

Owls and their prey



By Bowen Island Undercurrent

Published: **January 24, 2013 08:00 PM**

Updated: **January 24, 2013 02:512 PM**

I feel fortunate that we share our beautiful island with several species of owls, include the barred owl, famous for its 'who-cooks-for-you-too' call. The barred owl is also known by other names, including Rain Owl, Wood Owl, Striped Owl, Hoot Owl and, best of all, Eight Hooter (though in my experience, our Bowen owls are Five or Six Hooters). Barred owls are pretty social and that's why you can often persuade them to respond, with even a rather poor imitation of their call. There are certainly several who live around Killarney Lake. I vividly remember coming eyeball to eyeball with one on the very day we moved to Bowen, in the summer of 2007. I had got up before 6 a.m. to walk the dog before the moving van came at 7 a.m. There I was on the short boardwalk below our home, and there she was - a barred owl on a low branch, staring at me. Me and the dog stared back. This went on for about ten minutes, until I moved on. I was thrilled and felt that I had been properly welcomed to Bowen. This impression continued through that summer as I often saw and heard juvenile barred owls in the canopy. Once there was a parent and three juveniles all in one tree, chatting away with each other (they have a different sound for chatting with the kids), and keeping an eye on me down below.

Barred owls are fairly large, up to two feet long with a four foot wingspan. They glide silently through the forest: their wings seem to make no noise at all, in contrast with the creaky strokes of crows and ravens and geese. They typically feed on voles, mice and shrews but also on large insects, lizards, frogs, rats and squirrels. They will also take birds. Last spring there was a real panic going on among the robins near us and then I saw why: a barred owl landed on a high branch with a nestling in its beak. This was in the middle of the day: barred owls are among the most opportunistic and will hunt at almost any time of day, although like most owls they prefer dawn and dusk.

There is one other animal that might form the prey of the barred owl: cats. The evidence comes from pellets recovered during urban studies that contain the remains of cats, kittens and even small dogs too. At the moment on Bowen there seem to be a lot of cats missing. It's good for us all to remember that raptors are one definite risk for our kitties, especially the ones that like their nocturnal adventures outside. Keeping our cats indoors at night is likely to keep them safer.

Susanna Braund

Find this article at:

<http://www.bowenlandundercurrent.com/opinion/188276551.html>