

Barred Owl *Strix varia*

Ornithological History: Not recorded by Mailliard (1932) or Munro (1950, 1958).

Butler et al. (1986) considered Barred Owl to be *rare* with most sightings in Lakeview. The first recorded nest for the area was found on 19 March 1975; the young owls fledged by June.

Creston Valley Status: An *uncommon* resident; breeds.

Occurrence: Barred Owl is present year-round but is sparsely distributed on the bench lands of Canyon, Lister, Lakeview-Arrow Creek, and on forested mountainsides. Little of its forested habitat is present on Kootenay Flats, with the exception of Corn Creek and Summit Creek woods within the Wildlife Management Area. Resident owls have occupied these coniferous forests since at least the 1970s. The species occurs from the valley bottom at 535 m (1,754 ft) to 1,284 m (4,212 ft) elevation at Boundary Lake. Single birds account for 75% of all records.

The species is vocal day and night throughout the year, with greater frequency and intensity during courtship activities in February through early May. This period accounts for 52% of all records. Perched owls are occasionally seen at the edge of forests and on fence posts.

In the winter of 1994, Lorne Ostendorf often saw a Barred Owl on a fence post in one of his fields near Wynndel. The owl was hunting small rodents over the course of four weeks. Occasionally, an individual owl will roost in a hay shed or outbuilding during winter. For example, Don Stace-Smith observed one roosting in a farm building on Kootenay Flats from 25 December 2006 through 20 January 2007. It is unusual to see or hear more than one or two Barred Owls on an outing. On 25 February 2008, I heard a pair “caterwauling” from Corn Creek woods and two additional birds were vocalizing from forested habitats in other parts of West Creston.

Breeding: Barred Owl likely nests throughout the valley where natural cavities or hollows in cottonwoods and tops of dead coniferous trees are found. Fledged young have been recorded in June.

In British Columbia, broods of 1 to 4 young have been reported.

Notable breeding activity:

The first evidence of nesting since 1975 was noted by Ed McMackin in 1984. He heard a strange sound in a forested area of Lakeview-Arrow Creek and eventually found two young owls with adults roosting nearby.



In some parts of the Creston valley, the range of Barred Owl overlaps with that of Great Horned Owl, a known predator of other small and medium-sized owls (Van Damme 2005).

Seasonal Occurrence Records

Spring – 181 records from 1 March to 31 May (1 to 3 birds)

Summer – 36 records from 1 June to 30 August (1 to 2 birds)

Autumn – 30 records from 3 September to 30 November (1 to 2 birds)

Winter – 102 records from 10 December to 29 February (1 to 4 birds)

Barred Owl was reported on 4 of 21 Creston Christmas Bird Counts from 1998 to 2018.



When Barred Owl young are 4 to 5 weeks old, they may leave the nest and perch on nearby branches. *Photo by Mark Nyhof.*

Two breeding records are anecdotally based on a conversation I had with Gary Chomyshen, a Summit Creek campground host. He shared his story of the “black-eyed” owl he saw teaching two “clumsy” young to fly near the campground office in the summers of 1997 and 1998. Gary also commented that he did not see any owls in 1999.

A downy owlet was discovered on the ground during logging operations on Dodge Creek Forest Service Road on 12 June 2006 and was transported to the Creston Veterinary Hospital. Fortunately, the bird had no injuries and was transferred to a wildlife rehabilitation facility near Nelson.

On 9 June 2016, an adult Barred Owl was hunting the edge of Corn Creek woods and the begging calls of young owls were audible. About 10 minutes later, the adult flew further south. As I entered the edge of the forest, two fledged young clumsily launched themselves and flew deeper into the forest.

Databases: Occurrence records (349) and breeding records (4)

Habitat: Barred Owl mainly inhabits mature coniferous forests. It is occasionally found in deciduous-coniferous forests.

Comments: The first report of Barred Owl in British Columbia was in the mid-1940s from the northeastern part of the province. Since then it has expanded its range to include most of the province except Haida Gwaii. Its range now overlaps with that of the Spotted Owl on the southwest mainland coast.

From my Field Notes: *In April 1999, I jotted down this story from Dr. Rob McLeod, our local veterinarian, who received a Barred Owl with an injured wing from a local Conservation Officer at 10 pm. Not wanting to euthanize the owl, he pinned the wing and kept close watch until midnight, then headed home for some sleep. In the morning the owl was flapping its wing and Rob was hopeful it would survive. The owl was transferred to Helen Jamieson for rehabilitation where it made a full recovery.*

