



Barn owl observed actively hunting on the road verge, Flinders Highway, Big Swamp.

Photographer Graeme Richards

## How to help wild owls

Barn Owls are reasonably common across Eyre Peninsula, though not often seen because of their nocturnal habits. Many people enjoy seeing them because they are an attractive looking bird, and they are a good indicator of environmental health.

[Barn Owls](#), [Southern Boobook](#) Owls and other night birds like [Tawny Frogmouths](#), use the roads as feeding grounds. Food items like insects, mice and other small mammals, frogs and reptiles are regularly killed on the road by cars. Unfortunately many owls are hit and killed by cars as they attempt to collect food items off of the road.

Birds of prey including Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) are great hunters that among other things balance the numbers of mice and rodents in our environment. They are so proficient at this that we know from overseas studies a pair of barn owls can eat more than 3000 mice a year.

Barn Owls rely on habitats with suitable hollows for roosting and breeding. So if you are looking to attract owls to your property and help them to survive, retaining old hollow baring trees, and establishing nest boxes will provide the habitat that barn owls need. You can also plant trees like gum trees that one day will provide tree hollows.

Barn owls are [highly susceptible to poisons used to kill rats and mice](#) (rodenticides). It is called secondary poisoning when predatory animals like owls become sick and die after

eating poisoned prey. Owls are also more susceptible to car strike in their weakened sick state. They often sit in danger, on or near the road, unable to move because they are so ill from secondary poisoning. To avoid poisoning owls consider alternatives like traps, cleaning up old materials which rodents use as habitat and keeping grains and other food sources out of reach to rodents. If it is necessary to use rodenticides, use them carefully. It may be possible to place the baits in confined places where the owls cannot access poisoned rodents i.e. in a closed shed.

When an owl has a visual 'lock' on its prey it often won't notice an oncoming car or truck, until it's too late. Motorists wishing to avoid colliding with wildlife at night are advised to drive carefully using their peripheral vision to help spot wildlife that maybe sitting on the road.

Insert: Southern boobook (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) being assessed by local vet after being picked up in a dazed state near Poonindie. Later rehabilitated and re-released.



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