

2009

Birds of the Great Plains: Family Tytonidae (Barn Owls)

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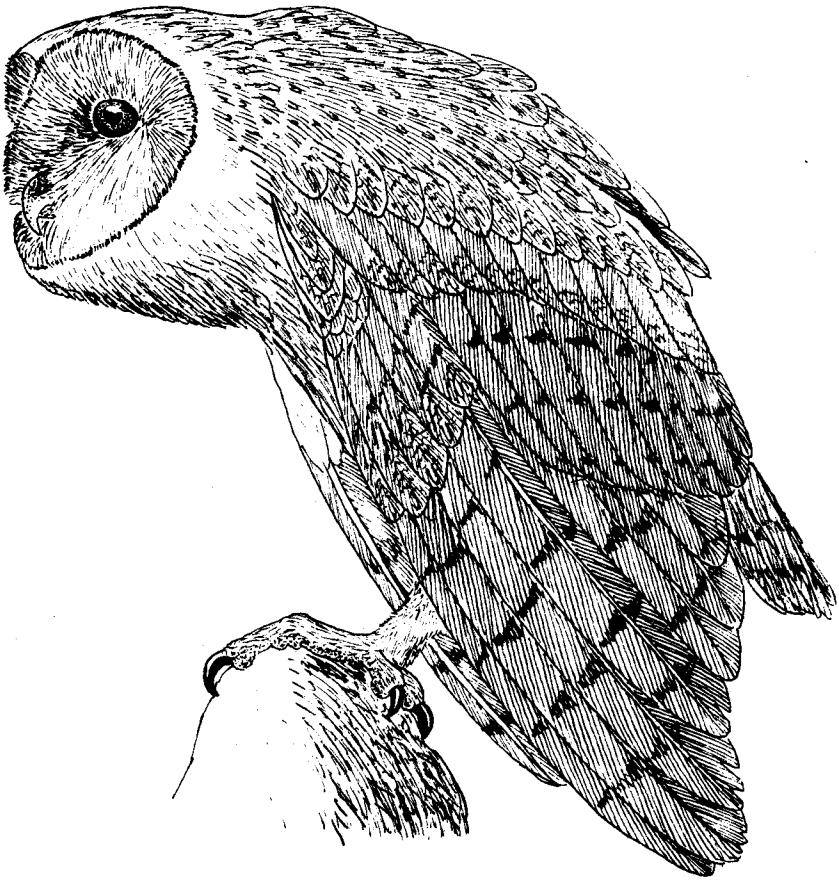
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Johnsgard, Paul A., "Birds of the Great Plains: Family Tytonidae (Barn Owls)" (2009). *Birds of the Great Plains (Revised edition 2009)* by Paul Johnsgard. 31.

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FAMILY TYTONIDAE
(BARN OWLS)

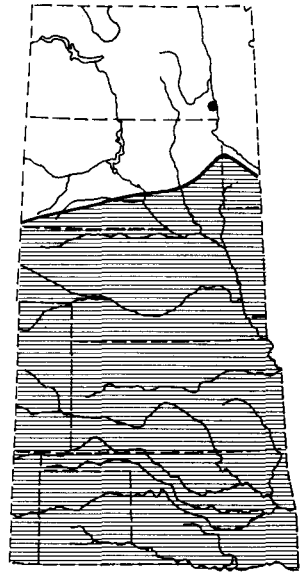


Barn Owl

Barn Owl

Tyto alba

Breeding Status: Breeds locally and commonly throughout nearly the entire area except the northernmost portions. There is a single North Dakota breeding record (Cass County), and only one Minnesota record (Nobles County) since 1965. The species is considered rare in Iowa, breeds only locally in South Dakota, and in Nebraska apparently occurs uncommonly throughout the state, though there are few actual nest records. It likewise is a "low density" resident throughout Kansas, is a rare breeder in extreme northwestern Missouri, and is uncommon in Colorado. It is probably a casual breeder in eastern New Mexico (no definite records), is infrequent in the Texas panhandle and Red River Valley (breeding records for Hemphill, Wilbarger, and Cooke counties), and apparently is uncommon throughout Oklahoma.



Breeding Habitat: Extremely widely distributed, this species favors warm climates and open to semiopen habitats where small rodents are abundant and where hollow trees, old buildings, or caves provide roosting and nesting cover.

Nest Location: Natural cavities, crevices, nesting boxes, or deserted buildings are frequent nest sites; old crow nests or rooftops may also be used. Often no nest is built; the eggs are simply deposited on the substrate, with disgorged pellets or other rubbish often forming a nest lining.

Clutch Size and Incubation Period: Usually 4-7 eggs (4 Kansas nests averaged 4.7), but up to 11 have been reported. The eggs are white and elliptical. They are laid at intervals of 2-3 days and incubated from the first egg. The incubation period is 30-31 days. Double-brooded in favorable years, but not nesting at all in unfavorable years.

Time of Breeding: Eggs in Kansas are laid from at least April to July. Oklahoma egg records are from March 4 to October 1. In Texas, breeding occurs almost throughout the year, but most nesting is during winter, with eggs reported from November 13 to May 16.

Breeding Biology: Barn owls become mature in their first year of life, and once paired they probably remain mated indefinitely. The first indication of breeding activity is the increased screeching of males, reflecting territoriality. Males often screech while flying through their territories in a kind of "song flight," and they also greet their mates with a squeaking call. Females greet their mates by "snoring," which stimulates prey-presentation and copulation. Only the female incubates, but the male often visits the nest with food, and after hatching he brings food to the nest, which the female dismembers and feeds to the young. Later the female also gathers food, and the young are fed for a time even after they

fledge at about 8 weeks of age. About a month after fledging they leave the territory, and the pair may begin a second brood.

Suggested Reading: Bunn and Warburton 1977; Reese 1972.

