



# ONTARIO BARN OWL RECOVERY PROJECT

## *Barn Owls: Commonly Asked Questions and Answers for Landowners* (Revised September 2001)

*How do I know if I have Barn Owls on my property or nesting in my barn?*

Barn Owls are nocturnal (active after dusk), do not hoot like other owls and are quite secretive. You probably will not be aware of their presence unless you are lucky. Other than actually seeing a barn owl the following are indicators of the presence of barn owls in your barn:

- Barn Owl pellets (regurgitated balls of rodent fur and bones)
- White wash (droppings on sides of beams and overhangs)
- Feathers (which can be identified for you by biologists on our committee)
- The sound of young chicks begging parents for food or defensive hissing if disturbed in the nest

*If I allow a nest box on my property what am I expected to do? Can I do my own nest box monitoring?*

We encourage you to become involved in monitoring. Each spring you will receive a letter outlining how to monitor and a recording sheet for your observations. These can be returned to the Coordinator in late summer with the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided. Your support is always greatly appreciated. Of course, if you actually see a Barn Owl on your property or at the nest box, please call Bernie Solymar, our Coordinator, immediately at 519-426-7124 or 519-420-9674 (cell) for a site visit.

*What incentives are there for me in regards to taxes/grants, etc.?*

Currently there are no tax or financial benefits to being a participant in the Ontario Barn Owl Recovery Program. We do provide a sign - "We Give a Hoot!" - that allows you to indicate your participation in the project. The biggest incentive, and source of satisfaction and pride, for all of us is the possible presence of Barn Owls in your nest box.

*If I allow a nest box to be put on or in my barn will I be inundated with birders and other curious people on my property?*

No. All location information is kept strictly confidential, and we will not release exact location and landowner information to any agency (government or otherwise) or individuals outside the committee without your exclusive permission. This benefits you and the Barn Owls. Any visits to your property by the Coordinator or committee members will be preceded by a phone call.

*Will barn owls in my barn kill my chickens/geese/ducks/cats, etc.? Will they attack my kids if they play around the nest box site?*

Barn Owls are almost exclusively "mousers", feeding mainly on voles, mice and shrews. They may occasionally catch and feed on songbirds. They do not attack humans. They may, however, give a "blood-curdling" screech and hiss if disturbed or threatened at the nest site.

*Since the Barn Owl is now classified "endangered" by the federal government, will I have restrictions placed on my farming practices/activities?*

Because the birds are using artificial structures that are erected to benefit this species with landowner approval, there are no special legal commitments or obligations, apart from the simple obligation from the landowner that the birds, eggs or young will not be deliberately destroyed. *No special federal restrictions will apply to people who participate in the nest box program.* However, if you are lucky enough to have Barn Owls nesting in an artificial structure on your property, we will offer a set of easy to follow



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guidelines for you to consider, so that the owls are able to successfully fledge their young. Landowner participation in the program is completely voluntary, and based on the notion that landowners sincerely wish to have Barn Owls on their property and do what they can to help the species recover. Still, landowners can completely withdraw from the program at any time with a simple phone call.

*If I have Barn Owls nesting in my barn do I have to avoid noisy activities around the barn so as not to disturb them or scare them off?*

Barn Owls prefer barns as nesting sites and have for centuries. Although unused, darker barns are preferable, normal and routine farm activities are unlikely to unduly disturb Barn Owls nesting in your barn. Loud, unfamiliar noises (car back firing, shotgun blast) may startle owls, however. Tampering with or disturbing the actual nest box is discouraged, especially during the incubation stage.

*Is there anything I can do to make my barn more favorable to Barn Owls?*

Ideal barns are those not regularly used with a height of 18 feet or more. The darker the barn the better. One or more permanent openings to allow barn owls to enter the barn allows for a roosting site for adult barn owls when not in the nest (occurs commonly after young reach 2-3 weeks of age), and at all times of the year, including winter. We encourage boxes to be placed so that the entrance faces out of the barn (6'' x 6'' opening), and towards suitable habitat. This discourages raiding of nest boxes by raccoons, opossums, cats, and other nest predators.

*Will other birds use the nest boxes? If we notice other birds nesting in our nest box should we be concerned or discourage this?*

Other birds may nest in the boxes. American Kestrels, Starlings and Pigeons are common occupants of Barn Owl boxes. Squirrels, raccoons and wasps (hornets, yellowjackets, paper wasps) may also occupy boxes. Screech Owls may use the boxes as winter roosts or for breeding.

In general any raptor nesting in a Barn Owl box is a good thing and should not be discouraged. In Ohio, Barn Owls have been observed evicting American Kestrels and other birds and taking over nest boxes. Placing box so that opening faces out of the barn will minimize chances of squirrels, raccoons and other mammals from taking up residence. The Ontario Barn Owl Recovery Committee would be appreciate being informed of presence of any raptors (and indeed any species) occupying your nest boxes.

*How long does this project go for?*

We anticipate that this project will continue for at least 5 years (through 2004), and are looking for commitments from landowners for this duration if at all feasible.