



Issue Number 36 - Autumn 2006



FEEDBACK

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

Baley Meets Bill Bailey and

- The Making of a TV show
- A Bad Year for Britain's Barn Owls
- Rehabilitation Research Results



Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to Feedback. It's been a really bad year for wild Barn Owls as you can read on page 3 with unusually high mortality in the early months of the year followed by an appalling breeding season. This month we have had a few late owlets come in, most of which have been underweight. With extreme weather becoming the norm, it's vital that we all do everything we can to reduce our personal impact on the environment - read about how the Trust is using Bio-Fuel to reduce its CO₂ emissions on page 4.

After a crazy Summer which included lots of events (page 6), loads of preparation for the new website (page 3), the completion of two new research project drafts (page 5) and even a trip to Hungary (page 14) we thought the Autumn period might be slightly calmer for the Trust; but the website is still to be launched - October 18th is now looking likely, and we have had a TV crew making a programme for Channel 4 here for more than a week (pages 8 & 9).

The results of Nick Askew's research funded by the BOT, (identifying priority areas for Barn Owl conservation across the UK), will be available in a leaflet produced by the RSPB this Autumn and this will link into pages on our website.

We've had lots of students, some new volunteers and we have two almost new members of staff too (pages 10 & 11). Around and About visits Dorset in this issue and it's great to see how the seeds we sowed with our nestbox workshop in 2002 have flowered into a thriving conservation project.

Focus on Friends too is a fascinating story of how individuals can make a difference. Seeing Barbara and Richard develop their dream at Fowlescombe has been particularly interesting. In 1989 I found my very first wild Barn Owl nest in the roof of the derelict gate lodge described in the article. Unfortunately the nest site was destroyed in 1990 when vandals pulled the ceilings down so it's been great to watch Barbara and Richard encourage owls back to the farm.

Congratulations to Mark Green and Sonia Seldon who both used to work at the Trust and got married (to each other) in April, also to Assistant Conservation Officer Lisa Ashford and her husband Rob who married in May and to Trustee Simon Wilson and his new wife Cate who got married in June. Whilst in wedding mode we should also congratulate our Treasurer Mark Pountney and his wife Chris who

were married secretly last December. We hope you will all have many happy years of togetherness.

Those of you who receive our Annual Report will know by now that in the last financial year our income did not keep pace with our expenditure. Trustees, staff and volunteers here at the Trust are very aware of this and hope that the time invested in developing the website (page 3) this year will both promote the organisation and help to free up staff time in the future. There is lots of team news on pages 10 & 11.

The Lennon Legacy Project is not featured in this issue but we have now received planning consent for the ponds we plan to build and hope to have the contractors on site in October; more news in the Spring. The field is still a source of inspiration for us all and we continue to see new species taking advantage of the wildlife haven the Project has created. This summer we have had exceptional numbers of butterflies (including Clouded Yellow) and our first lizard and an adder. Friends ran a Moth trap in July and we recorded 115 species of moths in one evening. We found our first ever Hawk Moth caterpillars and have seen both Hobby and Peregrine hunting over the field. About 15 people joined us for the Bracken Bash in July and had the opportunity to share in the LLP experience. See below if you fancy joining us for our winter task.

Thank you for supporting the Barn Owl Trust - we really do need your help to do what we do and your contribution, whatever it is, really does make a difference. We hope you find this issue of Feedback interesting and feel it keeps you informed about our work. Please feel free to "feedback" to us as we love to hear your view and your stories - enjoy the read.

Eds: Frances and Sandra

In this Issue...

Welcome to Feedback	2
Barn Owl Trust News	3
More Barn Owl Trust News	4
Research Reporting	5
Eventful Days	6
Bird News	7
In Memoriam	7
The Making of Barn Owl TV	8-9
Team Talk	10-11
Around and About Visits Dorset	12-13
Recycle & Reuse	13
Other Owl News	13
BOT Visits Hungary	14
Focus on Friends	15
Thanks and Things	16
Tail Piece	16

Cover Photo: Frances Ramsden

Feedback is produced for the Friends 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 37 is 12th February 2007

*Send your contributions - news, letters, pictures and information to: Feedback, Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU
Email: feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk*

Join us for a

Hedge Coppicing Day

A Lennon Legacy Project Event

**Saturday 2nd December
10am - 4pm**

This is an opportunity to see the field and help to restore an old hedgerow.

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.

Barn Owl Trust News

Disastrous Year for Barn Owls

The forecast for Britain's Barn Owl population is extremely bleak following the worst breeding season for over twenty years. A huge amount of conservation work has taken place and the future was looking brighter after a long history of decline but this year's appalling breeding season and unusually high mortality is a severe set-back for the UK Barn Owl population.

Records of dead or injured Barn Owls reported to the Trust between January and July 2006 tripled in comparison to 2005. Below average temperatures in March, caused reduced levels of prey activity causing higher than normal owl mortality. The birds were then hit with well above average rainfall in May, which further reduced hunting success. Those birds that did attempt to breed nested much later and laid fewer eggs than in a normal year.

At least two out of three traditional breeding sites have failed to produce young this year. This is particularly disappointing following the gradual increase of Barn Owls in the wild over the last ten years. Every year we visit the same 70 breeding sites and we generally find young owlets in most nests. This year one third of the sites we have visited had no signs of Barn Owl occupation at all, let alone nesting. One third have had single adult birds which implies their partners didn't make it through the winter and most of the adult pairs

that did survive show no signs of breeding. This lack of nesting success, on top of the high mortality means a further reduction in the British population

The phenomenon is not limited to the South West as conservationists in other parts of the UK are reporting similar findings. John Lightfoot from the Shropshire Barn Owl Group normally expects to find 40 nests at the sites he monitors, this year he's found 3. We have also had similar reports from Sussex, Wiltshire and other areas.

It is natural for Barn Owl populations to go through peaks and troughs like any other species. However the sheer volume of mortality and the high frequency of nest failure is a serious setback in the species recovery.

Global warming is thought to be behind many of the extreme weather patterns in recent years. Virtually every year has record-breaking weather and prolonged extreme conditions are bad news for Barn Owls. The thought that climate change may significantly hinder the recovery of this national treasure is a huge worry to those concerned with Barn Owl conservation in the UK. □



Photo: Frances Ramsden

Bill Meets Baley

As you will have seen from our cover picture Baley the Barn Owl met Bill Bailey the TV star, comedian and 'Black Books' star who is also a team captain on Never Mind the Buzzcocks. Bill is currently recording a new series for Channel 4 – 'Wild Thing - I Love You' and came to Waterleat to film for part of the programme on Barn Owls and the building of a stone wildlife refuge we had helped to design.

Each week on 'Wild Thing - I Love You', Bill will lead a team of experts as they attempt to solve an urgent wildlife crisis. Every show will feature a different animal/issue and the team will strive to help the animals overcome problems that mankind has put in their way. The programmes are due to be shown in the Autumn and the dates will be available on our website as soon as we have them.

On pages 8 & 9 we have a picture diary of the making of the Barn Owl programme and on page 10 media student Alison Blackler describes how she was involved in the early stages of planning in the Spring.

After posing beautifully on Bill's shoulder for our cover picture Baley decided to try out Bill's head as a perch; fortunately Bill didn't mind and subsequently agreed to adopt Baley to help promote our adoption scheme.

If you would like to support the Trust by adopting Baley or one of our other resident owls please visit the Trust's website or ask us to send you an adoption leaflet. □



Photo: Frances Ramsden

The one to watch

Visitors to the Trust's new website will have the opportunity to watch live owls on the webcam in one of the Trust's aviaries.

Handyman Tim and volunteer Graham have been building a traditional barn front in one of the Trust's aviaries where the camera will be running 24 hours a day.

New BOT Web-site

Trust staff have been working frantically for months to compile the content for the Trust's new website due to launch this Autumn. Back in 2005 the Trustees decided this should be a priority for the Trust this year.

The new site should be live by the time Feedback reaches you; you will know that it's the new site because of the webcam link on the top right of the home page.

The new site will not only provide all the information our existing one does, it will also have loads more pictures, feature slideshows, audio clips, on-line sales and most importantly a management system that enables staff to update it regularly and keep it fresh and live.

Visit our site at www.barnowltrust.org.uk and see what you think. □

More BOT News



A site visit for ecologists – a field trip is part of the training day Photo: Frances Ramsden

BOESS - Ecologists' Training Days

Since the first Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys and Signs (BOESS) training days held in September 05 and February 06 were such a great success, we held two further days of training in July this year. Once again people came from as far afield as Scotland and Chesterfield and the events were very well received. Feedback following the course included: *"Wonderful course, I really enjoyed it and feel enthused about Barn Owls and Barn Owl conservation. Keep up the good*

work!". *"Superb course - well thought out for consultants and very enjoyable"*.

We'll be holding another two BOESS training days in early November and have already had quite a lot of interest and some bookings although we have only produced limited publicity at this stage. As BOESS has been so popular if demand is there the long-term plan is to hold a series of training days each year. Contact the office for more details. □

Fighting Financial Fraud

They say financial fraud is on the increase and we would agree as there have been 3 attempts to defraud the Trust in the past few months. The first was from a visitor to our stand at a show who offered to hold a coffee morning for the Trust and wanted a donation box and draw tickets to raise funds. Their details were taken so that the office could deal with the request. However on checking our records we discovered that the same person had approached us at a previous show 15 years ago. On that occasion we sent a donation box and sales goods on a sale or return basis. Two years later we took her to the small claims court for the return of our property and although we won the case, bailiffs were never able to collect full payment. Thankfully we keep good records and did not fall into the trap of sending her more items.

The second attempt was discovered in June; an unauthorised Standing Order payment from the Trust's account for £2,500 to the account of a 'Mr Digbo'. We immediately informed trustee Frances,

then phoned the bank who told us 2 further payments (a total of £4,500) had been made to the same payee since the statement was issued. They put a stop on any further withdrawals and we contacted the police. It turned out that 'Mr Digbo' had set up unauthorised standing orders using a forged mandate taken into a branch of Nationwide. Fortunately they were suspicious of its authenticity and had frozen the account, so the money was refunded. The Metropolitan police are still investigating the matter.

The third attempt came in the post - a cheque made out to the Barn Owl Trust for £6,000. Initially it looked genuine, but on closer examination the accompanying letter asked for ½ the value of the cheque to be sent to an individual in Aberystwyth; suspicions were roused. On closer examination it was obvious that the cheque was a forgery and the police were once again informed.

Pete Webb

EDDC Result

Following the publication of the BOT document about making provision for Barn Owls in barn conversions even when no evidence of them is found, we are delighted to announce that East Devon District Council have now said that ALL planning applications for barn conversions must contain provision for Barn Owls. □

Greener Motoring

Much of the Trust's practical work involves driving and as we want to do our bit to slow down global warming, the Trust is in the process of changing its three diesel vehicles over to Bio-Fuel to try and balance out the amount of CO₂ emitted into the atmosphere. As most people are probably aware, the use of standard petrol and mineral diesel is contributing to the 'Greenhouse' effect and putting many other toxic substances into the atmosphere.

Bio-Fuel is a non-polluting road fuel made from used local vegetable oil; it may well have come from your local chippy, which also means the smell is a lot nicer than your standard diesel! It is made by mixing, modifying and cleaning good quality cooking oil with additives and combustion enhancing organic materials. Plymouth Bio-Fuel Ltd state that, 'It is not to be confused with Bio-Diesel (RME), which is chemically re-processed vegetable oil or Bio-Blend, which is a blend of 95% mineral diesel and 5% RME'.

By using Bio-Fuel the Trust won't be adding CO₂ to the atmosphere. The amount of carbon taken in by plants when they are growing is the same as the amount that is released by burning Bio-Fuel in vehicles - therefore the product and its use is carbon neutral. If you only use a mix of 5% biofuel with your regular diesel this can still help to reduce CO₂ emissions by up to 4.5%. It would also not effect the vehicle's warranty, is acceptable by EU standards and meets all vehicle manufacturers' requirements.

In addition to the environmental benefits of using Bio-Fuel, a distinct one-up on regular diesel is its greater lubricity. "Running an engine on Bio-Fuel should prolong its life, especially if the relevant guidelines and procedures are followed" states Bio-Fuels Ltd. It should also save BOT money in the long run, after the initial cost of converting the vehicles BOT should make an annual saving on all three vehicles of nearly £450.

Kelly Wakeham

Do take advice before switching your vehicle to alternative fuels (Eds).

Research Reporting

Since my arrival at the Barn Owl Trust in February I've been working on two research projects; literally 'sailing' in the database, a full immersion into Barn Owl Trust records! The results of this work are two draft reports which are now being proof read. Here is a brief summary of results to date.

Rehabilitation

As you probably know one of the Barn Owl Trust's activities – though not the main one – concerns the rehabilitation of injured birds and this was the topic of the first project. I investigated the finding circumstances, causes and types of injury and outcome of the birds received at the Barn Owl Trust from 1990 until 2005.

Overall 293 birds have been recorded, of which 276 were wild and 17 captive. The most common species have been Barn Owl and Tawny Owl (Fig. 1) followed by Little Owl and birds of prey like Buzzard, Sparrow hawk and Kestrel.

As expected one of the most frequent circumstances of finding seems to be related to roads; though it was not always easy to say whether the real cause of injury was a road traffic accident. Many young birds have been found below their nest or nest box, most of the time fortunately without injuries. Wing damage including fractures and dislocations are the most common types of injury. Many of the birds brought in were emaciated, sometimes this was due to injury but many were just failing to find sufficient food.

More than half of the birds we received were released (143 out of 273) mainly with supported release through a static or release mobile aviary. About one third of the birds received died (80 out of 273) and the remainder have been kept at the BOT. □

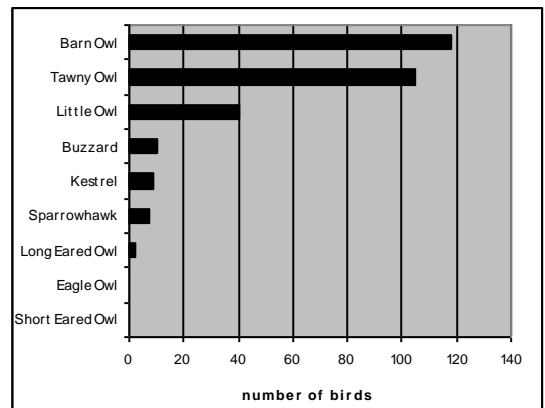


Figure 1. Species received at the BOT. The values refer to the total number of birds received, captive bred included.

Falling from Nest

The second report – which is rather shorter - considered the problem of owlets falling from nests and in particular from certain types of nestboxes.

Up until 1996 all the BOT's nestboxes were of the standard horizontal type with the entrance hole at the bottom and a tray at the front, but from 1997 a new deep indoor box design was introduced with the hole and tray at the top. A similar design for outdoor boxes has been developed this year.

However the report doesn't only consider Barn Owl Trust nestboxes as we have records of falling from other peoples boxes, many of which are tea-chests, and from provisions in converted barns, which are not necessarily boxes. What emerges from this research is that the deep design is much better than the flat one at minimising the chances of owlets falling.

Over 25 years approximately 238 cases of fallen owlets have been recorded by the Trust, of which 138 were from flat boxes and 40 from open-ended teachests, whereas only 10 are related to deep boxes (Fig. 2). Repeated falls from the same nestbox occurred more often with flat boxes

than deep ones (Fig. 3).

Unfortunately deep boxes haven't totally solved all the problems relating to falling owlets. Jackdaws represent another hard challenge for us. They are one of the main causes of owlets falling from deep boxes, as they fill the boxes with sticks reducing the space available for the Barn Owl to nest and so making it easier for the owlets to get out before they are ready to fledge. Therefore we are currently thinking of new solutions to modify our deep boxes in order to make them unsuitable for Jackdaws.

Copies of both reports will appear on the Trust's website when they are



TLC (tender loving care) at the Trust for a casualty
Photo: BOT

completed.

Chiara Bettiga

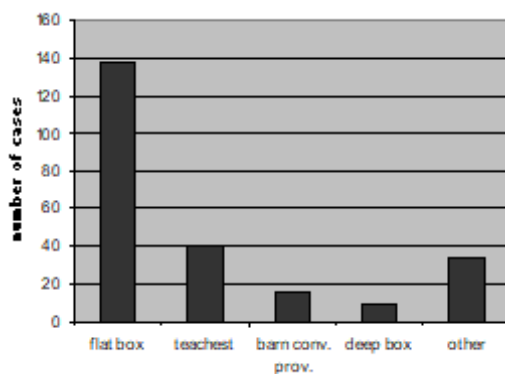


Figure 2. Number of cases of fallen owlets divided according to the nest type.

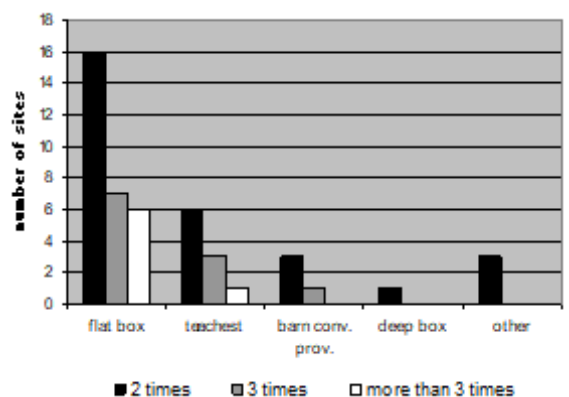


Figure 3. Number of sites where repeated falls occurred divided according to the nest type.

Eventful Days

Charity of the Year

Castle Brake Caravan Park nominated the Barn Owl Trust as its charity of the year in 2006. They began their support by sending us a cheque for £100 which was their commission from selling a caravan on behalf of a customer. The caravan park is run by Tony and Dare Walker and is located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; close to Woodbury Common in East Devon. Tony and Dare have created a wildlife haven as well as a popular holiday park and have received a Gold Conservation Award from Professor David Bellamy every year since 1998 by providing a peaceful retreat for both people and wildlife.

Throughout the summer months they have had our cuddly owlets for sale alongside Barn Owl Trust key rings, badges and fridge magnets. In the restaurant the tables have pictures of some of the owls that are cared for in our sanctuary. They also set up a scarecrow hunt to entertain families throughout the holiday season and at 50p a go all the money raised will go to the Trust. Our SCO, David, will be giving a talk on the 21st October and erecting a nestbox.

Castle Brake has raised over eight hundred pounds for the Barn Owl Trust so far - Thank you Tony and Dare for all your support. If you would like more information about Castle Brake please contact us.

Harry Davies



Congratulations Lisa and Rob. On Saturday 20th May 2006 our Assistant Conservation Officer Lisa Ashford became Mrs Hann. (Photo: Provided)



Photo Frances Ramsden

Congratulations to Mark Green and Sonia Seldon who were married on 29th April. They met at the BOT when Mark was our Conservation Officer and Sonia Admin/Conservation Assistant. □

Sponsored Walk

Thank you to everyone who helped with the sponsored walk this year. It is a very time consuming and complicated event to run and involves the goodwill and many hours of help from loads of people, not to mention nearly two hundred participants who turn up on the day willing to walk anything from three to ten miles.

It was a great day; the weather was perfect for walking and even the day before, when some of the hardest work takes place, was dry and not too hot. This year we made more of a feature of the picnic area with games, competitions and a raffle very ably run by Harry and Ali looking stunning in their Barn Owl costumes (I knew they'd come in handy again).

Thank you also to all our business supporters: Kevin Keatley (Wildlife Photographer), N P Carter & Co Insurance Brokers, Your Future Financial Planning (financial advisers), Inkost (computer ink cartridge sales) The Nestbox Company, Millwood Homes Property Developers, Greenclean (environmentally aware cleaners), Searles Electrical Shop, Chuley Road Garage, to everyone who sponsored Megan and Dolci and last but by no means least Anthony Mildmay-White who made the Flete Estate available to us again this year and Canoe Adventures for ferrying us across the estuary. The grand total raised was £2,463.18.

Next year's walk is on 13th May. See you there!

Sandra Reardon

Show News

As well as attending the Devon, Cornwall and Dorchester Shows this year we also returned to Woodlands Leisure Park for three days. Geoff their resident falconer was really helpful as usual and spoke about the work we do here at the Trust and asked the audience to support us.

Our stand looked really good and the display boards were particularly effective. We managed to attract lots of people and our lucky dip, which was manned by one of our latest volunteers, Kirsty, was very popular with the children. We had enormous help from Jake Bakewell, a young lad who was staying at Woodlands for 2 weeks with his parents. He was extremely keen and helped on all three days, so a very special thank you to Jake. Also a big thank you to Kirsty for all her help and support.

Thank you also to volunteers Sarah and Graham Dimmock who set up and ran the Trust stand at Exmoor Wildlife Park this year. The event was yet another success and takings were significantly up on the previous year.

Lesley Ford

Wagtails

Last November on a wintry Autumn morning "Wagtails", a Parent and Toddler group, met in a yurt situated at the top of the Lennon Legacy conservation field.

Seven families came for a day of Forest School based activities. This began with taking everyone across the field to the woodlands by the river Ashburn where we foraged around for Autumn colours, then climbed back up to the yurt. Everyone was glad to sit down by the woodstove with a hot drink and snack. We then made a collage with the things we'd gathered and after listening to a story finished off with planting a crocus bulb.

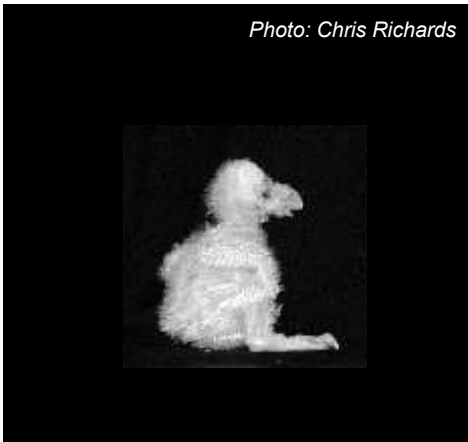
We also held a Winter Celebration in the field in December which was another magical day and included making a mobile and collage with things foraged in the woods and pomanders and bird feeders to take home.

Wagtails would like to thank the Barn Owl Trust for their help and support to ensure the smooth running of these sessions and for permission for them to be held on their land. It was a fantastic opportunity to launch the Wagtails project, giving young children and families the opportunity to engage with and explore their natural environment.

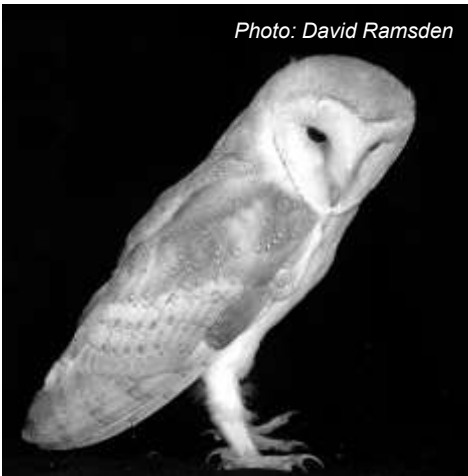
**Anna Penkala
Wagtails**

Bird News

Baley has to take centre stage in this issue's Bird News. In just nine weeks he/she turned from this:
... into this.



Baley was conceived in great secrecy



amongst the straw bales in the pond aviary; proud mum was Hazel and dad was Noel (he was the only male in the aviary). The staff here are a little undecided about Baley's gender; I'm on the side of female so she'll be a she for the rest of this article. She hatched over the Easter holidays and was called Easter Owlet for quite some time.

Baley has proved an invaluable research tool being measured, weighed and photographed every day during her growth period and fed on various different rodents in order to try and collect full sets of particular rodent bones from her pellets. It's all really useful stuff – honestly! We are also hoping that Baley will eventually be able to take over from Dusty when she retires from her post as education volunteer so regular handling and plenty of human company is very necessary to keep her sociable.

Earlier this year Barney, a fifteen year old captive bred Barn Owl, arrived from Braintree in Essex. When his owners unexpectedly had to move house they could not take Barney with them and they were concerned that, as he was such an elderly Barn Owl, he should have a peaceful old age and not be somewhere

that he would be on display. Initially we did find that Barney was hard to settle but he is now living in an aviary with Holly (a disabled wild female) and after an uncertain start they can be seen happily roosting together.

After nearly six years at the Trust Willow died a few weeks ago. She was a captive bred female that had been found in someone's garden in Yeovil in Somerset in poor condition and very hungry. She actually appeared on Channel 4 television's Pet Rescue series that was filmed soon after we took her in.

Tim (our handyman) and Graham our new volunteer handyman have been working very hard to create the illusion of a traditional agricultural building in our pond aviary in readiness for the webcam and we very much hope that by the time this issue of Feedback lands through your letterbox you will be able to log on to our brand new website and see our newly refurbished pond aviary for yourselves with the resident Barn Owls.

Back in June the mobile release aviary underwent some renovation work; it needed welding and general refurbishment - since then it has been used several times including for the release of a female Barn Owl that was found injured on a farm near Crediton in May. She had a fractured left wing.

As always we have received a great many live bird emergency calls both from the UK and abroad. A lot of the callers could be directed to our website for the information they needed but a number of wild birds have been brought in to our sanctuary. A few of the birds have unfortunately been beyond help but some of them we have been able to rehabilitate and release. A few weeks ago we received a call from a lady with a fledgling Little Owl. She had heard rustling in her chimney and three days later she went into her living room and found a Little Owl perched on the sofa. She brought it to our office and after



The Little Owl in our mobile aviary Photo: DR
a thorough check over the Little Owl was found to be uninjured but very thin. After a short time with loads of food and TLC it was ready to be released. The parents were still being seen in the area so there was no problem re-uniting it with them. We set the mobile aviary up in a nearby field and after a few days, when the Little Owl had become familiar with its surroundings, the top was opened up.

The latest news is that it keeps returning to the aviary for food; in fact it's now bringing one of its friends in for a meal as well!

And lastly, the Trust recently had a letter from Sue and Charles who farm just outside Exeter and are the owners of one of our nestbox sites. Two broods of owlets fledged successfully in 2005 and it would appear that space was at a premium as



when Sue went to her wardrobe one day, she found an unexpected visitor. The squatter was taken out of the wardrobe in the early evening and Sue and Charles had the pleasure of seeing it fly to its proper home in one of their barns.

Sue says that she is now always a little hesitant when considering a change of clothes.

Sandra Reardon
Office Manager

In Memoriam

The Trust has received a legacy from the estate of the late Dennis Lomax and donations in memory of Valerie Ann Axford and Freda Thornton

Our grateful thanks and sincere sympathies go to their families and friends

The Making of

In March this year we were approached by RDF Media who were making a series called "Wild Thing - I Love You" for Channel 4. They were looking for an idea for a Barn Owl story. We suggested a wildlife refuge on the site of a derelict barn in terminal decay.



By the end of the month we had arranged for BOT volunteer Alison Blackler to visit them in London with pictures of a proposed location. Phone calls and emails bounced back and forth throughout the summer and at the beginning of June we sent them sketches of a building that could provide homes for bats, kestrels, little owls, sparrows, stock doves, invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles and of course Barn Owls. By August planning permission was applied for and on 14th September the first film crew arrived and the foundations were laid. A local company, Riviera Stonemasons, were contracted to build the refuge and a marquee was erected to make sure the weather didn't interfere with the tight 10-day schedule. By Saturday the refuge was beginning to



take shape and more of the crew had arrived on site. Left to right Claudia De Wolff - Runner, Jack Bootle - Researcher, Phillipa Murphy - Programme Producer/



Director, David Ramsden BOT, Catherine Ross - Assistant Producer/camera. By Monday more of the crew had arrived along with presenter Bill Bailey.



The builders had put in the joists for the



first floor and filming had begun in earnest. There were 3 crews involved in the filming (25 RDF staff in total over the 10-days) and they travelled all over the county to shoot different scenes.

Bill and David outside the derelict barn discuss the project.



They then move inside with Phillipa, Nigel Dupont - camera & Kiff McManus - sound.



On Monday afternoon Bill and the crew came to Waterleat to film with Dusty the Barn Owl (below).



He also met Baley the Barn Owl and had his picture taken with her (front cover) to help promote the Trust's Adoption scheme - thanks Bill.

Above Alison Blackler - BOT volunteer (left)



with runners, Sam Turner and Claudia. The programme has 3 other presenters - eco-strategist Dusty Gedge, zoologist Sasha Norris and engineer Jem Stansfield. Below - the scaffolding is up and the builders just keep on going.



Barn Owl TV



Series producer David Johnson directs



looks on, as David (RDF) directs, Mark



Before the final touches were made David (BOT) and presenters Jem (2nd left), Bill and Dusty (right) posed for this picture - note the skip still in the background. Stone piles were left at the foot of the



Hugh Lambert - camera. By Tuesday afternoon the refuge has



Wellman - sound, Hugh - camera. By Thursday you could see how the refuge would look..... and on Saturday after more than a



refuge to provide a habitat for amphibians and reptiles. From this side you can see the provision for kestrels and holes for little owls, sparrows and other birds. On this side there is access for Barn Owls,



grown and has access for bats. On Thursday morning presenter Sasha



week of frantic activity everyone mucked in to take the scaffolding down to shoot the final scene.



bats and hole nesting birds. Small holes have been made between the stones to provide access for invertebrates. You can see here how beautifully the refuge fits into its surroundings. The final scene is due to be shot in November when Bill comes back to see if any wildlife has taken up residence by then. The series will begin on 15 October and details will be available on our website. A big thank you to everyone who participated in making this wildlife refuge a reality. □



visits the Lennon Legacy Project field. She and David (BOT) are filmed looking at good habitat for voles. Researcher Jack (left)

Photos: Alison Blackler, David Ramden BOT,

Team Talk

We're delighted to report that Caroline Lewis who worked for us briefly last year has rejoined us. Welcome back Caroline....

I initially joined the Trust last October as Publicity and Events Officer but with a busy family life was 'lured away' to an administration job that was school term time only.



Although working elsewhere, I kept in contact with The Barn Owl Trust, helping out at Newton Abbot Victorian Christmas Market with Harry, Support Officer and coming along to the Annual Grand Christmas Draw at The Rising Sun.

I soon realised that although the working hours were great, with a background in advertising, marketing and design, administration alone wasn't for me. I felt frustrated and was still coming up with publicity ideas for The Trust even though friends and family were frequently reminding me that I didn't work there anymore! I really missed the challenge of working for the Trust and kept in touch by email. I knew a desk was waiting for me and after some negotiating returned in September for 3 days a week, school term time only – fantastic!

Picking up where I left off I am keen to generate awareness and publicity for the Barn Owl Trust by writing press releases, organising and attending events and coming up with new fundraising ideas. As a charity we have to make sure every penny counts and there is a lot of work to be done. I am sure I will have many exciting and challenging times ahead! Feedback is a two-way communication, so please email me with your thoughts about what we do well and you enjoy or what you would like to see us do more of. We can't promise to act upon every email but we will read and take on board your comments. You can email me at caroline@barnowltrust.org.uk

I am really looking forward to meeting and hearing from Barn Owl Trust supporters and hopefully recruiting lots of new ones too!

Caroline Lewis

Chiara Bettega from Italy who volunteered for us for six months has now been given a six month contract to carry out research into a new conservation project.

Over the summer we had 3 students on work experience, Scott Pooley from Ivybridge Community College and Will Rawcliff from King Edward VI Community College in Totnes both spent a week here and Sarah Comont from Bicton College of

Agriculture sent us this letter after her placement...

Dear everyone at the Barn Owl Trust,

Thank you very much for letting me do two weeks work experience with the BOT. I understand it can be challenging to try and keep it interesting and show a lot of the aspects of the jobs in such a short space of time but I thoroughly enjoyed my time with you all and learned a lot and found it very worthwhile.

I asked for work experience at the Trust because I am interested in wildlife and conservation work (and work which has close contact to the species it is aiming to conserve). I've also done work experience with other organisations such as FWAG and DWT so that I can have an insight into the work of different groups. I really enjoyed my 2 weeks with the Barn Owl Trust, and I got to do a variety of different things; e.g., butterfly survey, help with research for the website, site visits and a Barn Owl release.

What I enjoyed most was helping to feed an owlet which was brought in very near to death, going out to nest sites to check for breeding owls with young and dissecting the owl pellets to find out what they have been eating. Thank you for an enjoyable and informative time.

Sarah Comont

We also had a media student from Swansea University, Alison Blackler, volunteer for a week:

I am currently doing a BA in Media studies at the University of Wales Swansea. In March I contacted the Trust about doing some work experience and in April I came to work here for four days. Having not known anything about Barn Owls before the placement I think it is true to say my knowledge has definitely been widened.



Sandra had told me that during my time here I would be helping out with the annual sponsored walk, writing press releases, thinking of fund raising ideas and generally helping out with anything that needed doing; however this was all to change. I was asked about doing some research for a television production company, who are based in London. RDF Media had contacted The Barn Owl Trust and needed someone to research a Barn Owl nesting site in a collapsing barn. The company were planning to create a programme for Channel 4 showing how a team of experts were able to tackle the problem and hopefully keep the Barn

Owls in the same area. The programme, set to be part of a nine part series, is entitled 'Wild Thing - I Love You'.

So having been a little bit apprehensive about my time at the Trust, I was even more nervous at the thought of researching for a major television production; however my worries were groundless. Having entered the office at 9am I soon rushed out with David to the site of the collapsing barn. With the Trust's digital camera at hand I began taking pictures from all angles. With hard hats on, we entered the barn and I saw my first nestbox, along with my first owl pellet! David was delighted to find fresh pellets as this was evidence that owls were roosting at the site. That afternoon I downloaded the pictures, and began to research the Barn Owl itself and its life, ready for my big day in London.

After a 5.30am start and a four and a half hour car journey I was in London at the RDF production offices. It was a nerve-racking moment and with my Barn Owl Trust sweatshirt on I felt both confident and at the same time slightly concerned about the questions I might be asked. There was no reason to fear though, the staff were really friendly and the information I had gathered the day before and the photos I had taken were just what they needed. For the rest of the day I was asked to research the Barn Owl, its appearance, breeding habits and more importantly to them, any weird and wonderful Barn Owl facts; an old English folk cure was that alcoholism was treated with an owl egg, it was also believed that if a child was given this treatment, they would gain lifetime protection against drunkenness, or so they say!

I spent the rest of week at the office doing what I thought I was going to be doing all along. With a crash course on the Trust's database from Harry I was busy researching yet again, but this time on the Trust's annual sponsored walk, writing a press release and coming up with fundraising ideas. One day was fairly chaotic as there were lots of extra bodies in who were busily sending off the latest Feedback plus a goodbye lunch with lots of tea and cakes for **Garfield Harris**, (a long-term volunteer). All in all I had a great time working at the Barn Owl Trust, I learnt lots of new things and every day was completely different.

Alison Blackler

Ali came back to help out with the walk and spent another week in September working with the Trust and RDF Media during filming for the programme. On the practical side we have been joined by some new volunteers;

Hello I'm Graham and I'm currently working as a volunteer for the Trust in a practical capacity, assisting Tim with handyman duties at Waterleat.

Team Talk

I am married with one daughter, Lucy, and two grandchildren, Ben and Maisie. I previously worked in education as a Vocational Co-ordinator at a comprehensive school and have more than 30 years experience as a mechanical engineer working for various multi-national companies encompassing production maintenance and design, boat building and servicing the Power industry with component manufacture.



I really enjoy the important and interesting work at the Trust and what it stands for. I find working here very therapeutic and satisfying. Each day I am learning more about environment issues that are so important at this time.

My interests include art, music, history, restoration, sport and using my abilities to fix and recycle things (including my Grandson's toys).

Graham Banfield

and

Hi - I'm Kirsty and I joined the Trust as a volunteer back in May of this year. Since then I've been helping to develop the Legacy Project and supporting some of the fundraising activities. In particular I've helped with running the Lucky Dip at events. Armed only with 19 years experience of working in healthcare, an enthusiasm for Barn Owls and a strong belief in the ever increasing need for conservation and education I've found it great fun. I have been amazed by the extent of the knowledge that some of the children have. Fantastic!! I have very much enjoyed the opportunities that volunteering has presented; the highlights so far being the interaction with the children and in watching Baley grow and transform from a 'scraggly' owlet (sorry Baley) into the incredible creature she is today. I'd thoroughly recommend volunteering to anyone with an interest and my thanks to all for making me feel so welcome.



Incidentally - if anyone is interested in leaving a legacy to the Trust...

Kirsty Allchin

Sarah and Graham Dimmock have also helped with events and donation boxes and Melanie Lindenthal from Berlin who was here in 2003 came back for a few days to take pictures for our new website.

We are delighted to welcome student Paul Winney to the team. Paul will be with us 3 days a week for a year.

Hello one and all.

I have just begun my time at the Barn Owl Trust for a one-year placement as part of my BSc Wildlife Conservation degree at the University of Plymouth. Having successfully completed my second year, I felt that gaining some experience within the conservation field before I return for my final year would be an opportunity too good to miss.

With my course being mainly theoretical, the placement at the Trust will show me the practical side of conservation and what it takes to conserve a species as wonderful as the Barn Owl. I hope to develop my animal monitoring skills, research techniques and learn about the natural history of the Barn Owl.



In my spare time I enjoy seeing live music, playing guitar, reading and walking through the Devon countryside; being a Londoner, I am amazed at the beauty of the South West and the amount of wildlife there is to see.

I am excited to be joining the team and I'm sure this next year will be a brilliant one.

Paul Winney

Kelly Wakeham has been with us since January and she explains her diverse roles:

I have two roles at BOT, one as an admin assistant and the other as personal assistant to David. As a result of this I get to do a great variety of different things. Earlier in the year I was lucky enough to attend one of the Barn Owl Ecology training days that the Trust runs; along with Lisa Hann I'm now organising the days. I also organise our stands at the county shows. This is a nerve-racking experience, hoping that you haven't forgotten to pack something crucial like the tent! I have managed to get out of the office a few other times as well on site visits and helping out with the bracken bashing in July.

My diverse job means that I have had to undertake varied training, from First Aid and Adobe Photoshop training to 4x4 off-road driving around the LLP one sunny morning in July. So who knows what I shall be doing next.

Kelly Wakeham

Kelly is also leading the search for new volunteers for the Trust...

We are still looking for people to volunteer as aviary cleaners. Would you or anyone you know be interested in coming along once a week or every fortnight for a few hours to clean the owls' aviaries? We provide training, equipment, waterproofs and tea or coffee. If you don't mind getting your hands dirty and being outside it is a wonderful opportunity to spend time in close proximity to owls, and learn a little about their ecology and methods of

conservation. This is a good job for two people so why not do it with a friend.

Volunteers are also needed to help on our stand at events. If you are a 'people' person and enjoy a good day out then this might be just the thing for you. The role would involve assisting with sales, looking after the Lucky Dip and possibly face painting (training will be given). The main summer season of events are now over, but we hope to have some dates leading up to Christmas. Having a BOT presence at local events is a really good way of lifting our profile and for raising funds. However, without dedicated volunteers it is not possible to attend as many events as we would like.

and finally, we are really proud of Harry who completed the London Marathon this year. Well done Harry (Eds).

In February 2004 my mother sadly died from lymphatic cancer after many years fighting the disease and in 2006 I secured a place to run in the London Marathon for the Lymphoma Association. I was overjoyed but at the same time petrified!

After a practice run I was less than optimistic of achieving a decent time but at least I knew I could go the distance.

It took forty-five minutes of walking to get to the start but once I was off I enjoyed every second. The atmosphere and support kept me bounding along and I crossed the finish line in 4 hours 9 minutes. I raised over £3,000 for the Lymphoma Association which made the painful training worthwhile.

I have applied through the ballot for the 2007 London Marathon and if I secure a place I will be raising funds for The Barn Owl Trust - you never know I may even do it dressed as a Barn Owl!!

Harry Davies



Around and About ..

In this issue of Around and About we visit Dorset and hear about the work of Jason Fathers who is the Project Officer for the Chalk & Hawks Project, an EU funded Conservation / Wildlife Tourism initiative which started in 2003 to benefit nature conservation, local people and visitors to the Chalk and Cheese Area in Dorset.

The Chalk & Hawks Project is a non-profit making organisation working with local people to help conserve Dorset's wildlife, especially birds of prey such as Barn Owls and Kestrels which are in decline. They offer advice to farmers and landowners on bird of prey conservation and habitat management, and they provide boxes in which birds can roost and nest. Jason writes:

As long as I can remember I have had a keen interest in wildlife and birds of prey have held a particular fascination for me ever since I identified my first kestrel hovering at the side of a road. My father instilled this interest in me at an early age, as I was his right-hand-boy tending to racing pigeons at five years old. I'm some 33 years older now but that childhood excitement for wildlife is still there.

At the age of 30 I made a career changing decision to study for a degree in Wildlife Management (Sparsholt College Hampshire) in the hope of making my passion my profession. So far the plan seems to be working! The Chalk & Hawks Project revolves around delivering guided wildlife walks and daylong tours in the rural heartland of Dorset. We use innovative wildlife watching techniques (video camera technology) and advertise our events through countryside B&B, hotels etc. hoping to attract tourists and therefore money into the rural economy.

Much of my present conservation work with Barn Owls, kestrels and other birds of prey stems from my degree dissertation. I studied the diets of kestrels and little owls in lowland farmland trying to see if there was much competition between the species. My conclusions were there was very little and these species could happily co-exist. My dissertation fieldwork brought me into contact with several Barn Owl nesting sites and so I became keen on Barn Owl conservation work.



Little owl

All photos supplied by Jason



A brood of Dorset Barn Owls

Back in Dorset with a BSc and a ringing permit I joined the Dorset Owl & Hawk Group (DOHG) that had recently begun coordinating volunteers wishing to help Barn Owls and Kestrels. Gaining knowledge, experience and advice from the Barn Owl Trust, DOHG set about holding nest box workshops and installing and monitoring boxes. To date DOHG have installed some 150 Barn Owl boxes and about 100 kestrel boxes.

By monitoring the majority of these boxes with the help of volunteers I am able to get a good sense of the breeding performance of particular species. The last two summers have been so contrasting in the breeding performances of Barn Owls and kestrels. In Dorset the 2005 breeding season began very early and was highly productive. I monitored and ringed several healthy broods of six Barn Owls as well as above average broods of kestrel and buzzard. I knew of one well-developed brood of 7 Barn Owl chicks in Hampshire.

The 2006 breeding season has been completely different. At the beginning of June most of the traditional Barn Owl breeding sites I monitor were either not occupied or the resident pairs had not begun breeding. Some pairs have made a late attempt at breeding but these have not been very productive. Kestrels too have had a poor breeding season in that at least half of the active kestrels boxes have had their clutches abandoned by the female midway through incubation. There must be a real shortage of prey items this year.

The Chalk & Hawks Project continues the work of DOHG gaining contacts for wildlife walks and tours. Through the use of CCTV technology the project is able to show people wildlife close-up without disturbing it. For example we have used cameras to watch and film, nesting buzzard, kestrel, sparrowhawk and blue and great tit (both nesting and feeding). Recently we have had success filming badgers above and below ground (in an artificial sett) and we even have a camera inside a honey bee hive!

Over the last three years, working for the Chalk & Hawks Project, I have experienced a steep learning curve, as I do not have an electronics background. However, I have come to enjoy the challenge of filming particular species and being able to share the results with other people is very rewarding.

2005 was particularly notable for filming raptors for two reasons, I managed to film a pair of breeding hobbies at their nest over the entire breeding season and I captured on film, for probably the first time ever, the successful breeding of a polygamous group of sparrowhawks (one male and two females). 2006 will also be remembered for capturing footage of the secret world of some of Dorset's otters.

Breeding Hobbies

Of all the birds of prey I work with the hobby holds the greatest fascination for me. Having installed several artificial nesting baskets for hobbies across Dorset in the winter of 2004/2005 I set about trying to film a breeding pair. I installed a camera on one of the baskets at the beginning of the season, before the expected pair returned to the site where they had bred for the previous two years. On May 12th I saw the pair for the first time, back on territory having seemingly arrived together. Besides my basket there were three or four other old nests they could have chosen amongst the tree stand so a certain amount of luck was involved. I wanted to avoid installing a camera later in the breeding process. On June 11th I connected to the camera cable at a point 200m from the basket and there was a live image of the female sitting on 2 eggs. This was a very 'YES' moment. I continued to film the breeding attempt until all three eggs laid had turned into chicks and fledged from the nest. I was able to create a very accurate Nest Record Card and gather some wonderful footage.



As there are still considerable gaps in our knowledge of hobbies I am intending to continue studying these birds in Dorset and Hampshire by installing more baskets and monitoring the breeding pairs. I hope to learn more about adult site faithfulness,



Female hobby feeding 3 chicks

... visits Dorset

pair monogamy and ultimately where British hobbies spend their winters!

Polygamous Sparrowhawks

Polygamy in sparrowhawks is very rare, Ian Newton (1986) recording it in less than 1% of all sparrow hawks in Britain. It is generally thought that this unusual breeding situation arises when there is a



2 female sparrowhawks and their young

shortage of males in a given area (most probable in this case) or when a particular male dominates large areas of prime breeding habitat (as is frequent in some harrier species).

I installed a camera at this sparrowhawk nest and was most surprised to see two ♀ females incubating the six eggs. As I gathered more video footage of this nest it became evident there were two females and one male in attendance at the nest. The evidence suggested both females laid three eggs each in the nest, which they both incubated (simultaneously) then co-operated in feeding the chicks.

Recycle & Reuse

Our cartridge-recycling scheme continues to bring in money and this has increased now that it is publicised on our web site, over £1,000 since 2003 for something that would otherwise go in the bin. We now have recycling points in three Job centres in West London and a solicitors in Paignton. Can you set up another one?

Those of you who are collecting stamps for us can now send them directly to the company that buys them, please contact me for details of what they will pay us for.

A number of details and links to recycling information will be on our new web site. For any supporters who are interested in recycling it should be well worth a look.

Thank you all for your continued support and for helping in a small way to preserve our planet's dwindling resources.

Pete Webb

Coincidentally, all of the five chicks that fledged were male. Did this sex ratio bias come about in order to redress the balance within the environment?

Otters

In partnership with the Environment Agency, and the Dorset Otter Group we have been able to obtain some amazing images of wild otters as they pass under Walford Mill in East Dorset. A motion detecting system triggers a recording device when the animals move in front of the camera. Some of the interactions have been compelling viewing.

2007 is looking promising as we hope to add long-eared owl, peregrine and red squirrel to the list of species filmed, and shared. It's a tough job I know but someone has to do it.

All in all the last three years with the Chalk & Hawks Project have been an amazing experience, any excuse to climb a tree...long may it last!

Jason Fathers
Project Officer

The Chalk & Hawks Project

You can view short video clips of the sparrow hawks and hobbies at the Chalk & Hawks website and other clips (otters) at the second website address:

www.chalkandhawks.org.uk
www.falconsflight.org.uk
Contact Jason by email at:
jason@chalkandhawks.org.uk



Jason Fathers - Project Officer

Other Owl News

Hi BOT,

We have just come back from our double African expedition (Kalahari Desert and Cape Town where we were white shark cage diving). We really had a wonderful time.

Many, many owls. Sadly I came across an unusually high owl road mortality on South African roads: Marsh Owls and Spotted Eagle Owls mainly. I found more than 15 owls in less than 300km.

I also found a Barn Owl nest in the desert in a mice plague area, simply amazing! The owls were perching just 1m from my head taking no notice of me. We saw very well and even photographed Pearl Spotted, Marsh, White Faced, Cape Eagle and Spotted Eagle owls. Such an astonishing owl experience!

Iñigo Farjardo
Spain



Pearl spotted owl

Photo: Iñigo Farjardo

BOT visits Hungary

In February 2004 a 23-year-old PhD student visited us from Hungary, Ákos Klein was studying the Barn Owl at Eötvös University in Budapest and working for the Hungarian Barn Owl Conservation Foundation as a volunteer. After his visit we featured the work of the Hungarian Barn Owl Conservation Foundation in Feedback (31). When Ákos left he extended an invitation for us to visit him in Hungary and see their work at first hand, but we never actually expected to get there - its funny how things work out. Earlier this year David was asked to present a paper on the Major Road Research Project at the 1st European Congress of Conservation Biology, which was being held in Hungary. After consultation with the Trustees it was decided that it would be an excellent opportunity to network with other organisations and individuals throughout Europe and indeed the world and to raise awareness of road mortality. So we contacted Ákos, who was also presenting a paper and arranged to stay on with him after the congress and see Hungarian Barn Owl conservation at first hand.

The congress ran between the 22nd and 26th August and during the week we sat in on some interesting symposiums on the consequences of GM plants, science and policy in conservation and conservation and agriculture. Luckily for us the conference language was English so we could understand all the presentations. We met up with delegates from other UK conservation groups as well as having the opportunity to meet and talk with folk in other fields and from other countries. The owl symposium was on the 26th when there were 9 presentations. David's talk generated a good number of questions from the audience. Chris Sperring from the Hawk & Owl Trust gave a presentation about Long Eared Owl surveying with



Ákos climbing in a church tower above the bells - the owls nest on the platform above him

volunteers, Jenny Holden from the World Owl Trust talked about Barn Owls in her study area in Cumbria, and Ákos talked about the use of nestboxes for Barn Owls in church towers in Hungary. There were also speakers from Germany, Finland and Spain. The conference hotel was home to a large colony of nocturnal bats so every evening you could see them flying about and in the daytime we could hear the young chirruping.

After the congress we spent 5 days travelling around Hungary with Ákos and seeing the countryside. Hungary has mountains to the north, the highest just over 1,000 metres, but the central area is mainly flat with quite a lot of wetland in the areas we visited. There is a population of 10.2 million, 2 million of whom live in Budapest. Away from Budapest the habitat became really diverse, lots of wild flowers, surprisingly no fences or hedges, small flocks of sheep managed by shepherds and lots of small areas of crops (loads of sunflowers) interspersed with pasture.

One of the reasons for the decline of Barn Owls in Hungary is the shortage of nest sites caused by their exclusion from church towers. Pigeons are a real problem in the towers and with the mechanisation of church bells most towers were wired up to keep them out, thereby excluding the owls too. The Foundation's main project is to provide access into a dark nest space (which the pigeons won't use). We visited 4 different Barn Owl sites, 2 in church towers that were still in use, one in a derelict tower and one in a water tower on an old Russian barracks very close to the Serbian border where we saw a brood of owlets being ringed. Hungarian Barn Owls seem to select much higher nest sites than their British counterparts; it wasn't unusual to find them 120' above the ground. Fortunately for Barn Owl conservation, health and safety regulations don't seem to have hit Hungary yet.

It was a privilege to have the opportunity to visit Hungary and we hope to go back one day. There is a wealth of wildlife; as well as Barn Owls we watched rollers on telegraph wires, saw a wealth of wild flowers and insects including an amazing stripy spider, which if you're daft enough to touch, can give you a nasty bite. We saw a red footed falcon, loads of great egrets, black and white storks, great bustards, marsh harriers, a saker falcon, black kite and hundreds of frogs and we found a freshly killed squacco heron on the side of the road. We also caught and ringed a little owl, I had a tree frog land on the back of my neck and had an amazing close encounter with a grey heron.

Hungary joined the European Union in 2004 and is now starting to receive money to "develop" the country. Hopefully the changes in the EU agricultural policy, which now include "preserving our rural



Tyto alba guttata - the Hungarian Barn Owl - much darker than its British cousin *Tyto alba alba*

heritage and preservation of the environment", will mean that these developments avoid intensification and take account of the incredible diversity of the countryside.

Ákos is currently planning an Eco-tourist package to help fund the Foundations work. Beginning next year he is hoping to provide an opportunity for people who would like to see the country with a local guide. If you are interested in more information we can put you in touch with him. □



A brood of six owlets and the water tower they hatched in
Photos: Frances Ramsden

Focus on Friends



Barbara & Richard with their owlets
All photos supplied

Richard and Barbara Barker became Friends of the Trust in 1998, shortly before they moved full time to Devon. Richard was still working in the software industry and travelling the world on business. Barbara had been working as a technical editor and was thoroughly fed up with sitting at a computer most of the day. As they had both been involved in practical conservation for many years and their 3 children had all left home (well, just about) it seemed a good time for a radical change. They bought part of an old farm with a lot of very run-down but potentially attractive stone buildings. So Barbara started farming and Richard carried on working and travelling for a few more years to fund the restoration. When the first plans for building work were being drawn up they discovered an old record of Barn Owls having nested in one of the derelict buildings (an old gate lodge) and so began their association with the Trust.

A Barn Owl space was built into the roof of the lodge but sadly it has only ever been used by pigeons. The swallows checked it out at first but decided they preferred nesting under the roof overhang. Over the next few years modern barns were built and old barns repaired all with due consideration for Barn Owls. 3 'tea chests' were put up and regular checks were made for evidence of owls.

At first there were a few pellets found and a few sightings of birds and then success. In 2001, towards the end of the wonderful summer that followed the horrors of the Foot and Mouth outbreak, David (from the BOT) found 3 owlets in the first box put up. The next year everyone on the farm was disappointed when there was no sign of breeding despite lots of sightings of owls during the spring. That year the sheep had

been lambed in some old barns close to the farmhouse and whenever Richard or Barbara went out to check during the night an owl was nearly always seen nearby.

That year the Trust ran a big event for 100 primary school children – maybe they would have to fake the evidence of owls! A second box had been put up in the modern barn where the children were going to have their lunch and since Fowlescombe is a livestock farm this area had been cleaned so thoroughly that you could have eaten your dinner off the ground – if the owls hadn't splatted over it the night before. It was then discovered, to everyone's amazement, the owls had moved to the noisiest part of the farm and they raised 4 owlets that year. Owls continued to raise broods for the next few years although there were a few changes of partner. Sadly the owls did not breed on the farm this year - 2006.

In the first few years 10 acres of new broad-leaved woodland were planted and the farming regime became less intensive.



This meant there was much more rough grassland suitable for Barn Owls and lots of other wildlife. The farm is now much larger and changing to organic management means much of the more modern grassland is reverting to a more tussocky, species-rich sward, more like the unimproved fields that still exist on site.

Fowlescombe is a tapestry of grasslands, old and new woodlands, miles of hedges, ponds, little streams and not a few ruins. It is home to

a large pedigree herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle and a few Devon Ruby Reds, flocks of curious horned rare-breed sheep, Manx Loaghtan and Hebridean, a few chickens, 2 peacocks and lots of wildlife. The food for the farm stock is produced on the farm.

The barns where the sheep were lambed in 2002 have been turned into a couple of holiday cottages and an educational centre which schools and other



The Manx sheep checkout the camera

groups can use as a home base on farm visits or for training events. Richard and Barbara have both been teachers in the past so are very keen on educational access on the farm. Appropriately the first group to use the facilities was the Barn Owl Trust, with a training day for ecologists in September 2005. It was even better when they came again in February and the builders had actually finished everything!

The life style had certainly changed, well almost. Richard is a full time farmer but still manages to fit in some website work. His favourite task on the farm is probably getting stuck in to groundworks with the digger and JCB, although working the sheep with his sheepdogs is a close second. Barbara is also a full time farmer but seems to be spending a lot of hours on the computer again, doing all the paperwork that goes with farming, not to mention the accounts. Her favourite task on the farm is lambing and working with the sheep.

More picture of Fowlescombe, its owls and animals can be seen on-line. Richard and Barbara can be contacted on (01548) 821000 or via their web site: www.fowlescombe.com □



Fowlescombe valley in November

Thanks and Things

Thank you very much to everyone who has supported us since the last issue of Feedback. We have been delighted to receive a shovel from Rob Hamer, a multimeter from Linda Tilbury, and from Mary Owlet ten sheets of commemorative stamps; thanks to them and all those other people who have donated old mobile phones, empty inkjet cartridges and used commemorative stamps, we are still collecting them.

Very special thanks must go to Ian Saunders of Wildplant Design who very generously donated end of line children's t-shirts and also provided us with children's and adults sweatshirts and adult polo shirts at greatly reduced prices. Thank you also to Paul Rendell of Dartmoor News for a Gazebo (first outing at the sponsored walk).

Mr Davies (Harry's dad) gave us a pair of barn doors, David Vandervlist an old farm gate, Mr Gale old corrugated iron and Tom & Yvonne Byles old wood, all of which is now installed in the webcam aviary, giving a bit of authenticity to the traditional barn setting. Margaret and Derrick Crocker donated a wonderful traditional wicker picnic hamper as a raffle

prize at the walk and Mrs Brown gave us a set of Wedgwood owl plates by local artist Dick Twinney as a prize for our Grand Draw in December. We mustn't forget volunteers Pat and Jenny Ford who regularly give us their time throughout the year and also bought us a rather splendid electric kettle and finally all the other people who give so generously of their time to help us out in so many ways including once again all those businesses who very kindly supported the walk this year.

Thank you all!

If you have any of the following items surplus to requirements we can give them a good home and we'd be extremely grateful:

- Heavy duty rotary cutter/guillotine
- Hardwearing carpeting for office
- Staple gun
- Tractor
- Wild bird food
- Wood for making nestboxes (9mm softwood ply, 25mm x 50mm batten)
- A4 and A3 Recycled paper and card both coloured and white
- Photographic quality colour inkjet

- printer
- Box trailer
- Telephone headphones
- Inkjet cartridges (black and colour) for HP Deskjet 3820 and HP Deskjet 930C
- Lawn rakes
- Pitchfork
- Postage stamps (both new and commemorative)
- Office chairs (they must meet H & S specifications)
- Office fan

- Outdoor brooms

Wild Barn Owl Pellets

If you are lucky enough to have wild Barn Owls at your site you can help the Trust by collecting their pellets for us.

Schools request hundreds of Barn Owl pellets from the Trust every year and demand is currently outstripping our supply. Please call if you can help or would like more information.



Tail Piece

It was really quite heartbreaking visiting our annual monitoring sites earlier in the year to find virtually no breeding and, even worse, often no recent signs of Barn Owls; quite a blow after nearly 20 years of conservation work. At times like this you might begin to wonder if it's all been a waste of time, but then you just need to consider how much worse it would be if the population hadn't improved because of projects like the Barn Owl schemes, nestboxing and habitat advice. At least now there is much more awareness of the birds and more account taken of their needs. It's also possible that the unpredictability of the seasons and the extreme weather conditions that are so bad for Barn Owls will make the 'powers that be' take some real measures to combat global warming.

It might have been a bad year for Barn Owls but it has been great for fruit and flowers. Anyone visiting the office at the moment is likely to be hit by the abundant crop of acorns falling from the trees and we have an amazing display of sunflowers that have sprouted from the wild bird food. The hedgerow berries have been spectacular and will hopefully help the small mammals, and therefore the remaining Barn Owls get through the winter, so there is an up side.

I was pleased to hear that Richard Branson had announced that Virgin Atlantic will spend \$30 billion dollars over the next 10 years looking at ways to reduce CO2 emissions from airlines; wouldn't it be great if every large company invested some of their profits in doing the same. With enough investment and goodwill I'm sure that environmentally friendly and more sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels could be found. You may have read in this issue that the BOT is converting its diesel vehicles to Bio-Fuel and we already use recycled products wherever possible. I was horrified, when I was in a huge Tesco recently, to discover that there was not one brand of recycled loo paper in the vast range on display. There was a selection large enough to account for a small woodland and personally, I can't understand how anyone can justify cutting down trees simply to provide virgin paper for wiping bottoms when there are perfectly acceptable recycled alternatives.

People power is an amazing thing and if enough of us express our concern for the environment in the way we live and spend our money, politicians and industry will have to take notice. If you travel frequently by car (who doesn't these

days) or fly anywhere, you can off-set your carbon emissions by subscribing to a climate neutral scheme. For instance, our emissions to fly to Hungary and back were 0.74 tonnes of CO₂ and the cost to offset this was £ 5.52. We can all do our bit to help reduce carbon emissions, just remembering to switch off lights, buying energy efficient appliances and local produce (rather than things that travel miles to reach us) and of course, demanding your local supermarket stocks recycled loo paper, can make a difference.

Thank you for supporting the Barn Owl Trust and for everything you do to help conserve our wonder-filled natural world. Make sure you take the time to get "out there" every now and again and give yourself the opportunity to refresh your spirit – it really does help to put our hectic lifestyles and society in perspective.

Together we can make a world of difference.

Frances Ramsden