



TYTO ALBA IS SCREECHING FOR HELP... A REINTRODUCTION CAN BE A GOOD REPLY

By María Slob Pacilio, Biologia Ambiental 2015

INTRODUCTION

Tyto alba (Barn Owl) is...

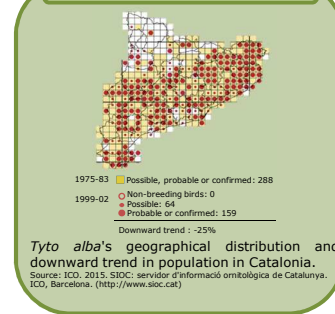
- An excellent indicator of environmental and sociological changes.
- A sign of healthy and productive grassland habitat.
- A natural rodenticide.

If Tyto alba disappears...

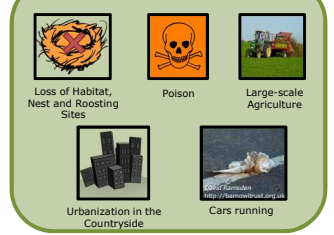
- Rodent populations would increase and cause great costs on agricultural productions.
- The loss of some of our cultural landscape would be inevitable.
- Future generations would not be able to enjoy a beautiful flight of *Tyto alba*.

**All these reasons are why it is so important to conserve Barn Owls
Reintroduction is a possible tool**

Alarming population trend



Causes of death



OBJECTIVES

- Avoid local extinction of Barn Owl's.
- Restore viable Barn Owl populations in the wild for conservation purposes in Catalonia.

STEPS FOR AN ADEQUATE REINTRODUCTION

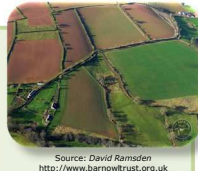
Before starting one must know...

The duration of the reintroduction must be a minimum of 10 years in order to be able to know if the reintroduction is being a success. Common breeding densities of Barn Owls may reach 2-5 pairs/10km² and up to 10-30 pairs/10km². The best release period for a suitable reintroduction is between **April** and **early June**.

1 SELECT A RELEASING ZONE

A good releasing area must:

- NOT present any causes of death.
- Have 2km of suitable land beyond the area.
- Have roost sites with dense foliage.
- Be replete with species that constitute the natural diet of Barn Owls.
- Have 50ha of permanent pasture or 50ha of rough grasslands.



Areas where Barn Owls have been living previously might be a good starting point for identifying suitable releasing sites

2 SELECT A RELEASING METHOD



Adults

- Unsupported or Cold release (See picture on the left)
- Locked barn

Source: David Ramsden / <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk>



Adults and Fledged

- Top-opening aviary release
- Mobile aviary release (See picture on the left)

Source: David Ramsden / <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk>



Unfledged

- Returned to nest / Fostered in (See picture on the left)
- Young brood release

Source: David Ramsden / <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk>

3 OBTAIN INDIVIDUALS

The individuals that can be used for the reintroduction can proceed either from (1) captive-breeding centers or from (2) rehabilitation centers.

The following centers are operational in this moment in Catalonia:

- Centre de Recuperació de Fauna Salvatge de Torreferrussa.
- Centre de Fauna de Vallcaient.
- Centre de Fauna dels Aiguamolls de l'Empordà.
- Estació Biològica de Canal Vell.

The reintroduction has to focus on **young owls** in order to achieve the best survival rates (without excluding the release of adult owls).

4 MONITOR THE PROCESS

To ensure that the reintroduction is carried out successfully, a survey of the reintroduced individuals is essential. The best way to perform it is:

- Via radio-tracking
- Periodical inspections of nest-boxes.
- Interviews with local farmers and landowners.



5 SEARCH FOR EVIDENCE OF SUCCES OR FAILURE

The indicators that one will have to take into account in order to measure progress and success of the plan include the following:

- evidence of presence of released individuals (e.g. pellets and feathers at implemented nest-boxes).
- increased number of reported sightings (e.g. by local landowners and farmers, volunteers or researchers).
- presence of individuals in areas where they were not seen before.

If none of these signs are observed, the reintroduction has to be considered a **failure**.

DO NOT FORGET TO...

INVOLVE PEOPLE!

This is always a very important component of a reintroduction program. People should be aware of the importance of avoiding the disappearance of Barn Owls and they must understand that **they can help**. This is why it is useful to:

- ✓ Develop, produce and distribute educational materials, to have a website, provide presentations giving important information about the Barn Owls or even showing living birds to the public.
- ✓ Establish partnerships with NGOs, governmental and private sector entities.
- ✓ Specially involve landowners and farmers → If they feel they can take part of the program, they will be more eager to participate.

The reintroduction program should start to be communicated to the public from the very beginning of the plan.



CONCLUSIONS

Over the last few years, the population of *Tyto alba* has been declining in Catalonia. Therefore, a good conservation plan for the Barn Owl is needed. One of the techniques often used in conservation programs in order to increment the number of individuals of a species is a reintroduction plan. The steps proposed here are key to achieve a successful reintroduction.