

25 October 2023

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Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 03 October 2023, in which you asked for:

I am rather fearful of the effect the new pest Barn Owl, now naturalising in Aotearoa, is having or will be having on the pekapeka, on the skinks, geckos, weta and tuatara as they spread their plague wings across the country. Have you, as in, DOC, any eyes on these owls and their ecological footprint so far? How far have those birds now spread? Have populations of fragile native creatures survived well in the places they may have been sharing with the owls? I hope you can indulge me and provide some strong answers to these worries which have been active since the barn owl was said to be breeding and spreading from the north.

Our responses are listed below.

Records show barn owls are well known to occasionally arrive from Australia unaided through strong winds, however this is the first time they have been known to breed. They are therefore classified as a native species, coloniser.

Unfortunately, because barn owls are only recent arrivals in New Zealand and numbers are still low, the Department of Conservation doesn't have much data on their distribution, abundance, and effect on pekapeka and other native fauna. So far, they have not made their way into key short-tailed bat areas of Northland such as Omahuta Forest. Diet studies from overseas noted they take predominantly rodents, and a wide variety of animals including reptiles, frogs, bats, insects and even some larger animals such as rabbits and hares (but they don't specify the sizes). Included here is a link to a paper on diet of bats from Europe. [A Review of European Owls as Predators of Bats | IntechOpen](#)

What we do know in New Zealand is from analysis of 18 pellets cast by the Kaitaia barn owls they had consumed mice, rats, and small birds, including house sparrow, greenfinch, yellowhammer, starling, and a fernbird. The best source of information on Barn Owls in New Zealand, their ecology and dispersal are from New Zealand Birds Online. A link is provided here.

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiYrLoktvGBAxVIT2wGHZLAC2gQFnoECDIQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fnzbirdsonline.org.nz%2Fspecies%2Fbarn-owl&usg=AOvVaw0_oGnQdIKIMGTactu4eqHI&opi=89978449



The situation in New Zealand is far different than from in Europe in that our climate extremes are a lot less. In Europe barn owls only live on average a few years, but they can breed prolifically tied in predominantly with the eruption of small rodent numbers. Barn owls are more susceptible to the elements than other owls. Their feathers are less water resistant (soft feathers equate to silent flight when hunting) and provide less insulation and for this reason it is considered unlikely they would survive in higher rainfall areas like the West Coast of the South Island, Fiordland and Stewart Island.



Nāku noa, nā



Sue Reed-Thomas
Director Terrestrial Biodiversity
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai