

LETTER ON BARRED AND SPOTTED OWLS

Jonathan Balcombe

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To whom it may concern:

I'm writing as a biologist, an author of widely-read books on the inner lives of animals, and as a birding enthusiast for nearly 60 years, to express my opposition to plans for the mass killing of barred owls. The idea of shooting some 500,000 of these magnificent birds over a 30-year span (for the intended purpose of protecting threatened spotted owls where the two species' ranges overlap in northwestern North America) is ecologically unsound and ethically repugnant.

Killing barred owls will temporarily reduce their numbers, but it will not cause them to disappear from suitable habitats. Each death creates a vacuum that will soon be occupied by adults seeking to avoid intraspecific competition, and by young birds dispersing from their nests.

Huge numbers of owls will also suffer from this plan. No matter how skilled the sharpshooter, many birds will survive a bullet. Unable to fly or hunt, injured birds will slowly starve or fall victim to predators. All for the "crime" of being born a species (and an individual) with every right to exist, but which we have chosen to persecute.

In an era when terrestrial wildlife has been reduced to just 4% of its historic presence on earth, it's time to discard lethal policies. It is not humanity's place to play judge and jury in who in the wild gets to live and who doesn't.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Balcombe

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