# Barn Owl Sculpture Project Guide

**by Vicky Oldham for LearnSculpture.Org**

***Create an original barn owl sculpture in clay at the Learn Sculpture YouTube Channel.*** *Follow along with a professional sculptor in live-streaming lessons online at [www.YouTube.com/LearnSculpture](www.YouTube.com/LearnSculpture). Imagine you can achieve your own signature portrayal of this beautiful and wise owl known the world over—from miniature up to life-size!*

# Notes

Barn Owl Sculpture Project Guide, 1st Edition.
Drawings and instructional materials, by Vicky Oldham
for Range Dog Publishing.

Visit LearnSculpture.Org for more information and guides.

# Why Project Patterns?

**It's all about learning how to master proportions. Difficulty with proportions is hands down, the number one problem for beginning sculptors.**

If a sculptor hopes to portray lifelike subjects with fidelity to accuracy and detail, depicting true-to-life proportions is essential.

Think about the times you've seen a beautifully finished sculpture with great detail, movement, and flair. Maybe it's a large figure cast in bronze or a sculpture displayed in a fine art gallery. Unfortunately, there's just something about it that bothers you, but it's hard to tell exactly what.

Look a little closer, and you'll see: the proportions are all wrong. Commonly, the head is too large for the body. Additionally, the body may be too shallow or short. Feet, paws, hands, and other parts may look mismatched. If your goal is to sculpt realistically, the way you render proportions can make or break your work. As a beginner, getting proportions right can be really daunting. Even after a lot of practice, it's still very challenging. That's because your point of view is continuously shifting. Without reliance on measurements, every shape becomes an elastic mass, and you end up with mismatched parts. If your goal is to create stylized or impressionistic designs, you'll still need to understand managing proportions. Experienced sculptors who work in abstract or impressionistic styles still understand proportions but take creative liberty on purpose in the search for originality.

The patterns in this guide will help you understand these concepts by putting them into practice. You will be able to control proportions as you work. With careful measuring and attention to detail, you may be pleasantly surprised by your efforts, especially if this is your first attempt at sculpture!

# Tools and Materials

**First, gather your materials. For this project, you'll need clay, sculpting tools, artist brushes, and measuring tools.**

**Clay:** preferably oil-based clay such as plasteline. You can use any kind of clay that you like, but oil-based clay is helpful for learning because it won't dry out. Clays available from a long-established company like Chavant.com are used by professional sculptors, especially those who plan to have their work cast in bronze. We use Clayette by Chavant and prefer their hard styling clay. See pages at the end of this guide for more information about clay.

**Sculpting Tools:** your hands are your best tools! However, several sculpture tools will enable you to create small details or realistic textures. Pad tools and hoop tools are just a few; see LearnSculpture.org for more information about sculpting tools.

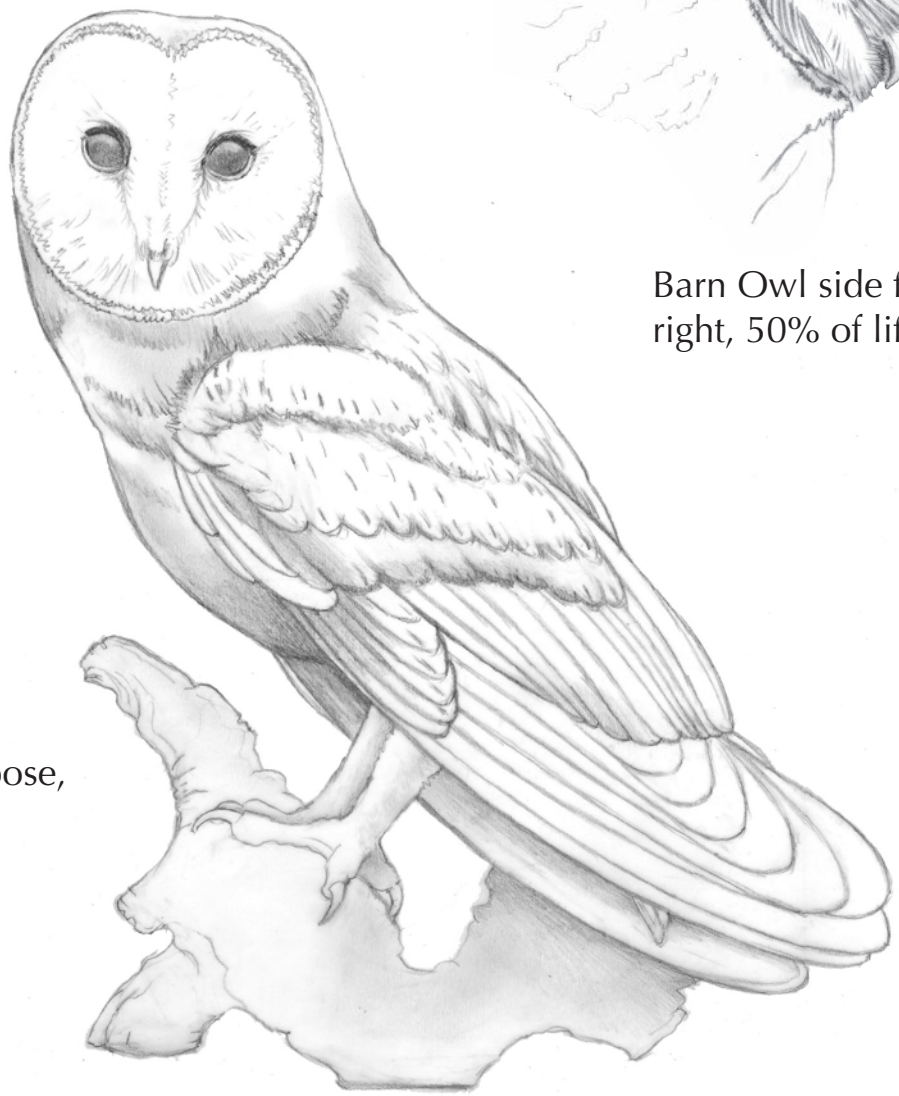
**Artist Brushes:**

- Use small brushes for smoothing and refining fine details.
- Use a brush dry or sparingly with isopropyl alcohol, mineral oil, or Vaseline®.
- Dip the brush into a small jar of alcohol to clean off excess clay.
- Use alcohol and solvents in moderation with your clay (to avoid dissolving the clay's material composition).

**Measuring Tools:** may include string, tape measures, calipers, or a proportional divider. In addition to measuring patterns at actual size, a proportional divider will allow you to accurately enlarge or reduce your sculpture while maintaining the original design's proportion.

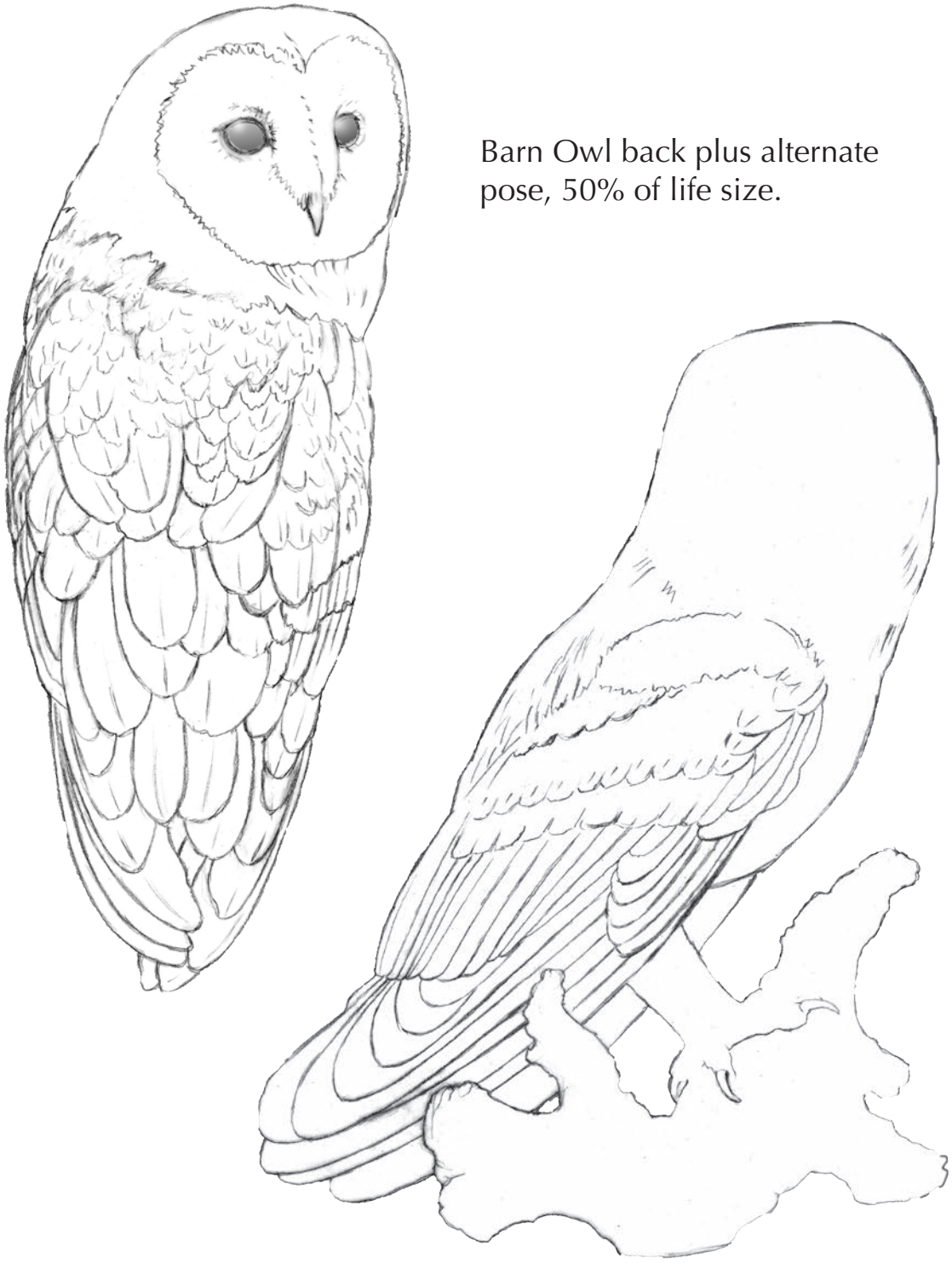
# Barn Owl - 50% Life Size

Barn Owl side face right, 50% of life size.



Barn Owl front pose, 50% of life size.

# Barn Owl - 50% Life Size



Barn Owl back plus alternate pose, 50% of life size.

# Barn Owl - 50% Life Size

Barn Owl side face left.

Barn Owl head, 3/4 view and view of inner skull shape.

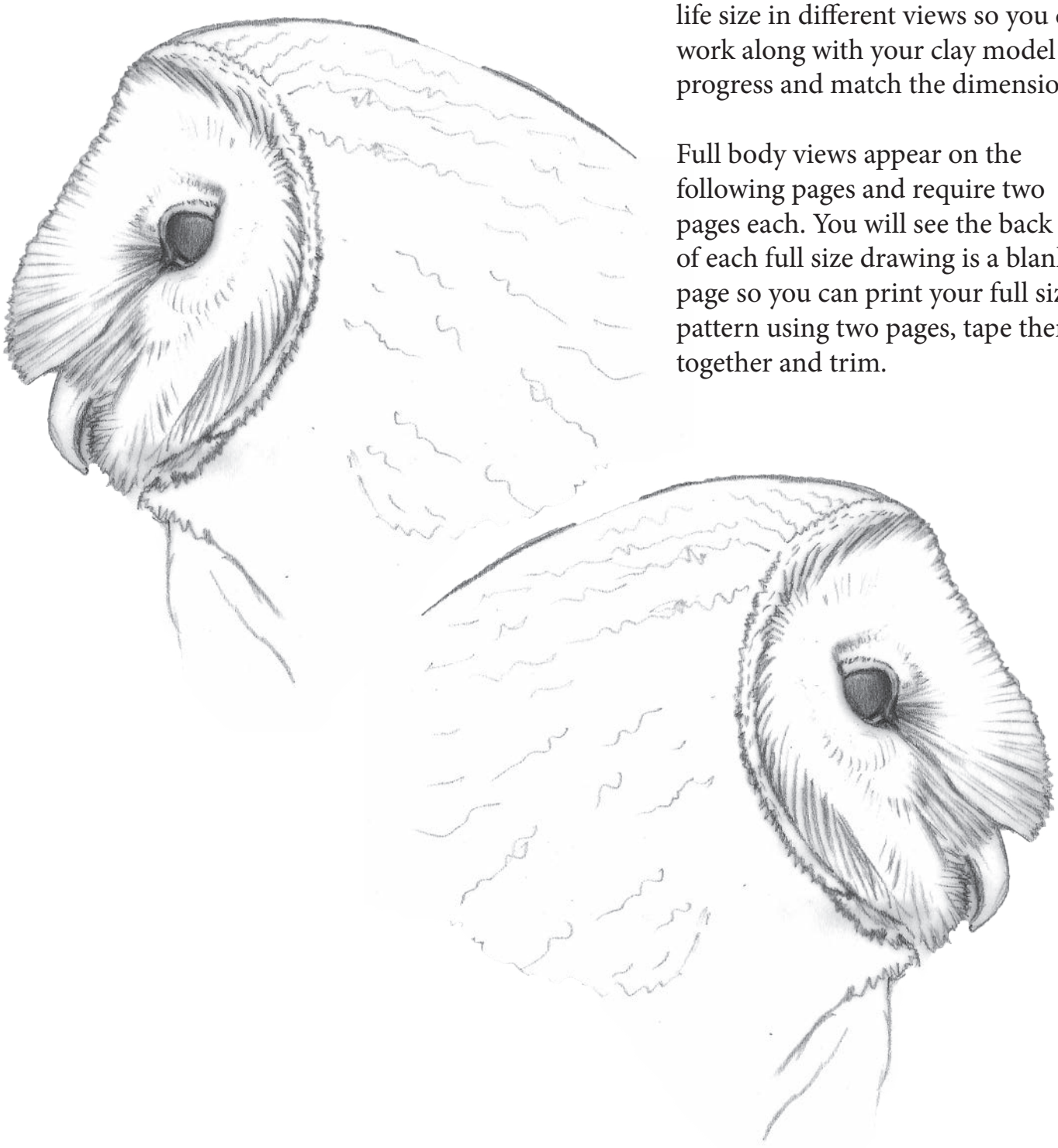
Barn Owl side face right.

# Barn Owl - 100% Life Size

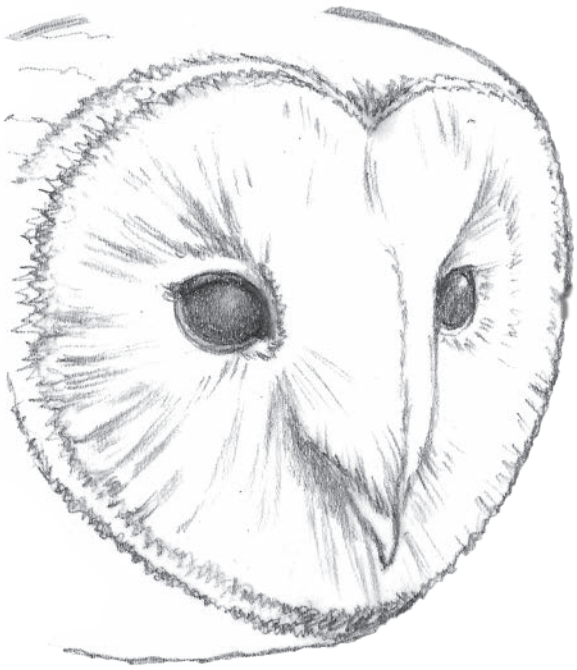
**The next pages include barn owl patterns at 100% of life size.**

The barn owl head is presented at life size in different views so you can work along with your clay model in progress and match the dimensions.

Full body views appear on the following pages and require two pages each. You will see the back of each full size drawing is a blank page so you can print your full size pattern using two pages, tape them together and trim.



# Barn Owl - 100% Life Size



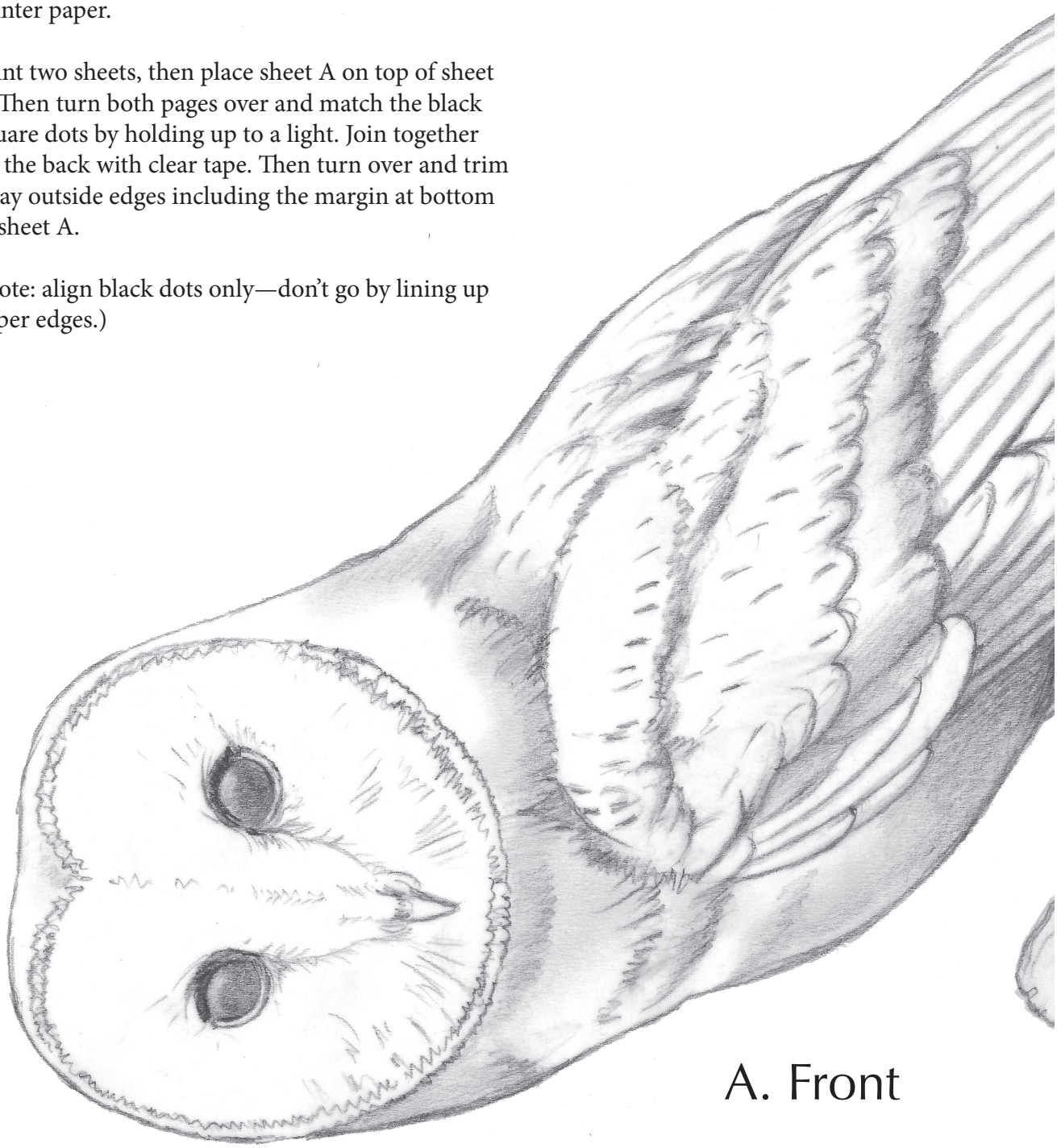
# Notes

# Barn Owl - 100% Life Size

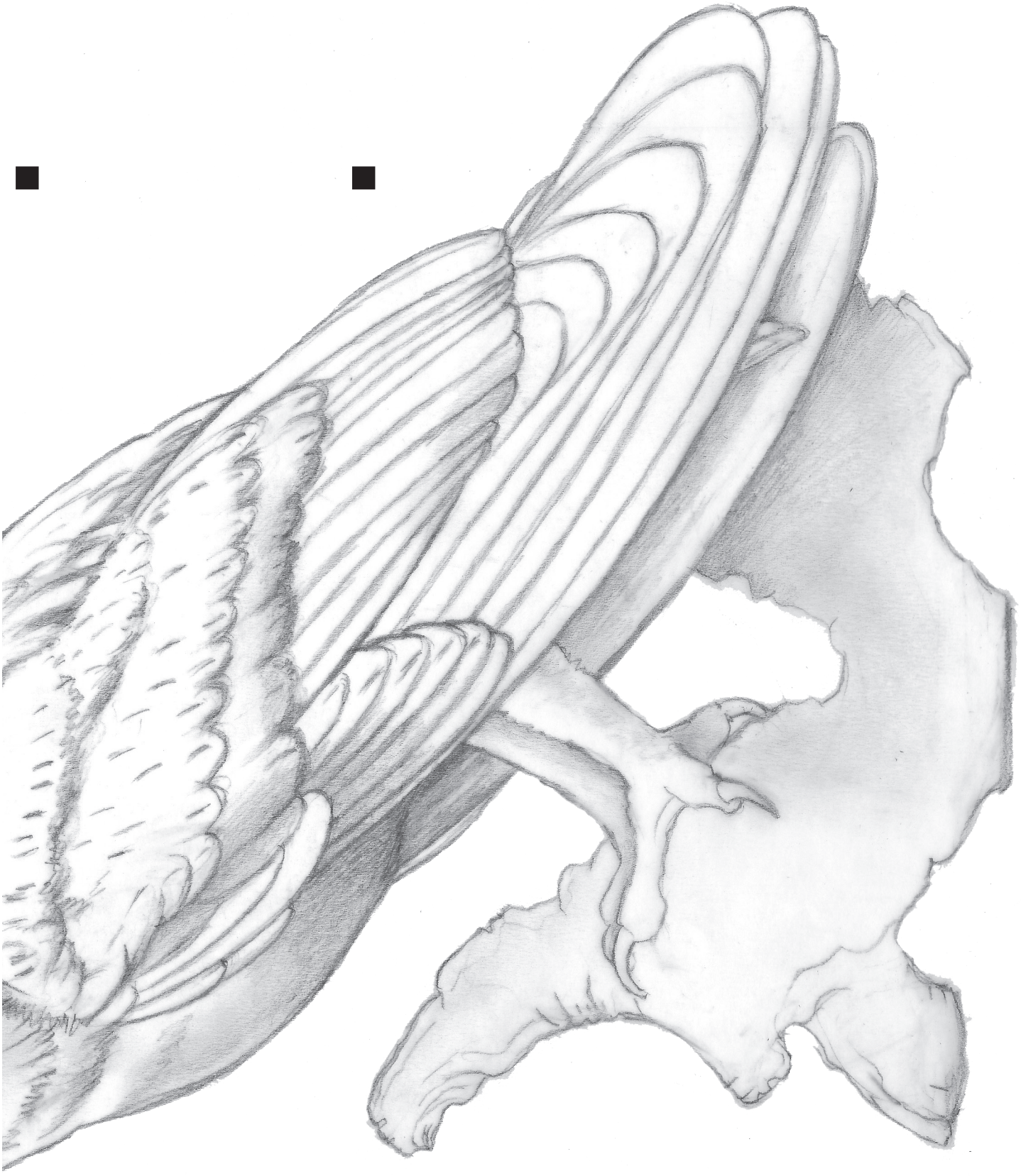
Due to size larger than the paper, the life sized barn owl patterns require piecing together after printing. Each page is printed on 8.5 x 11 standard white printer paper.

Print two sheets, then place sheet A on top of sheet B. Then turn both pages over and match the black square dots by holding up to a light. Join together on the back with clear tape. Then turn over and trim away outside edges including the margin at bottom of sheet A.

(Note: align black dots only—don't go by lining up paper edges.)



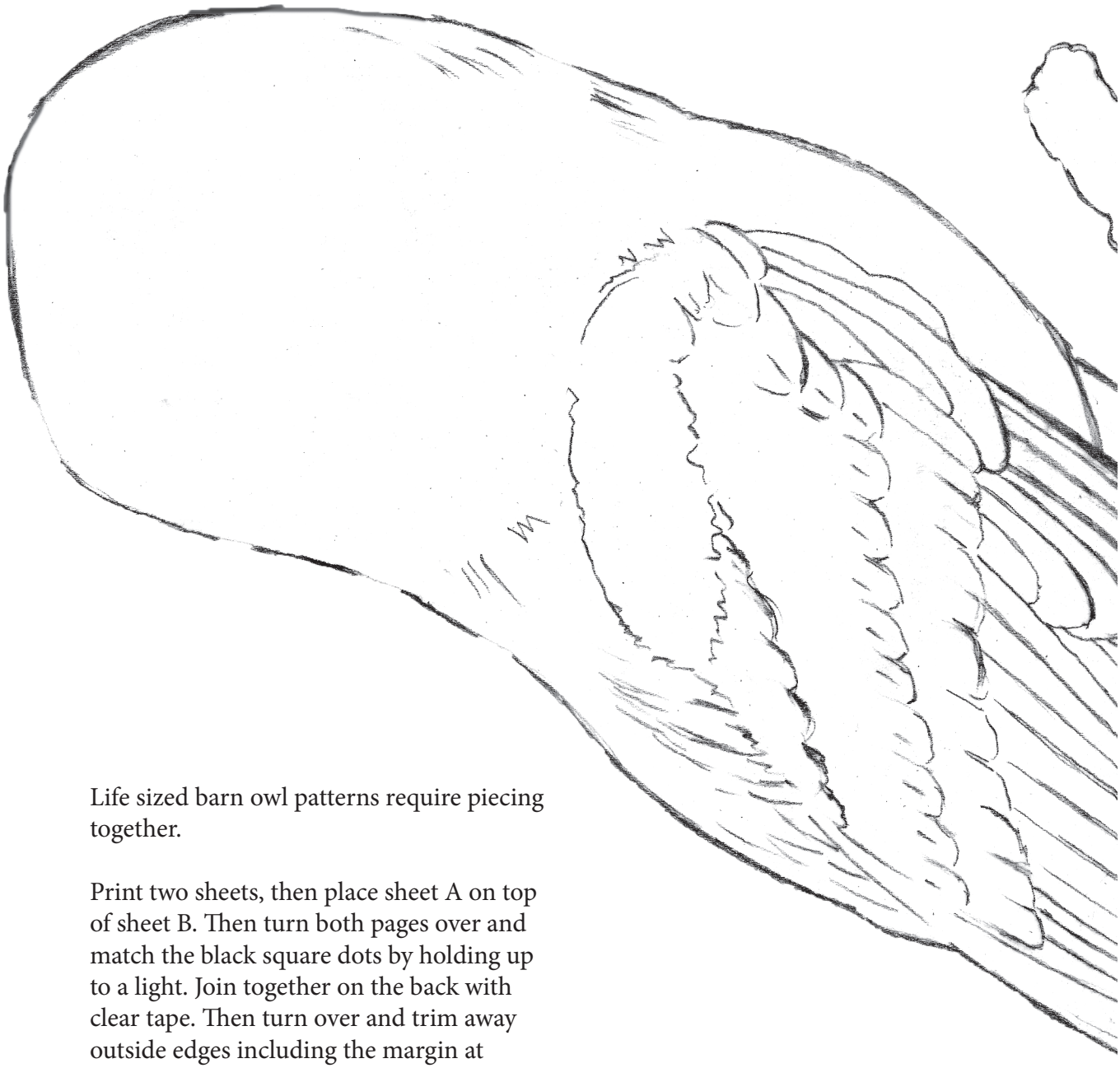
A. Front



B. Front

# Notes

A. Back 1

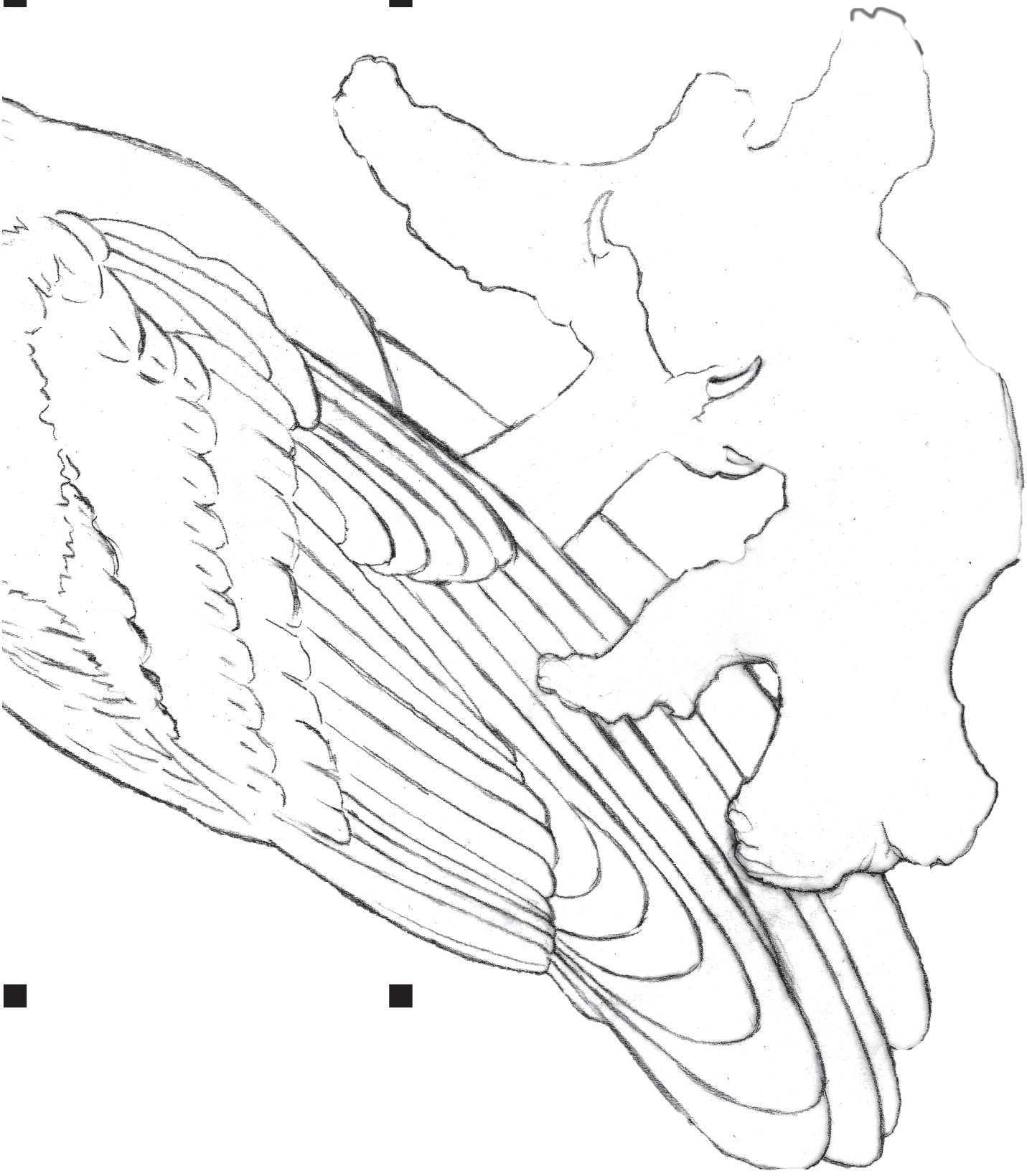


Life sized barn owl patterns require piecing together.

Print two sheets, then place sheet A on top of sheet B. Then turn both pages over and match the black square dots by holding up to a light. Join together on the back with clear tape. Then turn over and trim away outside edges including the margin at bottom of sheet A.

# Barn Owl - 100% Life Size

# B. Back 1

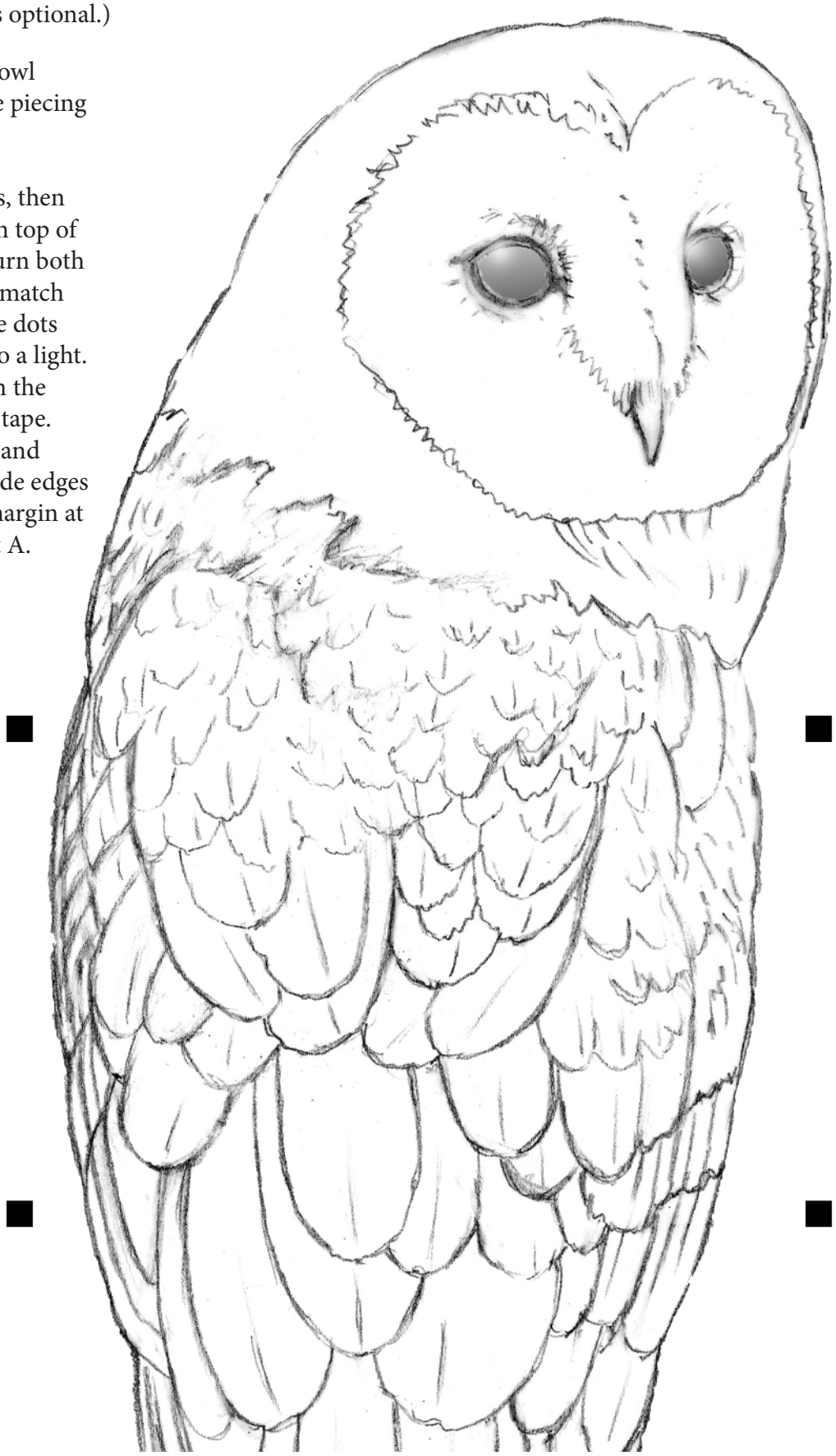


# A. Back 2

(Turned head is optional.)

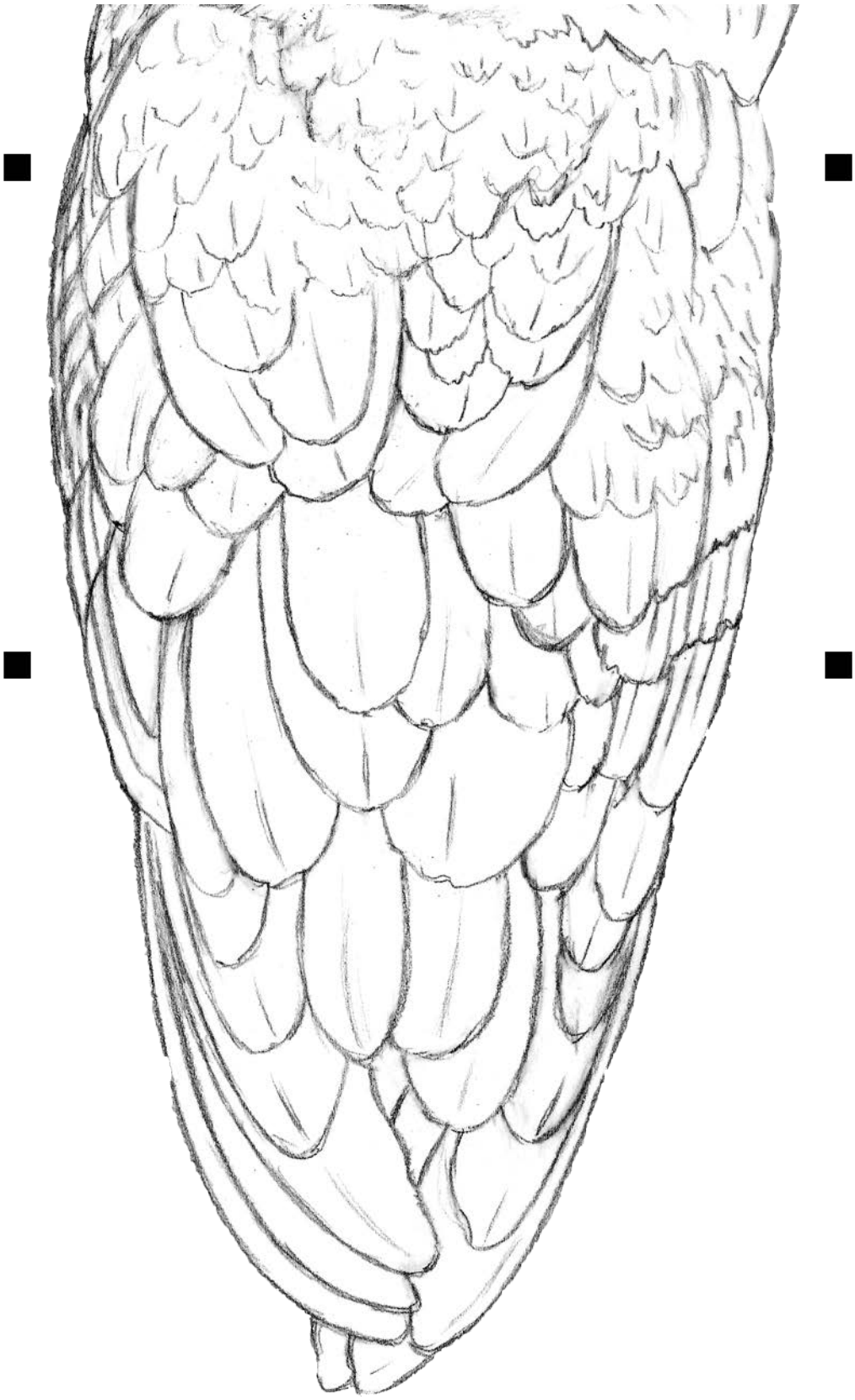
Life sized barn owl patterns require piecing together.

Print two sheets, then place sheet A on top of sheet B. Then turn both pages over and match the black square dots by holding up to a light. Join together on the back with clear tape. Then turn over and trim away outside edges including the margin at bottom of sheet A.



**Barn Owl - 100% Life Size**

# B. Back 2



# More About Sculpture Clay


Clayette is the type of oil-based sculpting clay used in the Barn Owl and other clay projects at Learn Sculpture. It is a product of Chavant, a company which makes a variety of sculpting and modeling clays, not only for fine artists, but also for specialized industrial designers (makers of automobiles and other commercial products).

You can use several types of modeling material in your quest to learn how to sculpt. Each type of clay has advantages and disadvantages.

**Oil-based Clay:** Also known as modeling clay or plasticine, our original sculpture models use this clay, shown in the videos. Since it is not water-based clay, it will not dry out or crack and stays workable virtually forever. The only reason to cover it is to keep the dust off in between working sessions. A plastic storage bag or box is all you need to protect your clay and sculpture in progress.

Plasticine clay is excellent for those interested in learning how to sculpt due to its ease-of-use and ability to capture subtle detail, combined with self-supporting qualities. Plasticine is also the top choice of professional sculptors who require maximum flexibility during the creation process and wish to reproduce their works in a more permanent medium later on (like bronze, resin, pewter, or marble). The sculptor often begins the process with soft clay to work out the general design flow on a small scale. A miniature sculpture study is known as a "maquette." Then, using firmer clay, a fully detailed sculpture is made. If the sculptor plans to produce work in a monument-suitable medium such as bronze, mold making proceeds on the clay. Often, mold making requires the expert help of a reputable foundry. The foundry is also able to enlarge the piece to life-size and beyond for casting in bronze.

**Polymer Clay:** Another non-water-based clay is polymer clay, like Sculpey®. This clay can be baked hard in the oven and painted for permanent display after completing your sculpture. Many successful doll makers also use it. The disadvantage of polymer clay is that it may not be suitable for every sculpture design and may crack under too much weight or stress.

**Water-based Clay:** Many sculptors prefer using earthenware, terracotta, porcelain, and other water-based clays. Refined detail is possible as with water-based clay as well. However, once the clay begins to dry out, it is challenging to avoid cracks (which can ruin the design). The clay may also not be changed once it begins to harden (the "leather hard" stage). Firing in a kiln may be necessary to attain permanency, but fired sculpture may be further decorated and re-fired with various glazes.

**Wax:** Some sculptors prefer to make their original sculptures in wax. Cool wax may be extremely hard compared to plasticine, but it does require heated tools to join forms together. The advantage of wax is its readiness for use in the "lost wax" process when casting in a metal material (like bronze). However, wax does not offer the same degree of flexibility if you hope to make significant changes before mold making.

**Armature:** An armature is a framework (usually metal or wood) used to give a sculpture extra strength and support. None of the clay models in our videos require any armature (or internal support), partly because they are small and compact. Although armature may support weak areas of the sculpture, it also restricts the ability to make any significant changes. Armature also makes it more difficult for mold making because cutting through metal may be required.

**Work Area:** Your work area can be super simple and doesn't require much space. Keep in mind that your oil-based clay could make marks on some surfaces, so it's a good idea to place your clay and sculpture on a firm base. You can also use things you have on hand, such as a tile or tray. Even a paper plate can be helpful to keep clay off your table. In the later stages of your sculpture, a turn-table (or lazy susan) makes a good base that allows you to rotate your sculpture 360 degrees as you work.

**Lighting:** It's a good idea to have an adjustable desk lamp that you can position over your work area. Controlled lighting that provides good contrast will help you balance and refine your clay model's details. A fluorescent, daylight-spectrum bulb, at least 100 watts, is recommended.

**Softening the Clay:** If you want to soften a small amount of clay quickly, you can use a small, adjustable desk lamp with a 75-watt incandescent spotlight bulb. Keep the light bulb at least 8 - 10 inches away from the clay, so there's no chance of accidental melting, and stay nearby to monitor it as it warms. Place aluminum foil under the clay during the warming process.

**Tools:** There are many kinds of tools available for working in clay, but the three categories of tools most recommended are wire hoop tools, flat spatula-like tools, and brushes.

**Visit LearnSculpture.Org for more information about the clay and tools used in Charles Oldham's sculpture videos.**

## What To Do Next...

Once your clay sculpture is finished, you can photograph it (please do! ... see below), crush it in your hands to make a new sculpture, or—take it to the next level by making a mold on it.

If you have used oil-based modeling clay and want to display your sculpture, you most certainly can, but it will be vulnerable to damage unless it is protected under protective clear acrylic or glass. Since this type of clay's purpose is primarily to design the sculpture, and not usually considered a finished product, the next step is to consider making a mold.

A mold will allow you to cast your clay sculpture in a more permanent material, such as resin, ceramic, or bronze. Better yet, it will allow you to reproduce your sculpture, resulting in multiple copies. There are quite a few mold-making techniques depending on the material used but the simplest method involves pouring silicone rubber over properly sectioned parts of your sculpture. When the rubber mold cures, liquid casting material is poured into the mold. The casting material solidifies and the mold is removed, revealing the final sculpture "cast."

## Photograph Your Work!

Photographing your work not only provides a record of your progress, but also allows you to create a portfolio that you can post online or use in other presentations. Photographing a sculpture is fairly straightforward. Position an adjustable lamp about 20 inches or so above the sculpture, away from a wall or other object (to prevent casting sharp shadows behind it). Avoid using a built-in camera flash. By positioning the light above, and using no flash, you can control exactly the way the sculpture looks in your final picture. A tripod, if you have one, will also prevent any blur in the final image. If you don't have a tripod, hold the camera as still as you can, and just ensure there's enough good, ambient light in the room, in addition to your adjustable lamp positioned over the sculpture.

## Send Us Your Pictures!

We'll post photos of your finished sculpture. Email your photos to: learnsculpture@gmail.com. We look forward to seeing your work!