

Issue Number 42 - Autumn 2009

FEEDBACK



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Reg Charity: No 299 835



* A Little Owl was one of the first birds to be released from our new mobile aviary

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Cover Photo:

Little Owl release – Matthew Twiggs

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

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Send your contributions - news, letters, pictures and information to:

Feedback, Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU

*Email: feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk
Website: www.barnowltrust.org.uk*

Join us for our annual
Winter Work Party
on
Saturday 5th December
10.00am - 4.00pm

This is an opportunity to see the Lennon Legacy Project field and help us to manage the land.

You need to bring suitable clothing and a packed lunch.

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

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Welcome to Feedback - we were delighted to see those of you who made it to the rescheduled 21st Birthday Celebration (page 3) and really sorry that so many of you who booked for the first date couldn't make it. Fortunately the weather was good second time around. Thank you to everyone who sent donations or raised sponsorship for doing the Walk.

It's been a busy few months here at the Trust and as usual they've sped past. In this issue we bring you news of the 2009 breeding season (page 5) and the Westmoor Scheme (page 11) where we have been directing most of our practical conservation work. Live owl emergency calls to our hot-line and casualties (see *Bird news* page 6) have also been keeping us busy. Having the new Owl Hospital (page 12) and the new release aviaries (page 4) this year has been brilliant, making caring for the birds easier and the "wait for release" shorter.

We've been developing our international links with a radio tracking study in Hungary and at home (pages 8 - 9), and haven't had room to tell you about David's (our Head of Conservation) trip to Portugal where he gave a presentation and ran a training session for the University of Evora.

Even if you don't like computers, we recommend you get someone to show you the Trust's brand new 3 minute promotional video on our website (page 5). We think it's great. Made for the Trust by Hilltribe Productions, this very short film gives a potted history of the Trust and its work and has received loads of very positive feedback. We hope that this will help to promote our work and increase our supporter base.

Hilltribe Productions have also produced our new 'Wings of Change' DVD (page 13) which will have its first screening at our AGM in October.

This year once again, our nestcam (page 10) was a great success, despite lots of technical problems and expense early in the season; the owls performed brilliantly rearing a brood of 3 bringing a great deal of pleasure to people all over the world in the process.

Megan and Hugo, the heroes of our Sponsored Dog Challenge, survived the event despite the appalling weather and even quite enjoyed the attention and the biscuits. See the item on page 15 to find out how they got on and how much they raised for the Trust. A big thank you to all of you who sponsored them.

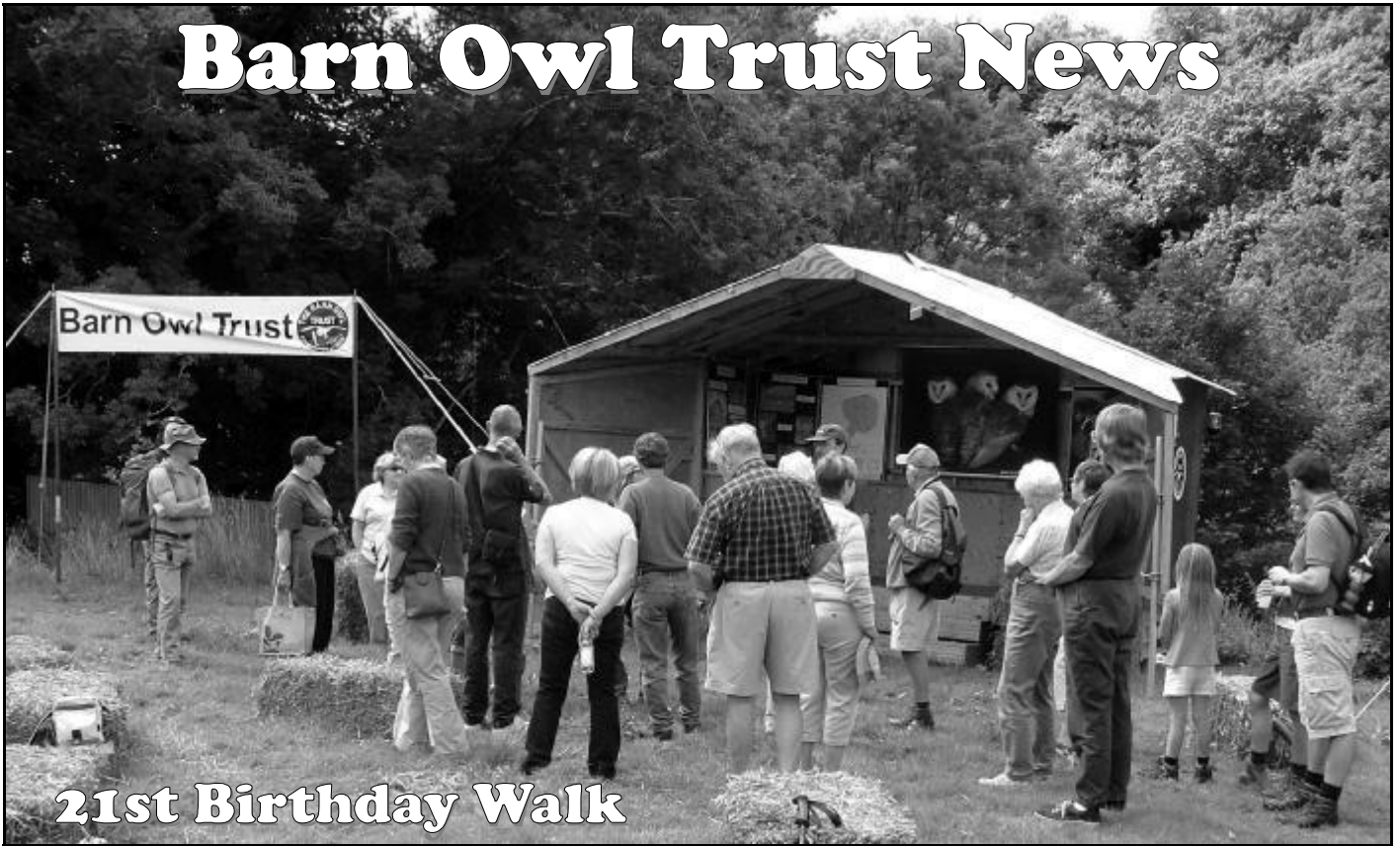
We've had a couple of staff leave during this period: Carole (admin adoptions) is leaving her part-time role here for a full-time job and Rosa (David's PA) is going back to university to finish her degree. Her post is advertised on our website. Jasmin, who built our birdroom and mobile aviaries is now a permanent part-time member of staff. Working alongside handyman Tim, she provides practical support 2 days a week and is currently building outdoor nestboxes which can be purchased from our website. Jackie has settled in well as Office Manager and thankfully, although now retired, Sandra hasn't completely managed to escape us and is still part of the Feedback editorial team. We hope you like the slightly new look we've given this issue.

We reported in the last issue that we expected to make a loss in the last financial year. Well we were right. Fortunately due to grants, donations and legacies it wasn't as big as it might have been, -£40,068. Unfortunately we expect another even larger loss this year. The bottom line is that we don't generate enough regular income to keep pace with expenditure and it's the unpredictable income, from donations, one-off grants and legacies that have allowed us to be able to cope with these shortfalls. Hence the need for the promotional video.

Thank you for your support and for all your feedback; we really appreciate it and hope you enjoy catching up on our news in this issue.

Eds: Frances & Sandra

Barn Owl Trust News



21st Birthday Walk

After loads of preparation, two days before the date set for our 21st Birthday Party in July, we had to cancel. The persistent rain meant that the ground conditions in the field were awful. Staff spent the day contacting the 100+ people who had confirmed attendance, letting them know that a smaller, low key event would be organised. Fortunately only a couple of people turned up without contacting us.

On the 8th August we held a guided walk and picnic for the 20+ folk who could make the new date. The sky was blue and the sun shone. Most of the flowers were over but there was the remains of a spectacular show of mullein plants in Forde Orchard where we had the picnic. On the walk, our guests saw several species of butterfly including a few Marbled Whites that had survived the rain in July. There were also sightings of ☉

4-WD Owl Aid

After two years of searching for funds we are delighted to announce that we have been able to replace our oldest vehicle with a brand-spanking new 4-wheel drive.

Our old Suzuki Vitara was 11 years old and had been funded by a grant in 1999. It was our only petrol vehicle and although it was the smallest, it was the most expensive to run, hence the need to replace it.

Now, thanks to support from the Gwen Rees Will Trust for Animal Welfare and other charitable trusts, we are the proud owners of a 5-door Suzuki SX4; perfect for towing the mobile aviary and our other off-road work. With a manufacturer's fuel consumption estimate of 53 miles per gallon compared with 22 mpg for the Vitara, this should help to reduce our motoring costs and our carbon emissions; the vehicle will eventually be converted to run on recycled vegetable oil..

We also had to replace our VW Caddy van during the year following an accident; fortunately no-one was hurt. Thanks to grant support from the Roger Vere Foundation and the Marjorie Coote Animal Charity Fund we were able to replace it fairly quickly with an identical second-hand vehicle. ☉

Our visitors gather in Forde Orchard before the walk

Photo: Frances Ramsden

buzzards overhead and good views of a kestrel on the telegraph pole in Kiln Close. Some people were also lucky enough to see a Noctual Bat as it swooped into the barn when they walked past.

Although it was disappointing to have had to cancel the Party, everyone who turned up in August had a good time and it was great to catch up with old Friends and ex-staff and volunteers.

A big thank you to those who joined us on the day and to the people who collected sponsorship for their walk or made a 21st Birthday donation. Thank you for your support. ☉



In September Jenny Dunford and other trustees from the Gwen Rees Will Trust for Animal Welfare visited the BOT to see our work and to hand over the new vehicle to Conservation Officer Matthew. The Suzuki is hitched up to one of our new mobile aviaries ready to go off to a release site with a recovered casualty.

Photo: Frances Ramsden

New mobile aviaries fly into use



Two new mobile release aviaries hit the road this summer just in time to deal with the influx of juvenile birds brought to us for care during the breeding season. The two new aviaries were built to take over from our old and unique aviary built in 1997.

We have made significant improvements and modifications to the original design. Galvanised steel panels provide areas of protection from the elements and prevent animals such as cats and squirrels entering the aviary and stealing the owl's food. Drawing upon our experience of using the original mobile aviary, David (Head of Conservation) drew up plans for the improved design.

The chassis for the two new mobile aviaries were purchased in kit form from a company called Alko in Germany and assembled here on site. A representative from Alko travelled to Devon from the Midlands to help us put the first chassis together. The second was put together by Jasmin, our Handywoman. She then went on to build both the aviaries.

They are fairly large structures, 6ft x 12ft and 7.5ft high, with roofs which can be opened easily and quietly, facilitating release. There are nestboxes and another small box to hide the food provided for the owls from other creatures. Therefore, when the aviary is open only the bird being released knows where the food is.

As 49% of the injured owls received by the Trust recover well enough to be released, these mobile aviaries are a vital piece of equipment for getting Barn Owls and other owl species back into the wild.

When a bird is deemed fit enough for release a decision is made on the best release method to use. We take into consideration the species, age, experience, original finding circumstance, time spent in captivity, habitat requirements, time of year and weather

forecast. A gradual supported release is the preferred and most successful method and the mobile aviary is the perfect tool for this, providing the opportunity for the bird to become familiar with the area of release whilst it is still in captivity.



Photos: Jasmin Ramsden

The aviary houses one or more owls and can be towed to any accessible release location. By far the best place to release an adult bird is within its own home range or territory and the best method is a gradual release from a top-opening aviary. For birds that have never been independent (young birds that don't need to be returned to a particular area) the mobile aviary can be taken to an area of ideal habitat. The mobile aviary allows us to use the best method in the best place for each owl.

After two or three weeks at the release site, depending on the weather, the top of the aviary is locked into the open position allowing the bird(s) to come and go at will. The aim is for the aviary top to be opened without the bird flying out, so that it is able to leave in its own time in a relaxed manner. This helps to maximise the chances of a pattern of return for food being established. After release food continues to be provided for as long as the owl takes it.

Both aviaries were pressed into service immediately upon completion and we haven't yet managed to retire the old one as we have a queue of birds waiting for release.

A really big thank you from the Owls to the charities that supported this project. Ø

Nestbox workshop

Between 1990 and 2006 the Trust ran nestbox workshops in liaison with various organisations throughout South West England. One or two workshops a year provided the opportunity for participants to learn about Barn Owls and to build their own (indoor) nestbox to take home and erect. Now, after a three year break due to pressure of other work, we are delighted to be running a one day workshop in the South Hams district of Devon in liaison with Devon Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG).

The day includes a farm visit to see boxes erected in both modern and traditional agricultural buildings. If you are interested in attending the date is

Saturday 7th November 2009 between 10.30am and 4.30pm. It costs £10 per person or £20 per family to attend. This covers the materials to transform a tea-chest into a desirable Barn Owl residence, one nestbox per family, and tea and coffee throughout the day. There is a possibility of free places for the farming community. Please note that the workshop is not particularly suitable for young children.

A ploughman's lunch is available at £4.50 per person.

Booking is essential. Please contact the office for more details. ☎



Watch our three minute video



Visit the Trust's website www.barnowltrust.org.uk to see our brand new promotional video. In just three minutes you can see some stunning images and get a really good idea of what we do and why.

Made for the Trust by Hilltribe, the producers of our new, about to be launched 'Wings of Change' DVD, the video went live at the beginning of September and the feedback has been great. "Fab, enthralling, Wow! Absolutely fantastic!" are just a few of the comments we've had. Jenny Ford, a long-term supporter said, "It brought tears to my eyes when I watched it. It really shows what the Trust is all about". ☎

☎Egg-laid Date (FED) of 17th April, with nesting occupancy rates at approximately 50%.

Of the majority of the 76 AMSITES that we checked throughout Devon this year, there was a noticeable north/south divide during the early part of the season. Average brood size in June for the area roughly north of an east/west line following the A30 was 3.25 (11 sites with nesting). All these sites had owlets of at least 3 weeks old (the minimum ringable age), indicating a roughly average or earlier than average FED. Only 3 further sites north of the A30 required returns, as females there were still on eggs.

To the south, it was a different story. With only 6 sites with owlets old enough to be ringed, the average brood size was 1.5. However, a further 9 sites were at various stages of nesting, and these would need returns in the forthcoming weeks to catch the owlets at the right age for ringing. Clearly, nesting was later than average and in many cases significantly later.

Furthermore, during recent returns to these more southerly sites, mortality was very much in evidence, with a number having dead owlets in the nestboxes. The estimated time of death seemed to coincide with the start of the inclement weather at the beginning of July. Mortality was presumably linked to food shortages caused by adults not being able to forage in the poor weather.

Of course, this may also have been the case further north, but for the most part we were unable to recheck ringed broods so their fate is largely unknown unless owlets are found in the future.

Despite these rather disappointing set-backs, the 2009 breeding season has been better than might have been expected after such a cold winter. Overall it's been a positive experience to have found that at approximately 41% of sites, nesting was at least attempted, with a mean brood size of 2.

Postscript: Here at Waterleat we recorded 27 days with rain (133.2mm) in July 2009. This compares with 19 days (147.6mm) in 2008, and 22 days (90.7mm) in 2007. ☎



2009 breeding season

Office Manager Jackie Atkinson meets her first young Barn Owl on a ringing visit
Photo: Frances Ramsden

This year's breeding season has been particularly interesting, especially in terms of the regional variation within the county that was so apparent in June, and the impact of the inclement weather in July.

Data from Annual Monitoring Sites (AMSITES) collected by the Barn Owl Trust over the period 1990-2006 showed an average brood size of 2.9 for the south west of England, and a First ☎



Bird news

One of the two young Little Owls that arrived at the Trust this summer Photo: Maxine Chavner

In March a young female Barn Owl that had been with us since the beginning of December was taken to a lovely location for release. She was the last bird to use our original release aviary (see story on Page 4 about our new mobile aviaries). This bird was a very late 'fallen owlet' and had been picked up by the RSPCA who found that the nest was far too inaccessible to replace the bird. Since the release, local people have recorded sightings of a Barn Owl and it would be great to think that it was "our" bird that they were seeing.

By July an adult male Barn Owl that was brought to the Trust with a wing injury before Christmas was at last ready for release. This was the first Barn Owl to use one of the new mobile aviaries. The aviary was towed to a field near to where the bird was found and after a few weeks to get acclimatised to the area again, the top of the aviary was lifted and the owl released back into its home range. Food continued to be provided in the aviary for the bird, giving it more time to become independent. It is still being regularly seen at the site.

A very young owlet was 'fostered in' to a wild nest with similar aged Barn Owls. As Barn Owls can't count this method works very well. This bird's finding circumstances were very vague; it was taken into a vets and the only information that we had was that it had been found in some woods. This is unusual, as Barn Owls don't nest in woods like Tawny Owls do. They are farmland birds and nest in barns, old buildings and hollow trees in hedges. The owlet was popped into a nest where the adults took on the care of this new addition to their family seemingly without even noticing. The 'fostering in' method was ideal for this youngster.

Two other owlets, both very emaciated on arrival unfortunately did not survive despite our best efforts.

A nestling Tawny Owl collected from West Moor Veterinary Centre had been found in a garden; there was no sign of the adults or the nest. We passed it to Joanna Vinson who was one of our founding trustees in 1988. She had similar aged Tawnies so that it could be raised and released with them. Another young Tawny Owl, also found in a garden, was checked over by a vet who could find no injuries. It was not possible to return this owlet to its nest as it was far too high and each time it was

placed in the tree where the nest was crows mobbed it. This bird was also passed on to Joanna.

An adult Tawny Owl that was seen in a hedge for three days came to Waterleat for treatment. We suspected this bird had been released following a period in captivity although it wasn't fitted with an identifying ring. After spending some time in our new hospital under a heat lamp and being fed it too was again passed on.

Another Tawny Owl that had been hit by a car on the M5 was treated in our new Owl Hospital. It was initially very poorly, subdued and reluctant to feed. After some tender loving care it suddenly became very feisty and was later successfully released.

A beautiful buzzard that had been hit by a car was in such a bad state that the only humane thing to do was to euthanase the poor bird. Another buzzard was initially treated here and then passed on to another rehabilitator. This bird was very thin and had a slight injury to its wing. Hopefully it will recover and be fit enough to be returned to the wild.

Two juvenile Little Owls came in at different times from different sites. These delightful birds spent some time in our Owl Hospital before being old enough to be released from a mobile aviary here at Waterleat in August. After about 2 weeks one was recovered locally having been caught by a cat and sustained an eye injury, it is unlikely to recover well enough to be released again. The other Little Owl has taken up residence in the Trust's barn and we are still providing some supplementary food.

Our new hospital aviaries are quite full at the moment. We have a juvenile Barn Owl which was underweight and had small puncture wounds, and three more Barn Owls that had fallen from their nests and were unable to be returned. They are all due to be released using the mobile aviaries. Ø

Julie Matthews
Conservation Officer

LLP pond news

Further to the update in Feedback 41, in recent weeks there has finally been some progress in our pursuit of a successful resolution to our big pond problems.

At the end of June, the loss adjustor made an offer to settle out of court. This was a costs exclusive offer, which meant that the whole sum would be available to use for remedial pond works. However, according to quotes provided by our independent pond expert, it was not sufficient for all the remedial works necessary to achieve the kind of system, which, ironically, we had originally paid for but not got!

At our Trustees' Meeting in mid-July it was agreed to go back to the loss adjustor requesting an improved offer, and this was done. The way the system works, the original offer would stay on the table so that if no further improvement was forthcoming, it would still be available.

An improved offer was received about a week later. However, yet again this sum was insufficient for all works to be completed satisfactorily. The offer was therefore rejected a second time, but again would sit on the table.

The most recent news is that, finally, after nearly 3 years of problems, the Trust has accepted an offer to settle totalling £35,000 (excluding costs) from the Loss Adjustor. We now look forward to getting the remedial works done this autumn, and after some serious disruption we should have a problem-free, wildlife-rich future for the ponds. Ø

LLP update



*Marbled White Butterfly on a grass head in the field July 2009
Photo: Tom Williams*

Volunteer visits since the winter have included groups from Plymouth University in February and March, and two BTCV youth groups, also from Plymouth, in July and again in August. These have been in addition to the monthly Conservation Team outings into the LLP to tackle the more routine but nevertheless essential maintenance work.

Tasks during this time have included scrub clearance on the slope by Corner Wood, which gets regularly overgrown by bramble and bracken, and some areas of bramble and gorse elsewhere. Also tackled was the removal of the fallen tree across the river, and some tidying up of overgrown hedges around the LLP boundaries.

Attendance at our annual Bracken Bash in July was somewhat disappointing but a small (but dedicated) band bashed happily away until mid-afternoon, making good progress. The remainder of the bracken was finished by the July BTCV group, whose attendees were fortunate enough to see excellent numbers of Great Green Bush Crickets, mostly in Kiln Close. The August group picked Creeping Thistle all day, and again enjoyed close-up views of Great Green Bush Cricket, Kestrel, Buzzard and Sparrowhawk.

Wildlife has again been in good supply since the winter. First a female and then a pair of Mallards were seen around the Big Pond in March. Butterflies were very much in evidence with good numbers of the usual suspects. A real bonus this year was the massive influx of Painted Ladies from the continent; the LLP was no exception, with over 50 individuals recorded throughout the site on one afternoon at the end of May. We eagerly await the predicted second wave of this beautiful butterfly. In July, excellent numbers of Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterfly caterpillars were found in the nettle bed on the old dung heap. Two Dark Green Fritillaries, constituting the 2nd and 3rd LLP records were seen at the end of June.

A Barn Owl was heard screeching around the LLP in early May raising hopes of another productive year. These were quickly fulfilled following the discovery of a brood of four owlets at the usual local site. The parents were radio-tagged for an adult home range

study, and three owlets have subsequently been tagged as well for a post-fledging dispersal study for the second year running (see David's article Page 8). The adults could be seen hunting in broad daylight and at close range on consecutive days in early June, affording great views and some enviable photographic opportunities.

Other bird species recorded have included Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Peregrine and Hobby over the LLP at various times. More unusually, a pair of House Sparrows, the male in song, was in the hedge behind the barn for a couple of minutes. Why they're not resident here is anyone's guess. A pair of Collared Doves was prospecting the barn in May but didn't stay to breed, but a pair of Nuthatches did successfully fledge a brood from one of the LLP barn nestboxes accessed through a hole in the boarding.

Odonata (dragonflies, damselflies) recorded have included Large Red, Azure and Common Blue Damselflies, as well as Broad-bodied Chaser, Emperor, Golden-ringed and the LLP's first record of Southern Hawker Dragonfly, plus a Darter of some sort. Herpetiles (amphibians, reptiles) seen include a pregnant female Slow Worm, a young Slow Worm on the path outside the new Owl Hospital on one of the rare dry days in July, plus Common Frog and Common Toad, in addition to the LLP's fourth April record of Common Lizard. The Great Mullein have been in flower for the summer in Forde Orchard and were an absolute picture.

The 21st Birthday Party, postponed from July due to terrible weather, was eventually held on the 8th August. It was attended by about 25 people, who enjoyed a guided tour of the LLP in warm sunny weather. A large bat seen flying in and out of the barn too briefly to allow specific identification at the end of the tour was eventually found at roost between a couple of upper beams and photographed on the 13th August. It has subsequently been identified as a Noctule, which may account for all the Orange Underwing moth wing cases being found over the barn floor ☺

Matthew Twiggs
Conservation Officer

Owls that go beep in the night

- revealing *The Great Mystery*

Where do Barn Owls hunt? How far do they go? How much habitat do they use? What about the young - when do they leave and where do they go? So much mystery surrounds the lives of these nocturnal animals. In spite of years of research, there are still aspects of Barn Owl behaviour that we know very little about. For example, the average recovery distance of ringed young is 12km (7.5 miles) but how did the owl get to its finding-place? Where did it go between ringing and recovery? With regard to breeding adult foraging range, there is no published information in almost all European countries and not even in Devon where the BOT is based. In fact, the only published studies to date were done many years ago in Suffolk and SW Scotland. "So what" you may be thinking. "Why does it matter?"

Why it matters

Food supply governs survival and nesting success far more than any other factor and if we want to encourage birds by providing the right habitat it's obviously important to know what they are using and how far they go. It's a sad fact that most Barn Owls die in their first year and about half of all juvenile ring recoveries are road casualties. What happened to the others and where did the recovered birds go before becoming yet another road victim?

The only way we can hope to answer these questions, and others, is through radio tracking – attaching tiny radio transmitters to the owls and then following them with something that looks like a TV aerial attached to a little box that literally goes 'beep'. The louder the beep the closer the owl, and by pointing the aerial directly at the owl you get the loudest beep of all. In these days of GPS and satellite tracking, waving an aerial around sounds rather crude. It is, but satellite tags are still quite big - far too heavy for Barn Owls.

Radio tracking is still the best technology available for following the movements of these lightweight birds and with practice it's possible to determine the bird's position fairly accurately and even find out what it's doing. Someone once said, "time spent in reconnaissance is seldom wasted". The same is true of radio tracking; the only problem is the sheer amount of time that it takes.



An ankle mounted transmitter fitted to an adult Barn Owl

Photo: Simon Roper



Radio tracking training session in the field (UK)

Photo Simon Roper

Help is at hand!

Enter Ambios Ltd. a not-for-profit company headed-up by Simon Roper, one of our ex-Trustees. One current Ambios project is all about providing EU-funded volunteers to help Non Government Organisations (NGOs) with projects in exchange for training. Ideal! With teams of enthusiastic volunteers all kinds of things become possible! Even staying up all night, out in the dark in all weathers, and holding an aerial up in the air for what seems like an eternity.

The juvenile dispersal study

Easy, we thought. The project will run from early August to the end of November and all we need to do is plot dispersal movements by finding the birds' daytime roost sites. It'll be daylight, the birds won't be moving, and we'll have all day! Easy? How wrong we were...

Everything started well and we were amazed by how long it took for birds to start to disperse. Even in late August, weeks after they fledged, the birds were all still at or very close to their natal sites. Then the fun began. Some individuals started to roost well away from the nest, but they weren't using buildings (as we had expected), they had all independently chosen to roost in trees. We'd asked the trackers to determine exactly what the birds were roosting in (nestbox/tree hole/tree species etc.) but we'd also instructed them not to flush birds out. The Ambios team, headed by Jack Skuse, reported that it was usually impossible to get this information without getting too close. They could only "get a visual" of a bird very occasionally. Most birds were well hidden and even the most careful triangulation using two receivers couldn't pinpoint them from a distance. All we could say for certain was that none of them were in buildings. This in itself was a result.

Checking the whereabouts of nine juveniles from four different nest sites could be accomplished fairly easily in a day. The 'fun' really began when we suddenly couldn't find some of them. Instant dilemma. Should we search for the missing bird or should we carry on checking for the others that probably haven't moved? The longer the time that birds go unchecked, the further they may have moved, and the longer it is likely to take to find them. We soon realised that the ideal solution would be to have extra tracking teams to call out when birds went missing and for the 'A' Team to continue checking all the others. The problem was the ♂

receivers and antennas were £1,500 a set and we'd already deployed all our volunteers. The purchase of a car-mounted antenna enabled the searches to cover more ground but contact was lost with one bird, then another, then another. In September and October one was found dead (predated) and three were lost. Interestingly, when the first really chilly weather arrived the survivors all switched from roosting in trees to roosting in buildings at more or less the same time. Another result! By January 2009 five of the original nine birds were still being tracked.

Getting information without disturbing the birds was a constant issue and the birds' welfare had to come first. We expected the young birds to settle into their permanent "home range" by late November and so when we kept getting a signal from the same site we assumed that the bird was roosting there regularly and all was well. The down side of this was that we couldn't tell the difference between a signal from a live roosting bird and a signal from a dead bird or a tag that had dropped off. The last thing we wanted to do was to enter the site and risk flushing the bird out at regular intervals. In February and April 2009 we eventually realised that two of the signals we were getting were from tags that had dropped off the birds. The last remaining signal was lost in July 2009, which is pretty good considering that a tag battery is only expected to last 10 months! From the time that they started to disperse, the number of days each of the nine birds was successfully tracked were as follows: 0, 0, 8, 28, 103, 138, 177, 227, 295. We are currently tracking three 2009-hatched juveniles and in years to come once we have sufficient data we'll produce a full report.

The breeding adult foraging range study

We always knew that this would be a huge challenge and, for once, we were right! Having tried it back in 1999 we had a pretty good idea of the difficulties we'd have to face. "We", by the way, were Simon Roper and myself (David Ramsden) planning the study and providing training, and the teams of volunteer trackers headed by Jack Skuse in Devon and Mike Cooke in Hungary. Yes, Hungary! EU funding enabled Ambios to send volunteers to Hungary to work with our friend Akos Klein of the Hungarian Barn Owl Foundation. Simon came up with the idea of simultaneously tracking a pair in each country. We needed sites where we could catch a pair of nesting birds to fit the transmitters, in landscapes that suited radio tracking. Trapping was the first challenge – if we failed to catch the birds all the time we'd spent planning the project and the money spent on travel and equipment would be wasted. The pressure was on. We HAD to succeed. In Hungary, before the breeding season, Mike Cooke had prepared sliding trap doors on previously used nest boxes at two different sites - both church towers. Luckily, when Simon and I arrived in Hungary to fit the radio tags both pairs were breeding and we were able to choose the site with the most favourable landscape. Much to our relief, the trap worked perfectly (well done Mike!) and both birds were



*In Hungary the birds were nesting in a box in this church tower
Photo: David Ramsden*

quickly radio tagged and placed back in the nest. The female carried on brooding her young and the male continued to hunt for her. Fantastic!

Back in the UK we were again incredibly lucky and managed to catch and radio tag the adult pair that hunt over the Barn Owl Trust's own land here at Waterleat (the LLP). They too were breeding, so everything was set.

After initial training the radio trackers in both countries had one week of "soft data" capture before collecting six weeks worth of "hard data". The initial week was spent getting to know the birds' movements, learning the landscape, and practising tracking technique. Although the hard data capture had to be rigorous, we soon came to the conclusion that radio tracking was more of an art than a science. In order to get accurate "fixes" the trackers in each country were split into two teams. Each team had their own receiver/antenna, plus other essential equipment including two-way radios, compass, waterproof maps and markers, head torches, vehicles, all weather clothing, insect repellent, coffee and chocolate! We devised a good way of taking simultaneous bearings from two directions so we could triangulate the bird's position. Amazingly, the male here in Devon regularly hunted in daylight enabling the trackers to actually watch the bird while they were tracking it. This presented the perfect opportunity for linking subtle differences in the signal (the beep.....beep.....beep) to what the bird was actually doing at that precise moment. Bearing in mind that the majority of tracking was carried out at night, these daylight encounters were a real bonus. It's obviously good to know if the bird is active (hunting) or not when the fix is taken and it's the slight differences in the signal that can indicate the bird's activity. Clear observations of the bird you're tracking are like gold dust. Again, we simply couldn't believe our luck.



*The male Barn Owl in Devon regularly hunted in daylight providing a great opportunity for the volunteers to actually see the bird they were tracking .
Photo : David Ramsden*

Nocturnal tracking in all weathers is hard work, at times very hard work, and the volunteers did a fantastic job helped by Jack and Mike (well done!). We achieved the 'asymptote' for all birds – this is the number of independent fixes required for each bird (above this number no new information on the maximum area the birds use is gathered). Our current objective is to describe: 1) each bird's home range in relation to the wider landscape, 2) temporal and spacial activity patterns and 3) activity in relation to weather. We plan to carry out more adult tracking in future years and we'll be producing a full report once we have enough data. Watch this space!

David Ramsden

Acknowledgements:

Simon Roper and Mike Cooke (Ambios.net), Jack Skuse and Christine Carol (IgoMango.com), Akos Klein (gyongybagoly.hu), EU funding (Leonardo Lifelong Learning Programme), Nick Price, Simon Dicks, Jenny Sherwen, Elly Weir, Matthew Butler, Owain Hegarty, Rebecca Scott, Rachel Ford, Bob Maycock, Andy Denton, Kyle Winney, Jack Nolan, Anna Liddle, Elizabeth Cotterell, James Koston, Christine Carol. Ø



The female and her three owlets on 29th May 2009, the youngest owlet is just 15 days old

Photo: Website screenshot BOT

After the resounding success of last year's Nestcam, it was clear to all concerned that the project was well worth repeating. We made sure that the camera was up and running earlier this time around, as last year the first egg was laid the day after Nestcam went live. This time Nestcam and Barncam were broadcasting three weeks earlier, from the 24th March, with a pair of Barn Owls present in the box right from the start.

Last year's breeding female was fitted with a British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) ring so we could tell she was the same individual that had nested here in 2008. The male wasn't ringed, so we had no way of knowing for sure if he was the same bird. Sadly the average lifespan of an adult Barn Owl in Britain is only three years, so having one member of a pair die and a new bird move in is not uncommon.

Once a pair of Barn Owls has chosen a nest site, the female will spend nearly all her time there, relying on the male to bring her food. This allows the female to avoid expending energy, helping her to achieve breeding condition. She needs to be healthy and well fed if she is to produce eggs. This also acts as a kind of fail-safe. If the male is unable to catch enough food to keep the female in condition, then he would probably not be able to catch enough to feed a brood of owlets. We had no concerns here though as the male made regular food deliveries. During this period frequent bouts of mutual preening and copulation were observed.

On the morning of 3rd April there was a cause for concern, only the female was in the box. Up to this point, both owls had been roosting in the box every day. We checked Barncam, which shows the outside of the box and some of the surrounding barn but there was still no sign of him. Had something happened to him overnight? Fortunately there was nothing to worry about as he was seen in and around the box the following night. It seemed he had decided to spend his days roosting elsewhere.

On the 7th of April the first egg was laid; a full 10 days earlier than the average first egg laying date. Would this mean a larger than average clutch? Barn Owls exhibit asynchronous egg laying, meaning that the eggs are not laid all at the same time, but at 2-3 day intervals. The next egg was laid on the morning of the 10th, exactly three days after the first. We waited for the third egg... and waited... The next three days came and went with no sign of another egg. By the end of the third day we had all but given up hope. However on the morning of the 14th there was another one; unfortunately this was the last. After the promising start with such an early first egg, it was a little bit disappointing to have a relatively small clutch of only three, little more than half of the average clutch size of 5.6.

The incubation of Barn Owl eggs takes between 31 and 32 days. During this period we experienced quite a few technical problems with our cameras. On the 8th May, just as the pictures came back online, the first egg hatched, 31 days after being laid. The remaining two eggs hatched just as promptly, at three-day intervals. This was excellent news, as it is often the case that one or more eggs fail to hatch. Although we were a long way short of the average clutch size, the average brood size is only 3.1, and with our three owlets, we were back on track.

The female owl was regularly seen ripping up prey items to feed to the owlets. The two oldest owlets even helped her out by feeding their younger sibling! By the 4th of June, the owlets had developed sufficiently to be left on their own, and the female owl began to roost elsewhere during the day, and to hunt during the night to provide ever increasing amounts of food for the growing owlets. Both parents were seen making regular food deliveries to the nest box throughout June and at various times we saw spare food items in the box.

On the 22nd June David and Frances visited the site to ring the owlets. All three were in excellent health, and we discovered that the eldest was male and the middle one female. Unfortunately the youngest was still too young to be accurately sexed.

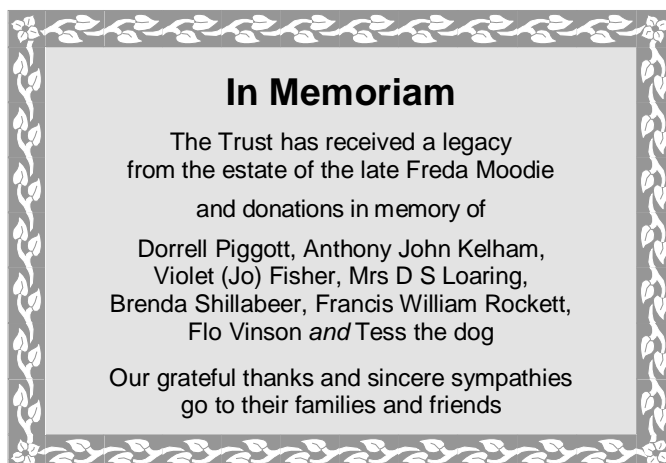
By the beginning of July all three of the owlets were starting to spend more and more time out of the box. The eldest took his first flight on the 2nd, but the youngest wasn't seen flying until the 20th. Throughout this month, despite extended periods of extremely wet weather, the adult birds managed to keep up the food deliveries, proving what excellent parents they are. By the last week of July, the eldest owlet was roosting elsewhere, although there were still regular sightings of him at night coming back to the nest in search of an easy meal.

By August the middle owlet, like her older brother, hadn't been seen for a week. The 11th was the first day that we didn't see any owls at all on the cameras. It was starting to look like our nestcam adventure was over for another year. The conservation office here at the Trust felt slightly empty without "our" owlets on the screen to keep us company. Many of you must have the same feeling. We have had regular updates from all over the world, places such as Canada, the Netherlands and the U.S.A., as well as many more from closer to home. At its peak in the middle of July, our Nestcam was attracting 7000 new visitors every day.

It just remains for me on behalf of the Barn Owl Trust to thank all of our supporters, and contributors who were with us on the many highs, and thankfully few lows, of this journey, and to say that we hope you all join us in going through it all again next year.

Video clips of highlights from this year's breeding season can be seen by accessing the links from the 2009 nestcam diary on our website: www.barnowltrust.org.uk Ø

Stuart Baker
Assistant Conservation Officer



Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme news



In late February 2009 we launched our new Barn Owl Scheme aimed at increasing the Barn Owl population in West Devon. This was made possible thanks to significant funding from Biffaward and the Devon Bird Watching & Preservation Society. Dartmoor National Park, Devon County Council and West Devon Borough Council have also contributed to the scheme. The Westmoor Scheme follows on from similar Schemes carried out in other Devon Districts - East Devon, North Devon, South Hams and Teignbridge between 1997 and 2003. These areas all saw an increase in Barn Owl numbers after completion; it is hoped that West Devon will see the same success. The Scheme is due to run for 18 months, coming to an end in 2010.

The Westmoor area has been targeted as conservation priority as it was the only area to show a significant decline in Barn Owl numbers between the last two County surveys. The number of nest records fell from 16 in 1993 to only 2 in 2003, a decline of 87.5%. This was in marked contrast to the rest of Devon, where numbers went up by an estimated 42% to between 350-470 pairs (250-350 pairs estimated in 1993).

Our aim is to increase Barn Owl numbers in West Devon - the area between the A38 and the A30, Dartmoor and the Tamar. We hope to achieve this by working with farmers and landowners in order to improve foraging habitat for Barn Owls and erect nestboxes in appropriate places.

At 23 sites, the Scheme is applying a package of conservation measures which include erecting up to 3 nestboxes, giving advice about improving habitat, providing advice on safer rodent control and installing floats in water troughs. We hope to include all of the 16 nesting sites recorded in the 1993 Survey in the Scheme and also identify a further 7 sites where nesting has occurred or where Barn Owls are regularly roosting. If we can improve and increase the area of foraging habitat and provide ideal nesting sites then hopefully we can secure the population for future generations.

In addition, we will be erecting nestboxes at 50 sites that either

ACO Stuart erecting a tree nestbox

Photo: David Ramsden

already have Barn Owls around but no suitable nesting places, or have great habitat but no Barn Owls yet. The provision of a nestbox may encourage any dispersing juvenile Barn Owls to take up residence!

We are also offering free advisory visits to 50 sites in the area. This may be to provide advice on improving habitat, on making permanent provision for Barn Owls in an outbuilding or loft space, on the use of safer alternatives to second generation rodenticides or indeed any other aspect of Barn Owl conservation.

Progress to date

Over 30 nestboxes have been erected to date, mostly in modern and traditional agricultural buildings. Four outdoor boxes have been erected on trees and one outdoor box was actually erected inside a traditional barn. The roof had several holes in and as it was an important historical nesting site we decided to erect an outdoor box inside! We have also had to produce several bespoke nestboxes so that we could erect them in the most suitable place; 2 boxes had to have inspection hatches fitted at the side rather than a removable lid as they had to be erected very close to the roof of the barn, and another nestbox had to be dismantled and have 1½ inches cut off all the way around so that we could actually fit it through some very narrow beams!

Since the commencement of the Westmoor Scheme in February there have been:

71 identification visits carried out, 13 x Stage 1 visits completed, 8 x Stage 2 visits completed, 10 x Advisory visits made, 12 x Nestboxing visits made and completed and the first issue of the Scheme newsletter has been distributed to participating landowners.

If you live in the Westmoor area and would like to take part in the Scheme please contact the Trust ☺

Maxine Chavner
Assistant Conservation Officer

An Asian atrocity

We were shocked to hear that in a single raid this year in Malaysia 319 freshly skinned owl carcasses were seized along with 25 hind legs and 22 paws of Malayan Sun Bear and 2,330 live Clouded Monitor Lizards. Three men were arrested.

This follows on from a raid last year where the Malaysian authorities seized over 900 dead frozen owls including 796 Barn Owls, parts of other animals including Pangolins, Sun Bears and Pythons, plus 51 live Clouded Monitor Lizards. A local man was arrested and remanded in custody for three days, but pleaded not guilty and was released on bail. In yet another raid over seven thousand live Clouded Monitor Lizards were seized, but no arrests made.

"The number of owls and monitor lizards seized is truly staggering," said Chris R. Shepherd, Senior Programme Officer for TRAFFIC's Southeast Asia office. "This is the first time we know of where 'ready-prepared' owls have been seized in Malaysia, and it may mark the start of a new trend in wild meat from the region." All the animals seized are believed to have originated in Malaysia and were probably bound for China, to be sold in wild meat restaurants.

Our contact in Malaysia, Chong Leong Puan (see FEEDBACK 39) said, "I was truly shocked and sad to hear the seizure of large number of skinned owl carcasses. Barn Owls can be captured fairly easily from occupied nest boxes which are abundantly available in oil palm plantations. The huge number of dead birds seized reflects a potentially high demand for the meat and this must be seriously treated. The Malaysia Department of Wildlife and National Parks has made an effort to monitor these illegal activities and retrieve genetic information from the carcasses in order to trace their origin. Creating local awareness and imposing punitive penalties for illegal trade offenders are definitely some positive steps to counter this threat to the owls in our country." Ø

A grand day out



Winners of last year's Grand Draw enjoy a day out with the conservation team - left and right Chris and Barbara Stomenov, centre Rosa Bloomberg (BOT PA) meet a brood of owllets

Photo: David Ramsden

We were delighted when the winners of last year's Grand Draw prize "A day out with the conservation team" turned out to be Barbara and Chris Stomenov who have been supporters of the

Official opening



Pictured above are representatives from the Animal Defence Trust and the Naturesave Trust cutting the paper chain with David (BOT) and the Mayor of Ashburton

Photo: Pete Webb

The Mayor of Ashburton joined representatives from charitable trusts to cut a recycled paper chain and declare our new Owl Hospital officially open at the end of March.

"The new facility is a wonderful asset, enabling us to provide the very best care for casualties", said David Ramsden, Head of Conservation here at the Trust. "The bird room was in use even before it was officially opened and has been really busy all summer. Having a range of hospital aviaries in close proximity to our birdroom makes our day-to-day rehabilitation work much easier and of course provides better accommodation for the birds in our care."

The building of the Owl Hospital was featured in a picture article in Feedback 41 and is a slideshow on our website. Ø

Trust since 1994 – thank you folks. Make sure you send back your tickets, you can ask for more, and next year it could be you! Barbara and Chris visited the Trust at the end of June to claim their prize and Barbara wrote to us shortly afterwards:

"Winning a day out with the Barn Owl Trust was a dream come true for me after being a supporter for several years. It really was the most amazing day! At last I saw the Trust and the people who work there. The weather was glorious and the whole experience was wonderful.

"It is something my husband Chris and I will always remember. We visited two nesting sites and were lucky enough to see an adult owl fly out and most of all to be able to hold the owllets while David ringed them. They were sleepy little bundles of white fluff and so trusting! The owllets at the second nest were older and although still fluffy they had beautiful perfect Barn Owl faces!

"The day ended with a walk around the wonderful Lennon Legacy Project field, which is being transformed back to how it was hundreds of years ago. The once barren over-grazed land is now a mass of wild flowers and grasses and butterflies. David was so knowledgeable and we learned so much listening to him. So THANKYOU BOT for making us so welcome and for giving us a unique insight into your fantastic work." Ø

Barbara Stomenov

New 'Wings of Change' DVD



The new Wings of Change DVD makes its debut at our AGM on Friday 16th October! Produced for the Trust by Hilltribe Productions, it uses animation, graphics and wonderful characters to tell the story of the decline of the Barn Owl from the 1940s to the present day.

Featuring well known BBC wildlife presenter Nick Baker, the film captures the viewers' imagination as Nick carries us through the years with his informative and lively presenting style. Designed primarily to educate children about the decline of the Barn Owl, the DVD is fun and informative watching for adult viewers too.



Above - Farmer Joe gets an idea - taken from the Wings of Change DVD. Below - an animated farm scene

Education, education, education ..., there will be a new schools' pack to accompany the new Wings of Change DVD. New material includes information pages, reference material and photocopiable worksheets. The schools' pack material will be available later in the year via our website as downloadable pdf files, allowing teachers to pick and choose the information they require to support their lesson planning. We hope the new DVD and schools' pack will enable the Barn Owl Trust message to be spread 'far and wide'. Ø



Wildlife presenter, Nick Baker captures the viewers' imagination All photo stills: Hilltribe Productions

After two years of planning, preparation and filming we were delighted when we finally saw the finished Wings of Change film. Then, when Robbie told us it was "Farmer Joe's" birthday we thought we'd send him a BOT sweatshirt to say thank you for his contribution. We received this reply:

To all my friends at the Barn Owl Trust...

Well, what a lovely surprise I had when I received your very kind gift and card for my birthday. But the best gift of all was learning that my small contribution was for such a worthwhile charity. It wasn't until I saw the complete film that it all came together and the case for sustaining the Barn Owl habitat was so well made.

Now no letter from a farmer is complete without a story; What 'appened was, I was walking along the quiet lanes around Cornwall one summer when I came across a deserted barn just about thirty feet from the lane. It was so quiet, no people nor cars, just birdsong, a rustle of breeze and me. The steel gate to the barn was open and looking through I saw signs of demolition and abandonment. Hmm, nice spot I thought and so to satisfy my curiosity I sauntered up to the abandoned run-down barn. I paused at the open entrance, no door just a doorway.

Looking up, I saw openings in the weather-worn roof and upper walls. Treading carefully across debris on the floor I came to the centre of this quite large barn and had the fright of my life! I saw, but did not hear, a large Barn Owl leave a ledge high up in the barn, swoop down then lift gliding a few feet above my head. I recall the owl's face clearly and its silent wing beat. Wow! Sadly nature does not feature a replay facility because I would have wanted to savour such a moment again and again.

So the film Robbie Hill put together for you was quite meaningful for me. It was a real pleasure and privilege to have made a contribution and thank you once again for your kindness. As we say in this side of the Tamar, "you're some 'ansome folk up there". Best wishes to you all, and the Trust, for the future. Ø

Farmer Joe

New aviary in action



Above: The mobile aviary arrives on site

Main picture: The owl emerges but is in no rush to exit the open aviary

Photos: Neil Lindsay

Within days of completion the first of our new aviaries headed west to Cornwall and after a Little Owl release here at the BOT the second aviary headed North East into Somerset. "The release went really well," said Assistant Conservation Officer Maxine, "the top opened quickly and quietly and the owl emerged a few minutes later, totally relaxed and in no rush to leave".

Meanwhile in Somerset a young pair of Barn Owls were installed in an area of fantastic habitat, courtesy of thewebbroadcastingcorporation.com "Having a mobile release site is fabulous," said Conservation Officer Matt. "It means we can use the best release method in the best place for every individual owl". Ø

Supporters' news

To celebrate 21 Years of Barn Owl Trust conservation, Megan the Golden Retriever and Hugo the Spaniel, along with their faithful people, Frances and Caroline, took on a sponsored dog challenge. Challenge was a very apt description of the event as neither of the dogs had ever been on a boat or a train and the weather was awful!

The 17th May saw us setting off from Totnes by boat in strong winds and heavy rain. We reached Dartmouth cold, wet and bedraggled, and took respite from the weather by finding a pub that would let the dogs in. Megan and Hugo were delighted!

Warmed up and revived, we caught a ferry across to Kingswear and then the steam train to Paignton. Thankfully the weather brightened and passengers greeted Megan and Hugo with enthusiastic cuddles and donations filled our collecting tins. The final stage of our challenge was a leisurely bus ride back to Totnes. As the dogs slept, worn out from the day's events, a glimpse of sunshine shone through the clouds.

Thank you to everyone who supported the dog challenge by sponsoring Megan and Hugo or giving a donation on the day. We raised over £1,500 for Barn Owl conservation.

Kat Brown, Press Officer at the Paignton and Dartmouth Steam Railway and River Link said, "It was a pleasure to have Hugo and Megan on our Round Robin excursion. Our passengers and staff enjoyed giving them lots of fuss and we are delighted they raised so much money for Barn Owl conservation." Ø



Dog challenge

Now a bit drier, Caroline, Megan and Hugo wait with the Guard to board the steam train
Photo: Frances Ramsden

New look adoption

Just in time for Christmas, the Trust has revamped its Adoption Pack. At £30 a year with a new A6 photo card adoption certificate and a more compact pack (to reduce postage costs) you can be sure that when you adopt an owl from the Barn Owl Trust you are really helping to support our work.

For those of you who'd really like to give an adoption as a present there are two exciting new options if you want to spend an extra £5. As well as a gift card bearing your own message you can choose to send a soft cuddly toy **owlet** in its own nestbox with your gift or you can select an **Enviro Goody Bag** - a washable unbleached cotton bag printed on one side with a unique BOT design containing a pack of reuse labels, a recycled pen and pencil and a BOT note pad.

Visit our website or contact the office for more details of the *Gift that keeps on Giving* and the perfect present for someone who has everything! Ø



Show success

Our prize winning exhibition stand at the Devon County Show.
Photo: Maxine Chavner

The show season got off to a flying start when our exhibition trailer was awarded first prize in its class at the Devon County Show in May. The Royal Cornwall Show was a mixture of sunshine and showers and we became proficient at moving our displays from outside to inside in record time in order to dodge the rain! However the weather did little to dampen visitor spirits and we had the opportunity to meet loads of people and provide lots of information. With the Dorset Show finishing off the season in September the trailer has now been put away until next Spring.

The Shows are such a great opportunity to meet people, hear their stories about Barn Owls, record Barn Owl sightings and give advice on Barn Owl conservation. It's so rewarding to have so many people visiting our stand to talk about Barn Owls and their conservation. It reinforces the message that 'together we can make a difference'. Ø

A big 'thank you' to all our mitten knitters! We have received some wonderful colours and patterns. See the enclosed leaflet to order yours for Christmas!

Thanks and things

We'd like to say a really big **thank you** to **everyone** who has supported the Trust since the last issue of Feedback and give a special mention to those of you who have collected stamps, used film pots, ink cartridges and phones for recycling as well as all of our mitten knitters who have contributed to our latest "crafty" fundraising idea. We also need to say thank you to Hilltribe for the excellent promotional video they made for us alongside the new Wings of Change DVD and to Nick Baker, Farmer Joe and everyone else who appeared in or helped out with the projects including Aunties Cakes of Buckfastleigh who provided cake for the filming and Phil Webb who produced lots of cake boxes.

From our Wants List we received bubble wrap and padded envelopes from Louise Anquetil, Linda Tilbury, Sarah and Graham Dimmock and Elaine Underhill. Pellets from Lester Bull, Susan Goddard and John and Veg Truman. Mike and Margaret North gave us a large bag of bird seed and Gwyneth Parish sent us towels. We received a picture and donations from Helen Kearney and a microwave from Sue Lee.

Well-done and thank you to Stuart Westway who sent us the proceeds from his Sponsored Cycle ride and Julia Dalton sent us a donation from a jumble sale. We are very grateful to all of you for your support.

And now in true Feedback style here's a list of things we could use and you might have surplus to your requirements. Let us give them a good home and save some money if you have any of the following that you no longer need:

- Copy of "A Manual for Wildlife Radio Tagging" by Kenward & Walls (2001) ISBN 10: 0124042422

- Empty film canisters to hold a single owl pellet
- Foreign change and notes (please enclose type of currency)
- Roll of new hardwearing office carpet for gluing to the floor
- Wild bird food - mainly sacks of black sunflower seeds, also peanuts & plain canary seed
- Wood for making outdoor nestboxes - sheets of 9 or 12mm tanalised softwood ply and lengths of 25x 50mm tanalised batten
- A4 and A3 recycled paper and card both coloured and white
- Box trailer in good working order
- Inkjet cartridges for HP Deskjet 3820 and HP Deskjet 930
- Soil rakes/garden rakes
- 12 stackable office chairs
- Postage stamps (both new, used, commemorative and foreign)
- Wildlife rehab group looking for somewhere to release house sparrows (we have the perfect release site)
- Good quality Barn Owl winter scenes either photographic or illustrative for Christmas card production
- Empty inkjet cartridges and old mobile phones for recycling
- Wild Barn Owl pellets (we can never have too many)
- Anyone in the Ashburton area who could occasionally provide temporary lodging for a Barn Owl Trust volunteer
- Small Plate Compactor
- Emulsion Paint (pale colour) sufficient to paint an office
- Set squares for woodwork use
- Modern 2 or 4 berth Caravan with serviceable gas appliances suitable for volunteers to stay in
- Handheld Dictaphone (Cassette, micro cassette, or digital)
- Walkman disc player
- Claw hammer(s) for woodwork
- White board (approx 600mm x 450mm) and marker pens
- Bathroom scales that weigh in kilogrammes

Tail piece...



It's a really good year for elderberries here, sloes too. This year the hedge that we planted in 2004 (to recreate the field known as Kiln Close in the LLP) has sloes for the first time – great for sloe gin! It's been a really bountiful year for some things but as always, others haven't fared so well, as Matthew reports in his review of the Barn Owl sites visited this year.

What a year, we British are renowned worldwide for constantly talking about the weather, but when you have a climate like ours who can blame us. July was horrible here; it rained on 27 of the 31 days in the month. Throughout the summer there were hardly any of those balmy summer evenings when we could sit outside.

It was really disappointing to have had to cancel the 21st Birthday Party. We had everything ready, but the implications of 100+ people and their vehicles slipping around in the mud were a potential Health and Safety nightmare, and these days we have to think about those kind of things. Fortunately the sun did come out for the rescheduled date and although it was a much scaled-down event, we did at least mark the anniversary and everyone had a good time. The greatest plans...

We all have plans; we constantly look towards our future goals whether it be doing the shopping, collecting the kids, just going home from work and putting our feet up, our next holiday, even retirement. And when we reach those goals, we're off again looking forward and planning for the next thing. How many of us spend how much time in the moment?

We live in the "age of information technology" and are constantly bombarded with data. We have more personal choices than previous generations but somehow, even with all our labour saving devices, less time. Doesn't it feel like absolute luxury being able to do (and think about) just one thing

at a time? Our society isn't really geared for being in the here and now but isn't it vital for our personal wellbeing to make the time to appreciate the present, to be in the moment?

Watching a bird fly or a tree dancing gently in the breeze are great ways of being in the here and now. Hearing the sound of waves crashing on the cliffs or smelling the freshly cut grass in your local park are great for reviving the senses overwhelmed by the day-to-day cacophony of machines and exhaust fumes. Spending time in the natural world is really good for clearing the mind. When you really look at the amazing diversity of the different plants and animals we share our planet with it's easy to appreciate how lucky we really are. Most of the time we are so busy striving to get everything done we don't even notice that we are missing the moment. Of course not every moment is one we really want to savour, but maybe, if we could all try to feel positive about what we are doing rather than constantly thinking of what we need to do, life would be less stressful. If more people were less stressed then smiles would be more commonplace and the world would be a better place.

I can almost hear you thinking, "What has most of this got to do with Barn Owls or the Trust?" Well, all things are connected and the Trust's aims are to conserve the Barn Owl and its environment. Humans are part of that environment and if we are more relaxed and in touch with the natural world then Barn Owls and all other wildlife are almost bound to benefit. Thank you for supporting the Trust; I hope that reading this issue of Feedback brings a smile to your face and encourages you to keep doing "your bit" for conservation and our wonder filled planet.

Together we can make a world of difference.

Frances Ramsden

