

## Facts at a Glance

### TYPE OF ANIMAL

Avian/Bird

### SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Strix varia*

### FOUND WHERE

Eastern U.S.;  
Southwestern Canada/ California

### HEIGHT/LENGTH

18.9 – 21 in. (48 – 51 cm)

### WEIGHT

Averages 630 - 800 g

### CONSERVATION STATUS

Least Concern



Barred owls are large arboreal birds, with a rounded head, grayish-white facial features, and distinctly large, wistful eyes. Their feathery down is typically a brownish-gray to bold cinnamon color with buffed white spotting and bar patterns. These owls have one of the most distinct baritone calls and an easily recognizable nine-syllable song said to sound similar to “who cooks for you? who cooks for you all?”

## HABITAT

As with many owls, barred owls prefer forested areas, typically living in coniferous forests or wooded swamplands. They prefer dense foliage for daytime rest and larger trees that have cavities optimal for breeding. They are most commonly seen in deciduous-mixed forest and favor thickly covered areas, only coming into scattered clearings to hunt.

## DIET

Barred owls are carnivorous, primarily feeding on small mammals. They typically eat mice, squirrels, shrews, and rabbits, but they will also eat small birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, insects, and even some aquatic creatures like crabs or crayfish. They are fairly generalist eaters that hunt by night, dawn, or dusk. Like almost all owls, they are silent hunters, slowly flying low through tree cover and snatching prey with strong talons without making a sound.

## LIFE & BEHAVIOUR

Barred owls are monogamous and mostly solitary, only coming together to form bonded pairs that mate for life. Males and females will engage in a courtship dance of sorts, bobbing and bowing their heads, raising wings, and calling to each other from parallel branches. After the duet, the pair will nest in a large nesting cavity, usually dug in trees. However, they will also use abandoned hawk nests, crows' nests, nesting boxes, and even squirrel nests. Couples breed from December to March and usually lay 1 to 5 eggs that they incubate and care for about 6 months.

## ATTRACTING BIRDS

Though not typically backyard birds, if you live near a forested area or have a forested backyard, allowing dense clusters of mature trees and restricting pesticide use will help owls. Large nesting boxes may also encourage these birds to nest nearby.