



Running commentary

“The Brood of 101”

A chronological interpretation of the dispersal pattern of an imaginary “brood” of 101 Barn Owls based on what actually happened to 101 real birds that fledged successfully and were subsequently recovered is herewith presented.

Day 6 to day 30 (summer)

Most of the 101 fledge in this first 30day period. After only six days one drowns just near the nest site (6d/<1km). Another one leaves almost immediately and is found many kilometres away starved to death (10d/13km). Another starves too (20d/3km). Two die from flying into wires just near the nest (10d/<1km, 21d/<1km). Two more drown just near the nest (24d/<1km, 30d/<1km) and one chokes on a sharp bone (21d/<1km). Three are killed on local minor roads (11d/2km, 17d/2km, 25d/5km). One is killed by a predator (25d/<1km) and another accidentally trapped in a building (27d/<1 km). The rest are still really inexperienced, only just beginning to be independent and most have not started to disperse yet. 88 are still alive.

Day 31 to day 60 (late summer)

Four more are killed on minor roads and three of these had started to disperse and must have crossed lots of country lanes before they were hit (35d/1km, 43d/8 km, 55d/4 km, 60d/7km). One is killed by a predator close to the nest site (38d/<1km). One must have dispersed soon after it fledged because it went quite a long way (57d/11km) and was the first to be killed on a major road. By now all 101 have fledged, some are still inexperienced but many are now independent and in dispersal. 82 are still alive.

Day 61 to day 90 (early autumn)

Surprisingly, four birds are still less than a kilometre from the nest; two fly into wires (62d/<1km, 62d/<1km); one starves (71d/<1km) and one dies on a minor road (88d/<1km). One dies on a railway line quite close to the nest site (64d/1km). There are two more minor road casualties, one was only a few kilometres from the nest (69d/3 km) but the other one had dispersed a really long way and must have successfully crossed lots of minor roads before being killed on one (72d/23km). Another turns up drowned in a cattle trough after dispersing a similar distance (90d/21km). Four birds that managed to avoid flying into wires, drowning, or being hit during numerous minor road crossings, are killed on major roads (76d/9km, 81d/30km, 82d/1 km, 88d/12km). By now all 101 birds are almost certainly independent and most have dispersed away from the nest but by day 90, 31 are already dead. 70 are still alive.

Day 91 to day 120 (autumn)

Two birds are still fairly close to the nest even a couple of months after fledging. One is accidentally trapped in a building (99d/2km) and the other dies on a major road that was

unusually close to the nest (106d/<1km). Two die on minor roads (118d/8km, 110d/12km) and the rest are all major road casualties (109d/13km, 113d/30km, 120d/4km). We are now well over half way through the dispersal period.
62 are still alive.

Day 121 to day 150 (late autumn)

We are now running up towards the end of the dispersal period and very few birds are left near the nest. One is drowned in the nest area (121d/<1km) in spite of the fact it has avoided drowning around here for several months. Another drowns a long way away (145d/13 km) and one flies into wire (129d/7km). Five birds that managed to avoid starvation, drowning and flying into wires, become major road casualties (127d/17km, 129d/11km, 145d/34km, 146d/7km, 147d/13km).
54 are still alive.

Day 151 to day 180 (early winter)

The dispersal phase is drawing to a close and some birds have already adopted a more sedentary life style. Amazingly, one bird is still around the nest (!) and becomes a minor road casualty (152d/<1km). Another becomes a minor road casualty (167d/7km) and one starves (179d/13km). Five more birds become major road casualties (159d/6km, 159d/12km, 161d/33km, 165d/19km, 172d/10km). More than half of the "brood" of 101 are now dead.
46 are still alive.

Day 181 to day 270 (mid winter and early spring)

During this longer (90 day) period the birds are generally sedentary but may forage up to 5 km from their main roost, trying to get through their first winter. One is shot (205d/17km); five become minor road casualties (217d/4km, 218d/10km, 256d/9km, 257d/1km, 258d/5km) and ten die on major roads (190/15km, 210d/17km, 215d/10km, 229d/10km, 230d/17km, 230d/33km, 237d/16km, 246d/14km, 249d/33km, 258d/8km).
30 are still alive.

Day 271 to day 365 (mid spring and early summer)

In this 90day period most of the birds have probably found a mate and their foraging range contracts as nesting gets underway and prey numbers start to increase. Amazingly, one bird is still at its natal site (!) but even so, it starves (280d/<1km). Unluckily, many choose home ranges too close to major roads; seven die on major roads (280d/5km, 283d/25km, 289d/10km, 289d/10km, 300d/9km, 340d/12km, 358d/10km) and one on a minor road (333d/39km). Out of the brood of 101, eighty have died before their first "birthday".
21 are still alive and move into their second year, experienced survivors and "valuable" birds.

Day 366 to 730 (their second year)

Once nesting is over, their foraging range increases once more with the usual result. Major roads claim another seven victims (396d/20 km, 430d/4km, 433d/18km, 450d/17km, 551d/18km, 583d/19km, 724d/4km); four die on minor roads (475d/12km, 483d/1km, 567d/8km, 645d/21km); one starves (590d/8km) and one flies into wire (625d/6km).
8 are still alive and move into their third year, highly experienced survivors and very "valuable" birds.

Day 731 to day 1095 (their third year)

In spite of their extensive experience, third year birds fall victim to the same fates as the rest of the "brood". Two die on major roads (767d/3km, 1015d/17km), two on minor roads (819d/5km, 974d/9km) and one flies into wire (1072d/8km).
3 are still alive and they become the veterans, moving into their fourth year.

Day 1096 and beyond

Interestingly the last three birds are all found relatively short distances from "the site" where "the brood" originally hatched. One died soon after its third "birthday" on a major road (3 km), one was predated just after its fifth "birthday" (7 km) and the last one died on a minor road aged six (2 km).