



Issue Number 32 - Autumn 2004



FEEDBACK

Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU - (01364) 653026 - www.barnowltrust.org.uk - Registered Charity: No: 299 835

In this issue...

- Devon Survey results
- Cornwall Barn Owl Survey
- Lennon Legacy Project



...Christmas is coming

- Fluffy Owlets
- Christmas cards
- Plum puddings...

Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to Feedback - The Spring and Summer have galloped past and we're now into Autumn. By the time this issue hits your doormats the shops will be full of Christmas glitter so it's a perfect time to remind you that you can support Barn Owl conservation by buying lovely cards and (extremely yummy) puddings from the Trust - order forms enclosed!

As you'll see from page 10 we no longer have a fund-raiser. When Sue got an offer she couldn't refuse from another charity the Trustees decided not to replace her. So the arrival of the owlets, front cover and page 3 is particularly timely and we hope to generate lots of funds from the sale of these extremely cute and cuddly creatures - everyone should have one - they will make brilliant Christmas gifts.

For those people who really don't want any more material possessions an Owl adoption from the Trust comes highly recommended.

To quote from a recent letter "I was so delighted and surprised to discover my daughter had adopted an owl as a gift for me ...the card and feather have a special place on the mantelpiece".

As always Feedback is stuffed with stories and news. This time, Around and About visits Bob Sheppard in Lincolnshire - page 13; we have news of this year's Cornwall Barn Owl Survey - page 12; and amazing results from last year's Devon Barn Owl Survey - page 8. We say goodbye to some folk, pages 7 and 10 and welcome others - 12 and 15.

There are two events coming up that you could join us for, a nestbox workshop in Cornwall (below) and a hedge-day in our field - page 6. For those of you who are miles away we can provide details of a local B&B if you fancy making a weekend of it. As always with small organisations, there is far too much to do in too little time. But we

are extremely lucky to work in a beautiful place, with an incredible species and as the results of the Devon Barn Owl Survey show, we do make a difference.

The Legacy we received in 2001 which enabled us to purchase the Field made a tremendous difference to the Trust. The Lennon Legacy Project continues to be a source of wonder, we have more news and pictures on page 4. It's proved such an inspiration for us that discussions are now underway about the practicalities of inviting Friends and supporters to share the experience. We hope to hold a guided walk next year and will bring you more news in the next issue of Feedback. Meanwhile if you want to see it you'll just have to join us for the hedge coppicing day!

A significant legacy during this financial year from the estate of Florence Parsons has enabled the Trustees to increase the size of the conservation team by two. As you will see from the news item on page 5 there is no shortage of things for the new staff to do and we hope once initial training is complete they'll be able to relieve some of the pressure on existing staff as well as taking on new work.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Feedback. We aim to give you a flavour of the Trust, as well as its work and we hope you feel it keeps you in touch. If you're interested in getting more involved you can contact the office for details of volunteering opportunities.

Thank you for your support for Barn Owls, their conservation, the environment and for the Trust - it really does make a difference.

(Eds)

In this Issue...

Welcome to Feedback	2
Barn Owl Trust News	3
Lennon Legacy Project	4
More BOT News	5
Even More BOT News	6
Farewell to Friends	7
In Memoriam	7
Owl News	7
Devon Barn Owl Survey Results	8-9
Heligan Owlets	9
Owl TV Rescue	9
Team Talk	10
Misconceptions and Musings	11
Prize Winning Outing	11
Cornwall Survey 2004	12
Volunteer View	12
Around and About	13
Fun-draising Feedback	14
Focus on Friends	15
Welcome Stacey	15
Thanks and Things	16
Tail Piece	16

Cover Photo: Frances Ramsden

Feedback is produced for the Friends and supporters of the Barn Owl Trust by staff and volunteers.

*Many thanks to everyone who provided words and pictures for this issue.
Editorial team: Frances Ramsden and Sandra Reardon.*

Copy date for issue No 33 is 1st March 2005

*Send your contributions - news, letters, pictures and information to:
Feedback, Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU*

Nestbox Workshop

Spend a day with Trust staff and volunteers.

Learn about Barn Owls and build your own nestbox.

Indian Queens Cornwall

Saturday 13th November 2004

Call 01364 653026
for more details and
a booking form.

Barn Owl Trust News

Major Road Update

It's now a year since the Trust produced the first-ever published report on Barn Owls and Major Roads. Even if you missed the previous articles you may already know that lots of Barn Owls are killed on Britain's major roads. In fact half of all reported deaths are road casualties.

Of all the animals and birds that are frequently killed on roads, Barn Owls are the only ones that are rare. This leads us to believe that major roads have more impact on Barn Owls than on any other species. Although many thousands of rabbits and pheasants are constantly being slaughtered, the impact of roads on their overall population is relatively small because these species are extremely common. The Trust's report revealed (for the first time) the impact that major roads are having on Britain's Barn Owl population (absolutely dreadful). So what's happened since it was published? Are there any signs of improvement? Are our recommendations being implemented?

Just over a month after the report's launch we received the government's response. I don't know how many of you have ever had the pleasure(?) of receiving a ministerial response in writing. In our experience they usually consist of saying that your matter is receiving their attention (*great*), then go on to tell you stuff you already know (*frustrating*), and don't actually contain any *action*.

Initially we had a very nice (if non-committal) letter from Dr Kim Howells (Transport Minister) saying that the full government response would come from the Highways Agency. Most of the Agency's letter was pretty much as expected but also explained that they are "currently reviewing their own research and that the outcome of this, plus their liaison with 'appropriate organisations including the Barn Owl Trust', will result in advice being issued on implementation of appropriate actions".

In the world of government, agencies, and long-standing issues, the wheels of change turn very slowly. In April we had a meeting with the Highways Agency in Bristol and the good news is that Barn Owl deaths are on the agenda and our recommendations for changes in major road verge design and management are being considered.

Whether any of them are eventually adopted (become *appropriate actions*) remains to be seen. The idea of creating dense hedges along both sides of major roads to force birds to fly higher whilst crossing ⇒ ⇒ is simple and would no doubt be very effective. However, it represents a complete reversal of current design and management practice across most of the

An Owlet of your Own

We can now offer you the unique opportunity to own your own cuddly owlet and support wild Barn Owl conservation at the same time!

After five years of research and many disappointments along the way we are finally about to take delivery of 5,000 beautiful fluffy owlets. All we need to do now is to re-home some of them, but with Christmas on the horizon we don't anticipate that this will prove too difficult.

The owlets, which are made exclusively for the Barn Owl Trust, are approximately 6" high and made to British Safety

standards. They each have their own flat-packed nestbox and what's more they have been tried and tested by Barn Owl staff and are found to be very cute and cuddly!

If you would like us to send one as a present with a Christmas card bearing your personal message just send us £5.00 (plus £1 p&p) together with address details and your message and we'll do the rest. Please include your phone number in case we need to contact you.

If you would like the opportunity to win an owlet turn to page 5 and read on! □



trunk-road network. There are also very important road safety considerations.

Although the wheels turn slowly, they are turning. We've just had another meeting and now have to identify three trial sites where we want Barn Owl safety measures created!

Why not read all our recommendations at barnowltrust.org.uk/Forms/summary.pdf or ask for a free copy by post? □

Imerys Update

Our Imerys Barn Owl Initiative, a five year project had its first nesting pair in 2003.

This project involves landscape restoration on an extensive china clay works and combines habitat advice with nestbox provision and monitoring

This year we were delighted to find a 100% increase - 2 pairs in 2004! The Project has one more year to run. □

Lennon Legacy Project



Noah Ansell meets a Marbled White Butterfly on Bracken Bashing Day
Photo: David Ramsden

“Turning 26 acres of intensively-grazed sheep pasture into 26 acres of Barn Owl heaven” – the Lennon Legacy Project

Now let's see, where did we get to last time? Spring 2004, that's right, we'd just replaced a hedgebank that was grubbed out in 1970, restored another hedgebank and we were just about to plant 1,600 young trees on them. Oh yes, and we were in the middle of doing a mile of fencing to protect it all. Well lots has happened since then – not more capital works, but a massive invasion of wildlife...!

June and July saw a fantastic show of wild flowers especially along the new hedge banks where the turf was moved. Gail (a new volunteer) spent many hours identifying all the flowering plants many of which we've never seen here before. She recorded 45 species in all, new ones such as the delicate Field Pansy and spectacular Dark Mullein and there were huge numbers of previously scarce species such as White Campion and Great Mullein (which should flower next year). The number of beautifully-scented Musk Thistles continues to increase providing a wonderful food source for butterflies. Talking of which, we've recorded three new species (Wall Brown, Dingy Skipper, and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary) and the number of Marbled Whites and Gatekeepers has increased dramatically. Most of the young trees planted on the banks (hazel, hawthorn, blackthorn etc.) survived in spite of the very dry weather throughout May. Last year we saw Swifts for the first time – just a few mixed in with the Swallows and House Martins – this June we had a spectacular flock of 100+ Swifts hawking exclusively over our field for several hours each afternoon. There must have

been thousands of flying insects up there! There were certainly millions of insects in the long grass we've created: Grasshoppers, Great Green Bush Crickets, Ladybirds....

“hang on a minute!” (I hear you say)... “is this the Barn Owl Trust?”... “why are they going on about flowers, butterflies, Swifts, and creepy-crawlies?”.

We said right from the start (2001) that as well as managing the land for Barn Owls we'd try and encourage as much other wildlife as possible. Since 1988

the Trust has been telling land owners about the wildlife benefits of managing land for Barn Owls, about the flowers, butterflies and birds which benefit from the creation of rough grassland. Now we are gaining first hand experience of it – and what a fantastic experience it is! Seeing wildlife up-close is wonderful, but seeing it and knowing it is there as a result of your efforts is extremely satisfying too. We're wondering how many sites there are across Britain where flora and fauna have increased because of all the Barn Owl habitat leaflets we've sent out over the years. Anyway, back to the field.....

The brood of three nestling Barn Owls we rescued from North Devon (see Owl TV Rescue - page 9) were placed in a nestbox in our new barn and in August we had some wonderful views of them flying over the field – almost a dream come true but not quite. What we really want is for wild Barn Owls to move in naturally and start using the field all year round – maybe even breeding in one of our nestboxes. We're certainly seeing evidence of Field Voles every time we walk through the rough grass areas and on 6th August we found evidence that the released owls were hunting successfully – the first pellet containing Field Vole hair and bone!

In years to come there should be enough small mammals to help establish a resident pair. So far we've created around seventeen acres

of vole habitat but about eight acres has had to be cut again this year in an effort to try and reduce the amount of phosphorus in the soil (left over from when it was artificially fertilised). Ultimately this area will become vole habitat too. As well as maximising the acreage of rough grassland we also need to maximise the quality of it, a much greater challenge. If we don't graze the rough grass at all, the structural diversity of the sward will decrease and vole numbers will drop. If we over-graze it we'll lose the litter layer and numbers will drop. The challenge is to get the grazing regime just right. There's no simple solution, no formula that always applies; no two bits of land are the same and no two years are the same either. A few days ago we brought in the first cattle (a small herd of 40 Limousin/South Devon cows and calves). As I write they are just starting to graze our rough grass for the first time. We hope the combination of grass-tearing and heavy trampling will stimulate the grass to re-grow and allow wildflower seeds a greater chance of germination. Hopefully next year we'll have even more voles, even more insects supporting more shrews and insectivorous birds, and even more flowers supporting more butterflies (and so on...).

It's been a wonderful experience to see the changes, to smell, hear and see the wildlife, that it seems a shame not to share it with you. Discussions are under way and the Trustees are looking into the practicality of holding a guided walk, possibly just for Friends and supporters of the Trust. If we decided to go for it it'll probably be in June or July next year (2005). Watch out for news in the next issue of FEEDBACK. □



Grazing on our rough grass

Photo David Ramsden

More BOT News

Two More Staff

Thanks to a legacy from the estate of Florence Parsons, the Trust is now in a position to expand its conservation staff from three full-time posts up to five.

This is fantastic news and means we'll be able to do lots more practical and advisory work. We will have one new Assistant Conservation Officer who we hope will be a permanent addition to the team (funds permitting) and a Survey Officer for six months.

It's especially good because the new staff will be free to do anything (anything?) we want them to!!! The difference being that when posts are funded by a project grant those staff have to spend their time on that project. Our new staff will be available to do work which is very hard to get external funding for (such as emergency visits to nest sites under immediate threat, farm visits to give free advice on habitat creation, and survey work).

We've had more than fifty applications for the new posts and by the time you read this those chosen should be just about to start. By next spring their training will be virtually complete and no doubt we'll ask them to write something for the next issue of FEEDBACK! □

Owl Survey for Kids Win a fluffy Owlet

As part of our fundraising activities for the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey we are running a sponsored Owl Search.

Children can look for owls in books, poems, films etc and then record them on a form and collect sponsorship. Anyone raising more than £12 will receive a prize - a choice of a cuddly owlet, a Barn Owl rubber stamp or a book about Barn Owls by Ian Taylor.

Although designed primarily for children we will be delighted if grownups join in and help to support the survey by raising sponsorship.

So if you are not a child but just young at heart you can enter too and encourage your friends to join in or sponsor you.

Give us a ring for more information or if you would like to receive owl recording and sponsorship forms or you can print them out from our website. Go to the news page and look for Sponsored Owl Hunt at :

www.barnowltrust.org.uk □



Photo: David Ramsden

New Barn off to a Flying Start

One of the things about being a small, under-resourced charity is that there's never enough space! Every foot of outdoor space and every inch of indoor space is fully utilised (it's full of *stuff*). It's such a wonderful luxury to have a brand new building – built to our exact requirements. And we've even got some new *stuff* to put in it!

We now have somewhere to store the field management equipment (tractor, mower, chipper, brushcutter etc.). At last we have a dry space for our stock of Barn Owl nestboxes. As well as providing storage space we thought it would be really great to see how much wildlife we could get to share the building with us. Because it wasn't finished until April 2004 we didn't expect to get any wildlife breeding in the barn this year – how wrong we were!

Within days of the roof going on the building was visited by a pair of Redstarts (small Robin-sized summer migrants from Africa). We were amazed because

Redstarts had never been seen here before. On 26th May we discovered their nest high in the apex contained one beautiful clear blue egg and by 18th June they had a healthy brood of six young! We watched the adults repeatedly collecting insects from the rough grass (created for Barn Owls to hunt over) and even managed to get a few photos.

This winter we intend to make provision for all kinds of birds and bats in the barn. I wonder just how much wildlife you can get in one building? We'll see! □



Anony-mouse!

It's not just small mammals that support Barn Owls!

We regularly receive anonymous donations and are unable to thank those responsible. Sometimes we eventually discover who the generous donors are and sometimes we don't.

Since the last issue of Feedback we have received seven. One such donation was from a lady who had visited her solicitor to make her will and had been so taken with our legacy leaflet that she picked up in the



waiting room that she sent us a cheque. Three others are annual standing orders.

The most intriguing donation recently was £70 cash received in the post. We have been receiving donations from this particular anonymous person since 1999 and over the years they have sent us a total of £735, we recognise the envelopes! We have just received \$350 from what appears to be the same donor – so thank you very, very much and enjoy your life in America.

If any of you recognise yourselves then please accept our whole-hearted thanks. □

Even More BOT News

Desperate times for an evicted Barn Owl

Last June I received a call from Kath at English Nature (Sussex and Surrey team). She had just received a phone call from a member of the public who had recently converted a barn. The architect had obviously decided to make the most of the original features by incorporating the roof space into the living quarters, and all the original openings were fitted with glass. To the owner's alarm and puzzlement, a Barn Owl had shown up and was desperately trying to enter the building via one of the old openings. It was repeatedly flying head first into the glass and was so persistent, it was in danger of injuring itself.

This was an alarming case and my heart sank. Kath had phoned to ask how best to deal with the situation. Obviously something had to be done extremely quickly. Alternative provision was the obvious answer. Although not ideal, in the short term an outdoor nestbox needed to be erected as soon as possible on the outside of the building, preferably at or near where the Barn Owl was trying to get in. A second box would be useful in a tree close by. For the long term, the ideal solution was to re-instate the opportunity for roosting and nesting within the building itself. I recommended the owner partition off some roof space adjacent to the original Barn Owl access to create a nesting/roosting area, and that the access hole be re-opened.

What is most frustrating is that given the right advice the owner could have done this during the conversion at little or no expense. They needn't have worried about any visual impact either as this type of provision takes up very little roof space. I was thankful that they had at least phoned English Nature. Some people might not have bothered.

The local authority has a responsibility to address wildlife issues and protected species legislation. One would think a planning application to convert a barn would be an obvious situation in which to consider protected species such as Bats and Barn Owls. Any district council should feel a sense of duty to inform applicants who are not aware of such legislation, so they may avoid inadvertently breaking the law.

Kath has been working tirelessly to get local planning officers to request Bat and Barn Owl surveys to be carried out on all buildings due for conversion or demolition. Apparently the local authority concerned in this case had ignored her advice 3 times in the last month! I can only imagine how frustrated (or furious!) she must have felt when she received this call. I feel great empathy for Kath who is responsible for 26 area districts (I thought our workload was big!). The sad thing is, judging by the owl's persistence and time of year, this barn may

well have been a traditional nest site, the loss of which will most certainly impact on the local Barn Owl population. If the local authority concerned had requested a Barn Owl survey previous to any works, this tragedy may have been avoided.

On a more positive note, some district councils in Devon and Cornwall are becoming very vigilant when it comes to protected species. North Cornwall District Council for example, have introduced a policy whereby Bat and Barn Owl provision is incorporated into every barn conversion, regardless of whether or not either species were previously present. This has turned up some great results. Lately, we have had numerous reports of Barn Owls moving into purpose built provision in barn conversions at locations where they were never recorded before! Conducting the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey this year will give us a really good opportunity to investigate what effect this policy has had on the local Barn Owl population.

Amy Oliver

Scheme Updates

The last two Barn Owl Schemes have now been completed. Many thanks to Teignbridge and East Devon District Councils (and others) for funding the projects and for the owners of the sites for their help and enthusiasm.

The Teignbridge Barn Owl scheme (originally 9 sites) was extended to 13 and the extra 4 sites have now been completed. All the landowners involved have been very encouraging in their support of Barn Owls, with one site even managing two broods this year. 13 sites have been actively enhanced, and a further 15 closely monitored.

The last 2 sites in the East Devon Barn Owl scheme have also been finished, 1 of which produced a bumper brood of 5 young. 42 sites were part of this scheme.

We'll try to keep an eye on the sites in all four of our district Barn Owl Schemes (109 in all) and give support whenever needed. However the funded conservation and monitoring work at these sites is now complete. □

Rodenticide Labelling Progress

Town & Country Pest Services is a company which makes rat poison. We've been trying to get the labelling improved on rodenticides so we were really pleased to be consulted by them. Having read our leaflet (21) on rodent control they asked for our comments on their proposed wording.

Join us for a
Hedge Coppicing Day
Saturday 27th November
10am - 4pm

This is an opportunity see the field and help to restore an old hedgerow when we coppice the second section.

You need to bring waterproof outdoor clothing and a packed lunch

Places are limited so please phone the office or email us if you are interested in coming along.



Recycling



Raise funds with your rubbish!! Our Inkjet Recycling scheme received a major boost in August from an insert in Bird Watching Magazine. This has given us over 60 new people asking about the Trust as well as an increase in the number of cartridges being sent in by Friends and supporters. Over 400 lots of cartridges were sent in from the Bird Watching magazine insert.

A label is enclosed for anyone able to send more cartridges to LAH Recycling (formerly In-House Recycling). Since the last Feedback we have received £239.50 from them.

Larger cartridges and old mobile phones are still being sent to Eurosource. We have received £25.04 since the last Feedback from them. If you don't have a computer at home perhaps you could take the label to work and ask the IT department to recycle their cartridges through us (or you could ask the same of friends and family). We already have a number of firms sending cartridges on our behalf but the more that are recycled the more money is raised for the Trust.

We are still recycling used stamps and with larger quantities please sort separately into ordinary British, British Commemorative [not including Christmas] and foreign. These can then be sent directly to the dealer mentioning the Barn Owl Trust. If they are being sent direct to the dealer, please can you also cut them out with a small border of paper backing? Again, this could also be done through your place of work.

Please contact me on 01364-653026 for more information and the dealer's name.

Pete Webb

Owl News

The number of resident birds at Waterleat has increased by a few since the last issue of Feedback. We have a new Tawny Owl now living in the Pond Aviary; he is called Archimedes (Archie for short). This is another Tawny Owl with only one working eye so he and Nelson make a matching pair. It is quite interesting to watch them flying around as they spend quite a lot of time checking out where they are intending to land and then fly right past it. I wondered why it is that we so often receive Tawny Owls with eye injuries but this is hardly ever the problem with Barn Owls; they seem more susceptible to wing injuries. David suggests it's because their eyes are larger and more vulnerable. Of the Barn Owls that have passed through our hands: most have been able to be released and just a few unfortunately were taken to the vets to be put to sleep.

Nearly all of our resident birds have fared pretty well over the past six months and Mrs Cornish, our long-term old timer is still with us against all the odds. I think she may be going for a world record. I'll keep you posted with her continuing saga. We have had to move a Barn Owl named Hedera to the hospital aviary as he/she seemed to be suffering the effects of bullying and after a few days he/she (personally I think it's a she) has perked up and is eating well and looking very much better. Valentine still lays the occasional egg and guards it very ferociously. We have to be very careful to discourage breeding as it would just swell the numbers and we now no longer release captive bred owlets. To prevent breeding we make roosting boxes with perches but no floors and this discourages the females from laying eggs as there is nowhere to lay them. Valentine however lays hers on any horizontal surface she can find (generally the ground) so we have to keep a very careful eye on her. She was a captive bred owl so maybe she doesn't know that Barn Owls don't generally lay eggs on the ground! We haven't received any captive bred

Barn Owls since the last issue of Feedback but have had a succession of wild birds, most of which have spent a short time at Waterleat before being released. Our new agricultural building is stuffed with Barn Owl nestboxes so there is no shortage of space for the owlets which have come to Waterleat due to accidents at their original nest sites and subsequently fledged successfully. We hope that some might stay around long enough to help re-populate the valley.

We took in two young Kestrels, about four weeks old and just fledging, which were found on the ground in a china clay works. There was no sign of the parents and the area was extremely hazardous with large tanks and vats of clay filled water. The Kestrels needed safe habitat to be released into - where better than the mobile aviary in our field. So after a period of three or four weeks when we felt they were ready to go, the lid of the mobile aviary was lifted and off they went. Pellets have since been found and they were spotted a few times before dispersing. On a more personal note... Paddy and I put up a Tawny Owl nestbox in our garden five or six years ago. We did this because we had a Tawny Owl tumble down our chimney and unfortunately it



Valentine guards her egg with enthusiasm!

Photo: John Howells

did not survive the experience. We were so mortified that we took steps to make sure it couldn't happen again and erected the box to make the garden a little more owl friendly. As you will probably have guessed by now, this spring we had two Tawny Owls take up residence and produce two beautiful owlets that spent much of their early weeks exploring our garden. What a fantastic experience!

Sandra Reardon
Office Manager

Farewell Friends

Roger Pole and his wife Cathy first contacted the Trust in 1989 to tell us about owls in a derelict cottage in their village which was due for demolition and offering to have one of our donation boxes at their *Cream Tea* event. Despite being a full-time teacher, in 1993 Roger set about a huge self-build project: a new house for him and Cathy with a new nest site for the local Barn Owls!

Even before the house was finished the owls moved in and have nested almost every year since 1995. Roger had a keen interest in the owls and during his last few months expressed the wish that the Trust should benefit from his passing. We were greatly honoured to attend the *Celebration* of his life and receive a gift in his memory... What wonderful memories they are.

We were all saddened by the news that Barbara Parsons died in July of this year. I'm sure that Barbara would not have minded us divulging that she was in her eighties and as such was our most elderly active volunteer.

Barbara was introduced to the Trust by her daughter Janet Watts, (a long-term BOT volunteer) soon after she moved to Devon in 2001.

She was always very willing to undertake any of the tasks we asked of her and was one of our most accurate filers (a fairly unusual attribute these days). Barbara was very conscientious and did everything to the best of her ability. Our sympathies go to Janet and Neil. We miss you Barbara. □

In Memoriam

The Trust has received a legacy from the estate of the late Florence Lucy Parsons

and donations in memory of
Roger Pole,
Barbara Parsons
and
Leslie Goodwin

Our thanks and sincere sympathies go to their families and friends

Results of the 2003 ...

At last! – We have finished the Devon Barn Owl Survey! The results have been really brilliant and well worth all the hard work that everyone has put in. I'm glad to be able to tell you a little bit about what we've discovered and how the survey has already started to help Barn Owls.

The most important information is of course the overall result – the estimated population in Devon is now between 350 and 470 pairs, an increase of 37% above the 1993 estimate of 250 to 350 pairs. This is excellent news as it means that the work carried out by the Trust and other organisations has made a difference.

In 2003, a total of 1,176 sites were checked as compared to 576 sites in 1993. The 2003 findings consisted of 281 nest sites and 348 roost sites.

There were two main changes in the information recorded by the two surveys – these were taken into account when we analysed the data. First, roosting records in 2003 were divided into regular roosting and occasional roosting, instead of being grouped together as in 1993. In addition to surveying sites, we also used volunteers to interview the people at potential roost or nest sites within selected map squares. This gave an indication of distribution in areas where we had no records of Barn Owls (since 1993). The results showed that out of 28 tetrads (2km squares), only 5 roost sites and 9 sightings were reported. This suggests that we were achieving good coverage.

To confirm that we had recorded as many nest sites as possible we included places where Barn Owls had been seen frequently during the nesting season on the main results map (see map right).

These sightings generally occurred in or adjacent to tetrads where we knew that Barn Owls were nesting which suggests that nests were not greatly under-recorded.

In 1993 there was a significant southerly bias because the Trust was better known in South Devon and so birds were more likely to be reported. This bias has been reduced in 2003 partly through improved public awareness, so the 2003 data is more representative of the overall Devon population. We had to allow for this change in population coverage when we compared the data from 1993 to 2003.

In 6 out of the 10 Local Authority districts (North Devon, Torrington, South Hams, Teignbridge, Mid Devon and East Devon), the increase in the number of Barn Owl nest and roost sites has been

higher than the rise we would expect just due to better coverage. This indicates that not only have we been more successful at finding nest and roost sites but that the population has increased as well.

In the 3 small urban districts (Exeter, Torbay and Plymouth) the number of nest and roost sites has not changed significantly, suggesting the Barn Owl population has declined, although those local authorities have been (and still are) making significant efforts to improve the habitat and nest/roost provision for Barn Owls, in particular Exeter and Torbay.

Of all the Local Authority districts, West Devon is the one we are most concerned about, as although the number of nest and roost sites has increased in the north of the district (north of the A30), the numbers have declined very significantly in the south between west Dartmoor and the Tamar.

Each Local Authority district was individually assessed so we could analyse the changes in numbers between different areas, and also look for any evidence that the Barn Owl schemes we have run (in the South Hams, North Devon, Teignbridge and East Devon) may have made an impact. We are pleased to say that this does indeed appear to be the case. Those districts where a scheme was implemented had the greatest increase in the number of recorded nest and roost sites.

The results for each district are in the table to the right.

There are various areas of Devon where Barn Owls may not be present, particularly areas of high ground. The lack of Barn Owl activity on higher ground may be associated with altitude or rainfall but as the survey discovered several successful nesting attempts at high altitude

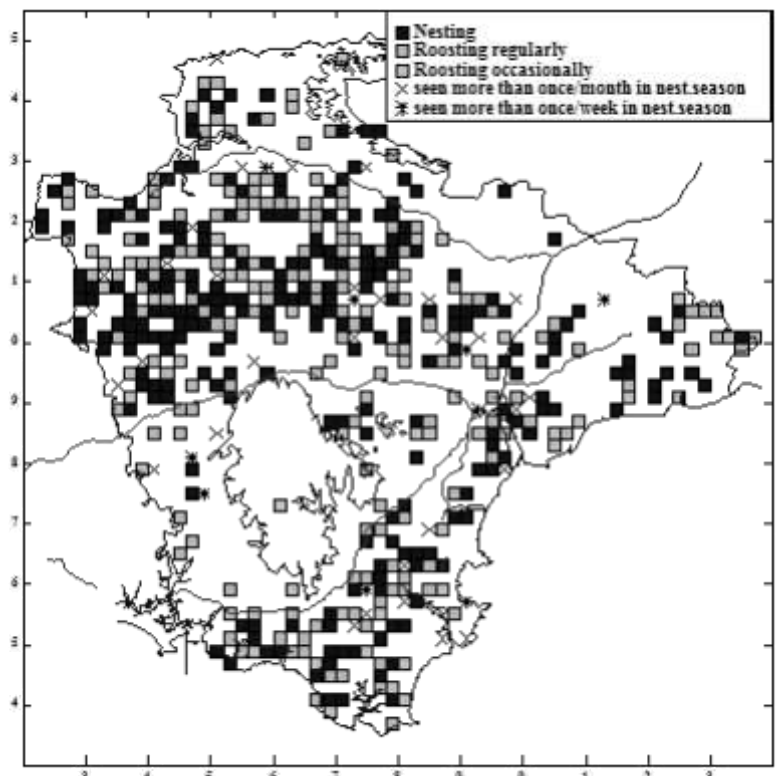
where good prey-rich habitat was available (along the western edge of Exmoor) it would appear that the quality of habitat has a greater impact than altitude and/or rainfall.

As highlighted in 'Barn Owls and Major Roads: results and recommendations from a 15-year research project', roads are a really big hazard to Barn Owls. The effect on distribution can be seen in the survey results with obvious gaps along the lines of the largest roads in Devon. The most obvious example of this is the extension of the A30 in East Devon; a number of nest and roost sites that were recorded in 1993 were not occupied in 2003.

The effect of major roads and the lack of habitat (restricting the development of a healthy population in some areas) appear to make the results look somewhat gloomy. However, there have been many more positive outcomes from the survey.

Since we published the results, West Devon Borough Council has shown a considerable interest in ways to help protect nest and roost sites and in encouraging local groups to get involved with Barn Owl conservation in their particular area.

The improvement in Barn Owl numbers has meant that we are well on the way to achieving the population recovery target in the Devon Biodiversity Action Plan (i.e. no fewer than 375 pairs by 2012). However we must ensure that the



... Devon Barn Owl Survey

District	Nesting 1993	Nesting 2003	% increase	Roosting 1993	Roosting 2003	% increase
North Devon	11	44	+300%	18	58	+222%
Torridge	25	90	+260%	26	91	+250%
Teignbridge	5	17	+240%	11	26	+136%
South Hams	19	37	+95%	25	58	+132%
East Devon	21	31	+48%	19	36	+89%
Mid Devon	28	35	+25%	28	39	+39%
West Devon	26	26	No change	22	37	+68%
Exeter	0	0	No change*	0	1	Small increase*
Plymouth	0	0	No change*	1	1	No change*
Torbay	2	1	-50% *	1	1	No change*

2003 Devon Barn Owl Survey results for each district (% increase is above 1993 data)

* = small sample size, urban area

conservation effort is maintained to prevent another decline and to hopefully increase the population still further.

Last but certainly not least, THANK YOU to everyone who has made the Devon Barn Owl Survey so much of a success. To the public who were so supportive of

Heligan Owlets

Most of you will have heard of the Lost Gardens of Heligan. They have a fantastic Hide which is open to the public, and houses a range of interactive exhibits and tableaux relating to Britain's wildlife. This includes a large screen showing live footage from inside a Barn Owl nest nearby.

The Hide is run by Luke Sanger, Lisa Philips and Michael Copleston of Eco-watch, a company based at Heligan. They are expert in the technical engineering, practicalities and ingenuity required for filming wildlife, and are responsible for all the live link-ups at the gardens.

Lisa phoned the office in August to say that the resident Barn Owls had successfully bred and the youngsters would soon be ready for ringing. We set a date for the 26th.

David and I arrived late morning and met with the Eco-watch team at their HQ. They were planning to film the event and send the footage to the local news team. Due to rather inhospitable weather conditions, we decided to ring the owlets indoors at the Hide. So off we set with the film crew and other enthusiastic Heligan staff in tow. David retrieved the owlets from the tree box and we moved to the Hide. We all arranged ourselves so everybody could observe the proceedings. The four owlets were unbelievably captivating and very beautiful.

It was very amusing to watch visitors as they wondered in, eyes wide and stunned, some of their faces were unforgettable, expressing surprise and utter delight - a good day to visit Heligan! The owlets went along with the proceedings very calmly and unusually, no

one got pooped-on. The spectators were very forthcoming with questions and David happily explained what he was doing. Once the job was done, all four owlets were popped back into their nestbox.

A few weeks later, our friends from the Dorset Owl & Hawk Group attached radio tags to two of the youngsters. This will provide a fascinating opportunity to monitor the owls' movements as they take their first few steps into the big wide world.

The Eco-watch guys have been observing events in the nestbox all summer. It was really interesting to hear Lisa recount this summer's saga. Earlier in the year, the female had attempted to nest with a male who turned out to be terribly lethargic. No matter how much noise and fuss she made, he seemed incapable of meeting her demands for food and attention. He was observed standing inside the box, ignoring his mate, as if he didn't really know what to do with himself. Sadly, he simply disappeared one day and didn't come back. Luckily a fit young strapping bachelor later turned up on the scene to save the damsel from spinsterhood. Nothing could stop him from fulfilling his duty and more. The female was visibly much happier, and four healthy owlets were subsequently hatched. Some animals seem to be just as individual and characterful as ourselves!

If you'd like to catch up with the Heligan Owls, you can visit the nestbox live on-line at <http://www.eco-watch.com/WebcamPopups/cam4vs1pop.htm>

Amy Oliver

our efforts and forthcoming with information, to those who volunteered to help with the searching and interviewing and to all the staff and volunteers who helped collect and enter the data, before preparing and printing the report. See you in 2013.....!

John Howells

If you would like to read the full version of the report then it can be downloaded free from our website or can be ordered direct from the Trust for £5 including p&p.



Owl TV Rescue

"Hello? Is that the Barn Owl Trust? There's these owls clinging onto a tree, half of it's blown down already an' it's blowin' a gale up here!"

We set off immediately armed with ladders, ropes, owl food, even tools and a nestbox. By the time we arrived the BBC were on site. Half the nest cavity had split off - there's no way the owlets would survive the impending storm. There's nothing particularly unusual about us rescuing owls but being on the top rung of a fully-extended thirty foot ladder in a howling gale and only just reaching them at full stretch made this one rather memorable... and we made the national news!

After the storm we provided the adult pair with a nestbox in a nearby tree for future use. A few weeks later the three young all fledged successfully! □

Team Talk

Goodbyes ...

Since the last issue of Feedback we've said goodbye to several folk, here we take the opportunity share some of their parting words with you:

After two and a half years of volunteering for the Trust Jamie (below) has left us for pastures new. He and Kandy are helping out at two schools now. We miss both of their cheerful faces and we particularly miss Kandy who helped out eating our apple cores – apparently the only thing she didn't like was sprouts!

"Thank you for the card and the copy of the DBOS report. I am glad I was such a help with the data entry and am privileged to find out that you couldn't have done it without me. Since leaving I have been continuing my voluntary work at Bovey Tracey Primary School and am now also at South Dartmoor Community College on a two day a week basis. I am helping with classroom and learning support and am really enjoying the variety of work which I hope will continue. I do hope things keep on the up for the wild Barn Owls. The amount of hard work and dedication has helped to increase an awareness of their plight and the other factors helping towards a growth in population numbers. All the best."

Jamie and Kandy
Volunteers

Isabel was Isabel was with us for almost a year during her student placement:



Jamie and Kandy

Photo: Mark Green



Photo Frances Ramsden

"I can't believe the time has gone so quickly, but my 48-week placement has now come to an end. I know it's a cliché but time does really fly when you're doing something you enjoy. When I came to the Barn Owl Trust my knowledge of Barn Owls was fairly limited. I knew that they lived in barns and like to hunt in rough grassland for voles but I didn't know pellets existed, let alone all the information they can give you!

Now my knowledge of Barn Owl ecology and behaviour has by far surpassed this. This is all thanks to the variety of work I have had the opportunity of doing at the Trust; from general enquiries and database work to fieldwork and caring for the captive owls. My knowledge of Devon has also greatly improved thanks to the Devon Barn Owl Survey 2003 - prior to this I was only familiar with South Devon. There are also experiences I'm not so proud of such as skidding down a slope in the four wheel drive, sliding down a hayrack and whilst taking a volunteer out during survey work, losing the Ranger keys on top of the vehicle and searching for them for half an hour, praying I wouldn't have to ring the office for assistance!

My experience has also made me look at the countryside in a completely different way now and not just in relation to Barn Owls but to all wildlife, as it's all interconnected. Whenever I pass an area of countryside I may assess its degree of roughness or its proximity to the road. I also try and spot any obvious wildlife such as butterflies or small birds. Ashburton is also seen completely differently now, as I know BOT is tucked away just behind it.

I've not regretted doing my placement in Britain even though I had the choice of going abroad, as I've always found British wildlife fascinating but never had the opportunity to explore any area in real depth. There's something very intriguing about animals that are rarely seen and only appear at night, but this has also made

them greatly misunderstood. Working at a local level gives you a great sense of satisfaction and connection and I feel I've gained just as much, if not more than if I'd been working abroad with exotic animals.

All the staff and volunteers have been really helpful and supportive and this made settling in a lot easier. This has really helped with my confidence and general work skills. They all work very hard and I hope I've done the same. I'm really going to miss BOT and will have many things to tell people when I return to University. This placement has made my degree much more complete, which I have BOT to thank for."

Isabel Vacas

Kim also did her student placement with the Trust:

"Thank you for all the great practical work and events I was able to carry out whilst on my work experience placement, and secondly a deep thank you to you and the rest of the team for the lovely 'Thank You' card and owl shopping bag that you sent me. I was really touched!

I would have to say that the best part of the whole experience was feeling part of a team and helping to achieve such a worthwhile cause as that of the Barn Owl Trust. Not to mention learning how to face-paint and all the practical hands-on work I did with those fantastically nocturnal owls!

Again thank you so much, for passing on even just a cup full of knowledge about that extraordinary animal that is the owl. I'll always remember it and the time I spent with you all. Lots of love and many thanks always."

Kim Fawcett

Our Fundraising Manager Sue Booth left just after the last Feedback went to press. We wish her all the best in her new post:

"By the time that you read this I will have left the Trust. I decided to leave in March as I was made an offer that I couldn't refuse. I'm going to work for St Luke's Hospice in Plymouth as their Fundraising Manager. Of course I will be sad to be leaving such lovely surroundings but a change is as good as a rest as they say! I wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you to everyone who has helped me through the last 14 months.

Finally the biggest thank you has to be to you the supporters. Without you it would be a bleak future for Barn Owls. So keep up the good work."

Sue Booth

Misconceptions and Musings

Popular Misconceptions

A regular Feedback feature where we explode the myths that surround this beautiful bird.

No. 10

“Barn Owls eat game chicks” – **WRONG!**

Those of you who frequent National Trust properties might be familiar with Gamekeeper's Cottages, often found on country estates where the vernacular architecture has thankfully been preserved. One is often awed by the serene setting of such buildings, only to walk in and be horror-struck by the historic photographs displayed inside! It is not uncommon to come across pictures of gamekeepers, proudly standing next to a gibbet upon which rows of dead owls, hawks and mammalian predators are hung.

The keeper's job was to rear game such as pheasant and partridge, and protect the young from any bird or beast that might chance an easy meal. For some keepers it was common practice to

indiscriminately shoot, trap or poison almost any other animal that moved! Being carnivorous, owls were often targeted without proof of their feeding on game chicks. The persecution persisted despite research carried out throughout the century that proved their innocence.

During the 1900's many kept estates became financially unsustainable, and gamekeepers were to become rarer than Barn Owls!

Previous to, and during the early part of the twentieth century, a favourite method of dealing with owls involved erecting a pole overlooking a rearing pen with a trap on top, known as a 'pole trap'. Victims were destined to a most horrendously slow and painful death. Thankfully pole-trapping was outlawed in Britain decades ago, but this inevitably led to an increase in shooting and incidents of poisoning.

Fortunately attitudes started to change during the latter half of the twentieth century. A noticeable drop in bird of prey numbers began to alarm many people,

and an appreciation of our natural heritage became more widespread. The introduction of new laws brought greater protection for wild animals forcing unruly gamekeepers to cease their trigger-happy habits.

David E Glue collected Barn Owl pellet samples throughout Britain and Ireland between 1960 and 1971, and of the 47,865 prey items extracted, only 2% comprised bird remains. In a similar study carried out by Alistair Love in 1997, birds formed only 1.2% of 17,352 prey items examined.

These days, the few gamekeepers that are left appear to be greatly concerned with the conservation and encouragement of wild species. I have heard about one or two who are incredibly enthusiastic, and have successfully attracted wild Barn Owls by erecting nestboxes. Needless to say, none have ever reported seeing owls prey on their game chicks!

Amy Oliver

Prize Winning Outing

“Rach, you're going to spend a night out in the sticks on Dartmoor, with a strange bloke, and there'll be no mobile signal... you're mad!”

This was the reaction of a very good friend of mine when I told her details of the prize I had won in the Barn Owl Trust's Grand Prize Draw.

I had been very pleasantly surprised to receive an email from the Trust last December, informing me that I had won a draw prize, and then as the details unfolded, I admit to feeling some degree of trepidation. This was not for the reasons expressed by my dear friend, Maggie, but rather due to concerns of how to undertake the journey from Sutton Coldfield to Devon with a then one month-old baby, and how to leave him whilst I experienced a *Night Out With the Conservation Team*.

My anxiety was quelled when further communication from David Ramsden suggested that a date should be set for the summer of 2004. On 14 July therefore my then 8 month-old didn't seem to notice as David collected me at 19:00 prompt. It immediately became apparent that I was in the company of a man completely devoted to Barn Owls, and the journey was accompanied by a wealth of information about their habits. My expectations of seeing small,

helpless, white balls of down were proven very much mistaken as David handed over the first of three owlets to be ringed. “Maggie”, as I named her, actually looked like an owl, and showed herself to be quite a feisty young character during this first experience out of the nest. With Maggie and her two sisters ringed, measured, weighed and recorded, we headed over the Tamar Bridge and into Cornwall where we were privileged to catch sight of an adult barn owl hunting in broad daylight.

David had recently visited the site in Cornwall to ring the four resident juveniles, but two had avoided ringing, as they were already able to fly. Silence and patience were quickly rewarded as one of the adult Barn Owls launched from a ledge and glided directly towards us in the jeep. The two older juveniles performed a highly amusing series of antics before curiosity overcame them, and they attempted to perch on the jeep's window ledges and wing mirrors before settling on the roof right above our heads. Some light attempts at pouncing were made before their attention was drawn towards a rabbit, all this with almost continuous swaying head movements in the style of a rap DJ. The graceful silence of the owls' flight was sharply contrasted with a frenzied rabble of calls each time an adult returned to the nest as the juveniles bid



Photo: David Ramsden

for food. This family of six provided a total of ninety minutes entertainment before the light became too dim for us to see.

And that accounts for an evening spent in beautiful, unspoilt Devon and Cornwall, with a man absolutely dedicated to Barn Owls, (and no mobile signal).

Rachel Edwards
Sutton Coldfield

Cornwall Survey 2004

Photo: John Howells

Amy searching a barn



These last few months have seen the conservation team working their socks off gathering data for the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey 2004. The scale of the operation is thankfully smaller in comparison to that of the Devon survey last year, mainly owing to the size of the county. This has provided the opportunity to begin fieldwork a bit later in the year; hence many nest sites have been confirmed in retrospect.

I spent 4 weeks in August checking sites for evidence of Barn Owl activity all over the Carrick and Restormel Districts. It was a very enjoyable task, but a very different experience from the survey work I carried out last year in Devon. I didn't see nearly the same number of Owls, but many pairs started breeding earlier this year, so most youngsters had flown the nest by the time I arrived on the scene. The extent to which central Cornwall's landscape has been carved up by the development of major

roads became very apparent during my travels. These days you'd be hard pushed to get yourself more than 10 miles away from a modern 'A' road or dual carriageway. Sadly, many people I spoke to reported having seen dead owls on the road, particularly along the A30. Generally, it was a great pleasure exploring the region and meeting such lovely, welcoming people. The countryside at that time of year was stunning.

John is currently working in the Penwith and Kerrier Districts. I am hoping he may confirm greater numbers in this region as much of the landscape has avoided intensive agriculture. At the moment, we're having a bit of an Indian summer, so I hope he is making the most of his time outside of the office!

We have managed to enlist the help of volunteers whose task it is to interview landowners in areas we haven't any previous records of roosting or nesting. Obviously we are hoping that they'll discover and identify new sites that we didn't already know about, but confirming that Barn Owls are absent is just as important. This helps us to monitor the coverage and accuracy of our records.

We held a training day for 12 volunteers last July in Bodmin. David and I ran the event, which turned out to be a really fun day with lots of informal chat and biscuit munching. They have all since received maps of the areas they chose to work in. It's now up to them to decide which farms and dwellings they'd like to visit, where they'll ask if any Barn Owls have been seen in the area.

We decided to hold an additional training evening here at BOT HQ for disappointed enthusiasts who couldn't make the original

date. It went really well, and again, we had the privilege of meeting some really lovely people. To all those who have given up their time to help us with the survey, thank you and good luck!

Isabel, our student volunteer has been pulling out all the stops in order to put together a colossal mail shot before she leaves us on 10th September. She has been tirelessly gathering address details for every post office, parish council, police station, tourist attraction and wildlife group in Cornwall, to distribute posters and recording forms (used to record Barn Owl sightings). Once every envelope has been posted, I'll be amazed if there's a single person or their dog, in Cornwall, who doesn't know about the survey! We are really grateful to Isabel for all her hard work and hope that her final year at college goes really well.

October will bring much anticipated help when our new Survey Officer begins work. Their sole task will be to check sites for evidence of Barn Owl activity throughout Cornwall. This will certainly lighten the load for the conservation team who will then be able to spend more time on other tasks.

We plan to get all fieldwork completed and data gathered by early next year, in order to publish the final report in Spring 2005. We are very much looking forward to this, as are many of Cornwall's residents. If the results turn out to be anything like as positive as they were for Devon last year, we'll be overjoyed!

Amy Oliver

Volunteer View

It's a funny old life, isn't it? Full of twists and turns and surprises. One minute I was sitting at a desk, just as I had for almost 20 years, confident that this was how it would be until I retired, when **BANG**, I was redundant, surplus to requirements and having to think again about the future.

My immediate reaction was to start looking for another job in technical authoring and editing which had been my career. But with time on my hands I began to question whether I was doing the right thing.

I was profoundly aware of the pressures on the natural world and the need to address them. I thought that if I could play a part in helping to save even one species, the effort would be worthwhile and that a new career in conservation was the answer. Eight months later, I was sitting in a lecture theatre at the University of Plymouth, embarking on a degree course in Wildlife Conservation.

Voluntary work is an important component of my learning, supplying the practical and real-life experience to complement the theory. It also shows commitment and the willingness to get your hands dirty – (literally, sometimes). My voluntary work with the Barn Owl Trust has only just begun and I am so glad they decided to give me a chance. The first job I had was identifying wildflowers growing in the disturbed areas of the Lennon Legacy field. Before I started the course, my ability to identify plants was very limited. But even with just a few days spent in the field, I have increased my knowledge and built my confidence and acquired an enthusiasm to learn more.

To date, my contributions at the BOT have included identifying plants, helping with a mailing, weeding and removing nails and wire from old bonfire sites. I'm happy to do the "grotty" jobs; they have to be done and it allows the staff to do more important work. In time though I hope that, with



Dragonfly Photo:
Frances Ramsden

training, I shall be able to become more closely involved with the owls and make a more meaningful contribution. Whatever I learn at the Barn Owl Trust will be valuable experience for when I graduate.

Two years ago I couldn't have foreseen this dramatic change in my life. Redundancy was a brutal blow, but it was an opportunity. I have no regrets. On a sunny day in Devon with a wildflower book in my hand, in the company of butterflies and humming insects, I can't help feeling glad I'm not still sitting at my desk in the office. It just goes to show how, in a roundabout way, a kick in the teeth can actually bring a smile to your face.

Gail Cobbald

Around and About



Bob Sheppard lives in South Lincolnshire with his wife Gail. They have two 'children', Phil a primary school teacher and Kate a journalist. Bob teaches part time nowadays having retired from his job as a head teacher four years ago to devote more time to owl conservation.

"I can still remember vividly my first sighting of a Barn Owl nearly fifty years ago. As a child I was taken on a picnic to Epworth, famous as home of the Wesley family. It was there that I saw this beautiful bird, in broad daylight, flying over the River Trent. I never forgot this magical sight and in 1976, when I moved back to Lincolnshire, I began a programme of nestbox construction and advice to farmers, which continues to this day.

I am now the Regional Advisor for the Hawk and Owl Trust with twenty-eight years experience and over six hundred owl and kestrel nestboxes throughout the county. Since I began my work the population of Barn Owls has nearly doubled in Lincolnshire and forms more than 10% of the UK population.

The early years saw me concentrating on Tawny Owls. Putting chimney boxes up in the Forestry Commission woodlands of South Lincs showed immediate success and led to the development of a heavy duty plastic tunnel nestbox made from nine inch water pipe with a fibreglass removable base for easy cleaning. It was a start of a never ending quest to constantly improve on my nestbox designs.

I soon moved on to studying Long-eared Owls, a species quite common in my local woods. Many happy hours were spent late at night observing their fascinating breeding behaviour, including the wide range of calls that these owls make in the spring. Sadly there are

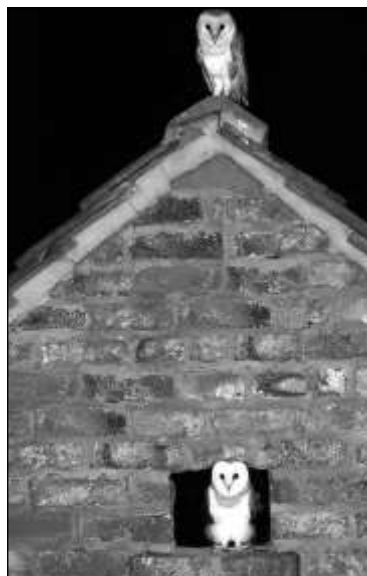
hardly any of these splendid birds left in their old woodland haunts in South Lincs.

In the early eighties it was clear to me that although the habitat was suitable for Barn Owls, there was a real shortage of suitable nest sites. Traditionally these birds have bred in old farm buildings and trees in the county. By providing suitable nestboxes I felt sure that the population could be increased. The BTO design of an open tray didn't seem right and my father and I set about designing an enclosed box that could be flat packed for ease of transportation but which could be easily erected on site. The design has changed many times over the years and will no doubt change again as the specific needs of these birds becomes more understood.

Twenty years ago I was offered a quantity of strongly made wooden ammunition boxes. They proved ideal for Barn Owls, Little Owls and Kestrels and more than three hundred have now been put up. I am particularly pleased that the ammunition box idea caught on with other owl workers throughout the country.

Fifteen years ago, in conjunction with Anglian Water and Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board, I devised a pioneering plan, along with Colin Shawyer of the Hawk & Owl Trust, to put Barn Owl nestboxes on telegraph poles on the banks of the South Forty Footy Drain and the River Glen.

Forty-eight of these boxes now grace the grassy banks and similar schemes can be seen right across the UK. There are problems with Jackdaws which often breed in the boxes, but the take-up by the target species has been excellent. Last year Black Sluice IDB sponsored a new design of box which I had developed for putting on their pump stations and this is already proving very successful.



All photos: provided by Bob

One of my most satisfying achievements has been the designing of an owl tower for my friend, local farmer and conservationist Gus Grant. The idea was for Gus to build something for his Barn Owls that would be virtually everlasting. Standing twelve feet tall and made with reclaimed bricks Gus has two of these towers and is soon to build a third. Last year one was occupied for the first time and now the towers have created much interest from farmers and landowners across the country.

My latest success is a Little Owl nestbox that I have been trialling for the past five years. Most of the earlier designs were complicated to make and erect and often didn't meet the most important criteria, namely a pitch black nestchamber and a very precise entrance hole size. The new box has been incredibly successful and I am making them as fast as I can to meet the needs of local farmers.

I am a great believer that individuals really can play an important role when it comes to wildlife conservation. The people I admire most have all shown their love for wildlife in a hands-on practical way. My philosophy is: If you only pass this way once then it's nice if you can make a difference, the growing population of Barn Owls in Lincolnshire can testify that this is a philosophy that is paying handsome dividends."

Bob Sheppard
Lincolnshire

Fun-draising Feedback

China Owls

Tony and Meg Clarke from Surrey kindly donated between 100-150 owl ornaments, which they delivered to the Trust in June.

This represented just half of an amazing collection made by Meg's sister who had sadly died. We hope she would be pleased that they have been put to such good use.

The owls were mainly china and porcelain some of which are by Leonardo. We also have some quirky ones made from shells and other materials and several pictures.

If you are an avid owl collector and would like to know more we have photographs of some of the collection which we'll be happy to send you. □

Eviction Imminent



An opportunity not to be missed - this beautiful limited edition, signed print is now available for sale.

From an original chroma-artists-colour on linen paper by Dick Twinney. Image size 21 x 15 inches, print size 26 x 18 inches. Published as a signed limited edition of 300 to help promote the work of the Barn Owl Trust. Fifty prints have been donated to the Trust to retail at £52 plus post and packing of £3 - (£55)

This is a way to help wildlife whilst acquiring a really beautiful print either for yourself or as a present (when we will be happy to enclose a little information about the Trust and its work and a greetings card with your personal message).

If you would like to see more of Dick's work you can contact him at: The Lyndhurst Studio, Trekenning Road, St Columb, Cornwall TR9 6RR. Tel: 01637 880606. □



Photo: John Howells

One of this summer's fundraising events was a three-day trip to Woodlands Leisure Park in Dartmouth. Thankfully it was a little bit warmer than last time we went and spent the week shivering in the April wind!

As usual we took the lucky dip and our face painting kit. These were very popular, with some people having six goes on the lucky dip so that they could win all the different prizes! Geoff the falconer also gave us a 'top prize' for the lucky dip. Whoever won it had the opportunity to have their photograph taken holding one of the birds - one of the winners chose to hold a Woodlands Barn Owl.

We took with us lots of the model owls that had been donated by Tony and Meg Clarke from Surrey and they proved to be very popular - there was always a crowd around where they were displayed and we sold enough of them to raise £98.85. On our last day at Woodlands the falconer wasn't there, so instead of

Out of the Woods and into the Zoo...

watching the flying displays people came to look at our stand instead. At one point we had a mad rush for face painting and two of us did over thirty without a break (our face painting skills are definitely improving!).

Our most recent fundraising event was a day spent at Exmoor zoo at the end of August. We put up our stand in the picnic area opposite the Meerkats. We spent most of the quiet periods between the face painting frenzies watching them sitting comically on top of their rock and then darting back into their house every time an aeroplane flew over. We were also visited by a peacock (we thought at one point he was in the queue for face painting, but when we asked him whether he would like a full Barn Owl face or a small flying Barn Owl on his forehead he strutted off...)

Again face painting was very popular. As always we received lots of requests for faces other than owls - but this time we were able to grant them as the resident face painting guy - Steve - helped us out. He even taught John how to paint butterfly faces, so who knows what might happen if we get some pink face paint of our own...

We had a fantastic day at the zoo (despite the marmosets sticking out their tongues at us as we unloaded the Astra). We made nearly £100 from the lucky dip and face painting and the zoo very kindly donated £400.

Also, a big thank-you to everyone who volunteered at the events (extra pairs of hands are vital when trying to paint faces, run the lucky dip and sell cards and bookmarks all at once!).

Stacey Sewell

Owl Quiz

BOT volunteer Pat Williams received a cheque from Gordon and Jan, landlords of the Walkhampton Inn where Len Hyde and Chris Brannagan arranged a quiz night on behalf of the Barn Owl Trust. It was an enjoyable and lively evening with the added bonus of a donation of £85.50 to Trust. Thank you all.

Photo provided by Pat



Focus on Friends



Pat Williams became involved with the Trust in 2002, and has since then been very generous in volunteering for a very wide range of tasks. Pat was born in Sidcup, Kent and mostly attended church schools and schools for girls. She spent the last two years of her education as a Deputy Head Girl and Captain of House in south east London. During her childhood, Pat developed a keen interest in gardening and the countryside - a hobby that greatly influenced her future occupations.

In 1958 she joined the Wrens aged seventeen. Her first posting was on HMS Drake in Plymouth where she worked as a Wren Writer. She was then transferred to the Recruiting Office at HMS President in London.

In 1961 she left the services to marry Bernard. They lived together at St Budeaux in Plymouth for the next 25 years, and raised two daughters (they now have two granddaughters and one grandson). It was during this time, around 1976, that Pat began working on a local small-holding at Saltash, helping with livestock, strawberry and potato picking and other seasonal tasks. In 1979 she set up her own business providing holiday cover for smallholders

called Helping Hand Service. She mostly worked for goat keepers in Cornwall, Wales and Shropshire. She also worked on organic farms as a member of WWOOF (Working Weekends on Organic Farms). Her border collie accompanied her on most trips.

They moved to St Keverne on the Lizard Peninsular in Cornwall in 1986, and Pat worked part-time for the next 12 years on a family run dairy farm, looking after the calf section. It was here she acquired 2 farmyard kittens and a collie called Holly. During this time she wrote 3 small books. *Day Dream Believer* was based on her days whilst running the Helping Hand Service. *Tuppy the Cornish Farmyard Kitten* and *Tuppy the Cornish Farmyard Cat* were both written for children. Pat published the books herself and sold them locally. She donated half the proceeds to cancer charities.

In 2001 Pat and Bernard moved to Tavistock to join their youngest daughter who had just moved there with her family.

Pat first heard of the Barn Owl Trust when she saw David Ramsden on a television news item in 2002. She had always harboured a desire to work with birds of prey, but had never found the time. Determined to put this right she phoned BOT to see if we had any volunteer work available. We suggested she might like to help us with survey work for the Devon Barn Owl Survey 2003, which she duly did. Pat spent an enormous amount of her own time and resources, interviewing farmers and landowners in the Tavistock area, gathering information about Barn Owls. She undertook this task with abundant enthusiasm, and is still in contact with many of the people she interviewed. Some of the locals fondly refer her to as 'the Barn Owl Lady'.

Pat has also helped to raise funds for the Trust. Last year she ran a Christmas stall at her local Pannier Market; she regularly monitors our donation boxes around Tavistock and she has helped with BOT stalls and events. The Cornwall Barn Owl Survey 2004 has presented Pat with another opportunity to carry out survey work just across the border.

In the long term Pat would like to become more involved in Barn Owl conservation, and learn the skills required for BTO ringing. She is also very interested in the idea of visiting other Barn Owl conservation organisations in the UK, to see how conservation methods work elsewhere.

Pat still enjoys gardening and all aspects of the countryside. She is a member of the Devon Wildlife Trust as well as a Friend of BOT. We feel very thankful that she chose to dedicate so much of her time and effort to our cause. Her help has been invaluable and her enthusiasm so consistent! Everyone here agrees she is always such a pleasure to work with.

We are all very grateful to you Pat and look forward to working with you in future.

□



Top left:
Pat now
right:
Pat in 1959
Photos
provided

Welcome Stacey



Stacey

Photo: John Howells

"As the newest member of the BOT staff I've been asked to introduce myself ... I was born in Yorkshire, but moved to Devon three years ago to study music at Dartington. I play the clarinet and fiddle (as well as attempting to play lots of other instruments!). As I was approaching the end of my course I decided to gain some practical experience of working in an office by volunteering for a local organisation. I found the Barn Owl Trust through an advert at the CVS in Newton Abbot (and unknown to me at the time, I had sat behind one of the trustees on the bus on the way there!). I thought I would give it a try, as I'd always been interested in wildlife.

I started volunteering at the Trust in March this year. When I finished university in July I was busily looking round for a job (and possibly stressing about it just a little bit in the BOT office!) and the Trust were kind

enough to offer me a job as a part time admin assistant.

I'm really enjoying working here and I can honestly say that no two days have been the same. I've hung around the Pond aviary trying to photograph the owls for adoption certificates, made bookmarks, done lots of filing and even more face painting. I even modelled for a poster advertising the face painting that was put on public display at the entrance to the falconry centre at Woodlands Leisure Park.

The highlights of working at the Trust so far have been Dusty the Barn Owl standing on my hand and meeting lots of fantastic new people. I'm looking forward to all the new and not so new things I'll get to do as part of my new job!"

Stacey Sewell
Stacey Sewell

Thanks and Things

Thank you to everyone who has given so generously to the Barn Owl Trust over the past six months: their time, their efforts and their financial support. This is traditionally the page where we list our wants (both large and small) in the hopes that somebody might have one of these items taking up valuable space. So here goes....

To those who donated items from last issue's wants list thanks go to: Wal Towler and also Graham Lawes and the Dawlish ATC for shelving, Beryl Welsh for the magnificent round table to hold our meetings around, Christine Mercer for a scanner.

Thank you Brendan Scott-Smith for that elusive book 'Butterflies of the British Isles', Rachel Edwards for files and towels, David Jackson for stationery and folders, John Rae, Christine Chapman, David Glover, Gil Gaylor, Mr and Mrs Bird, Freda Moodie and Mrs Softly for unused stamps, and people too numerous to mention who have donated

used stamps, inkjet cartridges and old mobile phones and last, but not least, Darren Nichols for the powerpoint projector (yes honestly).

Thanks also go to Andy Boal for a stuffed owl (probably Victorian) and to Tony and Meg Clarke for a collection of hundreds of china owls and owly pictures which we are able to sell at fund-raising events. Thank you all for your support.

Can you help?

We could use:
Comfortable good condition office swivel chairs to *save our backs and bottoms*
New unused stamps
Badge making machine
Metal filing cabinets
Calculators
4" galvanised nails
Small digital cameras to *take on fieldwork*
Mixed drill bits
Electric over-sink water heater
Modern petrol chainsaw
Modern petrol brush cutter *in good*

working order

Clean and dry storage nearby to the office for stationery and packaging
New hard-wearing carpeting for the post-room and small office
2x1 and 2x2 tanalised timber
9mm and 18mm softwood ply
Wild bird feed - this is becoming an increasingly expensive purchase (or help towards the cost)
Modern 4WD Tractor (at least 60hp)
Waste grain to encourage small mammals and wild birds in the field
Any reasonably up to date books about the natural history of the British Isles *and lastly...*
A handy-person on call to do all those little jobs to keep the office, aviaries and grounds in good order (well you don't know if you don't ask!).

We also want your used ink cartridges and stamps for recycling – see page 6.

Tail Piece



Do you ever feel you have too much to do? It seems to be a common phenomenon these days. Even people who have retired make statements like, "I don't know how I ever found the time to have a job". Has it always been like this or is it a recent thing? Surely these days with all our labour-saving devices we should have more time. Maybe it's because we have too many choices, watch too much TV, or maybe we just take on too much and expect too much of ourselves and other people?

People here at the Trust always seem to have too much to do. Part of the reason is that we have fewer staff now than we did a couple of years ago, but our workload, the number of enquiries we deal with has increased. In the financial year 2002-2003 the Trust's conservation and information and advice services recorded over 12,000 individual contacts of which 1,474 were new contacts. These included enquiries ranging from general information requests to emergency call outs.

No one wants to say 'no' and when things need doing it's often easiest to do it yourself rather than have to explain to someone else what needs to happen. Deadline chases deadline with tedious regularity. The most essential tasks get tackled and the other things, no matter how much you want to do them, get pushed back again. To help to deal with this the Trustees have decided to increase the number of conservation staff. But this has, at least in

the short-term, increased the pressure on the team with applications to vet, interviews to arrange and eventually staff training to undertake. We just hope we choose the right people...

Personally when I have a lot to do I find having a list helpful and get satisfaction from crossing things off when they're completed. But what if new things keep getting added on faster than you cross them off, it just gets demoralising, or even worse you have so much to do you don't get time to write the list in the first place? When that happens you have to stop; if you don't, then eventually you won't have any choice. We have some friends who had been so busy for years they hadn't taken a holiday - the husband didn't have time. For two years comparatively minor incidents laid him up for a few weeks at a time but as soon as he was fit he leapt back on his treadmill. The third year he had a stroke and things had to change. If you don't listen to your body - it will make you listen!

When things get too much you have to take control of your life, you have to prioritise, decide what is really important and create a new list. Maybe you can't do everything or maybe you need to ask for help, whatever you do, you need to do something. Planning ahead is something fairly high on the Trustees' agenda at the moment. It's difficult to plan too far when you don't know what your resources, both human and financial will be. It's also hard for the

Management Team, who are the people on the ground, to surface from their workloads long enough to decide priorities. But we hope the new staff will create some space for tackling those things that keep getting pushed to the bottom of the list and allow the team the opportunity to be more proactive than reactive.

It is possible to change the habits of a lifetime and it's really important that we make the most of the time we have. Taking stock is vital for our physical and mental health. Just making time to be in the countryside, without doing anything is incredibly therapeutic. Where would we be without the natural world?

We are blessed to live in a time of relative affluence and stability. We have freedom from hunger and the chance to make choices. For the sake of our spirits, and the planet that sustains us, it is essential that we make choices that are in harmony with other living things. Barn Owls, bush-crickets and butterflies have all benefited from your choice to support the Trust. Thank you for that support and for everything you do to conserve our wonderful planet.

Together we can make a world of difference **Frances Ramsden**