

OWLS IN OUR AREA - DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE?

It is always a pleasure to see owls, whether it is a quick glimpse of them flying through the light at night as they hunt for food, or when they are disturbed from their rest during the daytime by a group of angry small birds. Most birdwatchers experience a great thrill when they just by chance see a Powerful Owl perched high up in the branches.

Powerful Owl *Ninox strenua* 60 - 66 cm. Male larger

The Powerful Owl is the largest of the nine species of Australian owls. It lives in gullies in Eucalypt forests, mainly in the foothills of coastal ranges from mid-Queensland to the extreme south-east of South Australia. Its habitat must be open enough to permit it to hunt tree-dwelling animals: possums, gliders, young koalas, kookaburras, magpies, currawongs. Roosting by day in a series of trees, it hunts at dawn and dusk. Pairs occupy the same territory year after year, those in western Victoria exceeding more than 1000 ha. Territories are well separated by up to 20 kilometres.



Powerful Owl

move into urban areas where they can catch moths near street lights.

Southern Boobook Owl *Ninox novaeseelandiae* 25 - 36 cm. Female larger

The Southern Boobook is our most common owl. It is distributed over most of Australia except in places devoid of trees for roosting or nesting. Its call of Boo-book or Mopoke must be known by anyone who has spent a few nights near forest or woodland. The Boobook nests in the hollow of a live or dead tree. As hollows take many years to develop - a hundred or more - we need to be sure that these old trees are retained. Non-incubating birds roost among dense, leafy branches near the nest. During the winter they



Southern Boobook Owl

Barking Owl *Ninox connivens* 35 - 45 cm. Male larger

The barking of this owl can be heard in the Australian bush all year round. Occasionally, usually in autumn, it produces a loud, high-pitched, tremulous scream that has earned it the name 'screaming woman' bird. It is slightly larger than the Southern Boobook, and has piercing yellow eyes.

The Barking Owl is found in forest and woodland, preferring the more open country for hunting and hollow eucalypts for breeding. It has a flexible diet from insects and small rodents, to Magpies and White-winged Choughs and mammals as large as Ring-tailed Possums.



Barking Owl

Barn Owl *Tyto alba* 30 - 40 cm. Female larger.



Barn Owl

Also known as the White Owl, the Barn Owl is widespread and common in many places including cities and towns and around farms where there are plenty of trees and out-buildings. Unlike the owls mentioned above, the Barn Owl has a distinctive white heart-shaped facial disc. It has a ghostly appearance, and flies close to the ground or sometimes perches on a branch or post listening for any movement. It glides or drops onto its victim, usually swallowing it whole. It's main diet consists of small marsupials, rodents and small birds.

References: *Bird of the Month* (ANGAIR Newsletter) Pauline Reilly, *The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* Graham Pizzey and Frank Knight, *Reader's Digest Complete Books of Australian Birds*.
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