

when food is scarce, the smallest chick may starve, the asynchrony may be a strategy for maximizing the production of young during years of abundant food. Parental care lasts until fall, but the young are on their own for their first winter.

Like other owls, Barred Owls are superb predators with excellent night vision and large asymmetrical ears that produce hearing so acute that they can locate and capture prey in complete darkness. They are largely nocturnal but may hunt by day, particularly when it is overcast. They may hunt by cruising forests scaring up prey or merely sitting, waiting, and pouncing on prey from a perch. They have relatively small feet and hence prefer small prey, so mice, shrews, and rats make up the bulk of their diet. However, sometimes they take squirrels and small rabbits, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and birds. In southern swamps they may take large numbers of crayfish, frogs, and even fish.

Barred Owls have few natural predators, although they lose in contests with Great Horned Owls. Since Barred Owls prefer mature forests with large old nest trees with hollows, they have declined locally in areas where old-growth forest has been harvested and where rotation periods for harvesting have been seriously reduced. However, Barred Owls have expanded their range in the northwestern U.S. and now overlap with the endangered Spotted Owl. Some biologists are concerned that the more aggressive Barred Owls will have a negative impact on the already reduced numbers of Spotted Owls. Barred Owls are behaviorally enigmatic, usually wary but sometimes absurdly tame, and they are known for showing up in urban yards and parks during winter. In southern swamps they frequently call in the daytime. Perhaps because of these behavior peculiarities Barred Owls are probably our most commonly seen large owl — and seeing one is an unforgettable experience.

--William E. Davis, Jr.

ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

Louise Zemaitis, a freelance artist and naturalist, is a regular exhibitor at "The Loft," Cape May Bird Observatory's gallery. Her illustrations have appeared in *The Birds of North America*, *The Birds of Cape May*, ABA's Bird Finding Guides, and a wide variety of magazines, brochures, newsletters, and T-shirts. She is currently illustrating Pete Dunne's next book *Small-headed Flycatcher. Seen Yesterday. He Didn't Leave His Name. . . . and other stories*. She also leads bird and butterfly field trips for Cape May Bird Observatory. Louise lives in Cape May Point, New Jersey, with her two young naturalist sons, Bradley and Alec, and her husband, Michael O'Brien.