

LEVELED BOOK • L

Owls Overhead



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Written by Karen Mockler

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Boreal owlets

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Flying in the Moonlight

It's a quiet, moonlit night. You walk along the edge of town. A shadow crosses your path, but you hear no sound. You look up as a dark shape floats over you and into the nearby trees.

It's an owl. More than two hundred different **species** of owls live around the world. They come in many sizes and live on every continent except Antarctica. Owls may seem **mysterious**, but the way they look and act helps them **survive**.



Long-eared owls



Northern hawk owl

Burrowing owl

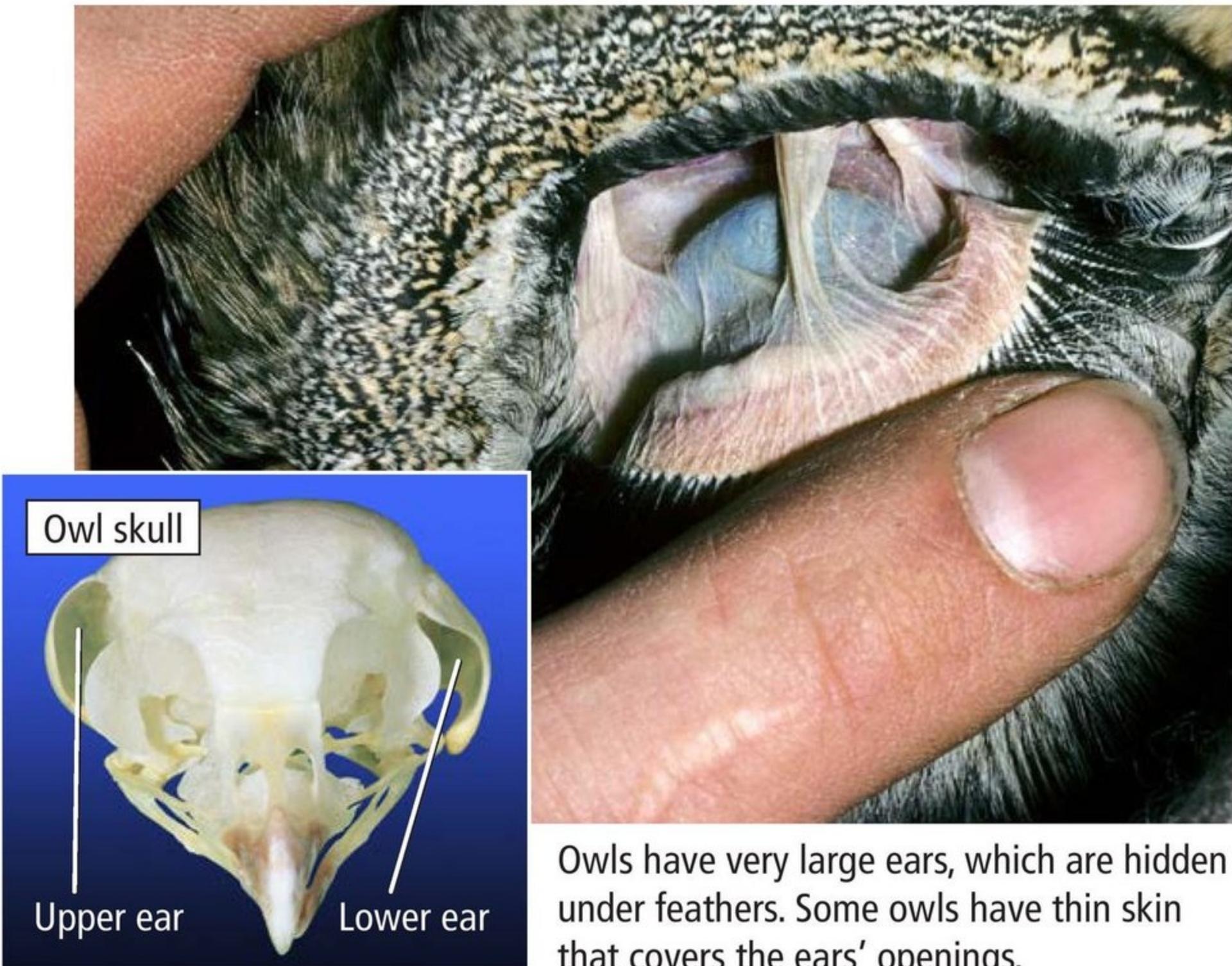
Eyes for the Night

Like most birds, owls can't move their eyes. Instead, they must turn their heads to follow a moving object. Owls are able to turn their heads almost all the way around. They can even turn their heads upside down.



An owl's pupils are small in bright light (top) and large in low light (bottom).

Owls' big eyes help them survive, too. Owls can't see in total darkness, but they can see better in low light than most animals. That's because of their pupils—the black circles in the center of their eyes. Their pupils can grow large to let in more light.



Owls have very large ears, which are hidden under feathers. Some owls have thin skin that covers the ears' openings.

Even Better Ears

Most owls rely on their hearing to hunt. Most owls have huge ears, with one higher than the other. The higher ear hears sounds from above. The lower ear hears sounds from below. Owls can move the feathers around their faces to send more sound to one ear or the other. This helps them find prey.



Owls, such as this barn owl, often crush their prey with their strong feet and sharp claws. The grip of some owls can be ten times stronger than a human's grip.

Great gray owls can hear a mouse hidden under the snow. Barn owls can hear a mouse moving far away and catch one in complete darkness. These owls have the best hearing of any animal ever tested.



Owl pellet

Pellets!

Owls can't chew their food. Instead, they often swallow small prey whole. They can't digest the unwanted parts of the animals. A part of their stomach with strong muscles rolls those parts into small balls, called *pellets*. A few hours after they eat, owls cough up a pellet.



A saw-whet owl flies silently through the trees.

Silent Hunters

Many animals that owls hunt also have very good hearing. So if an owl wants to eat, it must **attack** by surprise. The soft feathers that cover owls' bodies help them fly without a sound.



Great horned owls are great hunters. They can even catch another bird in flight.

The main food for most owls is small animals—lots of them.

A hungry great gray owl may eat 1,400 mice in a year. In its lifetime, a barn owl may eat 11,000 mice!



A barn owl lives up to its name by raising its young in a barn.

Where Owls Live

Some owls can live in many different **habitats**. Other owls need a special habitat, though. Burrowing owls live mostly on the prairie, making their nests underground. They use old burrows dug by other animals. Sometimes they move into fields and golf courses, and even near airport runways.

An Owl's Housekeeper

Screech owls hunt snakes. However, they bring the blindsnake back to their nest alive. They let it go inside the nest, where it eats the insects that feed on the dead animals stored there. The snake becomes a housekeeper!





Like many other owls, spotted owls do not fly south for the winter.

Spotted owls can only survive in old forests with huge trees. By 1994, most of their habitat had been destroyed by logging. Today, few spotted owls are left.

Owl Sounds

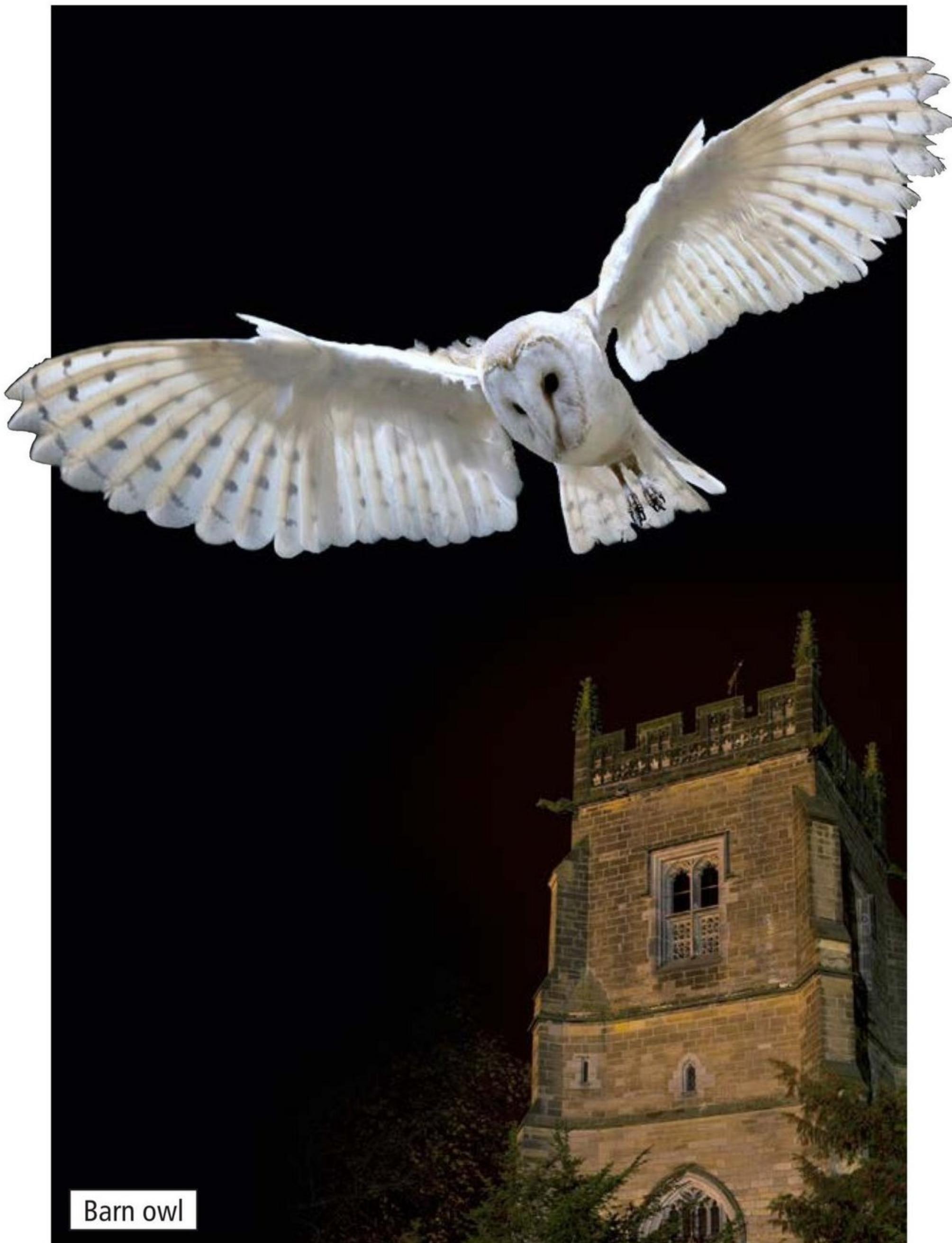
Owls aren't always silent, and they don't all hoot. They all make different sounds. A great horned owl can bark like a dog and meow like a cat. Barn owls don't hoot—they scream. Their strange cry and appearance once made some people think of barn owls as a sign of bad luck.



People take pictures of a great gray owl, the largest owl in the world.

Owls Are Out There

People don't often see owls, but they're out there. If you're in the country and want to find one, try going out at sunset. Listen for their calls.



If you stay out late enough, people might think you're an owl—a night owl, that is.

Glossary

attack (<i>v.</i>)	to act harmfully toward (p. 10)
habitats (<i>n.</i>)	the place where a plant or animal lives (p. 12)
mysterious (<i>adj.</i>)	odd; not easy to understand (p. 5)
prey (<i>n.</i>)	an animal that is hunted and eaten by another animal (p. 8)
species (<i>n.</i>)	a group of living things that are similar (p. 5)
survive (<i>v.</i>)	to stay alive (p. 5)

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Front cover: Barn owl

Back cover: Little owl

Title page: Tawny owl

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