

Barred Owl

(Strix varia)

Family: Strigidae

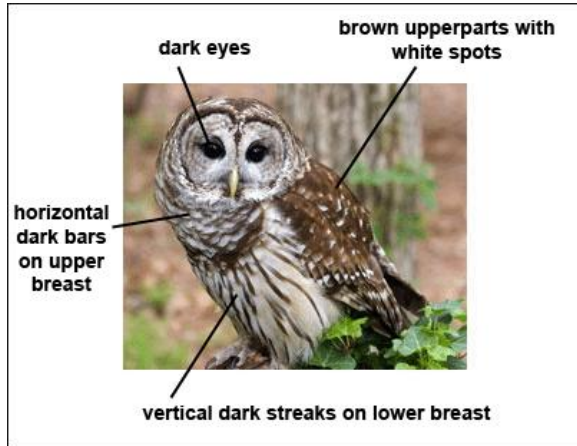


Photo from Birdzilla.com

Physical Characteristics: Large, 16-25 in. long with a wingspan of 38-49 in. The barred owl is a grey/brown woodland owl with round head and no ear tufts. It has a pale face with dark rings around the eyes, yellow beak and brown eyes. The ruff of feathers across upper breast is horizontally barred. The rest of the underparts are whitish to buff with lengthwise streaks. Legs and feet are feathered to the talons. Back is brownish grey with variable whitish to buff patches.

Interesting Facts: The only owl of the eastern US with brown eyes. All other owls are yellow eyed. Female is up to one-third heavier than male.

Young are able to climb trees using their beaks and talons.

As its range increases into the Pacific Northwest, it is breeding with the Spotted Owl to form a hybrid.

Life span in captivity has been documented at 23 years.

Status: Populations and range have been reduced in e. Canada and the U.S. secondary to forest clearing and agriculture during the last 200 years. Predation occurs from other large owls and hawks, and climbing predatory

mammals of the weasel family. Raccoons will eat the eggs.

Habitat: Some recent studies have found suburban neighborhood populations, but large, unfragmented blocks of forest consisting of mature trees in swamps, riparian and upland oak areas are preferred owing to greater availability of nest sites, easier hunting and closed canopy for thermoregulation and protection from mobbing by other birds. They are strongly territorial to other barred owls and call imitation by other species.

Nesting: Solitary except during breeding season, they are presumed monogamous. Eggs may be laid as early as Dec. in the south, but March through April is typical. Nests are seldom original; rather more commonly, use is made of existing structures such as stick nests built by hawks crows, ravens, or squirrels; and tree cavities or nesting boxes where they may add lichen or conifer sprigs. From 1-5 pure white, oval eggs may be laid with an incubation period of 28-33 days. Typically one brood per year is raised, but occasionally there is a second one if 1st batch has been destroyed. The female is the sole brooder and feeder of the young, although the male does bring the female prey to give the young. Fledging occurs at approximately 4-5 weeks of age. Normal lifespan in the wild is 10 years.

Food Habits: Opportunist predators, barred owls will consume small mammals, rabbits, birds, grouse, amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates. Observations have found them wading in shallow water for fish and crayfish as well as plunging beneath snow to capture small mammals. Prey is consumed whole or the head eaten first in larger mammals. Primarily a nocturnal hunter, diurnal hunting has also been observed. Prey may be cached in the nest, on conifer branches, in crooks and on top of snags.

Song: . Known to have a wide variety of vocalizations from a bark to laughter; but, the most common is the “Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all” call.

Range: Dense woods across Canada, eastern U.S. and south to Mexico.

Legal Status: The barred owl, while not endangered, is a non-game bird and may not be legally hunted or trapped.

Milam County: Permanent resident. Barred owls are non migratory.

Sources: Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>); Cornell Lab of Ornithology (<http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species>); The Peregrine fund (http://www.peregrinefund.org/Explore_Raptors); Barred Owl Biology (www.Owling.com); www.Birdzilla.com