

BEST PRACTICES



Barred Owl (*Strix varia*): A Boisterous, Naturalizing Migrant

What They Look Like

Barred owls are large and stocky. They are mottled brown with round heads and tail. Barred owls do not have ear tufts and their eyes are nearly black. They are smaller than the great horned owl, but larger than a barn owl. Their upper breast is crossed with vertical brown bars on a white background. Their wings and tails are barred brown and white.

Where They Live

Barred owls live year-round in mixed mature forests, preferring older forests with large trees and plenty of places for nesting and prey. They nest 20–40 feet off the ground. They also use human made nest boxes and stick platforms created by other animals. It is thought that barred owls nest for life, raising one brood per year of 2–3 eggs. The female sits on the nest while the male hunts for food. These large owls are territorial, especially during nesting season and when raising young. Barred owls have been known to chase away intruders, including humans, by aggressively hooting or striking with their talons.



What They Eat

Barred owls mostly eat small mammals such as squirrels, mice, voles, rabbits, other birds and reptiles. They have also been known to fish for crayfish and crabs. If they eat enough crayfish, the feathers under their wings can turn pink, just like flamingos turn pink from the carotenoids in the shrimp they eat.

Impact From Humans

Did you know that our collective actions at home can have a negative impact on wildlife around us like birds and small mammals? Pesticides and insecticides used in our yards and around our homes can kill beneficial insects eaten by birds and also harm small mammals, disrupting their hormones and poisoning their food sources.

How They Got Here

Until the twentieth century, barred owls were found in the mature undisturbed forests in eastern North America. How did they get from the eastern forests to the forests of the west? They naturally migrated as forest cover increased throughout the prairies, due to forest fire suppression and tree planting on the Great Plains. Starting in the late 1800's, barred owls began expanding their geographic range north and west. Since the 1980's they have become common in Pacific Northwest (PNW) forests. Their newly expanded range completely encompasses the

range of the federally listed endangered spotted owl, outcompeting, displacing and interbreeding with the smaller less aggressive species, further endangering their populations. Barred owls also prey upon other smaller native owls of the PNW, wiping out their populations in some areas.

What They Sound Like

Barred owls have a distinctive call, which sounds like “who cooks for you.” Sometimes their call is mistaken for the call of a forest primate!

How Will a Changing Climate Affect Barred Owl Populations?

Increased wildfires, due to climate change, can destroy habitat for owls. Hotter temperatures in spring can lower nesting survival for young owls. Owls, like other wildlife, face loss of habitat due to increased urbanization.

Source: Stream Team News, Summer 2021