

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

This resource can be cited as:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

The Barn Owl, the most far ranging of the world's owls, is absent only from parts of the West Indies, Indonesia, and New Zealand and is found only rarely north of 55° N latitude. When the Florida Atlas project began in 1986, this species was named the Common Barn-Owl (AOU 1983), however, in 1989 its former name was restored (AOU 1989).

Habitat. The Barn Owl inhabits open or partially open country, where suitable nest sites are available. It generally avoids wooded habitats, preferring instead farmlands, meadows, and towns. It hunts by flying over open habitat searching for small rodents its primary prey item. Bent (1938) reports that, in the south, Barn Owls may specialize on cotton rats. However, Johnsgard (1988) states that Barn Owls feed on whatever food is available and small enough to be taken. In addition to small rodents, insects, and amphibians, birds are also taken. Several studies of Barn Owl food habits in Florida (Horner et al. 1974, Trost and Hutchinson 1963) support Johnsgard's conclusion. The Great Horned Owl is known to be an important predator of the Barn Owl and, where present, may influence the Barn Owl's foraging patterns (Rudolph 1978).



Illustration © 1995 Diane Pierce, All Rights Reserved.

The nest site, in a tree cavity, rock crevice, abandoned machinery, or old building, is usually unlined, but occasionally bits of wood, twigs, and other similar materials are placed on the floor. The eggs are white and somewhat more elliptical than those of most other owl species. Clutch size varies greatly. Usually 5 to 7 eggs comprise a clutch, but as many as 11 eggs may be laid. Johnsgard (1988) reports that fledgling success is correlated with prey abundance during the nestling stage and tends to decline in clutches larger than 5. The female incubates the eggs, during which time she depends on her mate for food. Incubation lasts 30 to 34 day; and the asynchronous hatching of the young may result in age differences of up to 3 weeks. Both parents brood the young, which fledge at 56 to 62 days of age.

Courtship behavior by the male includes patrolling the territory while screeching loudly, hovering over the female, repeatedly flying in and out of the nest site, and offering food items to the female.

Seasonal Occurrence. In Florida, nesting takes place throughout the year, and a pair often produces 2 brood per year. A pair nesting in a tree next to Audubon House in Maitland, Florida, produced 3 broods in 1990 (H. Kale, pers. commun.). When a second brood is produced, courtship and even egg laying may begin before the young of the first brood have fledged (Johnsgard 1988).

Status. Howell (1932) considered the Barn Owl "a rather common permanent resident in all parts of the state. Today, Atlas data are somewhat misleading. The map suggests that the Barn Owl is much more common and widespread in the southern peninsula than in the remainder of the state. Although this may be true to some extent, a much higher degree of Atlas coverage was obtained in the central and southeastern peninsula than in the Panhandle and north Florida, with the exception of a few areas, and this no doubt has affected the map. The Barn Owl is not known to breed in the Keys.

Due to its strictly nocturnal habits, the Barn Owl is a difficult species to locate. It commonly breeds in winter and early spring before most Atlas activity. Significant Atlas data were obtained from wildlife rehabilitators and local residents.

Sean P. Rowe

Sponsored by Peter B. Belmont

Barn Owl

