

Raleigh, the Barred Owl

Raleigh is a Barred Owl that was hit by a car in Raleigh, North Carolina in 2008. He cannot be released back into the wild because he will never again be able to fly well enough to hunt. We are not sure whether Raleigh is a male or a female. In the raptor world, females are larger than males. The table in Figure 2 shows Raleigh's weight over a period of time. We thought he was a male when he first arrived. What do you think?

Raleigh has some interesting characteristics. His color helps him to camouflage, or blend in with, trees. He has a small skeleton with hollow bones and is very lightweight, with a fluffy body and long wings. The hair-like structures on his feathers reduce air resistance, which reduces vibration, which reduces sound. Even the legs of an owl are feathered to muffle sound. His body is designed for "silent flight." An owl hunts by stealth, not by speed.

We feed Raleigh a rat each day, and he swallows it whole. He has no teeth. In the wild, a Barred Owl is an opportunistic predator that will eat small mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates including crayfish. The prey's body parts that he doesn't digest are coughed up later as pellets. Owl pellets are regurgitated balls of indigestible waste, usually bones and fur.

The owl's eye orbits are very large. Owls' eyes are especially adapted for nocturnal hunting. Their eyes contain many photoreceptors called rods, which are sensitive to black and white contrast in low light. Cones, on the other hand, discern color, and are helpful for day vision. Because the eyes are so large, there is not much room left in the owl's skull to accommodate large muscles, so the owl cannot roll its eyes, like we do. Instead, the owl has the ability to rotate its head a full 270 degrees, while humans are restricted to about 180 degrees.

Raleigh has very good hearing. The owl has a flat face with concave facial disks that work like a satellite dish to collect and funnel sound. His ear openings are right behind his facial disks. The ears are asymmetrical. One ear opening is higher than the other, which helps the owl identify exactly where a sound is coming from. Have you ever seen a dog cock its head when listening to a new sound?

The Barred Owl lives in swamps and woodlands near water. It is one of our most vocal owls. It calls to establish territory or to attract a mate. The call of the species sounds like someone saying, "Who cooks for you?" The Barred Owl is solitary, except during breeding season.



Figure 1.
Average Weight for Barred Owls, in grams (g)

	Range	Mean
Barred Owl, Male	468-774	632
Barred Owl, Female	610-1051	801

(Source: Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 2000)

Figure 2. Raleigh's Weight (g)

DATE	MASS in grams
4/28/08	690
5/19/08	708
6/2/08	720
6/16/08	722
6/30/08	731
7/14/08	730
7/28/08	733
8/11/08	724
8/25/08	740
9/8/08	762
9/22/08	770
10/6/08	776
10/20/08	744
11/3/08	748
11/17/08	810
12/1/08	822
12/15/08	860
12/29/08	858
1/20/09	847
2/5/09	799
2/19/09	847
3/16/09	846
3/30/09	831
4/9/09	801
4/23/09	760