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# Barn owl



The barn owl is generally only seen at dusk or at night when it can appear to be almost white. Its call is a long, eerie shriek.

## CALENDAR

### **Breeding season:**

Generally April to August, but may be earlier or later if conditions are favourable.

### **Nest:**

Mostly in undisturbed old barns or ruined farm buildings, but also in holes in trees.

### **Winter:**

Outside the breeding season, similar locations are needed for roosting during the daytime.

## HABITAT

Breeding mostly in lowland areas with suitable nest sites and feeding grounds. Barn owls use farmland with a predominance of rough, unimproved patches, ditches and hedgerows or other areas likely to harbour prey. Fields with arable crops and stored animal feedstuffs are also likely to be important. Even in these areas, they are thinly distributed.

## DIET

The diet of barn owls in Ireland is almost exclusively small mammals. In rural areas, they mostly take wood mice and pygmy shrews, although rats, house mice and birds are also important, particularly nearer urban areas.

## HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE BARN OWLS?

- Choosing not to plough or re-seed feeding areas is vital. These include areas of rough or extensively grazed pasture, unimproved grassland and hay meadows. The grassy verges of tracks, lanes or field edges, woods, rivers, ditches and hedges are also important feeding areas for barn owls.
- Create new feeding areas by establishing areas of tall/rough grassland, away from roads to reduce the risk of collisions with traffic.
- Leave old farm outbuildings and barns, as barn owls use these as nest sites provided the roof is maintained to keep them dry and sheltered. They also favour holes in trees, so leave old hollow trees, particularly elm, oak, beech, sycamore and ash. You can also put out special nest boxes for barn owls.
- Barn owls can die from pesticide poisoning if they eat contaminated prey. Of particular concern are second generation rodenticides, such as difenacoum, bromadiolone and the even more toxic flocoumafen and brodifacoum. Where rodent infestation is a serious problem, pest control specialists should always be consulted. If rats are not resistant, farmers should use warfarin, as this has a lower toxicity to barn owls.

You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:



The RSPB,  
Northern Ireland HQ,  
Belvoir Park Forest, Belfast BT8 7QT.  
Tel: 028 9049 1547

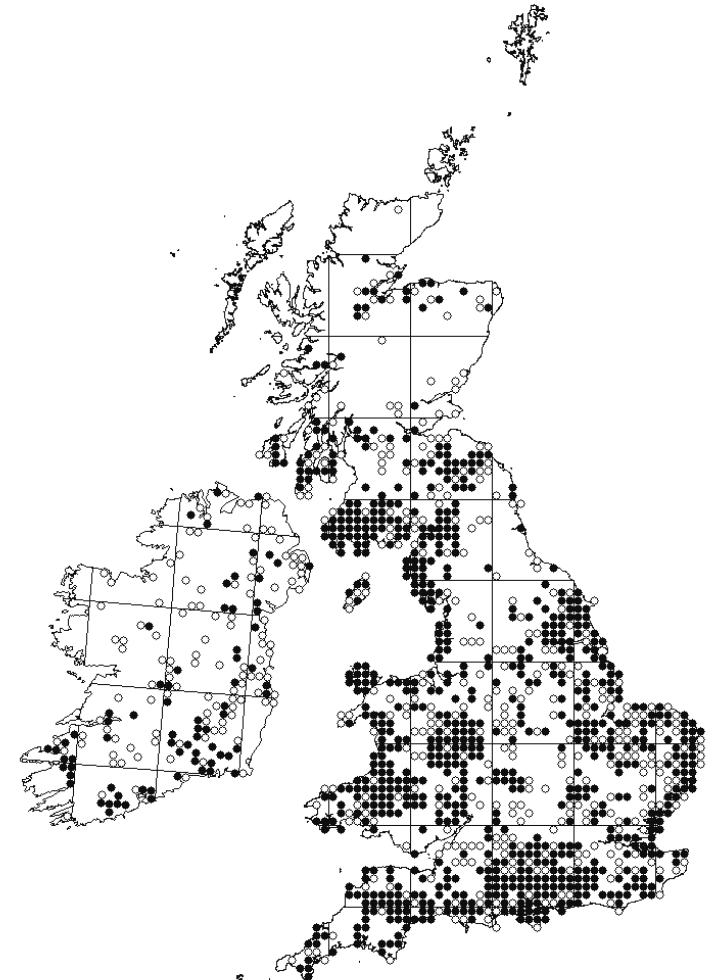
### DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Countryside Management Division  
Annexe D, Dundonald House,  
Upper Newtownards Road,  
Belfast BT4 3SB Tel: (028) 9052 0922



## Barn owl distribution

Data provided by *The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland 1988–1991*. British Trust for Ornithology, Scottish Ornithologists' Club and Irish Wildbird Conservancy (now known as Birdwatch Ireland).



**Filled dot = breeding**

**Open dot = present during the breeding season**