



STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

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BARRED OWL (*Strix varia*)



Identifying Marks: Wingspan 38-50 inches; length 16-24 inches. Large, dark-eyed, gray-brown owl with a barred chest and striped belly. Lacks “horns” or feather tufts on its head, unlike the somewhat larger great horned owl.

Habitat: Year-round residents in mature woods ranging from lowland swamps and bottomlands to upland forests. Found throughout the eastern United States including all of Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana.

Nest: Tree cavities as well as abandoned nests of crows, squirrels, and hawks, especially red-shouldered hawks. The presence of large trees is key.

Diet: Mice, chipmunks, voles, shrews, insects, snakes, lizards, frogs, toads, birds, and even an occasional fish.

Voice: A two-phrase hoot: *hoo-hoo-to-hoo-oo*, *hoo-hoo-hoo-to-whooh*. This hooting pattern is commonly phoneticized as, “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-all?”

Comments: Like Stillman’s other raptors, the barred owl is non-releasable. It has a damaged wing.



Who Hoots For You?

Marking Territory

“Who cooks for you?” is a call that tells other owls this territory is spoken for. Both sexes make the call. The female’s hoot is higher than the male’s. The call can be heard in all months of the year but most frequently in February and March during mating season. Unlike most owls, barred owls will hoot during the day.

March Madness

While barred and great horned owls do hoot, others owls screech, chatter, bark, wail, whoop, whinny, trill, howl and caterwaul rather than hoot. With the barred owl, the caterwaul is just one of the calls you’ll hear performed by a dueting pair of owls. The duet, often performed in March, includes a raucous mix of cackles, whoops, caws, laughs, hoots, and gurgles.



Not only do owls rest during the day, they also yawn.

Halloween Hoots

Now, imagine hearing these haunting sounds while sitting by a campfire in a dark woods. Is it any wonder that a hooting owl is often heard in the background of scary movies? Of course, you know that a hooting barred owl is just letting the listener know *whoose* woods these are.