

Ohio Wildlife Spotlight: The Barred Owl

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Whoooooo wants to learn about more Ohio wildlife? Whooooo has heard this animal sounding its call in the middle of the night? You may already be able to guess the species that we have chosen for this week's news article. More specifically, this week's news article will look at one member of this species that is found around Ohio, the Barred Owl. Where does this animal live? What do they eat? What are some unique characteristics about them? Learn along with us as we look at another amazing Ohio wildlife resident.

Unlike other owl species, the Barred Owl does not have "horns" or large ear tufts, which are long feathers on the tops of their heads that look like horns. This species is identified by its brownish-gray feathers with white patches on their back, and white streaks that run laterally along their stomach. According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), the Barred Owl has white bars that appear on their neck and breast that run slanting across these areas and to which this animal gets name. Additionally, it is important to point out that this species is unlike most of its other owl relatives in that their eyes are brown in color rather than the yellow we traditionally see with owls. On average, the Barred Owl will be around 18-22 inches with about a four-foot wingspan.

According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Barred Owls will take up residence during the day high in the forest trees while coming out at night to do their hunting for prey, often those of the rodent kind. This is a nocturnal behavior which means they are active at night and typically inactive during the nighttime hours. The owl will make a home in an area that offers a mix of deciduous and evergreen trees with their home specifically being in the cavities of the tree. Homes are often located near sources of water. ODNR points out recent research that points to the fact that Barred Owls have shown a preference towards damp sites because these areas have a lesser likelihood to be disturbed by timber harvests that take away the mature trees they use for their nesting areas, which is a critical part of their habitat. Should hunting prove to be less productive in a certain area, this species of owl will move to a different area, otherwise they do not travel large distances.

Previously, it was mentioned that rodents are a favorite of the Barred Owl, although this is not the only thing that they will eat. Other prey of this owl includes: reptiles, fish, snails, slugs, bats, chickens, crows, crayfish, and rabbits to name a few. ODNR writes that Barred Owls that live in Ohio will commonly dine on meadow voles, short-tailed shrews, and white footed mouse. Again, the owl does its hunting at night and it is extremely rare to see them doing any hunting during the daytime hours.

It is common for members of the owl species that they will not go to the trouble of building their own nests. As was previously mentioned, they commonly will use hollowed out tree cavities or maybe an old squirrel's nest. Typically, the incubation time for the egg of the Barred Owl is about a month with the average two to three eggs hatching between the middle of March and the middle of April as spring sets in. ODNR writes that within a

week of hatching the eyes of the young owls, known as owlets, will open and leaving the nest a month following that. It is not until the owlets are around nine weeks old that they will gain the ability to fly.

The Audubon Society notes that the Barred Owl is currently “widespread and common” but has possibly seen a population decrease in areas of the south with a loss of swampy habitat. It is also noted that this species has moved into the northwestern areas of the United States only to find itself competing with another owl species already living in the area known as the Spotted Owl.

Have you seen a Barred Owl spotted in your neighborhood? Let us know, we would love to see your photos and hear your stories! If you do take a photo, why not submit it as part of our ongoing photo contest? Send us your photos and be entered to win a cash prize from the Paulding Soil & Water Conservation District! Check our website for complete details or call the office and we will be happy to assist! Now you know a little more about yet another resident of our great state of Ohio, stay tuned for additional installments of our *Ohio Wildlife Series*.