



ISSUE NUMBER 11

FEEDBACK 93-94

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RELEASE LICENSING A SUCCESS

As 1993 draws to a close the Department of the Environment (DOE) are receiving detailed report forms from Barn Owl Release schemes for the first time. All released birds were fitted with BTO rings. The combination of ringing data and report forms will allow the effectiveness of release to be assessed nationally for the first time.

The release scheme run by the Barn Owl Trust in Devon has always been closely monitored which allowed us to produce the first Reintroduction Report in Britain in 1989.

Unfortunately most release operators did not use British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) rings or keep detailed records. By 1992 it was estimated that 2-3,000 Captive bred Barn Owls were released annually by about 600 operators. The problems with uncontrolled release were immense not least the probability that most released birds died within weeks (see article in Feedback issue five).

With help from the Barn Owl Trust and other conservation and welfare organisations the DOE addressed the problems by introducing a compulsory licensing system for releases. The DOE Barn Owl Working Group produced a Code of Practice (drafted by the Trust), license application form, license conditions, and the End of Year report form.

Approximately 150 copies of



Owlet being ringed with ring number FT00001 for release under licence.

Photo: Muzz Murray

the-Code were sent out by the DOE (and a further 100+ by the Barn Owl Trust) 63 applications for licenses were received and out of these only 13 were refused. Licenses were granted for Barn Owls to be released from 76 sites up and down the country. The Trusts own application was granted.

The fairly low number of licence applications begs the question - "What are all the other release operators doing?" We have received information from some to say that they do not wish to bother with the licensing system and have given up. It is possible that some

operators have released Barn Owls illegally (without a licence). The DOE have received several complaints regarding delays in application processing, however, the DOE staff have gained valuable experience in this first year and are confident that next year delays will be avoided providing that applications are received early enough. The Code of Practice recommends the two release methods used and tested by the Trust and include standardised local Barn Owl surveys prior to release to ensure that no wild Barn Owls are resident within 2Km of a release site. This will avoid disturbance to existing wild birds by newly released birds and minimise extra competition for food. Interestingly all of the

licence applications which were refused fell down on lack of a local survey. The era of inappropriate releases with thousands of released birds starving to death has finally ended. We have entered a new phase with improved release practices and monitoring. The 350 or so Barn Owls released under licence in 1993 will stand a reasonable chance of survival. In years to come the BTO will be able to produce figures on the survivorship of released birds compared to wild birds and establish whether or not release is making a significant contribution to wild Barn Owl conservation.

FOOTNOTE

On Saturday 8th January 1994 at the British Trust for Ornithology Ringing Conference (The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwich, Derbyshire) Keith Grant (Barn Owl Trust Trustee) will give a presentation on the results of the Barn Owl Trust Release Scheme 1986-1991. For further details of the conference telephone the British Trust for Ornithology on 0842 750050.

SET-ASIDE - IS IT HELPING?

Over the last 30 years arable farming has become widespread with thousands of acres of pasture ploughed up and hedgerows removed to make way for bigger fields of cereals. In addition the way in which the crops are grown has changed dramatically with the switch from spring-sown cereals to winter cereals. The winter walks through stubble fields which many of us remember from our childhood became an act of trespass when the winter cereals took over. Pesticide and artificial fertiliser use became the norm and each acre produced three or even four tones of grain instead of one.

During the eighties the amount of cereal produced was far in excess of demand. The EEC spent vast amounts of money on storage of grain mountains (alongside the beef mountain and the milk lake). The Set-Aside scheme was introduced to reduce overproduction on arable land. Farmers are paid to take fields out of production. The conservation movement particularly the RSPB put a lot of energy into agricultural policy reviews and reforms in an effort to try and re-create areas of farmland of great value to wildlife.

In 1990 our conservation officer started to map the habitat in twenty Barn Owl study areas. One contained eleven fields of new set-aside. He has been monitoring both the habitat and the Barn Owls in the area for the past three and a half years and has just re-mapped the habitat to assess any changes. To start with the set-aside was just bare soil. During 1991 there was a good scattering of weeds (thistles etc). Good because annual "weeds" are an important food source for seed-eating birds in winter. In 1992 there was a really good show of dandelions, poppies, and thistles with a few wild grasses starting to appear, large flocks of finches were seen feeding.

The grasses gradually started to cover ground and this year (1993). The grasses are just about long enough to start to provide sufficient cover for small mammals. There is NO sign that vole numbers have started to build up yet and the Barn Owls have actually declined in the area. Basically Set-Aside is either rotational in which the field Set-Aside changes from year to year or individual fields are Set-Aside for a three or five year period. The scheme was brought in to reduce over production not to improve wildlife habitat. It is at present a short-term

measure which makes little sense. To pay farmers to NOT do something is a negative approach. However, it is true to say that in the short term some Set-Aside is beneficial to some wildlife. We were recently approached by a farmer who said that he had a Barn Owl hunting regularly over his five-year old set aside. He was really pleased and said "Where do you think the owl will go, I have to plough it up next year."



BARN CONVERSION RESEARCH PROJECT

The end of the Barn Conversion Research Project is now in sight with David Ramsden planning to complete the last of the fieldwork by the end of 1993. He will then be office bound for several months in order to analyse the data and write up the report which will culminate in the results and recommendations being distributed to planning authorities throughout the country. This project has taken up the majority of Davids time since its inception in April 1990, we are already accumulating a list of things that need his attention next!

WELCOME TO FEEDBACK

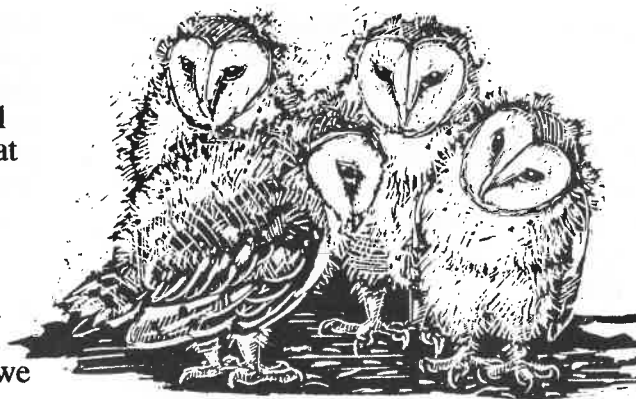
Feedback is the biannual newsletter of the Barn Owl Trust and this issue looks at the first year of Barn Owl release under licence, the captive Barn Owl crisis, a day in the life of a student field worker, set-aside and nestboxes - are they worthwhile? In addition we have included news and views, an article from a BOT foster parent and a conservation Fairy-tale (however this one is a true story!)

Feedback is more than just a newsletter it is a reflection of the work of the Trust and the people involved. This year the Trust celebrated its fifth anniversary as a national charity and as our recent annual general meeting reflected we have come along way in those five years. The Trust has many areas of work and now has contacts locally, nationally and internationally.

However the philosophies governing the day to day work of the Trust have remained the same. We reply to every enquiry we receive and encourage those that come to us for information and advice to act positively. We believe that everyone can make a contribution that counts towards a better environment and no effort is wasted although it may sometime feel that way.

Raising awareness is one of the aims of the Trust, but not just awareness of Barn Owls because these beautiful birds could not survive in isolation. As Chief Seattle said in 1855 "All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth". As we go through our lives we would do well to remember this

We hope that this newsletter will encourage you to support the Trust and to do your bit for the environment. Good luck.



A CONSERVATION FAIRY TALE

Over the bridge we went and around the edge of the enchanted wood carrying our basket. Along the path to the bottom of the primrose field and past the rusty harrow, until we reached the hollow tree. Then up the ladder until we found the little door in the tree trunk.

Once we had opened the door, we carefully opened the basket and took out the four young owlets which were inside and placed them gently, one at a time, inside the hollow tree, and carefully closed the door and climbed down the ladder. It was like something out of a fairy tale, but in fact I had just accompanied David on a "young clutch release!"

I had agreed to feed the young birds, so I had the pleasure of this pilgrimage every evening at dusk over several weeks and many evenings since, for the joy of it. I have had the pleasure of watching them grow and venture out of their tree home, seen them perch on the boundary fence and most evenings I see at least one on the branch of one of our ancient oak trees. In the early days of their adventuring all four were often to be seen, side by side on one of the branches of the hollow tree, looking amazingly demure! Now they are much bolder and fly away over the field of horses. My visits to the owls take me close to our badger set and several times I have seen or heard them at play.

One evening the dogs had a close encounter with a young boar badger - they began to chase him.

As they started to gain on him, he turned, snarling, teeth snapping and held them at bay, then made off into the next field.

Now, the evenings are drawing in and before long it will be winter. I hope the season will be kind to our Owls and badger and all the wildlife.

Heather Buswell

LIMERICK COMPETITION

Following the limerick competition in the last issue of Feedback, the following two winners were selected by Heather:

There's a Barn Owl in
Devon called Moon
Who features in many a
"Feedback," cartoon
Now "Moon," is a "Star,"
Who travels by car
And makes all the other
"birds," swoon!

Robert Hamar

At night they shriek,
By day they peep,
From boxes by our door,
Like judges sat with
powdered face,
Their regal pose is sure;
With wings of grace
outstretched they soar,
Not far from box to post,
Those residents of the Barn
Owl Trust
Those owls outside our door.

Chris Mallins



THE CAPTIVE BARN OWL CRISIS

The number of Barn Owls in captivity has escalated dramatically in the years since the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) came into force. The Barn Owl is listed on schedule 3 of the Act and is a species which " maybe sold alive if bred in captivity and fitted with a closed ring (I). The addition of the Barn Owl to schedule 9 of the WCA in November 1992 in which the Barn Owl Trust played a part has gone some way to resolving some of the problems for captive bred Barn Owls in Britain as it is now illegal to release these birds without a licence from the Department of the Environment (DOE). However other major problems for captive bred Barn Owls are a long way from over and rapidly getting worse.

The number of Barn Owls in captivity was estimated in 1991 to be at least 25,000 - two and a half times that of the wild population. Each successive breeding season sees an increase in numbers and captive bred Barn Owls in Britain have become a fairly common pet.

They can be found for sale in almost every imaginable location and also in some not quite so likely ones. Captive bred birds have been won in bets, exchanged hands in pubs and are a fairly common sight in garden centres as well as being available through the more usual outlets of pet shops and newspaper columns. Prices vary between £5 and over £100 and some sellers charge different prices for the two sexes. Despite this we have been contacted by several people who bought a male bird only to find it laid eggs or a female that on maturity was found to be a male.

People buy and keep Barn Owls for many different

reasons. These birds should be in good long term homes with keepers that are aware of the birds individual needs and the overall problems with the species in captivity. One of the most worrying things about the worsening captive Barn Owl situation is the escalation in the number of cases of "impulse buying" when people respond to an advertisement or bird for sale without finding out about the birds needs or thinking through the long term implications of taking on the birds. For example very few people purchasing Barn owl have any idea that the bird could live between ten and twenty years.

losing their Barn Owl the seller had told them they didn't need to build an aviary for the bird it would just fly around and return each night at 8pm for food. A gentleman contacted us for advice recently after watching a falconry display during which the falconer was encouraging his audience to buy a pair of Barn Owls and breed them "as there was a national shortage of captive bred birds for release". We were able to give the gentleman concerned the information he needed to take steps to encourage wild birds. However stories like this make you wonder how many



Photo: David Ramsden

Unsuitable long term housing is a fairly common problem, inappropriate handling can lead to behavioural difficulties, inexperienced attempts to use falconry techniques can result in birds starving, getting lost, becoming caught up in trees or as in a recent case a television aerial. Often once the novelty of owning a Barn Owl wears off and the reality becomes apparent the owners attempt to sell the bird, pass it on or in some cases simply (illegally) let it go. In some cases prospective purchasers are misinformed or misled by the seller. One family contacted us after

people at the display would follow this falconers "expert advice" without seeking any confirmation that he had his facts straight and knew what he was talking about. Hand reared imprinted or tame Barn Owls are not suitable for release into the wild and they are extremely unlikely to survive if they escape. Most recovered captive bred birds are dead or starving. If they survive it is often impossible to trace their owners and then a decision has to be made about the birds future. There is of course a limit to the number of birds that can be kept in sanctuaries and good long term foster homes

are not easy to find. However at present there seems to be no limit to the numbers of Barn Owls being produced by unthinking or irresponsible breeders. The Trust is dealing with more and more captive Barn Owl issues all of the time which of course directs resources away from the main areas of our work, conservation, education, information and research. The Department of the Environment say that legislation to either record or control the sale and exchange of captive bred Barn Owls is highly unlikely as it would require funds from central government because the scale of the problem is so huge. In the absence of any legal requirements the best hope for the birds is education of the public and everyone with an interest in Barn Owls and their welfare can do their bit to help.

What you can do:

If you own a Barn Owl or Owls already. Ensure that you are aware of the birds long term requirements. Develop a contingency plan or insurance policy for the birds in case at sometime in the future you are unable to keep them. Make sure you have a record of their ring numbers just in case they ever escape or fly off. Do not allow your birds to breed unless you have already organised places on Department of the Environment licensed release schemes for the young or have lined up and inspected any prospective homes with responsible keepers who are aware of the long term implications of keeping owls.

If you are thinking about keeping Barn Owls please think very carefully about why you want to do this and whether you have adequate facilities and are able to provide the birds with a suitable and long term home.

Don't buy birds on impulse. Find out as much as you can before making any commitment. Please also consider that by purchasing a Barn Owl you are rewarding the seller. Therefore if you buy a bird from an irresponsible breeder who is simply interested in getting rid of the bird and putting money into his pocket he will simply breed more and other prospective purchasers may not be as aware of the responsibilities of keeping Barn Owls.

If you see Barn Owls offered for sale, particularly in a situation that is likely to encourage "impulse buying" e.g. newspaper articles, pet shops etc write to the seller explaining why you feel that this is not good for the bird and asking whether they provide any information on feeding, housing etc. If you send a copy of your letter any reply and advertisements connected to the incident to the Trust with your concerns then we too will write and explain why these advertisements are bad news for Barn Owls.

FOOTNOTE:

(1) Further information on Barn Owls in captivity and closed rings is available in Barn Owl Trust leaflets Numbers 15 - "Rings for Barn Owls," and 25 "Captive Barn Owls in Britain - The Situation."

NEWS

We have received a post card from Rachel Humphrey who worked with the Barn Owl Trust for three months during 1992. Rachel is currently working in Finland.

Whilst recently holidaying in Southern Spain Alison Robbins a Friend of the Trust was amazed to find on returning to her parked van a young man leaping excitedly around it. On investigation it appeared that the cause of his excitement was the Barn Owl Trust car sticker displayed. The young man in question was the brother of Jose Antonio who visited the Trust in October 1992 and attended our AGM. Isn't it a small world !

Sue Williams at the BOT has been corresponding with environmentalists in Australia on behalf of the Trust. They are very interested in our work and are concerned with raising environmental awareness on the other side of the world.

In September 93 Barn Owl Trust volunteers held a litter picking picnic on the Flete Estate and collected flood water debris.

Photo: David Perkins



FUND RAISING

This years annual Sponsored Walk on the beautiful Flete Estate in the South Hams was greatly enjoyed and raised a total of £929-45. Plans are underway for our 3rd Walk in May 1994. Mrs Patricia Hall from Bovey Tracey was sent a Barn Owl Trust T-Shirt for raising £80 in sponsorship.



Photo: Mike Nichol森

Well Run Chris

Chris Welch has for the third year running (excuse the pun) raised funds for the Trust through his participation in the Great West Run. This year Chris raised £75 through sponsorship.

Eight year old Katie Vyse was disappointed that she was unable to participate in the Sponsored Walk earlier in the year so with the help of her mum Debbie she raised £17 by holding a General Knowledge Quiz.

Maureen Basford sold house bricks earlier in the year to raise funds and has more recently sent us £50 from holding a supper party and raffle in aid of the Trust.

The third annual Letter Box Walk organised for the Trust by Mike Wallsh was once again a great success and raised £135-50.

Our first ever Car Boot Sale in June raised £114 and was a very friendly and relaxed event. Thank you to South Dartmoor School for providing the venue.

David Cartwright and friends from the Leonard Cheshire Foundation in Brixham held a Cheese and Wine Party in October and raised £75 at a very enjoyable evening.

Both of the Cycle Rides held to raise funds for the Trust this year were affected by the weather, the Body Shop 25 mile ride in Plymouth in May and the Wiltshire 100 mile Cycle ride organised by Richard and Karen Chislett in September. Despite this the participants enjoyed the events and would "do it again".

The Exeter Body Shop has BOT T.Shirts for sale and has just taken a supply of our Christmas cards.

Thank you to all of you who have raised funds for the Trust. As our workload continues to increase we have less time available to organise events and are increasingly reliant on our Friends to help in this area. A copy of the Trusts new A-Z of Fund raising is just an SAE away if you would like one.

Thank you all.



Dear Barn Owl Trust
I'm writing to you from Portugal as I have in recent years become very interested in Barn Owls and I would like to share with your readers what I know about Portuguese Barn Owls. My family in Devon are lucky enough to have a family of Barn Owls on the farm stead and it is interesting to note how many similarities and differences there are between Portuguese and British Barn Owls: for example: the Barn Owl in England is clearly named for its habit of nesting in barns; in Portugal it has two different names: - "A coruja das torres," meaning Tower Owl and "A coruja da igreja," meaning Church Owl as there are no barns in Portugal. Here is a story that I think will interest you: Some time ago in a place called Burgau a pair of Barn Owls were found nesting below ground level in a crevice of a dry well. When the owlets were beginning to fly they had great difficulties in flying up out of the well in fact one of them was unable to do so and fell to the bottom. Luckily the owner of the land found it in time and was able to rescue it. Barn Owls are probably more common in Portugal than in any other country in Europe and the occupancy per sq. km is very high. There is no such thing as a Barn Owl Trust in Portugal. The Barn Owl is NOT a protected species in Portugal and it arouses very little interest so it is hard to find out very much about the Barn Owl.

Miguel Fialho

Shortly after sending this letter Miguel(13) visited his relatives who arranged for him to spend a day with David Ramsden and Lizzie Elford visiting English Barn Owl sites.

FOSTERING BARN OWLS

Derrick and I came upon the Barn Owl Trust about three years ago and have been volunteers ever since. We look upon the Trust as our second home and family. Eighteen months ago it was suggested that we might foster Barn Owls, of course we gleefully accepted. We are lucky enough to have space in the garden for an aviary, which we built to the Trusts specifications, and their approval. It is sited within viewing distance of the cottage so that we can watch the owls without them being disturbed, thus protecting their privacy and semi solitude. Even though they are in captivity we believe they should be left in as natural environment as is possible.

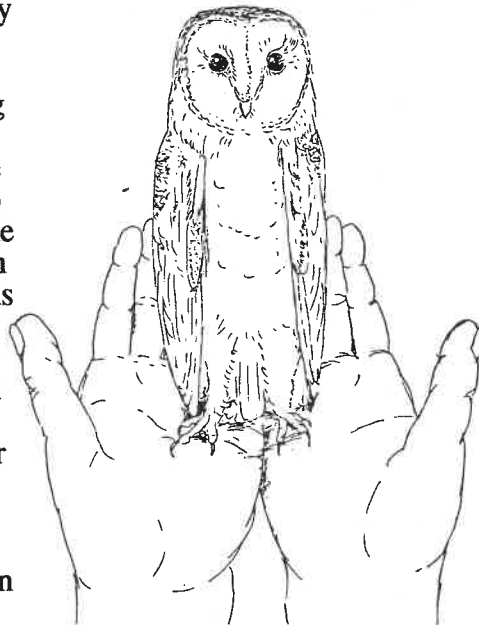
Fostering is very rewarding, but one must be committed to spending time and energy looking after the birds. Regular feeding and aviary cleaning are not for the faint hearted. Aviary cleaning involves removing any remaining partially eaten food, pellets and generally cleaning up the area, all very necessary so that one can observe healthy birds. We are very lucky in having wild Tawny Owls in the vicinity who regularly come and visit the aviary owls, so we have an extra bonus. One of the Tawny Owls has been visiting us for fifteen months or so ever since it was a young fledgling. She (we think) is not at all timid and does not fly away from us and lets us sit and watch her when she visits our foster Owls.

The Trust come and visit from time to time to keep an eye on the Owls and make sure everything is OK. If of course they were not happy with us or we could no longer look after them properly they would be returned to the care of the BOT. Something we

sincerely hope would never happen because we have grown to love our beautiful Owls, Tithe, Dutch and Linhay our three captive bred Barn Owls and Oak an injured Tawny Owl.

Whilst we would never like to part with our Owls it is very sad that there are now so many Barn Owls in captivity, some 20,000 - 25,000 which could not survive in the wild. The Owl is a free spirit and should be allowed to be so. If we all tried a little to help the land return to her natural status as a habitat for wildlife, be it dormouse or Barn Owl maybe this could change. Maybe there would not be an increasing trend for Owls to be kept as pets and then perhaps instead of the 5,000 pairs in the wild we would have a reversal of the numbers of the wild and captive bred Owls. So if you have any farming or land owning friends try and persuade them to leave some rough grassland, old trees and barns which is the ever disappearing habitat of the Barn Owl.

Margaret Crocker



PARTICIPATION

AVIARY BUILDING

The Trusts project to rebuild the main aviary block is now

underway. The Owls have been temporarily housed in the Tawny Owl release aviaries and Little Owl aviary whilst the building work is happening. A group of South Devon

Conservation volunteers and Friends of the Trust started work on Sunday 3rd October under the supervision of David Ramsden and Derrick Crocker. They demolished the old aviary block and cleared the site ready for the building work to commence. Every Sunday from now until completion will see the volunteers at work on the aviary. Funds for materials have come from the Jean Sainsbury Charitable Trust and the Marchig Animal Welfare Trust, we are still looking for a further £500 to finance the project. The materials have been supplied at discount by Parkins Steel Stockholders Ltd and FW Morgan (Woodstock) Ltd. Volunteers with practical skills and time to spare on Sundays are invited to come along. Please ring the Trust office on a Tuesday or Thursday for details.



THE BODY SHOP AND THE BARN OWL TRUST "TOGETHER IN 1993" LOGO COMPETITION.

The logo competition was organised by the Body Shop and the following people are the lucky winners:

Tiffany Stables, Cardiff - £10 Body Shop Gift Voucher

Laurie Casson, Exwick - Barn Owl Trust T-Shirt

Katy Nevitt, Upton Pyne, Exeter - £5 Body Shop Gift Voucher

Joanne Wilson, Exeter - £2 Body Shop Gift Voucher

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A STUDENT FIELD WORKER!

Hi there! My name is Elizabeth Elford and I have now been working for the Barn Owl Trust for about two months. I am actually a student at Seale-Hayne, which is now part of the University of Plymouth carrying out a degree in Rural Resource Management. As part of the course we are required to carry out a years work placement in an area of work which is of relevance to the course and of interest to us. During the first year of my course I was alerted to the plight of the Barn Owl in a talk given by David Ramsden at Seale Hayne. This raised my awareness of the necessity of conserving these magnificent birds and I inquired of the possibility of carrying out my placement with the Trust. I have always been interested in birds, however the sight of a Barn Owl flying causes a great excitement within me. The first month at the Trust I spent travelling out with David whilst he was carrying out field work. On my first day the major task was map reading! The signs of panic must have been clearly evident when David handed me a map and said can you direct me to this map reference! Well after a few minor detours here and there I did manage to direct David to most of the sites he required! Within the first weeks I learnt a large amount about Barn Owls their habitat requirements and feeding needs. David taught me how to check buildings for signs of Barn Owls and breeding activity. In the first week I was fortunate enough to see a lot of Barn Owls and observe David ringing many of the owlets we came across. The first time I peered over the ledge of a barn and saw three fluffy white balls and

three pairs of black eyes staring at me filled me with a great joy!
I enjoy working for the Barn Owl Trust immensely and after my initial training I have just started to travel out and about checking sites on my own. This is very exciting and coming across a Barn Owl is always a great encouragement. Apart from the field work I also spend one day a week in the office helping out with any outstanding jobs. The office I have decided is never quiet, there is always something which needs doing and I don't think the telephone stops ringing for more than five minutes! I have also learnt the importance of communications and working as part of a team. More importantly I have learnt the importance of conserving the Barn Owl and raising public awareness through information, talks and attending agricultural shows. We as human beings tend to destroy many of the beautiful things which inhabit God's earth, therefore it is of paramount importance that we encourage both adults and children to realise the importance of nature and conservation for future generations. I would like to leave you with this thought "*As human beings we create many things which could be created again; but if we destroy a thing like the Barn Owl, we could not recreate it with all the technology we have developed.*" (Gerald Durrell). This statement sums up the importance of conserving animals and birds such as the Barn Owl and I am glad that I can be a part of this very rewarding and worthwhile task!
Thank you and God Bless!

Elizabeth Elford (Student Field Worker).



GRAND DRAW

Thank you to all of you that returned your draw ticket money and stubs for the Grand Draw to be held on 29th October 1993 at Owl Night at the Ship Inn. Special thanks must go to all of you who requested extra tickets to sell to raise funds for the Trust. At the Trust Annual General Meeting David Vandervlist was presented with one dozen jam doughnuts (his favourite food!) to recognise his achievement of selling in excess of 600 draw tickets to date.

Can you help? or do you know a man - (or woman) who can?

Great news following our request for assistance with useful items in Feedback as we were given a camera and lenses by a gentleman who picked up a copy of feedback at a Trust event and we have also been lent a fax machine. THANK YOU!

Items still on our wanted list include:-

Digital scales - weigh up to 2Kg (for weighing birds)
Laser Printer or good quality DOT Matrix
Filing Cabinet
Rechargeable Torches
DIY Power Tools
Desk Top Publisher
Aluminium Ladder
Crow Bar
Post Driver.

BARN OWL NESTBOXES - ARE THEY WORTHWHILE?

The creation of purpose-made homes for Wild Barn Owls has been going on for years. During the last century some enlightened farmers incorporated owl holes into farm buildings and some even had a protruding perch for the birds convenience. However this practice was not very widespread as in many areas the birds were persecuted by gamekeepers or driven away by superstitious country folk who saw them as a bird of ill omen.

More recently owl enthusiasts have taken to erecting wooden boxes in farm buildings or in trees in an attempt to increase Barn Owl numbers. Some schemes have put up several hundred boxes and there are possibly several thousand Barn Owl boxes available to the birds in Britain. Our conservation officer has erected thirty three in the last year.

So why is the Barn Owl still a rare bird in many areas? Desirable residences are of course only part of what a Barn Owl needs. In order to find out whether erecting boxes is worthwhile in your area is a good idea to try and identify what factors are limiting the population. The two main factors nationally are food availability and site availability.

In an area where site availability is high i.e. there are lots of suitable old barns or nestboxes, but Barn Owls are very scarce then the limiting factor is almost certainly lack of food. In an area where there is lots of rough grassland and hedges supporting a good small mammal population but a shortage of suitable sites then the limiting factor is probably site availability. Nestboxes are far more likely to be occupied in an area where site availability is



a limiting factor. This has been well demonstrated in areas of commercial forestry in South West Scotland where the provision of boxes has greatly increased Barn Owl density.

So the answer is YES. Nestboxes are worthwhile in areas of good Barn Owl habitat. A well designed and well positioned nestbox can transform an unsuitable building or tree into a potential breeding site. Even in a location which is already occupied by Barn Owls a box may be erected (outside the breeding season) which might make the site more suitable.

NESTBOX WORKSHOPS

Following the success of our first two Nestbox Workshops we have two more planned. The first in North Devon on Saturday 20th November 1993 and the second in South Devon Saturday 22nd January 1994. The cost for the day is £7 and covers the cost of materials to transform a teachest into an indoor nestbox to take away. FOR FURTHER DETAILS PLEASE SEND AN SAE TO THE BARN OWL TRUST NBWKS.

NEWS FROM TRUST RELEASE SITES.

The Barn Owl Trust has organised Barn Owl releases since 1985 and in 1989 published the first British Reintroduction Report and

is currently compiling a second report.

In September 1992 birds ringed and released by the Trust and subsequent broods from these sites totalled 437.

This year the news is that at the Modbury 1986 site the birds have failed to breed, having doubled brooded nearly every year since release. The female was found dead on the road and the male deserted the site when a Tawny Owl moved in and started taking the food provided. On a happier note five Barn Owls were ringed at the Feniton site 1989 along with a brood of three at a neighbouring farm. Four Owlets and an adult bird were ringed at Woodbury Salterton 1989. At Tawstock 1988 where we released birds that failed to become established, wild Barn Owls moved into the site and this year have produced a brood of three. At Southleigh 1990 where a trio was established this year the two females has produced broods of three and five owlets.

News of a brood of owlets from the Trust released at Hawick, Scotland 1992 is that two birds are still at the site although there is no evidence of breeding. This year the Trust has provided birds for release under licence in North Yorkshire and at two sites in Devon.

WHICH CAME FIRST, THE BIRD OR THE BARN?

by David Ramsden,
Conservation Officer.

When visiting schools and giving talks to societies I get asked lots of questions, some common, some unusual, some incredible! I remember one small boy, about six years old, who listened intently as my tale about the owls on a particular farm

unfolded, then he saw the egg, and the ring, and the pellet, watched Moon fly around the classroom and listened to all the other kids questions, eventually he put his hand up and said....."Where did the first Barn Owl come from?" He was the only one (in about 17,000 children) to ask that question. I was impressed, amazed! and there followed an attempt to explain millions of years of evolution in several minutes and in a way he could understand.

A question that comes up quite frequently from adult groups is "Where did Barn Owls live before there were any barns?" I like that question!

Fossilised remains of owls show that *Tyto Alba* first appeared about 2 million years ago. There were certainly no barns in those days!! In fact there were no Homo Sapiens at all. When we Homo Sapiens first appeared a mere 50 thousand years ago building barns was definitely not number one on our list of priorities. Homo Sapiens lived in Britain (on and off depending on the climate) in small tribes hunting animals and gathering fruits, seeds, roots etc in the woodland that virtually covered the whole country. This woodland hunter-gatherer lifestyle predominated right up to about 3,500 BC. In those days we lived in harmony with our environment never taking more than we needed and never over populating the land.

Tyto Alba is not a woodland bird so it is likely that it was not very numerous and restricted to natural clearings. *Tyto Alba* is a hole-nesting bird so it probably lived in hollow trees and caves as it still does today in some places. In about 3,500 BC some folks came over from

mainland Europe who we now call the Beaker Folk (not because of their big noses, it's to do with pottery). They were brought with them a skill called "farming." This was an entirely new concept to us but we liked it. We started to cut down the trees, settle down, have more children and farm.

We started to build dwellings for ourselves, our animals and our produce. Archaeological evidence shows that *Tyto Alba* was roosting within buildings in the Iron Age and in Roman times. Somewhere in the last five thousand years we gave it the name "Barn," Owl.

LETTERS

In this section of Feedback we have chosen a couple of letters from our postbag to share some of our news with you.

In May 1993 Mike Steward brought an injured Tawny Owl to the Trust. The bird remained here for four weeks to recover and was fitted with a BTO ring prior to Mike collecting it to be released into its home territory and we received this letter shortly afterwards.

Dear Barn Owl Trust,
We released the Tawny Owl at Burrator at about 10pm on the day of collection. It was very sleepy when taken out of the box having eaten one of the two mice. I held it at head height for minute or so before its release. It flew low across the clearing before climbing to settle in a large fir tree some 40m from where I had initially found it. We heard several calls on the following day from noon onwards but more at regular Owl hours after that.

Mike Steward

Dear Barn Owl Trust
I am writing as a new "Friend," to the Barn Owl

Trust to congratulate you and your colleagues on your wonderful organisation. In this crazy world I sometimes feel I am the only one around who is seriously concerned about this planet, its wildlife and the environment. When reading through your "Feedback," newsletter it was a great relief to find that there are like minded people with such obvious dedication, inspiration and genuine concern.

Well done to all and keep up the good work!

Jacqueline Harding

ODE TO A BARN OWL.

Lynne Belben

The old white owl wakes up at night when watch dogs howl,
It is hunting time for the owl,
Watch the ground!
Listen for every sound!
He's very old and very wise,
His heart-shaped face bears scant surprise,
He see's so much with those big round eyes,
And oh! How cleverly he flies.
He lives within the dark church tower,
Goes flying at the twilight hour,
Swiftly he passes across the sky,
With smooth, sleek golden feathers he silently passes by.
Where will the hunting place be tonight?
The rafters in the hayloft or the belfry in the moonlight.
Patiently he sits and waits
A silent vigil.
But for a moment, pause and wait,
This bird could be awaiting a most dreadful fate,
A poisoned mouse, a rat or bird,
The loss of a roosting perch in a derelict barn I have heard.
These are factors which cause great harm,
So, let us do our best to see,
That we conserve our barn owls for posterity.

WILL POWER

Death is one of those subjects that the British, in particular, find incredibly difficult to talk about. I'm not quite sure why - upbringing and culture I guess. I can say from close personal experience that to lose a member of the family is tragic, shocking, emotional and incredibly upsetting. As a good friend told me just after our family death, "you never get over it, all you do is learn to live with it." Those words, I have decided, form one of life's "truths," an inescapable reality, just like death itself.

I have worked in the charitable sector for five years now, specialising in fund raising and promotions. I was delighted to be asked to become a Trustee of the Barn Owl Trust about a year ago. I bring with me to this position an understanding that legacies are a vital part of supporting a charity such as ours. While we may never know when we are likely to benefit from such help, it is marvellous to be on the receiving end of such kind gifts and I now know from personal experience how uplifting it is to be a part of the family whose loved one has given to their special cause.

Shortly the Barn Owl Trust will be launching a legacy leaflet which will deal with this very delicate subject and show people the many ways in which a loss can be made into a lasting memorial.

There are many ways to leave a legacy to the Trust, either as a financial gift or a gift in kind. As a proportion of what remains of the total sum of an estate after it has been divided among close relatives and friends, or as a fixed donation. Some families request that no flowers be sent to the funeral of their loved one and that instead donations be sent to a charity of special

relevance to the person they have lost. This too can help the Barn Owl Trust continue its vital work.

If you would like to help us to promote our legacy leaflet there are a number of things you could do that would help us. If you know of any solicitors who would be willing to take a few of our leaflets could you pass their names on to the office. If you feel that it is appropriate to suggest to someone that donations be sent to the Barn Owl Trust in lieu of flowers such donations would be most welcome and, of course, if you would like to leave a donation to the Trust in your will, to give us the funds to continue our work of protecting the Barn Owl and its Environment then that would be fantastic.

Simon Roper

LAST WORDS

"In South Africa and around the world the struggle to gain human dignity and equal rights for all people continue." This quote comes from a very powerful film called *The Power of One* hired from our local video shop one weekend.

What does apartheid have to do with Barn Owl

Conservation I hear you ask?

The answer is human attitudes. Human beings continually exploit the planet, its other inhabitants and even each other.

Exploitation is not sustainable, it is simply not possible to clear fell tropical rainforests or kill off a species without it having an effect on the natural balance. When the balance is tipped too far who knows what can happen. Human beings need to learn to live in harmony with each other, with the environment and the creatures we share the planet with Hopefully this will

happen before we push the natural balance too far, although indications from pollution, global warming and climatic change indicate it may already be too late. Unfortunately most of the world problems come from fear and greed.

The film ends with the statement *"Changes come from the power of many but only when the many come together to form that which is invincible: the power of one."* This is as true for wildlife conservation and sustainable environmental policies as it is for apartheid. Things will only change when enough people demand it together.

We can all do things to help the environment, our fellow human beings and the other creatures we share this planet with. There is something that everyone can do whether it be recycling, work on nature reserves, spending your money on produce and products that are created without harm or exploitation, making time for voluntary work or writing to MP's with your views. No one needs to feel impotent or should feel that "its not their problem". Its down to all of us to do what we can to help improve things. We all have a part to play in the complex tapestry of life to create a positive *power of one*. We are all in it together.

We hope you have enjoyed reading this newsletter and finding out about the work of the Barn Owl Trust. The Trust is a national charity which operates on a very small budget staffed mainly by volunteers and funded almost entirely by donations. If you are not already a Friend of the Trust please consider becoming one and if you are thank you, you help to make our work possible.

We wish you all peace and happiness in your lives.

SALES GOODS



T. Shirts and Sweat Shirts modeled by volunteers.

Photo: David Perkins.

THIS YEAR WEAR A BARN OWL TRUST T-SHIRT FEEL GOOD - LOOK GREAT AND SUPPORT WILDLIFE CONSERVATION!

BARN OWL TRUST T-SHIRTS AND SWEAT SHIRTS
100% UNBLEACHED COTTON

T-SHIRT/SWEAT SHIRT DESIGN

- 1) CHILDS T-SHIRT A B C D £6 A 23"-24"
- 2) ADULT T-SHIRT XL ONLY £8 B 27"-28"
- 3) LONG SLEEVED XL ONLY £11 C 31"-32"
- 4) CHILDS " " A B C D £8 D 32"-34"
- 5) SWEAT SHIRT M L XL £16

Also available

- 6) BLACK SWEATS (50% Polyester) XL £15
- 7) BLACK T-SHIRTS 100% Cotton XL £7

Postage and packing please add £1 for each item

CHRISTMAS CARDS £2 Per pack of 6
OR Blank for your you own message 50p each

15 different A6 designs, one colour on recycled card
Designs available on request.
Blank cards suitable for birthdays, thanks and messages
Single cards 50p.

This issue of Feedback was put together by Frances Ramsden, Lizzie Elford and Rachel Brewer with illustrations by Paul Adams, Derreck Crocker and Rosie Waine.

FULL COLOUR POSTERS

Barn Owl Portrait £2 + £1 p&p
Four Owlets in a Row £2 + £1 p&p
Set of two posters £3 + £1 p&p

COLOUR PRINTS

Selection of signed "Baby Owl" full colour prints 8" x 10" by wildlife artist Dick Twinney

Individual prints (unframed) £14 each
Set of six (unframed) £60 per set
Framed Prints £25 each
Set of Six (framed) £130 per set

Designs available are Barn, Tawny, Little, Long Eared, Short Eared and Snowy Owlets.

BADGES 50p

Logo or Barn Owl On Post

PENCILS 30p

POCKET MIRRORS £1

Barn Owl Trust Logo or Barn Owl On Post
75mm

Please note with the exception of posters and clothing there is no additional charge for postage and packing. However a SAE or a donation towards the cost would be very much appreciated.

If you are a Friend of the Barn Owl Trust you will automatically receive a copy of the next newsletter. If you are not yet a Friend and would like to receive a copy to learn more about our work, please write and let us know.

WHERE THERE IS A WILL
THERE IS A WAY

Please consider helping the
Barn Owl Trust to conserve the
Barn Owl and its Environment.

Make a donation now and leave a
legacy to help us in the future.

For advice and information
please contact us.

Together
we can make a difference.

