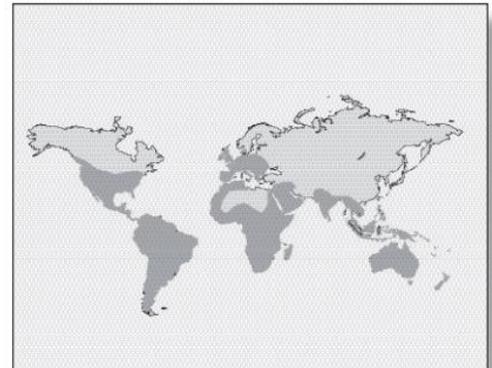




Barn Owl

Tyto alba

Order	Strigiformes
Family	Tytonidae
Genus	<i>Tyto</i>
Species	<i>alba</i>



Geographic Range: Most widely distributed of all owl species. Not found in desert or polar regions or in parts of Asia and some Pacific Islands. There are 20 – 30 subspecies recognized.

Habitat: Open farmlands or grasslands – prefers to hunt along the edge of woods

Niche: Arboreal, nocturnal, carnivorous

Wild Diet: Mostly small mammals, especially rodents

Life Span: Up to 12 years in the wild, 25+ in captivity

Appearance: White heart-shaped face and white underparts. Head and back are buff and grey. Long-legged and long-winged. Head to tail 12 – 18 inches, wingspan 30 – 40 inches. Average weight is slightly over 1 pound.

Adaptations: Specialized feathers help them to fly silently. Since barn owls hunt by cover of darkness, they have acute hearing with asymmetrically placed ears so that they can accurately determine distance and location of sound.

Fun Facts: Barn owls don't hoot, but instead give a shriek-like call. Because of this, some people fear them and consider them a bad omen; giving them names such as ghost owl, demon owl, death owl and night owl. In other regions, barn owls are highly respected for their rodent-catching abilities and are actively encouraged to roost in barns or attics.

At the Zoo: Our barn owl "Wilbur" lives at the Koret Animal Resource Center

Comparison: Owls and raptors are both birds of prey. They are both carnivorous birds which hunt while flying using their talons to capture prey. Raptors include hawks, eagles, buzzards, osprey, vultures and falcons. Raptors are primarily diurnal and rely on their keen eyesight to hunt for prey. Most owl species are nocturnal and as a result have better low-light vision and rely mostly on their superior hearing to hunt and locate prey.

Status and Conservation: Not threatened as an overall species but various subspecies are threatened to different degrees.

Threats: Habitat loss, the use of pesticides including rat poison, and pet or feral cats.

Bibliography: Nature Trail Handbook, Animal Diversity Web



Being nocturnal hunters, owls rely heavily on their ears to find their small prey. In this exercise, the students will close their eyes and rely on their ears to tell the difference between sounds the teacher makes in the room. By changing both location and type of sound, the teacher challenges the students to use the same sense the owl does.

