

# HELP BRING BACK THE BARN OWL!

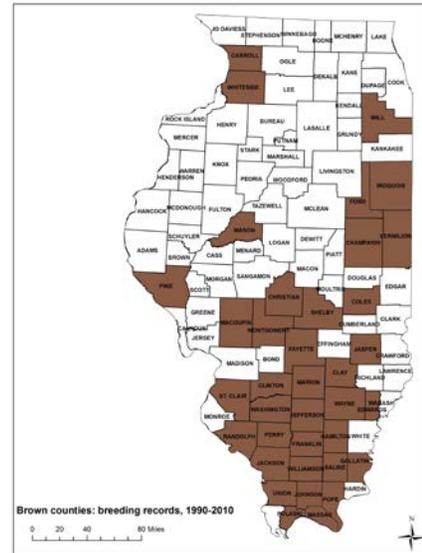


Photo by Carol Freeman

**About Barn Owls in Illinois.** Barn owls, with their whitish plumage and distinctive heart-shaped facial ruffs, have a striking appearance. Barn owls are found in a variety of open habitats in tropical and temperate zones around the world. True to their name, barns, grain bins, silos, belfries, nest boxes, and a variety of other human structures may all be used for nesting, in addition to natural nest sites such as tree cavities and dens on cliffs and bluffs. Barn owls sometimes nest two or more times in a year when prey are plentiful. While late spring-early summer is the peak of nesting activity, incubation and brood-rearing can occur during any month of the year in Illinois.

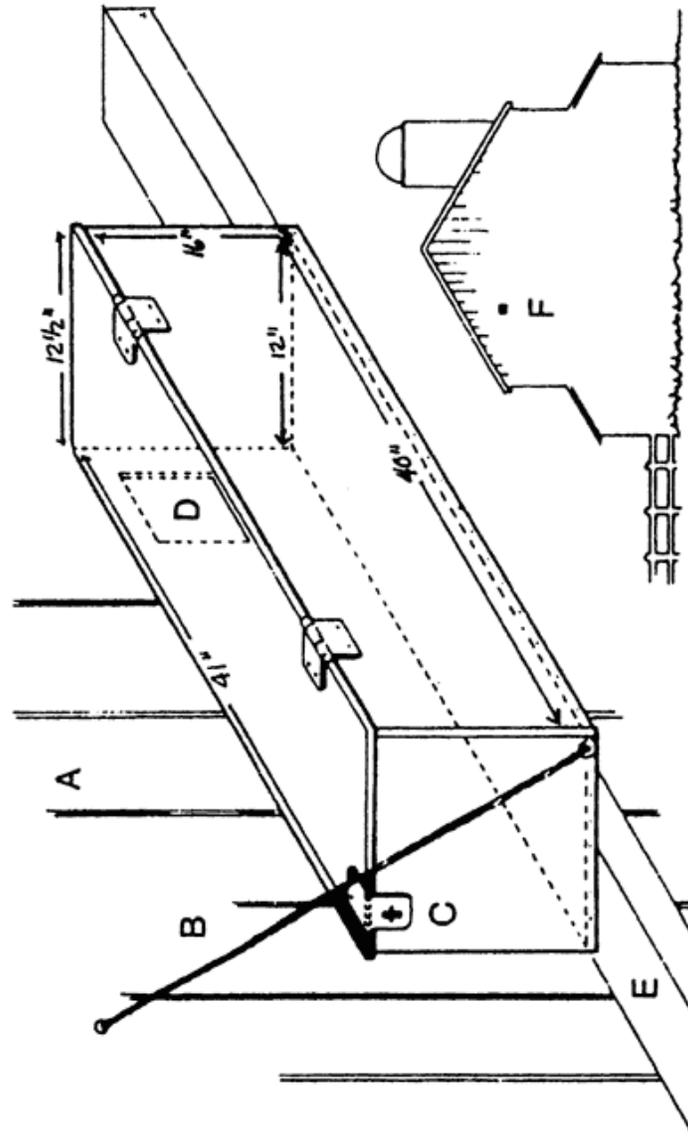
Barn owls are Endangered in Illinois, but they remain broadly distributed in the state. From 1990-2010, barn owl nesting has been reported from 37 counties, mostly in the southern half of the state (see map). Installing and monitoring nest boxes in suitable nesting areas is the easiest, most cost-effective action people can take to help barn owls (see the Illinois barn owl recovery plan at the “recovery plans” link at <http://dnr.state.il.us/espb/recovery.html>). Barn owls readily adopt nest boxes of various designs, and nests in boxes tend to be more productive and easier to monitor than nests in natural cavities. While barn owls can show up almost anywhere in Illinois, nest boxes that are close to grassland hunting areas are more likely to be used. Additionally, restoring and enhancing grassland habitat in Illinois will benefit barn owls and a variety of other species.

**You Can Help!** People are encouraged to help bring back the barn owl: putting up and monitoring nest boxes, reporting barn owl nests, and improving grassland habitat. Volunteer groups, such as 4-H clubs and scout troops, can lead efforts to check and maintain barn owl nest boxes in their area.



**I want to help by putting up a nest box. What kind of box should I use, and where should I put it?** Barn owls are not picky about the style of their nest box. Anything with about 2-3 square feet of interior space is adequate. Consider the safety of the young before and after leaving the nest when placing a nest box. As examples, a nest box opening directly to a barn’s exterior and surrounded by aluminum flashing will help keep raccoons out of the box, and a predator guard on a pole-mounted nest box is a good idea. A sample nest box design is on **page 2** and information about a pole-mounted model is on **page 3**. Adult barn owls will do most of their hunting within a mile of their nest site. If a third or more of that area is hunting areas like hayfields, pastures, CRP grasslands, marshes, orchards and vineyards, conditions are probably excellent for barn owls.

**What should I do if I find a barn owl nest or injured barn owl?** Many barn owl nests are discovered by accident – such as when a nest tree is knocked over in a storm or a bin or silo is used after a period of inactivity. **Resist the temptation to intervene**, and only move birds if they are in immediate danger, moving them only as far as is absolutely necessary. **Contact a DNR biologist** to report the nesting location and to help resolve the situation (<http://www.dnr.state.il.us/conservation/naturalheritage/sst/aff.htm>); in addition to being endangered in Illinois, barn owls are federally protected like other birds, and having them in possession without permits is illegal. Only injured birds should be taken to a wildlife rehabilitator – remaining in the care of their parents in the wild is a young barn owl’s best chance for surviving. Young barn owls can be placed into a nearby secure nest box, and their parents will find them and resume caring and feeding for them.



### **Barn Owl Nest Box**

- A. Interior of barn wall
- B. Wire (or wood) support if beam is narrow
- C. Latch
- D. Entrance
- E. Cross Beam
- F. Entrance (6" x 6")

## Pole-mounted Barn Owl Nest Box



**Suggestions for a pole mounted model:** the box should be placed at least 10 feet in the air; it can be made of wood or plastic (double walled and light colored); the mounting post can be wood or metal and should include the use of a predator guard (a 3-foot length of PVC is used here); placement of wood chips in the box aids nesting; face the box to the east to avoid overheating and weather; and, use a bag of concrete to mount the post 3 feet in the ground.

The box shown here was purchased from *The Barn Owl Box Company* - 2544 Hobbs Street, Pittsburgh, PA, 15212 (website: <http://www.barnowlbox.com/index.html> ) and was placed on a heavy-gauge sign post with a PVC predator guard.