

BARRED OWL FEEDS ON BAND-TAILED PIGEON

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In its range in eastern North America, the Barred Owl (*Strix varia*; Figure 1) is regarded as an opportunistic predator that catches a wide variety of small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, and even invertebrates (Mazur and James 2000). It is considered a semi-nocturnal to nocturnal hunter although there are many reports of individual birds with prey discovered during daylight hours. Throughout its range the Barred Owl's food habits, determined by pellet analysis, is composed mainly of small mammals that varies seasonally from about 46 - 97 % of the bird's total diet (Takats 1998; Marks et al. 1984). Major secondary food items include invertebrates and birds.

Although not an exhaustive search, literature describes at least 23 species of mainly forest-dwelling birds as prey, ranging in size from Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*) to Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*). Wild pigeons were not listed although Campbell et al. (1974) reported a Barred Owl with a Rock Pigeon (*Columbia livia*)



Figure 1. Part of the successful invasion of the Barred Owl into British Columbia is due to its opportunistic feeding habits and diverse diet. Victoria, BC. 21 May 1989. (R. Wayne Campbell).

in its talons in downtown Vancouver.

On 28 September 2004, at 1100 hrs, I observed a Barred Owl clutching the remains of a large bird in a Pacific dogwood (*Cornus nuttalli*) tree in my backyard in Coquitlam. Only the backbone of the prey was visible as the owl tore off bits of meat still on the skeleton. The owl stayed in the yard until dusk moving a couple of times between roosting in the dogwood and a nearby western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*).

Later, I collected some of the prey remains, that included a wing with sooty-coloured primary feathers, from below where the Barred Owl was roosting. These were compared with life-size mounted birds in the collection at the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary in Delta. The prey species was what I predicted, a Band-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*).

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About the Author

David is a retired fisheries biologist who has, since retirement, become hooked on birding. He is a member of several natural history organizations including the Burke Mountain Naturalists.