

# Bird of the Month

by Suzy Sharpe



# Barn Owl

Tyto alba



# OCTOBER

# Bird of the Month

## October

The aim of this project is to research a different bird each month, gathering poetry, songs, facts, stories and information, to further understand, discover and share ways in which we can help them in the wild.

All the books are free to download in the month that they are produced after which there is a small charge for back editions.

More of my work can be found on my website including greetings cards, prints, printmaking and original drawings and paintings.

Many thanks for your interest I hope you enjoy the booklet

Suzy Sharpe

[www.suzysharpartist.com](http://www.suzysharpartist.com)



# acts

There are approximately 4000 pairs in UK during the summer

Length: 34 cm

Wingspan: 89 cm

Weight: 300 g

Diet: Small mammals (mice small voles, shrews), some small birds,

Habitat Open country, farmland, rough grazing, field margins

Average Life span is 4 years

British record is 15 years Oldest recorded is 21 years in Europe

Broods 2

Egg Size 39 x 32 mm Weight = 21.2 g

Clutch Size 4 - 6 eggs

Incubation Period 32 days

Fledging 53 - 61 days

Incubation with first egg is laid, further eggs laid over a period of 8-21 days.

After 31-32 days they hatch every 2-3 days,



# Habitat



Field edges, the edges of watercourses, and grass strips alongside woods provide ideal hunting habitat for barn owls. However they prefer rough grassland according to the Barn Owl trust this should incorporate some specific elements, particularly a litter layer “Grass that’s allowed to grow tall in the summer and not cut or grazed, will collapse by the autumn. Fresh green blades of grass will then grow up through it and by the following summer most of the first-year’s growth will have died-back and formed a “litter layer”. A good litter layer is about 70mm deep”

On my own land my horses are inefficient grazers and have more grass than they need, as do my 6 sheep and being mostly native breeds like hedges as much as grass, I have also fenced some off the field margins, so I do have areas of rough grassland with the litter layer described... I can see small rodent holes running through it. I do see and hear them from time to time, which always brings me joy! However I would like to see more of them so this month's research will be useful to me.



# What can we do?

1. Join conservation groups
2. Support Charities who protect on conserve habitat and wildlife
3. Encourage good practice in farming
- 4..Vote with your purse, dont support bad practice in farming
5. Sign petitions to protect Birds and habitat
6. Share your love of wildlife with friends and family
7. If you are a land owner find out how you can improve your type of land to engourage and support more wildlife.

The Barn Owl Trust also suggests the following

- Manage land for Barn Owls.
- Provide a roosting and nesting place.
- Avoid using Rat Poison (rodenticides).
- Offer extra food in bad weather.
- Buy from wildlife-friendly farmers.
- Help your local Barn Owl Group.
- Start your own Barn Owl Project.
- Object to damaging rural developments.
- Help minimise climate change.
- Support the Barn Owl Trust.

Some links for further information:-

[Barn Owl Trust](#)

[British Trust for Ornithology](#)

[RSPB](#)

[The Raptor Foundation](#)

[Raptor Rescue](#)





# Behaviour



The barn owl is the most widespread landbird species in the world, occurring in every continent except Antarctica

Although the Barn Owl is nocturnal it also hunts by day, it relies on its acute sense of hearing when hunting in complete darkness. It prefers to hunt along the edges of woods or in rough grass strips adjoining pasture. It flies silently and effortlessly as it quarters the ground.

Females are ready to breed at ten to eleven months of age although males sometimes wait till the following year. They usually mate for life unless one of the pair is killed. Once a pair-bond has been formed, the male will make short flights at dusk around the nesting and roosting sites and then longer circuits to establish a home range.

Prey is normally swallowed whole, with indigestible parts (fur, bones, teeth, feathers etc) regurgitated in large, smooth, blackish pellets, which accumulate at nesting and roosting sites. Barn owls often hunt from exposed perches (eg fence-posts), but also in low flight.

# reeding

When the female joins the male there is chasing, turning and twisting in flight and screeching, the female's call is a lower, harsher call and the male's more high-pitched and tremulous. The female does all the incubation, and she and the young chicks are reliant on the male for food.

Although they choose holes in trees, fissures in cliff faces, in the British Isles, old buildings such as farm sheds and church towers are preferred due to our wetter climate as they provide better protection for fledglings.

No nesting material is used, instead as the female sits incubating the eggs, she uses the dry furry material from her pellets, so that by the time the chicks are hatched, they have a furry carpet of shredded pellets.

The eggs are elliptical chalky white, The chicks are covered with greyish-white down. By three weeks quills push through and the chicks stand, making snoring noises with wings raised and tail stumps wagging, begging for food now given whole. The male is the main provider of food until all the chicks are at least four weeks old at which time the female begins to leave the nest and starts to roost elsewhere. By the sixth week the chicks are as big as the adults but have slimmed down somewhat by the ninth week when they are fully fledged and start leaving the nest briefly themselves. They are dependent until about thirteen weeks and get training from the female in finding, and eventually catching, prey.



# Poetry



The Owl by Alfred Lord Tennyson

*When cats run home and light is come,  
And dew is cold upon the ground,  
And the far-off stream is dumb,  
And the whirring sail goes round,  
And the whirring sail goes round;  
Alone and warming his five wits,  
The white owl in the belfry sits.*

*When merry milkmaids click the latch,  
And rarely smells the new-mown hay,  
And the cock hath sung beneath the thatch  
Twice or thrice his roundelay,  
Twice or thrice his roundelay;  
Alone and warming his five wits,  
The white owl in the belfry sits.*





Barn Owl by R. S. Thomas

*“face hovering in the afterdraught  
of the spirit, making both ends meet  
on a scream. It is the breath  
of the churchyard, the forming  
of white frost in a believer, “*

The Owl seems to often represent good and evil in one body as here in the same poem

*“that is the voice  
of God in the darkness cursing himself  
fiercely for his lack of love.”*

from *The Way of It* (1977) You can read the full poem [here](#)

Also from by R S Thomas hes says



## More Poetry...



The Owl Who Comes by Mary Oliver,

this poem for me really captures the way I think about wildlife, when I see these incredible creatures but also feel for those they consume to survive. After perfectly describing the owl with eyes like “*two moons*” She continues

*“and if i wish the owl luck,  
and I do,  
what am I wishing for that other  
soft life,”*

*“what we must do,  
I suppose,  
is to hope the world  
keeps its balance;  
what we are to do, however,  
with our hearts  
waiting and watching—truly  
I do not know.”*

You can read the full poem [here](#)



## Owl Song Margaret Atwood

*"I am the heart of a murdered woman  
who took the wrong way home"*

*"I grew feathers and tore my way out of her;  
I am shaped like a feathered heart. "*

*"I sit in the forest talking of death "  
"there is only one death song,  
the colour of mist: "*

You can read the full text [here](#)



## And owl, Ted Hughes says

*"floats a masked soul listening for death.  
Death Listens for a soul  
Small mouths and their incriminations are suspended"*

I am afraid I cant find this poem online at the moment, but it can be found in the book A Ted Hughes Bestiary

# tories...

## lodeuwedd

In one of the Mabinogion legends, Arianrhod had two sons, one named Llew Llaw Gyffes onto whom she put three curses, that he would not receive a name unless it was given by her, he would not receive his armour unless from her, and the last curse was that he would never be allowed to marry a mortal woman.]

Two wizards, Gwydion and Math, created a wife for Llew Llaw Gyffes out of flowers and gave her the name Blodeuwedd, meaning 'Flower Face'. She was beautiful and innocent; immediately Llew fell in love with her and they were married. Not long after the marriage, Llew had to go and meet his uncles, and left her alone. She became bored and lonely and heard sounds nearby, looking from her castle she saw a hunting party approaching. The leader of the party was Gronw Pebyr, the lord of nearby Penllyn. He told Blodeuwedd that his party was looking for somewhere to stay and Blodeuwedd let him in.

Almost immediately she fell in love with Gronw Pebyr and they began an affair. They decided they would kill Llew. Gronw and his hunting party left and Llew returned, Blodeuwedd asked Llew what the method could be used to kill him, appearing to be sympathetic and concerned. Llew told her he could only be killed before he was about to take a bath on the banks of a river. One foot must be on the bath and the other on the back of a goat (!!!) and he could not be either indoor or outdoors. The only thing that would kill him then would be a spear, which had been worked on for exactly a year. Blodeuwedd went to Gronw Pebyr with the news, and he began working on a spear immediately.

Exactly a year later, as Llew was able to take a bath underneath a thatched roof along the banks of a river, Llew had one foot on the side of

a bath tub and the other on the back of a goat (but why!), Gronw Pebyr threw a spear into Llew's side.

However Llew had not told Blodeuwedd that he could not be killed; instead, as soon as the spear hit him, Llew transformed into an eagle and flew into a forest.

Gwydion found Llew in a tree in the forest nearby, living off the meat of a wild boar and was able to turn Llew back into a man. When Llew was back in the form of a human he set out to find Gronw Pebyr and Blodeuwedd.

Llew killed Gronw Pebyr, Blodeuwedd ran to the forest in fear.

Gwydion the wizard managed to corner her and as punishment for what she had done, he turned her into an owl, telling her that every other bird would fear her and thus she would have to live the rest of her life in solitude.



# Aesops Fable

## The Owl & the Grasshopper (Townsend version)

An owl, accustomed to feed at night and to sleep during the day, was greatly disturbed by the noise of a Grasshopper and earnestly besought her to stop chirping. The Grasshopper refused to desist, and chirped louder and louder the more the Owl entreated. When she saw that she could get no redress and that her words were despised, the Owl attacked the chatterer by a stratagem. "Since I cannot sleep," she said, "on account of your song which, believe me, is sweet as the lyre of Apollo, I shall indulge myself in drinking some nectar which Pallas lately gave me. If you do not dislike it, come to me and we will drink it together." The Grasshopper, who was thirsty, and pleased with the praise of her voice, eagerly flew up. The Owl came forth from her hollow, seized her, and put her to death.

Moral - Flattery is not a proof of true admiration.

There are 2 more Fables associated with the Owl, the Owl and the Birds and the Eagle and the Owl.





# Medieval



In the Middle Ages the Owl was a bird of ill-omen, believed to frequent tombs and dark caves. According to some sources it flew backwards! Isidore says 'It is a bird associated with the dead, weighed down, indeed, with its plumage, but forever hindered, too, by the weight of its slothfulness. It lives day and night around burial places and is always found in caves.' Rabanus says: 'The owl signifies those who have given themselves up to the darkness of sin and those who flee from the light of righteousness.' The owl gets its name from the sound it makes, because its mouth speaks when its heart is overfull, for what it thinks about in its mind, it utters with its voice. It is said to be a filthy bird, because it fouls its nest with its droppings, as the sinner dishonours those with whom he lives, by the example of his evil ways... For it lives in caves like the sinner who will not emerge from darkness by means of confession but detests the light of truth. When other birds see the owl, they signal its presence with loud cries and harrass it with fierce assaults. In the same way, if a sinner comes into the light of understanding, he becomes an object of derision to the virtuous. And when he is caught openly in the act of sinning, his ears are filled with their reproaches. As the birds pull out the owl's feathers and tear at it with their beaks, the virtuous censure the carnal acts of the sinner and condemn his excesses. The owl is known, therefore, as a miserable bird, just as the sinner, who behaves in the way we have described above, is a miserable man'



EE YOU IN



OVEMBER

If you would like to see some more of my work including original paintings, drawings, printmaking and greetings cards please visit my website [www.suzysharpartist.com](http://www.suzysharpartist.com)