Nature and The Barn Owl Trust 2002 – note: local knowledge needs to be taken into consideration

[Barn owl boxes](#), RSPB

[Barn owl information](#), RSPB

[Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan](#)

[Barn Owl Trust](#)

## Contacts

- **The Barn Owl Trust**, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU, Tel: 01364 653026, [info@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:info@barnowltrust.org.uk), website: [www.barnowltrust.org.uk](http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk)
- **Natural England**, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Rd, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 7RL, Tel: 0300 060 2122, [cumbriaplanning@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:cumbriaplanning@naturalengland.org.uk)
- **World Owl Trust** has expert knowledge of Barn Owls in south Cumbria: The Owl Centre, Muncaster Castle, Ravenglass, Cumbria. CA18 1RQ, Tel: 01229 717393, website: [www.owls.org](http://www.owls.org)

## Current Action in Cumbria

- Annual population monitoring through a network of schedule 1 licence holders takes place in North Cumbria.
- The national ringing scheme of The British Trust for Ornithology, ring/mark individual Barn Owls in the North Cumbria breeding population to study juvenile dispersal, longevity, mortality, breeding success and site fidelity. This study has been ongoing for over 30 years.
- Provision of nest sites and site protection - agri-environment schemes provide grants for the restoration of traditional barns, including provision for Barn Owls.