

Barred Owl

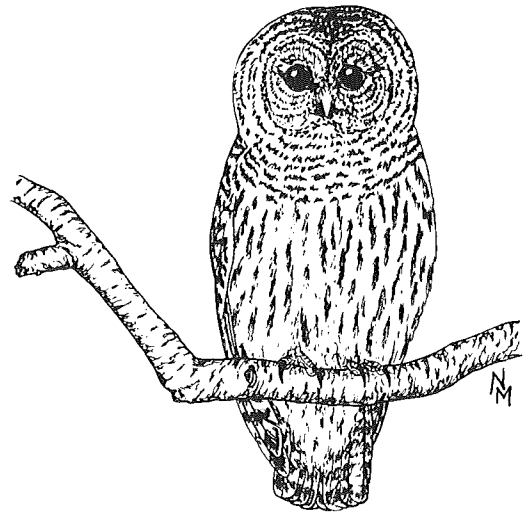
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The Barred Owl is the most common owl in Vermont, occurring in 53% of the priority blocks. This large, gray-brown owl has dark eyes, no feather tufts, and white breast barring; it is very distinctive in appearance. This species' diet includes mice, squirrels, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and insects; it will take whatever is easily available and within the grasping power of its relatively small feet (Errington 1932; Bent 1938). A gentle creature with an engaging personality, the Barred Owl can be quite tame and curious even in the wild. One individual raised at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science's raptor care facility in Woodstock returned there each winter for four years after his release, greeting his former benefactors with hoots, and swooping down to pluck mice from their hands. He returned in October or November and stayed until February or early March; the remainder of the year he lived on his own in the wild. Where he summered is not known, but he was found dead in Thetford, about 25 aerial miles from Woodstock, in January of his sixth year. As Errington (1932) wrote, the Barred Owl seems endowed with as mild a personality as a raptor could have and yet maintain a predaceous existence.

The Barred Owl is a very vocal owl and will frequently call during the day. The distinctive call is given by both the male and the female, with the male's deeper voice distinguishable in duets; the call can be translated as *who cooks for you? who cooks for you-all?* A variety of shorter calls, squeaks, and grunts is given.

The Barred Owl is one of the most common species across North America east of the Rockies. It occurs wherever preferred habitat exists—heavily wooded swamps, hemlock or pine forests, with adjacent open areas for hunting (Bent 1938). The Barred usually hunts by pouncing and so probably does not require as much open land as the Great Horned Owl.

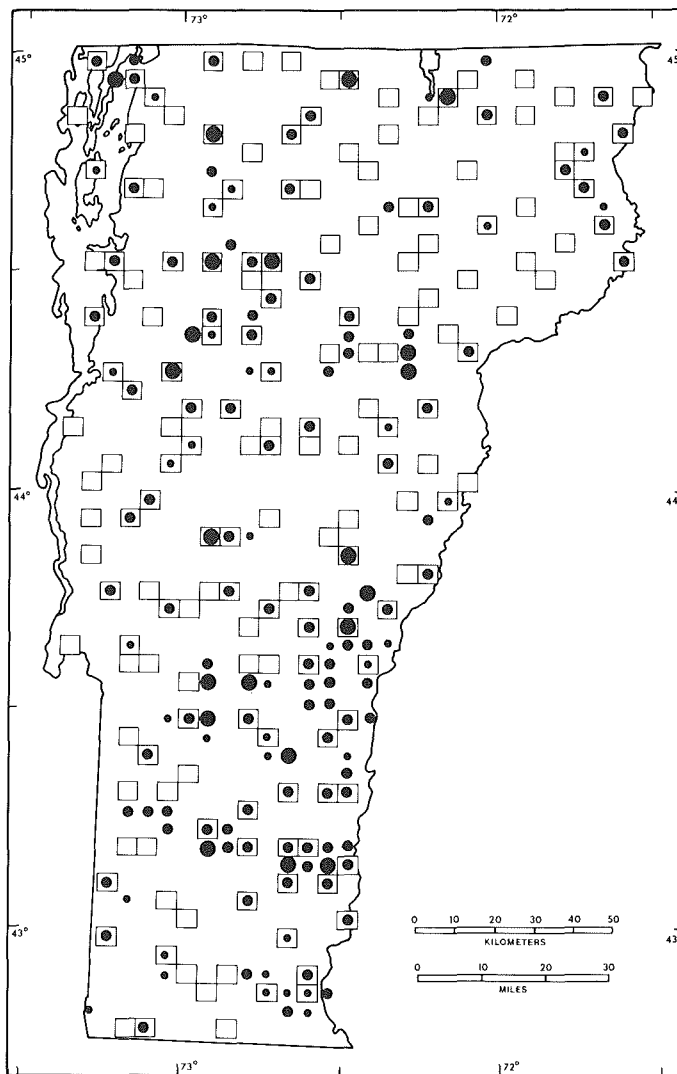
The Barred Owl's historical status in Vermont resembles its status today, although



Cutting (1884) sensibly reported that it seemed to decrease with the cutting of the forests. The Barred Owl's distribution in New England in the past has been considered meshed with that of the Red-shouldered Hawk (Bent 1938). The Barred is more common than the Red-shouldered in Vermont today (the Barred occurring in 53% of the priority blocks, the Red-shouldered in 35%). Both species' distribution is centered in the Eastern Foothills, with the Barred occurring in 92% of the priority blocks there and the Red-shouldered in 63%. In the Champlain Lowlands, the Barred occurred in 55% of the priority blocks and the Red-shouldered in 48%, and in the East Central region both occurred in 37%. Each of the two species occurred in all seven of the state's physiographic regions.

Although special fieldwork was carried out for this species, most Barreds were located during the course of regular block coverage. Barreds will answer readily to an imitation or tape of their hoot. Territorial pair hooting (T) and singing (S) provided the most frequent means of locating the species.

The breeding season begins in February or March, and the preferred nesting site in Vermont and Massachusetts appears to be the hollow of a tree (S.B. Laughlin, pers. observ.; Bent 1938). On two occasions, young owlets have been brought to the Vermont Institute of Natural Science by loggers who had inadvertently cut a large old beech



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 95 (53%)

Possible breeding: 20 (21% of total)

Probable breeding: 66 (69.5% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 9 (9.5% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	17	55	18
Green Mountains	30	56	32
North Central	5	26	6
Northeast Highlands	7	44	7
East Central	7	37	7
Taconic Mountains	7	44	7
Eastern Foothills	22	92	23

that contained an owl family. In each tree, a long slit entered into a natural hollow. If hollow trees are not available, Barred Owls will nest in a stub or the old nests of hawks, crows, or squirrels (Bent 1938). Such nesting has not yet been reported in Vermont.

The number of eggs laid varies from 2 to 3; laying is at intervals of 2 to 3 days (Kendeigh 1952). Incubation, as with most owls, usually begins with the first egg, probably because owls nest so early in the spring that unprotected eggs might freeze. There are two egg dates for Vermont: April 25, 1900, Brandon, 2 eggs; and March 15, 1913, Pomfret, 3 eggs. Dates for young include June 10, 1972—3 young were found in a tree cut by loggers in Thetford; and

May 13, 1981, Springfield. There are five dates for fledged young ranging from June 17 to July 9, with a concentration in the third week of June; three records are of 3 fledglings each. Young expect their parents to feed them for several months after they fledge.

The Barred Owl occurs in suitable habitat of deep, wet woods almost everywhere in Vermont and was widely reported during the Atlas Project. The species' future in Vermont could be threatened by careless woodlot management involving the removal of the old, hollow trees upon which so many species depend.

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