

THE NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL - “NSO”

(*Strix occidentalis caurina*)

The Northern Spotted owl is a threatened species, fully 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



How Can We Protect the Northern Spotted Owl?

- Never yell or hoot at an owl, and never play recordings of Spotted Owl calls. 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. Juvenile owls 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 domestic cats.
- Observe owls from a distance.
- Keep visits short (only a few minutes). Even though the owls appear tame, our presence, especially when loitering in groups, can interrupt important nesting activities.
- 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 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. 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 with others.**

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:
California Department of Fish & Wildlife Bay Delta Region
(707) 428-2002 or by email at AskBDR@wildlife.ca.gov - or -
Visit: marinaudubon.org/conservation/northern-spotted-owl