



Barred Owl

(*Strix varia*)

This large, tuft-less owl was named for the gray-brown barring across its back and vertical streaks over its light underbelly. Its dark eyes are set in a round facial disc. The barred owl's feathers are fluffed out from the body, causing its size to be quite misleading. Though this owl appears to be as large as the great-horned owl, it is actually only one-fourth its weight.

Habitat & Diet

The barred owl is seldom found far from wetlands, where its preferred prey is abundant. Though the owl feeds mostly on mice and small rodents, it will occasionally eat other small mammals, birds, frogs, snails, salamanders, snakes, and insects. It is also fond of crayfish, and even occasionally walks in the water to catch fish. It has night vision 100X better than humans, and can catch prey in total darkness, relying only on sound.

Fascinating Facts

This is the champion vocalist of owls, able to make a wide variety of sounds. It is best known for its eight-note call, interpreted as “who cooks for you, who cooks for you all?” It will make its call during the daytime, especially during thunderstorms. It has been nicknamed “Crazy Owl” for the various hair-raising noises it makes. Barred owls stay in the same area, migrating only during extreme weather. One pair was recorded to use the same nest for 33 straight years. Its niche-switch is the red-shouldered hawk. This owl has been evolved for about 80 million years, according to DNA testing.

Height: 17-24 inches
Weight: male: 630g, female: 800g
Wingspan: 40 - 50 inches
Habitat: Deep woods, streams or swamps
Range: Eastern US & Canada; scattered parts of the northwest
Life Expectancy: 20-30 yrs.
Baby: Owlet
Group: Parliament



Status

The barred owl depends highly on swamps and wetlands for its food source, and it suffers greatly when these habitats are destroyed. Excessive development in much of the barred owl's range has led to a decline in its population throughout the eastern US. Because of human habitat modification, the Barred Owl is moving west, and hybridizing with the Spotted Owl in the Northwest.

