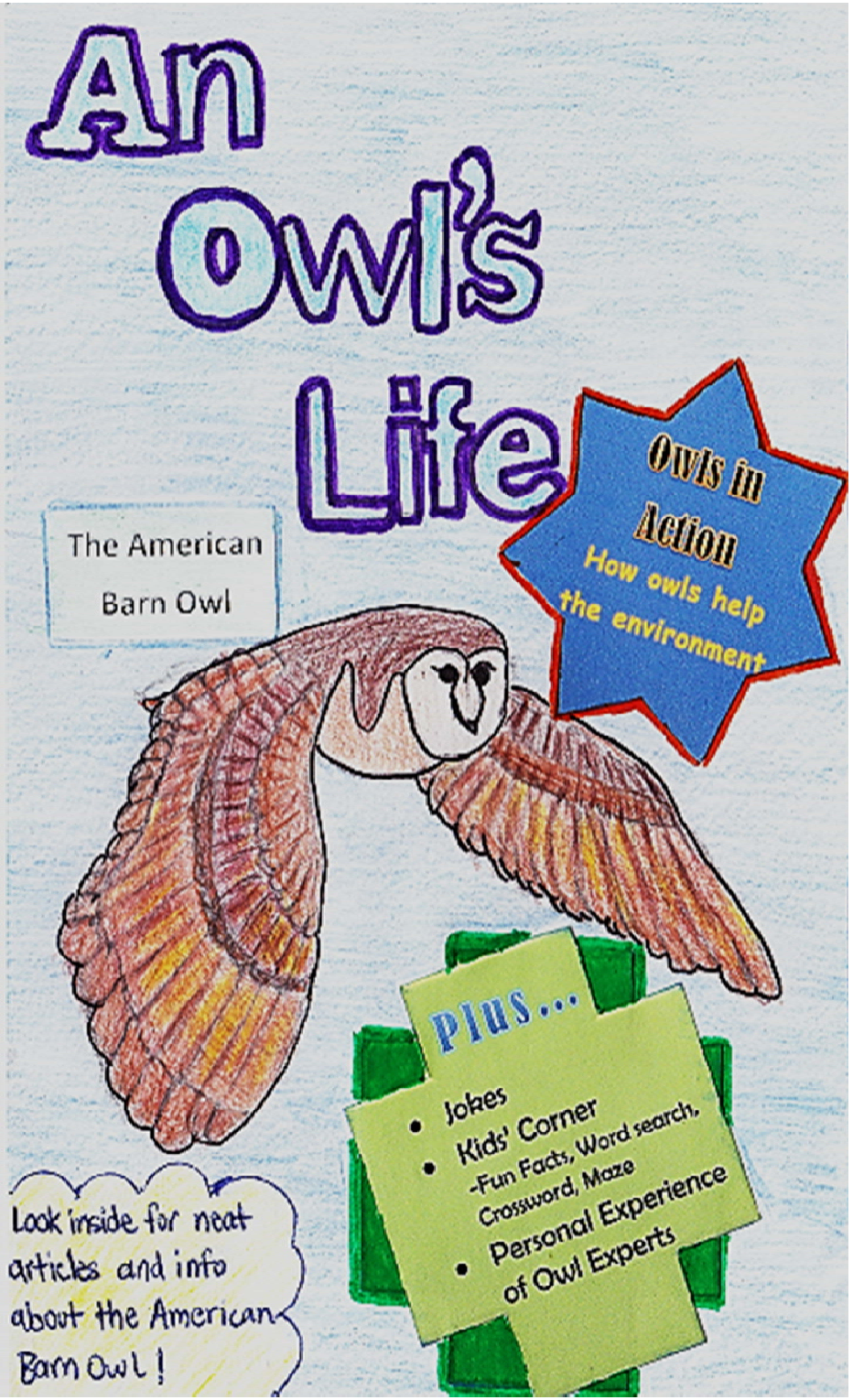
An Owl's Life
The American Barn Owl
Owls in Action
How owls help the environment
Plus...
Jokes
Kids' Corner
-Fun Facts, Word search, Crossword, Maze
Personal Experience of Owl Experts
Look inside for neat articles and info about the American Barn Owl!

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everybody who helped with this booklet. First of all, thanks to scouts Ryan Adolf, Naman Bhargava, Shaylan Dias, Krishna Gomatam, Aneesh Goel, and Alec Uyematsu for contributing to the booklet. This booklet would not have been possible without the help of these scouts from Troop 457.

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I especially want to thank Toby Goldberg, the programs coordinator for the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, for giving me the opportunity to do this project, for guiding and mentoring me throughout the course of this project, and for allowing me to share her article in this booklet, giving us her firsthand experience with barn owls.

Once again, thanks to everyone who helped with this booklet. I am looking forward to seeing the fruits of all of the work that has been put into this project.

~ Chetan Gomatam
Troop 457, Sunnyvale, CA

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Barn Owls and Their Boxes

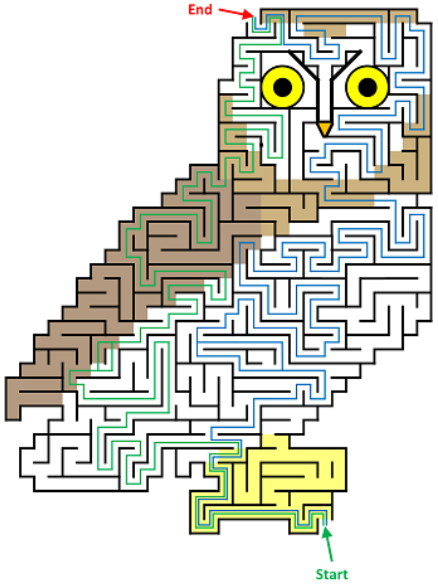
Barn Owl pair

Chetan Gomatam
Life Scout
Troop 457,
Sunnyvale

Barn owls live in buildings such as church towers and barns as well as in open areas in the wild, such as fields and meadows. They live in tropical and temperate regions throughout the world; in North America their range extends from Central America to Southern Canada. These owls are one of the most widespread of land birds, but their population is slowly shrinking in some parts of their range due to habitat loss. Barn owls also help limit the population of pests. They need wide open expanses of land to hunt, and they need cavities or crevices to nest.

This is where the owl box comes in. The owl box is essentially a home for owls, in this case, barn owls, throughout the breeding season (from February or March to July). Owl boxes are similar to traditional birdhouses, but they are much bigger in order to mimic an owl's natural habitat. These boxes come with a divider panel on the inside, which serves to protect the young owlets from predators. Owl boxes are usually installed in open areas, such as meadows and fields, on tall posts or poles. Because barn owls often live in holes in trees, this orientation mimics the natural habitat of these owls very well.

Solution to Maze:



Story in Pics: Ready to Fledge – 8-9 week old owlet

Photo by Lee Pauser

Solution to Word Search:

N	U	T	K	G	C	B	S	T	Q	F	N	P	Y	H
X	E	K	P	H	W	M	C	M	A	T	E	Q	F	G
J	Z	H	M	Q	T	K	R	W	I	D	S	Y	C	X
S	X	H	P	D	O	S	E	D	C	R	T	S	O	P
F	T	F	T	Z	E	M	E	G	E	X	B	K	W	E
R	Z	W	A	S	O	O	C	I	P	D	O	F	L	L
A	S	R	L	E	X	Q	H	B	Q	J	X	N	E	L
P	I	S	O	D	J	U	D	N	F	E	D	O	T	E
T	L	V	N	M	C	R	Z	J	G	Y	Q	C	F	T
O	E	F	S	F	A	V	A	N	I	C	E	T	U	S
R	N	U	S	Z	C	C	Z	C	I	V	Z	U	D	G
G	T	U	Z	D	P	R	E	D	A	T	O	R	B	Z
Z	K	I	S	I	C	R	X	N	J	E	R	N	H	X
I	G	O	D	Q	M	V	I	J	P	E	D	A	X	Q
M	J	G	F	D	F	R	L	C	J	H	K	L	T	H

GIZZARD
NESTBOX
NOCTURNAL
OWLET
PELLET
PREDATOR
RAPTOR
SCREECH
SILENT
TALONS

Story in Pics: Owlets 6-7 weeks old

Photo by Lee Pauser

The owl box has holes in the back for installation purposes. It also has vents on the bottom to allow for air transfer between the box and the outside environment. The front of the box contains the elliptical entry hole and grip grooves for the owl to grasp on its way into the box. The top of the box features a viewing door for someone to watch the owls as they nest. The right side also has a door, but this door functions as a clean-out door, so that the person who monitors and maintains this box can clean out the nesting material and any other debris at the end of the breeding season.

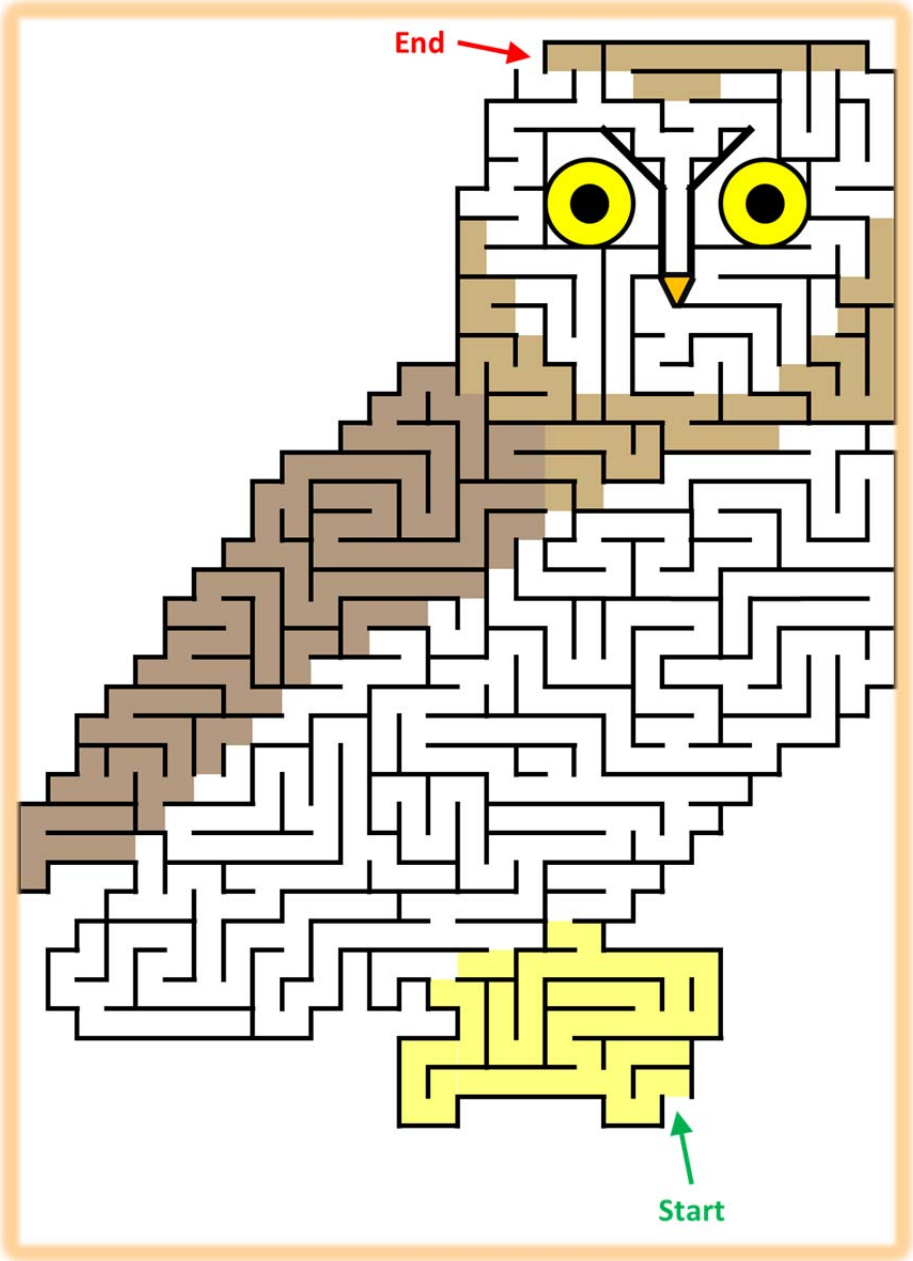
I believe that these boxes will help increase the population of the barn owls and help them lead successful lives and continue to be a critical part of their ecosystem. Having a home that is move-in ready means the owls can have one less thing to worry about in their quest for survival.

Story in Pics: Barn Owl Hen with Owlets

Photo by Lee Pauser

The A-maze-ing Owl

By Ryan Adolf – Troop 457, Sunnyvale

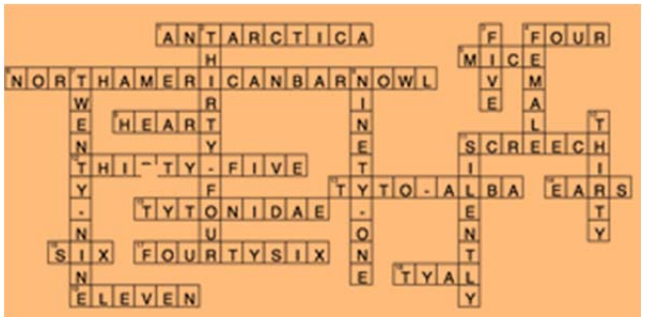


Trace two possible routes from start to finish

Story in Pics: Owlets 3-4 weeks old

Photo by Lee Pauser

Solution to Crossword



Owl Fun Facts

Compiled By Aneesh Goel – Troop 457, Sunnyvale

Barn owls are also called **monkey-faced** owls.

Length: Males 13-15 in., Females 14-20 in.
Weight: Males 14-19 oz., Females 17-25 oz.
Wingspan: Males 41-45 in., Females 43-47 in.

The barn owl's heart-shaped face collects sound in the same way as human ears. They can **hear** a mouse's heartbeat from **thirty** feet away.

During flight, the **left ear** captures sounds from **below** while the **right ear** captures sounds from **above.**

Barn owls don't hoot, they **screech** – they make a wide variety of high, low, long, and short calls.

Barn owls **do not** construct a nest - they use natural and man-made sites - tree cavities, buildings, barns, chimneys and nest boxes.

A large percent of barn owls were found to contain **rat** poison upon post-mortem. They are considered endangered in certain areas of the world.

How the Barn Owl became Berkeley's Official Bird

By Lisa Owens Viani
Co-founder of Raptors Are The Solution

My owl obsession began when I moved to Berkeley in 2003. One evening, while on an evening walk with a friend, she pointed out what she thought was the sound of someone breathing with the help of a respirator in a house on Edwards Street. That didn't seem quite right — I instantly thought "bird" — but I wasn't expecting to hear owls in such an urban spot.

I called a birder friend who suggested the possibility of a Barn Owl. Sure enough, upon closer inspection, we confirmed that the sound was coming from a Canary Island palm tree behind the house with the "respirator." Then we spotted Barn Owls flying in and out of the tree, pearl white in the dark sky, backlit by the moon, making trip after trip to feed their young.

But not everyone was as enamored with the owls — or their sounds — as I was, and the tree was cut down. I decided to found Keep Barn Owls in Berkeley, with the help of naturalist Joe Eaton and some other owl fans, to create more awareness about the incredible natural pest control services of these owls: one family can consume 600 mice in 10 weeks.

I connected with The Hungry Owl Project in Marin and local owl experts like Golden Gate Audubon field trip leader Dave Quady, and began to get a grasp on the number of Barn Owls this city supports.

I learned of about a dozen pairs nesting in Berkeley alone that year, most in Canary Island palm trees, many of which stand next to Victorians and thus were probably planted in the early 1900s. (I also learned about nests in El Cerrito, Albany, and Richmond, again most of them in Canary Island palms.)

In what may be the least controversial Berkeley city council resolution ever passed, we got the Barn Owl designated as the city's official bird.

Berkeley's Barn Owls have been here a long time. In a 1927 account in *The Condor*, UC Berkeley zoologist E. Raymond Hall wrote about the Barn Owls he discovered roosting in the tower of the First Presbyterian Church at Dana and Channing Way. Hall gained entrance

to the tower and dissected the owls' pellets. The most common prey remains were California meadow mice, pocket gophers, white-footed mice, and house mice. One pellet contained a Jerusalem cricket! Hall also wrote about hearing "as many as 17 barn owls" fly over his home on Panoramic Way one summer evening.

Today Berkeley's open fields and barns are gone and the church steeples and bell towers are screened off. But the Barn Owls have adapted. This summer, during a nighttime walk, I discovered a Barn Owl family in a palm tree on the Berkeley Unified School District property at Bonar and Addison. I first heard the fledglings in mid-June, although they certainly may have been calling before I heard them; by the end of July they had dispersed. This time their chosen palm tree was a Washingtonia filifera—much taller and skinnier than the stouter Canary Island palm. Washingtonias look like they are wearing long hula skirts, with dead thatch hanging down around their trunks.

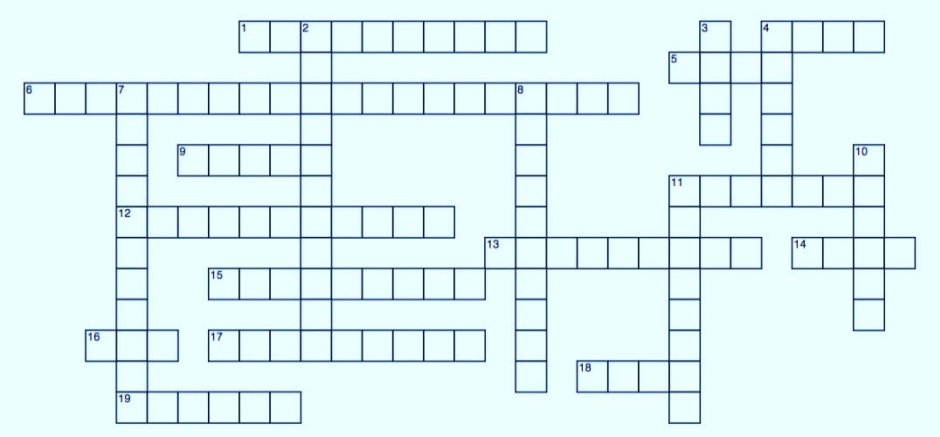
I have a new appreciation for this somewhat scraggly looking tree now that I know Barn Owls can use them. Of course, the entire time I was watching the young being fed by their parents, learning to branch, and then fly, my heart was in my mouth, worried that they might eat poisoned rats: the school district had placed poison bait boxes less than 200 feet away from the owls. Thankfully the district agreed to remove the boxes.

If you love owls, please don't use rat poison. Imagine a Barn Owl in every palm tree in Berkeley. It might be a little loud for a few months each summer, but it's a much less environmentally damaging way to control rodents.

Lisa Owens Viani is Communications Manager for the Coral Reef Alliance and Co-founder of Raptors Are The Solution. She was formerly Development Director at GGAS. This article was first published on Golden Gate Birder, a birding site produced by Golden Gate Audubon, an independent chapter of National Audubon.

Barn Owl Crossword

By Naman Bhargava – Troop 457, Sunnyvale



Hint: Some answers may be hyphenated.

ACROSS

1 The continent barn owls are not found in
4 The number of small mammals a barn owl averagely eats
5 One of the main meals of a barn owl
6 The only barn owl in North America
9 Barn owls have ____ shaped faces
11 ____ is what barn owls do to communicate
12 The number of sub species of barn owls
13 The scientific name of a barn owl
14 ____ are what owls use as their main hunting tool
15 The family classification of a barn owl
16 The higher end of the average tail of a barn owl
17 The number of races of the barn owl in the world
18 ____ is the species code for barn owl
19 The barn owl can lay up to ____ eggs at once

DOWN

2 ____ is the longest lifespan of a barn owl known in the world
3 The number of races of barn owl in Central America
4 The larger of the two genders
7 ____% of barn owl nests produce no eggs
8 ____% of dead barn owls were found to contain rat poison
10 The barn owls incubate their eggs around ____ days
11 The barn owl can fly very____

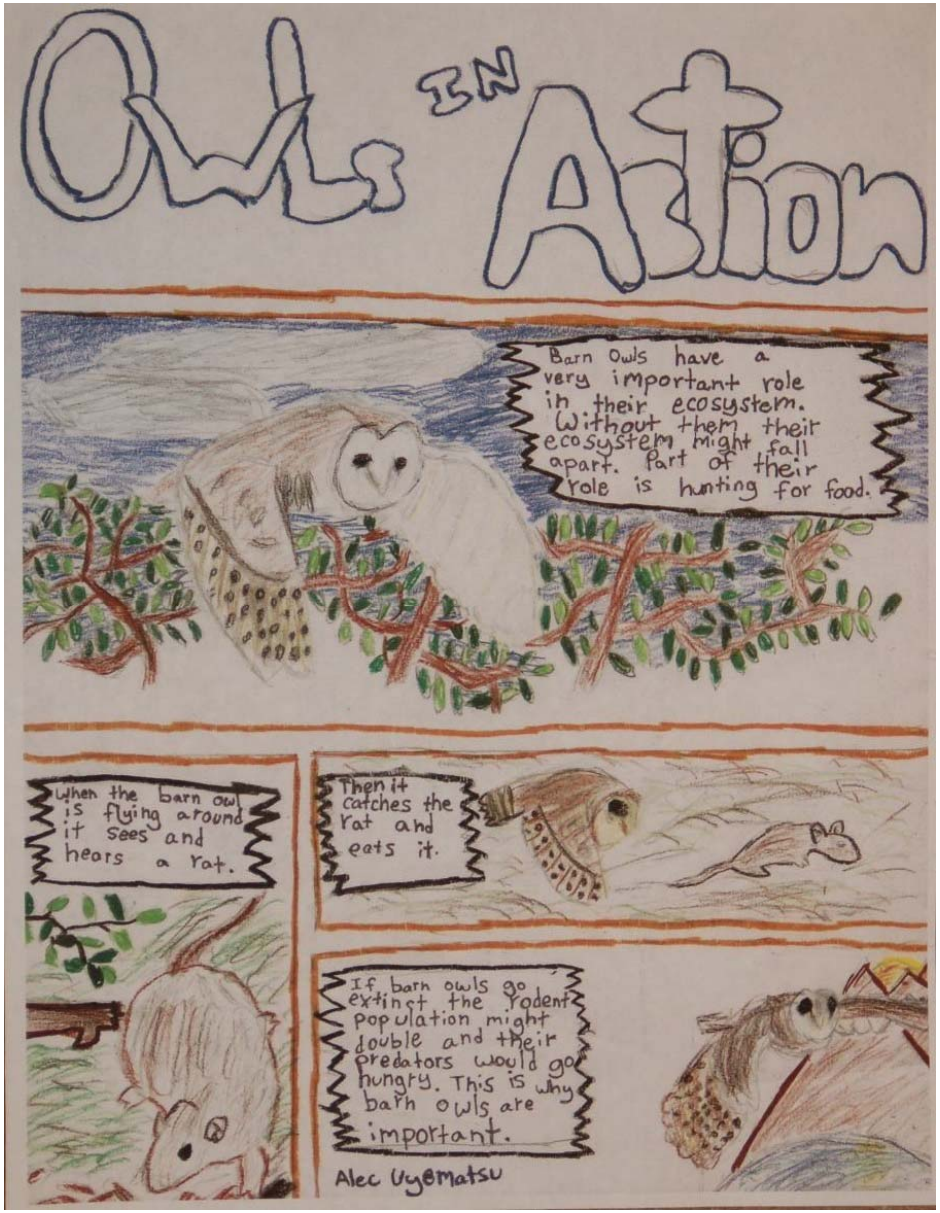
What's a Barn Owl's favourite Party food? Mush'Shrew'ms, 'Vole'avaunts and Micecream!

Owlish Word Search

By Shaylan Dias – Troop 457 Sunnyvale

N	U	T	K	G	C	B	S	T	Q	F	N	P	Y	H
X	E	K	P	H	W	M	C	M	A	T	E	Q	F	G
J	Z	H	M	Q	T	K	R	W	I	D	S	Y	C	X
S	X	H	P	D	O	S	E	D	C	R	T	S	O	P
F	T	F	T	Z	E	M	E	G	E	X	B	K	W	E
R	Z	W	A	S	O	O	C	I	P	D	O	F	L	L
A	S	R	L	E	X	Q	H	B	Q	J	X	N	E	L
P	I	S	O	D	J	U	D	N	F	E	D	O	T	E
T	L	V	N	M	C	R	Z	J	G	Y	Q	C	F	T
O	E	F	S	F	A	V	A	N	I	C	E	T	U	S
R	N	U	S	Z	C	C	Z	C	I	V	Z	U	D	G
G	T	U	Z	D	P	R	E	D	A	T	O	R	B	Z
Z	K	I	S	I	C	R	X	N	J	E	R	N	H	X
I	G	O	D	Q	M	V	I	J	P	E	D	A	X	Q
M	J	G	F	D	F	R	L	C	J	H	K	L	T	H

GIZZARD	PREDATOR
NESTBOX	RAPTOR
NOCTURNAL	SCREECH
OWLET	SILENT
PELLET	TALONS



Owls in Action

By Alec Uyematsu - Troop 457, Sunnyvale

A Year with the Owls

By Toby Goldberg, Programs Coordinator
Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

In the summer of 1999, I was hired as a field technician for a research project in the Negev Desert of Israel. Having never been to Israel before, it was a year of discovery and surprise in all aspects of my experience – and that included the research project for which I had been hired to help.

Our project focused on Desert Community Ecology, specifically the predator-prey interactions between Desert Gerbils and one of their main predators, the Barn Owl. Which led to the first discovery, before I even arrived – I had no idea that there even were Barn Owls in the Negev Desert! But, as I came to learn, Barn Owls are one of the most ubiquitous and widespread bird species, being found on almost every continent (Antarctica being the main exception) and almost every habitat across the planet, except polar regions. And, despite some differences in coloration and size across its distribution, the Barn Owl is also one of the most instantly recognizable species on the planet.

My experience with the Barn Owl in Israel was both hands-on and observational, as we worked with both captive bred and wild owls. This meant that I got to know "our" owls quite well, and made additional discoveries about their intelligence and behavior. Perhaps best encapsulated by our owl Stupid (disclaimer: I didn't pick their names!) I learned that not all owls are "wise." For example, despite always being given the same food each day, and being fed in the same way each day, Stupid would often forget whether he was supposed to go after the food held in my glove, or the clips in my hair (yes – Ouch!). Of course, maybe that was *his* way of teaching *me* not to wear distracting things in my hair…

In contrast, Big Momma completely surprised us in what she learned to associate with food. Each evening, we would approach the aviary while whistling, so the owls would know we were coming to feed them, and hopefully to learn to associate the whistle with something positive (and thus be willing to return to us after being released into the field). Our supervisor's dog also often accompanied us, and she

would wait for us outside the aviary with a few enthusiastic barks. Well, apparently one day the owls discovered a hole in the aviary and made their escape. At the time, they hadn't been worked with enough that anyone had any great confidence that they'd respond to the whistles and return to us. But, much to everyone's surprise, they had quickly learned to associate the barking of the dog with their daily meals, and with the dog's vociferous assistance, they were quickly and painlessly returned to their aviary.

As is probably not a surprise to anyone that has worked with birds, I also quickly discovered that each owl had his or her own unique personality, preferences, and interests. Stupid, as mentioned, was persistent in his need to check out – and try to eat - anything unusual. Big Momma, on the other hand, was very business-like (and a little impatient) in her approach to food, and would quickly let you know if you were taking too long in giving it to her. One owl was shy, while another was extremely curious (we suspect he was the one who found the hole…), providing hours of amusing observations for those of us who were fortunate enough to work with them.

The wild owls we observed were equally fascinating as we tried to understand what cues they used for hunting, how they made decisions, and how they were affected by changing light and weather patterns. Over the course of that year, I came to appreciate this unique and interesting species as an efficient hunter, an important component of their ecosystem, and a work of natural beauty. Now, whenever I see that ghostly silhouette, or hear that unearthly shriek, I smile – thinking of my time in the Negev and the antics of our aviary residents, and I enjoy being amazed all over again.