

OWLS: Marvels of *Life*, Countless *Legends*, *and here* Expressions of *Love*

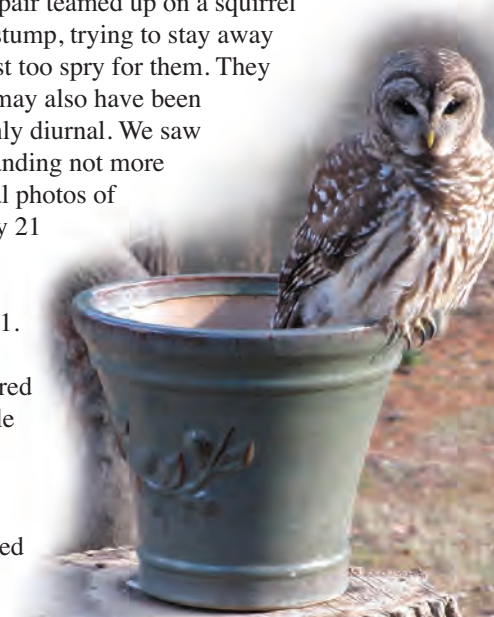
Photos and Article by **Charles Hammer**



They showed up in early spring, actually, and I took my first owl portrait on May 5, 2010. After that they lived closely with the people of Black Swan estates, a lake community in Shawnee, Kansas, with about 130 homes. We were loading up our car with neighbors for an outing, all the while discussing our recent sightings when someone said, "There she is!" Not twenty-feet distant, she perched in a white pine tree, eavesdropping on what was being said about her (we assumed the bigger of the pair was the female).

On another occasion, five or six walkers had paused under a tree to trade news, when the owl flew onto a branch not ten feet over our heads to study us, or perhaps the lakeshore bullfrogs. From our porch my wife and I saw two owls in a tree across the lake. One flew down to touch the water and up again to land on a post on our side. Why had she dipped to the water? Back again she flew, down to the water and splashed her claws in, yanking out a two-foot, wildly-wiggling, water snake. She flew with it to the far shore, sharing the grim meal with her pal. We ate breakfast once with the male owl sitting six feet away from our screened porch.

One day we watched as the pair teamed up on a squirrel that kept circling around a tall stump, trying to stay away from them. The squirrel was just too spry for them. They never did get him. These owls may also have been nocturnal, but they were certainly diurnal. We saw them at all hours of the day. Standing not more than 15-feet away, I shot several photos of our Canoodling Cousins on July 21 on the street near our mailbox. Owl sightings were a daily occurrence through March, 2011. Having likely thinned out the edibles near our home, the Barred Owl pair later moved a half-mile west to the other side of the neighborhood. We hope the folks over there enjoyed the seasons that followed with the owls.



BARRED OWLS

Habitats, Distribution and Prey

The primary habitats for Barred Owls (*Strix varia*) are woodlands across the eastern North America. The species is particularly numerous in a variety of wooded habitats in the southeastern United States. They often nest in tree cavities. With protection they have ventured into suburban areas with large trees. Small rodents and mammals up to the size of squirrels and rabbits, amphibians and some birds provide prey.

Vocalization

The usual call is a series of eight accented hoots ending in oo-aw, with a downward pitch at the end. The most common mnemonic device for remembering the call is "Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all". They often call during the afternoon.

Without the "you all", Barred Owl calls are sometimes confused with Great Horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*). Their call is a low-pitched but loud ho-ho-hoo hoo hoo; sometimes it is only four syllables instead of five. The female's call is higher and rises in pitch at the end of the call. The Great Horned Owl is larger and recognizable because of the prominent feather tufts on the head of adults. – RDK



Owls have been Widely Featured in Myths and Folklore

In Greek mythology, the Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) was the messenger of Athene, the goddess of wisdom and foresight. Similar to the Burrowing Owl, which is possibly related, when threatened, Little Owls (a species of Europe and Russia) have the habit of bobbing up & down.

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