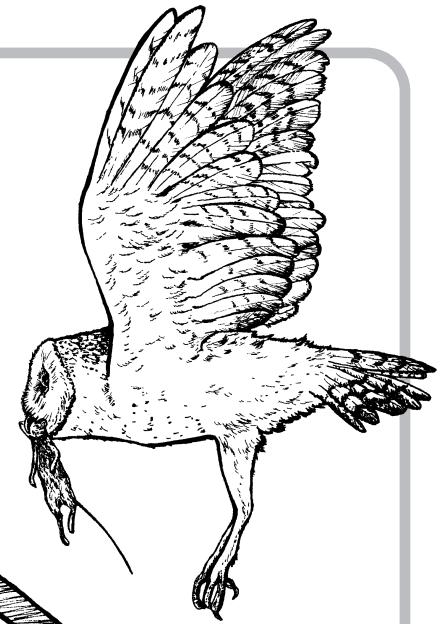
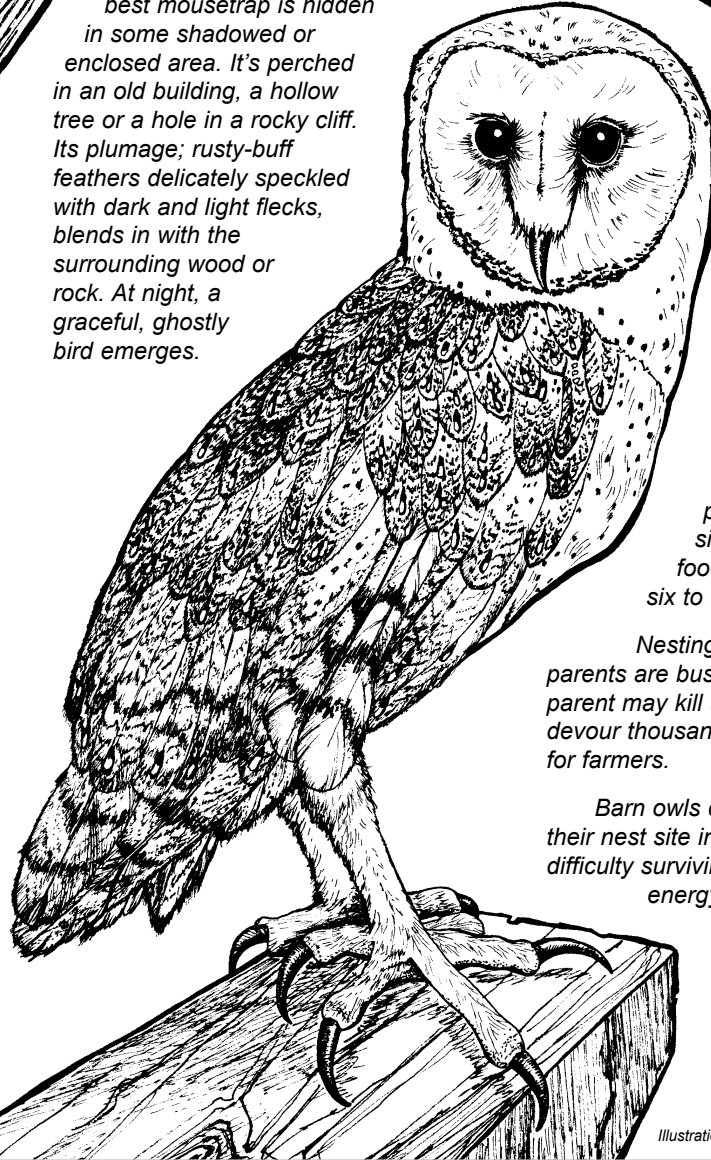


A Better “Mouse Trap”



If you're looking for a better mousetrap, skip the local hardware store. During the day, nature's best mousetrap is hidden in some shadowed or enclosed area. It's perched in an old building, a hollow tree or a hole in a rocky cliff. Its plumage; rusty-buff feathers delicately speckled with dark and light flecks, blends in with the surrounding wood or rock. At night, a graceful, ghostly bird emerges.



It has a white, heart-shaped face, dark eyes, and white undersides. The barn owl is an efficient hunter that can locate a mouse by sound and catch it in complete darkness.

Pound for pound, barn owls consume more rodent pests than any other animal. Compared to other owls of similar size, the barn owl has a much higher metabolic rate, requiring more food. They need to eat one and one half times their body weight—about six to eight rodents every evening.

Nesting pairs are truly super mousers. Their little owlets are hungry all the time. Both parents are busy night after night ransacking adjoining areas to feed their ravenous babies. Each parent may kill up to two dozen mice, voles, shrews, or rats each evening. A nesting pair and their young devour thousands of rodents per year, making barn owls one of the most economically valuable species for farmers.

Barn owls do not migrate like other birds. The adults stay put and the young simply wander away from their nest site in random directions. This means that these mousers must work year-round. Barn owls have difficulty surviving severe winter weather. Their bodies store little fat, so the birds have minimal extra energy to draw on when deep snow hides the small mammals they eat. If they don't find a constant supply of food, especially during cold spells when they use a lot of energy to keep warm, they may die.

Farmers can entice their “mousetraps” to stick around by providing nest sites. Barn owl pairs often use a nest site that has been provided or an old nest that has been occupied for decades rather than building a new one.

