

Species Sheets: Barn Owl



photo by Alan Nelson ©

Common name: Barn Owl

Latin Name: *Tyto alba*

Field Marks: Length 16 inches
Wing span 42 inches



Easily recognized owl that lives around the world with many races or subspecies (perhaps up to 46). Large head with heart-shaped facial disc and small, close-set dark eyes. Slim body with long legs and strong talons. Buffy-brown above with creamy white underparts. Often described as “ghost-like” in flight. Females slightly darker than males.

Habitat:

Countryside with open fields, hedgerows, farmland, and semi-arid lands, especially with old outbuildings.

Behavior:

Diet almost entirely small mammals. Mice, voles, pocket gophers, rats, shrews. With excellent hearing can catch prey by sound on the darkest of nights. Very nocturnal and usually hunts from perches.

Vocalization:

Most vocal during breeding season. Diverse calls include screeches, hisses, twitters, yelps, screams and wheezes, especially by male. Also click beak and spreads wings like other owls in defense.

Nest and eggs:

Called Barn Owl because of preferred nest and roost sites in old buildings. Also nests in hollow trees and caves. Lays 4-7 eggs, sometimes as many as 12 when prey plentiful. Male feeds female and young up to about 2 weeks, then female may hunt as well. Uses artificial nest boxes.

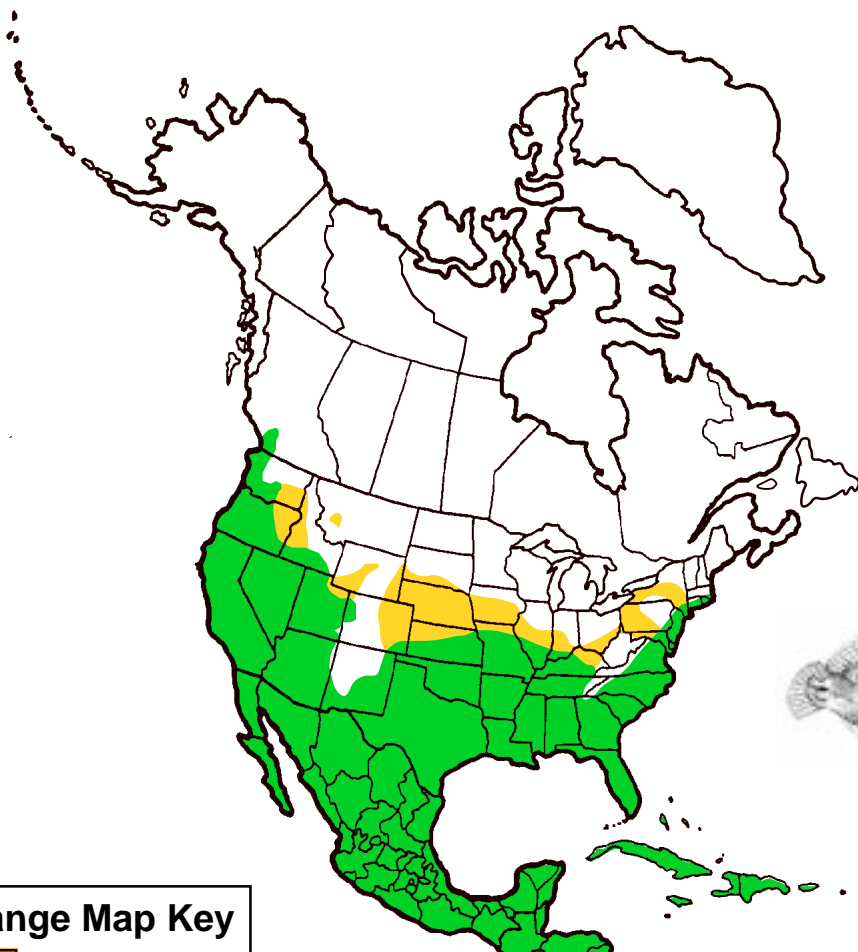
Movement:

Very rare and local in Montana, probably because of harsh winters. This seems to be the far northern-most reaches of this species. Young especially move south in winter.

Interesting Fact:

It is said that a single Barn Owl with a ten-year life span may eat 11,000 rodents. These rodents spread disease, foul human food, and may eat the equivalent of 13 tons of crops. Clearly, the Barn Owl, like so many other raptors, is the farmer’s best friend.

Range Map: Barn Owl



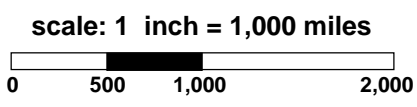
Barn Owl, Copyright © Alan Nelson



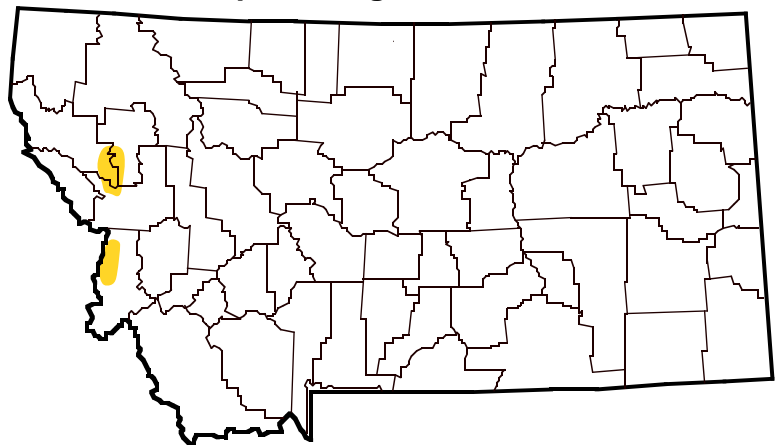
These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

Range Map Key

- Summer
- Year-round
- Winter



Raptor Range in Montana



Montana range maps are based on the Montana Bird Distribution data.