

SIMPLIFYING...

Luscinia
Ecology



Barn Owl
Tyto alba

A barn owl is a nocturnal bird of prey known for its silent flight, and distinctive, heart-shaped face. They feed primarily on small mammals such as mice.



LEGISLATION & PROTECTION

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Barn owls are afforded protection against killing, injury, and capture under the wildlife and countryside act 1981. Their nests and eggs are also protected.

Breeding barn owls are also afforded protection against reckless disturbance, while at, or near, a nest. This protection extends to their young.



DEVELOPMENT SURVEYS

Often on proposed development sites we inspect buildings to determine their suitability for barn owls and if they have previously been, or are currently being, used by barn owls.

We typically undertake the detailed pre-development survey approach which uses the bottom-up search procedure. The objective of the bottom-up search procedure is to record the evidence of barn owl occupation in every part of a predefined site.



To limit possible disturbance, an ecologist will survey the least suitable areas first. They will gradually extend the survey to the most suitable areas until active evidence of occupation is found. At this point, the survey may cease or be redesigned to limit disturbance. Evidence is methodically recorded and mapped throughout the survey.

BUILDINGS

Barn owls can use any building where there is a minimum entrance hole size of 70 by 70 millimetres.

Typical buildings include church bell towers, mine and quarry buildings, farmyard buildings, follies, occupied dwellings, bridges, and various forms of commercial development. In almost all circumstances barn owls prefer buildings which are at least three metres high or taller.



Key spots to check in a building include:

- Perching places such as roof beams and the tops of ledges
- Nest places such as cavities, and in, under, behind, between, or on top of, hay and straw bales
- Stored items and anything leaning against walls

TREES

Trees used by barn owls are nearly always near open ground. Typical species used include ash, oak, English elm and willow. With trees, we are normally looking for large open cavities which face the open landscape. These trees will typically be readily identifiable in the field.



EVIDENCE

Evidence of barn owls includes live birds (and owl sounds), carcasses, droppings, pellets, feathers and malt, nest debris, eggs and egg shells.



CONSIDERATIONS

When we find evidence, we think 'species', 'status', and 'time':

- Is this evidence of a barn owl?
- What is this evidence indicating in terms of the status of the site?
- How old is the evidence? Is all the evidence the same age or is there an age range?

SURVEY SEASON



● Optimal

○ Survey not possible



THE ROLE OF THE SURVEYOR

During the survey, the ecologist will:

- Assess current suitability of all parts of the site for barn owls
- Map locations of pellets/feathers/nests found on a site map
- Define current and historical use of the site for barn owls
- Identify current and potential, future suitability for barn owl nests/roosts that lie outside the survey site
- Identify mitigation methods for offsetting the negative impact of development onto barn owls
- Identify the optimum location for permanent provision inside a developed building
- Assess ways to enhance the site for barn owls
- Predict the impact the development will have on foraging habitat

OUTCOMES



If evidence is found, then avoidance, mitigation, compensation, and enhancement are considered. Often it is best to retain the barn owls in the same structure and with the same entrance. Where this is not possible, replacement structures and barn owl boxes can be used.

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