The British Barn Owl

The barn owl is one of the most popular birds in Britain but is now extremely rare.

The bird favours open habitats such as grassland, hedgerows, the edges of fields or woodlands, stubble fields and farmyards.

The barn owl is a carnivore and hunts for its favourite diet of small mammals and birds. It usually flies back and forth, about three metres above the ground, using its large eyes and sensitive hearing to spot likely prey. If suitable perches, such as fence posts are available, the bird may save energy by hunting from these.

When seen in flight, the general impression is of a large white bird. However, the upper parts are of a beautiful golden buff colour, delicately marked in varying shades of buff and grey.

After choosing a suitable hole in a tree or a ledge in an old building, the female barn owl lays between four and seven eggs in April each year. The owlets are developed after ten weeks and leave the nest after about fourteen weeks, by which they must be able to survive alone.

The number of barn owls in Britain is decreasing. There are now fewer habitats where they can find mice, voles and other prey. In some areas, owls have been affected by chemicals and cannot lay proper eggs. This means that they cannot breed and increase their numbers. In addition, many birds have been killed accidentally as they fly across major roads and motorways.

The barn owl is one of nature’s most graceful hunters. Many organisations in Britain, such as the Barn Owl Trust in the South West, are working towards their conservation.