

Tawny Owl Calling Survey 2018/19

INSTRUCTIONS FOR VOLUNTEERS

WHY WE ARE DOING THIS SURVEY

Although primarily associated with woodland, Tawny Owls are the most frequently encountered owl in and around gardens. Despite our familiarity with these birds we know surprisingly little about them. Tawny Owls call to show their ownership of a breeding territory, as well as using their vocalisations to attract a mate and reinforce their pair bond. This survey will help us explore the impact of artificial light pollution and other aspects of urbanisation on the likelihood of hearing Tawny Owls. At the same time we'll also look at seasonal changes in Tawny Owl calling behaviour more generally to see if urbanisation plays a role in this too. For example, do Tawny Owls call later in the evening in areas that are more urbanised, and do they call for longer throughout the winter months?

This work builds on information collected by volunteers who listened for Tawny Owls in their gardens during the 2005/06 winter. Thanks to their efforts we have learnt that the time of day, moon phase and weather conditions all influence Tawny Owl calling behaviour. With your help we can add to this knowledge and provide advice on the likely impacts of urbanisation on our breeding Tawny Owls.

HOW TO TAKE PART

You can help us learn more about Tawny Owls by listening for their distinctive calls from your garden, a local park or piece of woodland; in fact you can listen from pretty much anywhere you like for 20 minutes one evening a week, from **30 September 2018 – 31 March 2019**. You don't have to commit to listening every week, but you'll be providing valuable data by recording for as many weeks as you can. The first thing to do is to decide on a location and **register online at www.bto.org/owls** or call us on 01842 750050. If you are keen you can always record from more than one location. You can start your recording at any point during the survey period, so don't worry if you are joining the survey later than other people.

You can choose to stand outside for your surveys or you can listen from the comfort of your house, with the window open. Your 20 minutes can start anytime you chose after sunset but please be finished by midnight at the latest. It is best to choose a dry evening, that is either still or has only light wind. The evening you choose is up to you, and it doesn't need to remain consistent from one week to the next.

We are interested in whether or not you are hearing Tawny Owls calling. If you do hear them, then we want to know the type of call you heard. There are two main calls that we're recording; "hooting" and the "kee-wick" contact call. The hooting or "twoo" sound is usually made by the male and is a territorial call. You can sometimes hear a female responding to a male's "twoo" call with a sharp "kee-wick". Together this duet produces the classic "twit twoo" sound, which many associate with these owls. By recording which of the calls you hear you will be telling us about which of the sexes are present.



You can familiarise yourself with the sounds that Tawny Owls make by listening to the calls on our webpages.

WHAT WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO RECORD

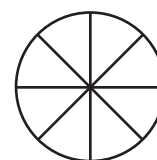
We'd like you to record three things on each weekly session.

1) The date and the time at which you started your count

You can start the 20 minute survey anytime from sunset onwards and time it to finish by midnight at the latest.

2) Cloud cover

Provide an estimate of cloud cover by looking at the sky and imagining that you're standing under a bowl. Divide the bowl into eight segments and work out how many segments' worth are covered with cloud. Then record 0 = **cloudless**, 1–4 = **some cloud**, 5–7 = **mostly cloudy** and 8 = **completely clouded over**.



3) Whether or not you heard an owl (**zero counts are as important as reports of calling owls**)

Record whether or not you hear a Tawny Owl. If you do hear a Tawny Owl please record what you heard, either "hooting", the "kee-wick" call, or both. There's also the option to include whether you've heard a Tawny Owl during the week at your site outside of the survey time period.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR OBSERVATIONS

You can enter your findings on our dedicated online site (www.bto.org/owls). Paper recording sheets can also be provided to those who would prefer to use them. To receive a paper form email us gbw@bto.org or call us on **01842 750050**. We are keen to start looking at the data as soon as possible after the survey has finished, so please send in your paper forms before the end of April 2019.

Be a zero hero! Remember that records of no owls are just as important as records of owls present. If you don't hear any, we still want to know.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

CAN I STILL TAKE PART EVEN IF I HAVE MISSED THE FIRST WEEKS?

Yes, definitely! Whilst the survey runs for 26 weeks it is still valuable to get records from a proportion of these weeks. We would encourage records for six or more weeks at any point across the survey period.

WHAT IS THE MINIMUM NUMBER OF WEEKS I CAN RECORD?

It's great to record for as many weeks as possible, but don't worry if you can't commit to them all. You can make a valuable contribution even if you are only able to provide results for some of the weeks. We would encourage records for six or more weeks across the survey period. If you miss any weeks please leave them blank in the recording form/online system.

CAN I MONITOR MORE THAN ONE SITE?

You certainly can. If you're keen you could always survey more than one site, recording from both your garden and a local park for example.

I CAN HEAR TAWNY OWLS BUT THEY ARE NOT IN MY GARDEN / SURVEY SITE. CAN I RECORD THEM?

Yes, record Tawny Owl if you can hear one from your chosen site. The exact location of the Tawny Owl is not important.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I SUBMIT DATA?

If you are recording online we'd encourage you to submit the data each week, but you can enter multiple weeks together. If you are using paper forms please complete and send in the forms at the end of the survey. If submitting by paper there will also be the option of sending in the first half of the survey (after week 13) early and completing the second half on a separate sheet. This will help us get the data entered into our system quicker though if doing so please ensure that your personal and site details are identical for both sheets. We want to use the data as soon as possible, so please enter/return your data before the end of April 2019.

WHAT IF I HEAR ANOTHER SPECIES OF OWL CAN I RECORD IT?

This survey is focused on Tawny Owls but you can record other owls through BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net). This survey is part of Project Owl, looking to gain a deeper understanding of owls. You can find out more about our work on other owls at www.bto.org/project-owl.

HOW DO YOU LOOK AFTER MY PERSONAL DATA?

If you are providing name, address and other personal details, BTO will store and use your personal details in line with our published Privacy Policy. You can specify your preferences about the way we contact you at any time. For further details, see www.bto.org, or email info@bto.org, or phone 01842 750050.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT TAWNY OWLS?

You can learn more about Tawny Owls (and our other owls) on our website, where you will find a whole suite of owl-related resources; these include information on each species, a guide to their calls, nest box designs and (for some species) video identification guides. If there is something that you want to know about owls but can't find an answer on our website please drop us an email or give us a call.

British Trust for Ornithology
The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU
Tel: +44 (0)1842 750050
Email: info@bto.org
BTO is a Registered Charity, Number 216652
(England & Wales), SC039193 (Scotland).

OTHER THINGS YOU CAN DO THROUGH PROJECT OWL

Project Owl is an ambitious five-year programme of work, through which the BTO aims to improve our knowledge and understanding of our breeding owl species.

There are other surveys and studies with which you can help; you can also learn more about owls and what you can do to help them (including putting up a nest box). To find out more please visit www.bto.org/project-owl

