

## **BARN OWL**

Tyto Alba

**Length:** 29 – 44cm

**Wingspan:** 85-98cm

**Weight:** 235-323g

**Description:** White underparts and under wings; Sandy-buff upper parts flecked with grey and black; sandy/buff tail with horizontal grey/black barring. Distinctive heart white face. The males tending to be much lighter than the females with a white face whereas the females have buff facial highlights from the eyes down towards the beak, they also have a hint of buff across the top of the chest and some have tiny spots on from under the wings towards the middle of the chest (but these can't be relied up for sexing in isolation as some males can have a smattering of spots), the barring on the tail feathers are also darker in the female.

Unlike other breeds of owls, both sexes of the Barn Owl tend to be very similar in size. The only weight difference will occur in the run up to breeding, when the male feeds the female so she comes into good condition for breeding.

**Habitat:** Open countryside, unmanaged grassland, pasture, and shrub. In Norfolk, they have been found to hunt over the reed beds for roosting starlings. They avoid woodland, forests, and mountain areas. As they rely on their hearing for hunting they are unable to hunt within suburban or urban areas although they have been known to roost and nest in buildings in noisy farmyards and business parks on the edge of towns, villages and cities near to their hunting grounds.

**Food:** Their favourite prey is the short-tailed field vole which lives in unmanaged grassland, they will also take other rodents including small rats and have been known to also take, birds, frogs, bats, lizards etc. The Barn Owl is the only owl which does not eat insects. The Barn Owl quarters over open countryside listening for its prey. They are nocturnal with a diurnal tendency this allows them to hunt in daylight if there has been a run of bad weather or they are providing for a large brood.

**Call:** Apart from the courtship period around April when the contact call is a long, harsh screech, you have to be close to a Barn Owl to hear any of its calls the main one being a wheezing hiss, it also snores and purrs.