

# Mudpuppy's Pond

## Baby Barred Owls at Lakeside!

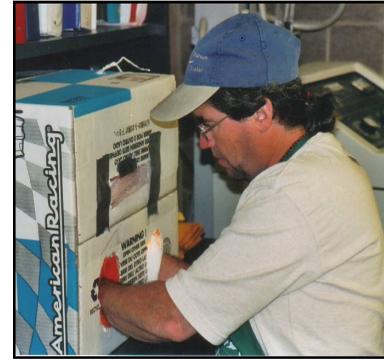
By Kris Harmer

To start a family, the Barred Owl uses empty nests that have been left by hawks, squirrels, or crows, or in a hollow space in a tree. In February, the female and male barred owls start to court. The male will give food to the female, "showing off" on how good a provider he will be for their family. The mom will lay two or three white, round eggs between March and August. The mom will incubate the eggs for one month. The male, just like he promised, hunts and brings her food while she is incubating the eggs.

On March 30th, Lakeside Nature Center received a very special and exciting challenge. Some people had cut down a dead tree, and two eggs came down with the tree. They placed both eggs in an incubator and called a Missouri Department of Conservation Agent to come pick them up. While they waited, one of the eggs hatched! The agent brought the newly hatched owlet and the remaining egg to Lakeside Nature Center Rehabilitation, and a couple of days later, the second egg hatched at Lakeside.



The Barred Owl babies, a week old, are covered with white, fluffy down. At this age, they are tweezer-fed small chunks of rat meat, with no fur or bones.



By age 2 1/2 weeks, they were eating cut up rats with fur and bones, and now they are eating three to four whole mice every day.



Here the owlets are about one month old; they can hop out of the nest, sit out on a branch together and look around. At this age, they are called "branchers." Soon these two owlets will be moved to a large pen so they can learn to fly and hunt. Ultimately, they will be released back into the wild.

Did you know that an adult Barred Owl lives at Lakeside Nature Center? He helps us teach people about the owls of Missouri. Visit Lakeside and meet our Barred Owl, as well as our other beautiful birds of prey.

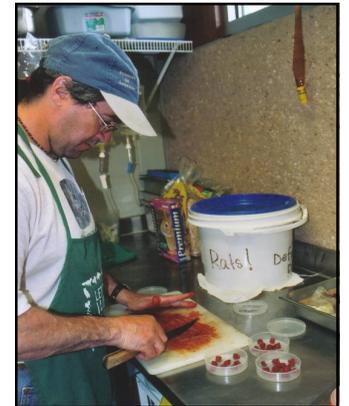


Photo: MO Dept. of Conservation

The owlets were put inside a box and fed by a person from the outside. This is called "blind feeding", and is done to keep them from imprinting on people. Any sound, even the sound of a person's voice, would confuse the owlets. It's important that they know they're owls and not people. They needed to imprint on each other, so it was very lucky that there were two!