

THE NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL - "NSO" (*Strix occidentalis caurina*)

The Northern Spotted owl is a threatened species, protected both by the state and federal governments under the Endangered Species Act and the California Endangered Species Act. Marin County, the Northern Spotted Owl's most southern range, supports one of the last stable populations in the world.

The Northern Spotted Owl is a medium-sized, dark brown owl with a barred tail, white spots on the head and breast, and dark brown eyes surrounded by a prominent facial disk (the feathers surrounding the owl's eyes). Marin County's Northern Spotted Owl prefers habitat made up of mature Coastal Redwood, Douglas Fir, and California Bay Laurel. The NSO is a nocturnal owl, meaning it is awake during the night, and sleeps during the day.



Photo: Elyse Omernick



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Nesting season runs from **February 1st - July 31st** each year. This is a critical time in which the nesting pair will choose their nesting site, mate and hopefully raise their young.

How Can We Protect the Northern Spotted Owl?

- Avoid loud noises during nesting season - This includes construction work, tree work, outdoor music (during day & night), and gas powered leaf blowers.
- Do not shout or make loud noises when you are in close proximity to a nesting site.
- Do not hoot at or play recordings of Spotted Owls. This is considered harassment under the Endangered Species Act.
- Never use flash photography as the flash can disorient owls.
- Always stay on marked trails.
- Keep dogs on a leash at all times (owl babies often perch on the ground shortly after leaving the nest).
- Keep your cats indoors *An estimated 764 million birds are killed each year in the US & Canada by domesticated cats.
- If you come across a Northern Spotted Owl, observe it from a distance and keep your visits short. Even though the owls appear tame, our presence, especially when loitering in groups, can interrupt their normal activities, such as roosting, feeding their young, and protecting themselves and their offspring from predators.
- Never use rodenticides. Poisoned rodents can be eaten by predators, including owls, and can make them sick or kill them.

Northern Spotted Owls and Barred Owls look quite similar. The easiest way to differentiate the two species is by the feather pattern on their chest. The **NSO (left image)** has a spotted brown and white pattern, while the **Barred Owl (right image)** has a barred brown and white pattern. Please note the below photos which clearly illustrate these differences. Should you see what you believe is a Barred Owl, we ask that you report it to the below agencies. Provide a description and the location, and if possible, provide a photo and/or recording.



Sharing NSO location information on social media platforms such as NextDoor, Facebook and Instagram, can lead to groups of people disturbing the owls. While sharing photos with friends and family is usually harmless, **never share location information.**

Loitering near NSO nesting or roosting sites, especially in large groups, can stress the owls and can be considered harassment under the Endangered Species Act. Harrassing NSO could result in criminal citations and fines.



Northern Spotted Owl
Photo: Elyse Omernick



Barred Owl
Photo: Ken Shults

Report NSO and Barred Owl sightings to owlobs@wildlife.ca.gov

For questions about project impacts to NSO, please contact:

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Visit: marinaudubon.org/conservation/northern-spotted-owl