



Barred Owls in Marin County

Importance: *Barred owls (Strix varia) recently expanded into the forest communities of Marin County and may be negatively impacting the federally threatened northern spotted owl (Strix occidentalis caurina).*

The barred owl is an eastern species that has expanded its range westward into the Pacific Northwest and more recently southward into California. Barred owls and northern spotted owls are closely related and have considerable overlap in diet and habitat. However, barred owls are slightly larger, more aggressive, and eat a wider range of prey items than spotted owls; these advantages may allow them to displace spotted owls from preferred habitat. Spotted owls may become less vocal in the presence of barred owls, affecting their territoriality and mating behavior. Researchers in Oregon, Washington, and parts of northern California have found that barred owls negatively impact spotted owl reproduction and survival.



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Barred Owls are originally from the Eastern United States and were first seen in Marin County in 2002.

Monitoring Program: *The National Park Service (NPS) monitors the northern spotted owl population on federal lands in Marin County. During surveys NPS also records the presence of barred owls and other potential threats.*

NPS has been monitoring the spotted owl population at Point Reyes National Seashore (PORE), Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GOGA), and Muir Woods National Monument (MUWO) since 1998 as part of a long-term monitoring program. Researchers conduct surveys during the spotted owl breeding season (March - August) to determine if spotted owls are present and successfully reproducing.

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Barred Owl



Northern Spotted Owl

Status and Trends: *Through the spotted owl monitoring program, researchers documented the first known barred owl on federal lands in Marin County in 2002, the first pair in 2005, and the first successful breeding in 2007.*

Researchers have detected barred owls in MUWO and on the west side of Bolinas Ridge in PORE. The successful breeding took place in high quality redwood habitat within a historic spotted owl territory in MUWO. In 2007 at least three known barred owls resided on federal lands in Marin County.

Aggressive interactions including physical and vocal confrontations between barred and spotted owls have been observed over subsequent years at multiple locations in Marin County. In recent years, a pair of spotted owls in MUWO has been more difficult to locate, and when located the pair has been found in marginal breeding habitat. This spotted owl pair did not nest successfully between 2004 and 2006. The pair relocated in 2007 and produced fledglings in 2008.

NPS and other agencies plan to perform more research, including color-banding barred owls for tracking, to determine the nature of the threat posed by barred owls and to identify potential management options that could ensure the persistence of spotted owls throughout their historic range. Since the barred owl has only recently invaded Marin County, the area offers a unique opportunity to study the early patterns of contact between barred and spotted owls.

Public Involvement in Conservation:

Human activities, including those of land managers, scientists, and park visitors, can have an impact on the land and wildlife. Because barred owls may be exerting pressure on spotted owls, it is especially important for humans to limit their own impacts. While watching owls, follow these guidelines to ensure that you do not unintentionally compromise the safety and nesting success of the spotted owl:

1. Quietly observe owls at a distance with binoculars or spotting scope from trail corridors.
2. Limit your time with the owl(s) and do not share the location of the nest site with others to avoid excessive activity in the core nest area, which could lead to nest failure.
3. Leave immediately if the owls are mobbed by other birds to avoid attracting predators to the owl's location. Also leave the area if your presence seems to be affecting or changing the behavior of the owl.
4. Differentiating between barred owls and spotted owls can be difficult, so please follow these guidelines when observing all owls.
5. If you discover a spotted owl or barred owl anywhere in Marin County, please fill out our [incidental owl observation form](#) to help biologists' tracking efforts. Photographs are helpful but photographing owls should be limited to daylight hours, and owls should not be approached for the purpose of photography.
6. It is ethically unacceptable or illegal to use calls or taped playbacks to attract owls, to stake out or flag nest locations, or to violate area closures or activity restrictions.

The American Birding Association provides a more extensive "code of ethics" for wildlife watching: <http://www.aba.org/about/ethics.html>.

Additional Resources:

For more information contact Bill Merkle, Golden Gate National Recreation Area Wildlife Biologist, 415-331-2894, bill_merkle@nps.gov. Also see: http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/sfan/vital_signs/Spotted_Owl/birds.cfm.

Incidental owl observation form: http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/sfan/vital_signs/Spotted_Owl/docs/owl_incidental_observation.doc.

View the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service webpage on the northern spotted owl: <http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/SpeciesReport.do?spcode=B08B>. The 2008 Final Recovery Plan discusses the barred owl as a significant threat.
