

Issue Number 47 - Spring 2012



FEEDBACK

WATERLEAT, ASHBURTON, DEVON TQ13 7HU - (01364) 653026 - www.barnowltrust.org.uk

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THE BARN OWL TRUST - CONSERVING THE BARN OWL AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

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*Cover Photo: Matthew Twiggs
Hungarian Trainees with handyman Jasmin - page 3*

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

*Many thanks to everyone who provided
words and pictures for this issue.*

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and information to:*

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LLP Diary Dates 2012

18th April Wednesday - Dawn Chorus Walk and Breakfast -
6:00 am start

9th May Wednesday - Spring Flowers in the LLP fields
and woodland

20th June Wednesday - Midsummer Evening Walk

11th July Wednesday - Butterfly Walk 2pm

15th August Wednesday - See the LLP at dusk

Please contact the office for more details or to book a place
at any event. Booking is essential as places are strictly
limited. Check out Forthcoming Events on our website for
dates of other LLP events: www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Welcome to Feedback. Inspired by the *Barn Owl Conservation Handbook* we decided that the next few issues of Feedback would feature practical *do-it-yourself* guides to helping Barn Owls. We start the series with a four-page article describing in detail 'What to do if you find an owl'. We hope you find it interesting and you never know it could help to save a bird's life one day.

We were thrilled with the number of entries we received for our first Poetry Competition. You can read the winning poem on page 13. Thank you to everyone who entered. It not only raised some funds for the Trust, it also helped to make more people aware of our work.

As you will see, there has been a lot happening here at the BOT since the last issue of Feedback. We are constantly looking at ways to use our resources most effectively and it is to this end that we plan to send out our Annual Report this year with the next issue of Feedback. Those of you who receive the report will receive one mailing in the autumn rather than two which will save some postage. We've also decided that due to the low numbers attending over the past few years, we will not be holding our usual Annual General Celebration and see if anyone misses it! We encourage anyone wanting to find out more about what we do to come along to one of the LLP events and ask questions then.

As you will see from the LLP Diary Dates at the bottom of this page, there are several opportunities for you to visit the Trust this summer and share in the natural magic of this wonderful place. Every day and every walk brings new delights and experiences. If you are not able to come along, just have a look at our LLP Diary on-line (<http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/infopage.html?id=219>) and see how managing land for Barn Owls benefits so many other species too. As usual the Trust will have stands at the county shows in Devon, Cornwall and Dorset so do come along and say hello. See our website for more details.

Looking ahead, we are hoping more people will get involved in our Walk for Wildlife week in June this year - page 15. Dog owners can walk their own pet anywhere during this week and collect sponsorship for the Trust. If you don't have a dog please consider sponsoring Poppy who is walking for us for the first time this year. Having just celebrated her 1st birthday she is keen to do her very best for the BOT.

We are also calling for folk to get involved in our county Barn Owl surveys in 2013 and 2014 - page 4 and to think about doing something to celebrate our 25th anniversary next year. Maybe you could organise an event to raise awareness of the Trust and its work or have a few friends over for a coffee morning and collect some donations? Let us know if you have any ideas.

Those of us who were involved with the Trust back in those dim and distant days couldn't have imagined how the Trust would develop and grow. It has been an education and a privilege to be involved. But we couldn't have done it without all of the volunteers, staff and supporters who have helped us over the years. These days we meet adults who remember a school visit they had when they were children, conservation professionals who had a work experience placement with us years ago, people who attended a talk and made a little change to their lives that benefited wildlife and landowners who attended a nestbox workshop, built a nestbox and now have Barn Owls on their land - it's incredibly rewarding - together we really have made a difference. Let us have your tales for a special 25th anniversary issue of Feedback next year.

We'd like to say a really big thank you to everyone who has helped us to **Conserve the Barn Owl and its Environment** - we couldn't have done it without you.

Frances Ramsden and Marianne Bryan

BOT News



After almost a year of planning and preparation the Trust's new Solar Project began generating electricity for the National Grid on February 29th. BOT Conservation Officer Matthew was charged with managing the project and 'Energy on the House' was the company chosen to bring it to life.

Pictured here behind the barn are the two 8-metre arrays which are as energy efficient and environmentally friendly as we could find and expectations are that in good weather they will not only provide almost all of the Trust's electricity requirements, they will also generate some much needed revenue to support our work.

The Solar Project was made possible by a legacy from Peggy May Fullman and our latest legacy from Richard Mervyn Bocking will support the planned Kingfisher provision in the Lennon Legacy Project above the Flo pond. Bless you all. ★



Two groups of volunteers from the Hungarian Barn Owl Foundation have visited the Trust for three day placements - the first in November, the second in March. After hearing presentations about the Barn Owl, the work of the Trust and the Lennon Legacy Project both groups undertook practical tasks. Featured on the front cover, some of the second group are seen above making outdoor nestboxes for the conservation team to erect. ★

News Bites

Webcam News

Things are looking hopeful for this year's webcam. There are currently two Barn Owls being seen regularly and indulging in pre-breeding behaviour. See page 5 for more information.

Late Breeding in 2011

The following reports of dependent owlets in a nest were received by the Trust. We thought it would be interesting to show these by county.

17/10/11	Devon
22/10/11	Northumberland
23/10/11	Hampshire
26/10/11	Pembrokeshire
28/10/11	Nottinghamshire
28/10/11	Oxfordshire
31/10/11	Lincolnshire
24/11/11	Essex

Let us know your earliest and latest nesting dates and we can report them here too.

Handbook Update

It's official! The Barn Owl Conservation Handbook is now *the long awaited* Barn Owl Conservation Handbook! It's over two years since we started writing it and eight months since it went on sale for pre-ordering. But, fear not, the end is in sight! As I write this, our conservation team are busy doing the final proof reading. All 400 pages are being double-checked for errors. The many hundreds of internal cross-references and all 344 images/illustrations are being re-checked for the last time. The content should be signed-off as finished by mid-March and printed copies should arrive in May or possibly June. It's looking fantastic and we can promise you, without any doubt, that it'll be well worth the wait!

Memorial Nestboxes

In early September 2011, the Trust was contacted by Deborah Dunsford about undertaking a nestbox scheme in the Otter valley. This was as a memorial to her late husband Simon, who had worked for Natural England in Exeter. A collection had been raised at Simon's funeral to fund the scheme. We set about chasing up leads for nestbox locations in areas where habitat was promising but where existing nestboxes were under-represented. The scheme should be completed over the next few weeks and we hope that the boxes are ultimately successful in attracting Barn Owls. ★

More BOT News

County Surveys

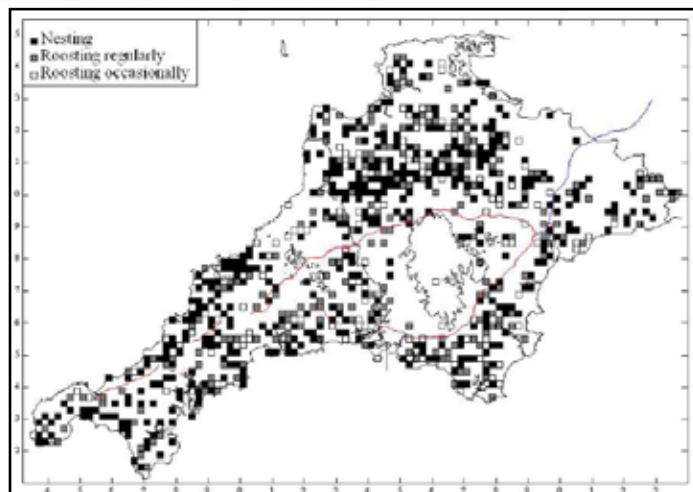
If you live in Devon or Cornwall and want to get involved in surveying Barn Owls on your local patch read on...

Due mainly to our own efforts and with the help of groups like the Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society and Cornwall Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Devon and Cornwall are the most surveyed counties in Britain.

The first surveys (1993 and 1994) established base-line information for each county and the second surveys (Devon in 2003 and Cornwall in 2004) involved checking all of the nest and roost sites recorded during the previous survey and the intervening nine years. In 03/04 a total of 2,011 sites were checked by BOT staff and volunteers – a quite amazing achievement.

Whilst sites monitored by knowledgeable informants can be checked by phone, email, or post, most need to be visited and this represents a huge amount of time and expense. So, why bother? Population monitoring helps us direct our conservation efforts to priority areas. However, the main benefit from the owls' point of view is that site checks often reveal threats to future occupation or breeding success such as the impending redevelopment of an old barn or an unsafe nest place causing high nestling mortality.

The necessary liaison with site owners also promotes opportunities for pro-active conservation measures such as the creation of more foraging habitat (to boost small →



This distribution map was produced following the Devon and Cornwall Barn Owl Surveys in 2003 and 2004 respectively.

mammal numbers), the erection of nestboxes or prevention of drowning.

Unfortunately, our application for funding from Heritage Lottery Fund for the surveys was unsuccessful so we are now on the lookout for other sources of funding. If you are involved with a charity or a business that would like to support the surveys, helping us to continue this unique data set, please contact Frances via the office.

We are also looking for practical help from conservation degree students and volunteers who want to get involved in one or both counties. If you can commit time to the surveys and think you can help, please get in touch before the end of 2012. Training will be given. Thanks! ★

Westmoor Site Checks

Last year we received small grants which have allowed us to carry out some monitoring of the nestboxes we erected as part of our Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme (WBOS) which ran between autumn 2008 and winter 2010/11. Altogether we erected 125 nestboxes over a period of eighteen months the funding will only allow us to check fifty of them. So far, we have visited forty-one sites and been able to check thirty-eight boxes.

Unfortunately, the results have not been very encouraging. Twenty-seven of the boxes showed no signs of use by Barn Owls. Eight boxes were or had been occasional roosting sites, and two were regular roosts. Only a single box showed signs of nesting.

These disappointing results are likely to be due to a combination of factors. Firstly, this area of Devon is a poor area for Barn Owls which is why we ran the scheme in the first place. Additionally, some of the later boxes we erected have only been in place for a very short time. Lastly and probably most importantly, is the weather. Barn Owls do not cope well with cold winters or wet summers and this is exactly what we have had from the summer before the WBOS started until the winter after the scheme finished. Fortunately the summer of 2011 was drier and the winter of 2011/12 has been warmer, so we are hopeful that the news will be better, should we be in a position to check the boxes again in the future. ★

Results	Number of boxes
Absent	27
Occasional roost	8
Regular roost	2
Nesting	1
Not able to check	3
Running total	41

IT Upgrades

These days IT (Information Technology - computers) is essential for any organisation that wants to provide information or to communicate. IT has changed all our lives over the past decade and when it works it is a wonderful tool. Since the last issue of Feedback we have had several IT issues to address all of which cost time and money.

Last Autumn we decided to install an additional camera at the farm where Nestcam and Barncam are broadcast from. Although the owls had bred in 2011 they chose a building without a camera and although we posted regular updates in the nestcam diary it just wasn't as good for the hundreds of interested people as seeing what was going on for themselves.

Back in the office we realised that our five year old server, where all the information we use everyday is held, was reaching its capacity and needed replacing with a more powerful one and the software we were using was in excess of 10 years old - more expense.

Then in January we received notice from the company that built and hosted our website, it had to move! A major panic ensued. Fortunately Alan, our 'IT wonderman', managed to track down the individuals who had built the site back in 2006. The company they now worked for migrated it almost seamlessly at the end of February. The move and the upgrades to the site we required meant yet more expenditure.

We have been fortunate to receive a few small grants towards these costs during the year and are hoping to find more organisations that want to help us continue to improve our IT resources and provision of information and education. ★

Even More BOT News

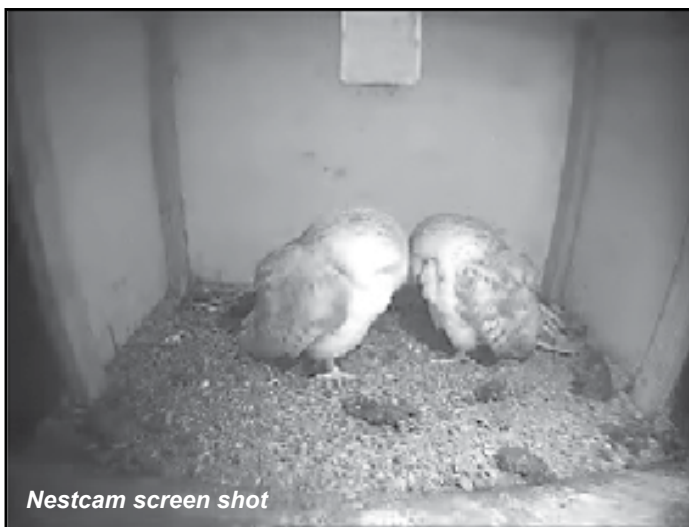
Webcam Update

After the disappointment of not having breeding on Nestcam and Barncam last year, the Conservation Team decided, with the farm owner's permission, to invest a large amount of time and funds to set up another camera in the Barn Owl nest space in the loft of the nearby barn conversion, where the birds did breed in 2011 – aptly called the Barn Conversion Cam. This means that, should the pair decide to nest there this year, we'll have all bases covered. Of course we don't yet know where (or even if) they'll decide to lay a clutch of eggs, but rest assured that if they do use either site, we'll be able to see it.

Typically, having made these preparations it appears that the resident birds are most interested in the original Nestcam box this year.

Interestingly, we're pretty sure the birds currently viewable on Nestcam and Barncam are both new individuals; the ringed female from 2011 went missing in early autumn last year but was replaced by an unringed bird within a few weeks. Similarly, the ringed male went missing in February this year but again was replaced within a few days with another unringed bird.

Clearly there are sufficient numbers of unpaired birds in the vicinity ready to move in when a resident is lost. Perhaps what's most interesting is that this has been a Barn Owl breeding site since 1994, and most years, despite a regular turnover of individuals, breeding has occurred in the same small brick shed that they're in now. Our nest cameras are viewable via <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/infopage.html?id=12>



Nestcam screen shot

Chomping Crisis

At the beginning of March we had arranged to take a Barn Owl ready for release to a site in West Devon. It would spend a couple of weeks in one of our mobile aviaries to get used to its surroundings before the top was opened and then it would have the opportunity to return to the aviary for food if it wanted to.

The vehicle was loaded and everything was ready until we went to attach Mobile Aviary 1 to the 4x4. Unfortunately something had chewed through the electrical connector that powers the trailer's taillights. We tried Mobile Aviary 2 and found that the same thing had happened! Only one aviary left and you've guessed it, all three aviaries which had been parked in the field had been damaged in the same way! We have had to postpone the planned release until the wiring has been checked and repaired on at least one of the aviaries.

The most likely suspects are dogs, cows or foxes and while we may never identify the culprit, we do need to think of a way to make sure it doesn't happen again. Picture on page 12. ★



Barn Owl polebox in snow

Photo: David Ramsden

Barn Owls with Altitude

How does altitude affect the distribution of Barn Owls? Have you ever wondered if the area you live in is suitable for Barn Owls?

Barn Owls in Britain are found in the open countryside, away from our urban areas, utilising habitats associated with rough grasslands, field margins and forest edges. They are also often described as lowland birds, with upper altitudinal limits to breeding quoted by various authors as 150m or 250-300m.

The effect of altitude on the breeding distribution of Barn Owls is a matter I am currently researching. Current literature presents many theories on why higher altitudes may be less suitable for Barn Owls in Britain. These include: an inability to tolerate extreme weather conditions, increased snow cover reducing feeding opportunities, a restricted range of prey species, less suitable habitat due to land use and higher mortality rates. But just how does altitude affect Barn Owl distribution? Perhaps there are fewer birds at high altitude simply because there is less land at high altitude.

Since Barn Owls evolved in warmer climates and are at the northern limit of their global range here in Britain, we would expect them to struggle in winter at higher altitudes. It is for this reason that winter weather conditions are thought to have some bearing on the suitability of land at different altitudes.

I am currently undertaking research to see if there is a pattern between the amount of land and the frequency of Barn Owl nesting at different altitudes in Devon and Cornwall. My research should discover if there is an upper altitudinal limit for breeding or if Barn Owls are simply distributed randomly across the landscape, simply occupying land at different altitudes in proportion to the amount of land available.

This research could have important implications for Barn Owl conservation on a regional or national level, informing future conservation measures and research associated with Barn Owls in uplands. The project should be completed by May of this year and the results will appear in a future issue of Feedback so watch this space! ★

Chris Batey

Conservation Assistant - Student

Chopsaw Donation

In January an email came into the office from a supporter in the USA asking how they could help, which led to a donation that has enabled the Trust to purchase a new chopsaw. This will be an amazing asset for our team and will be used for the repair of aviaries and the building of nestboxes. ★

LLP Update

In 2001 the Barn Owl Trust purchased 26 acres of intensively grazed land and since then this has been transformed into perfect Barn Owl habitat and a haven for a multitude of wildlife. Management has benefited flowers, butterflies, birds, insects and mammals and major projects have included the creation of traditional hedge banks, ponds, an orchard and a wildlife tower. The Lennon Legacy Project is named after the lady who made the project possible and a monthly on-line diary is posted on our website - www.barnowltrust.org.uk. Eds

The annual grazing regime commenced around the middle of August with eleven bullocks being brought in, they stayed until the very end of October. Most of the time they ranged over the whole site except for the woodland, however they were shut in both North Park and Kiln Close for a few days each in an effort to ensure that all the grassland experienced some grazing. The aim is really just to thin out some of the sward, rather than an attempt to remove the growth completely and, critically, to maintain that all-important litter layer. The livestock also tend to poach the ground in places, thereby encouraging more wild flowers.

A Tree Pipit was flushed from the bottom of the 'airstrip' in August and another went south overhead calling at the beginning of September. More notable was a Wryneck that was accidentally flushed off the ground from the fenceline in Kiln Close at about the same time. It was seen briefly before disappearing into the nearby hedgerow, never to be seen again. This is a scarce migrant from Europe and was one of a number seen in Britain during early September. By the end of September a Kingfisher was heard calling from the River Ashburn and it or another was seen flying off the island in the Flo Pond at the end of October. Three male and one female Bullfinch were around the bird tables in December with at least one male still visiting into mid-January.

The New Year started with the pleasant discovery of a Tawny Owl sitting in the hole of the Tawny Owl nestbox in Corner Wood. This box was checked last summer and was found to be completely empty with no evidence of occupation so its presence came as something of a surprise. Hopefully it is one of a pair and will result in a breeding attempt in the box for the first time later this year. The small bird boxes that were in poor condition have been replaced and two Willow Tit nestboxes have been erected. These specially built boxes are covered with bark and packed with sawdust in an attempt to replicate the natural nest site requirements of the species; Willow Tits must excavate their own nest hole in rotting timber and are not easily fooled! On cleaning out the existing small bird boxes of



*Another first for the LLP, the Harvest Mouse nest
Photo: David Ramsden*

old nesting material a presumed Pipistrelle bat was discovered at roost in one located on a dead tree so was left very much alone. By the middle of January, a couple of Song and a single Mistle Thrush were in full song around the LLP, no doubt a result of the continuing mild winter and an early spring? The first frogspawn was discovered in the ponds on January 19th, some two weeks earlier than in recent years. One or two Woodcocks visited the field at dusk on the 6th February and some movement was apparent on the 14th February, with small flocks of Fieldfare, Redwing and Siskins moving northwards in the mild weather conditions. In mid February we saw our first ever flock of Starlings, over 150, in the Holly hedge, amazing.

The Wildlife Tower had some bat enhancements fitted retrospectively in September and October in line with guidance received from several bat workers. The warm south-facing maternity roost space was fitted with some insulation boards and draught excluder to assist in maintaining ambient temperature. In addition, some Kent bat boxes were wall-mounted and Hessian sacks hung internally to benefit crevice dwellers in all the different bat spaces. Some roof tiles were also put on end for the same purpose. Scored timber planks were erected in the low void as a roosting perch for cavity dwellers. We're now looking for a kindly licensed bat worker to volunteer to check the tower for bat occupation on an annual basis. All offers gratefully received . . . A Blue Tit was seen exiting one of the deliberately created recesses in the tower wall just before dark in November, presumably after going in there to forage for insects or to roost.

The first new group of Plymouth University students visited in October and gave us their regular commitment of one visit a month. As usual, they tackled scrub encroachment along the hedgerows with much enthusiasm and good humour. In January they came and helped clear the site of the proposed solar PV arrays on the slope behind the barn. Conservation Team work parties also tackled scrub, the perennial problem, but did some orchard management too; the tight-fitting plastic tree guards that had been in service since planting two years ago had become brittle so were removed. The tree stays were replaced and the mesh guards re-fixed. All that remains is to re-mulch around the base of the trees and undertake some formative pruning this winter.

The first cohort of volunteers from the Hungarian Barn Owl Foundation who were in the UK for conservation work experience visited the Trust for three days in November. After a day of presentations and an LLP tour, they set to work clearing some of Corner Wood. In the spring, Bluebells carpet the ground, so encroaching Bramble and Ash saplings were cleared away from this area.

The Conservation Work Day in January was unfortunately rather sparsely attended but another first for the LLP when a Harvest Mouse nest was found in the hedgerow along Pennsland Lane during works to cut back encroaching bramble off the fenceline.

On the 6th February our chosen installers for the LLP Solar PV project finally started works. Holes for the field-mounted aluminium frame were augered and concreted, and various trenches required for the cabling were prepared. The frame was erected on the 10th, and the panels finally installed on the 13th. Western Power Distribution also attended on the 7th to lay their new three-phase cable to the barn and on the 10th to erect a new pole for the new three-phase transformer, which was fitted on the 24th. Our selected energy provider, E-on visited on the 29th to connect everything and turn it all on. On 29th February the 10kW system started generating electricity, which on fine days is forecast to provide much if not all of the Trust's electricity requirements. ★

Matthew Twiggs
Conservation Officer

Bird News

This last autumn/winter has seemed quite busy in our owl hospital. At the end of September concerned staff at the Met Office in Exeter brought a Barn Owl to us. The bird had a very severe eye injury that it had clearly had for some time. We took it straight to the vets, but unfortunately by the time we arrived the bird was looking very poorly and the vet decided that the best thing to do would be to put the bird to sleep.

A few days later at the beginning of October, we received a call from the vets at Estover who had a Tawny Owl that needed looking after. It had been found by the side of the road, but had no injuries. Perhaps a near miss? After it had spent a few days at the Trust resting and recuperating, we released the owl back into the wild.

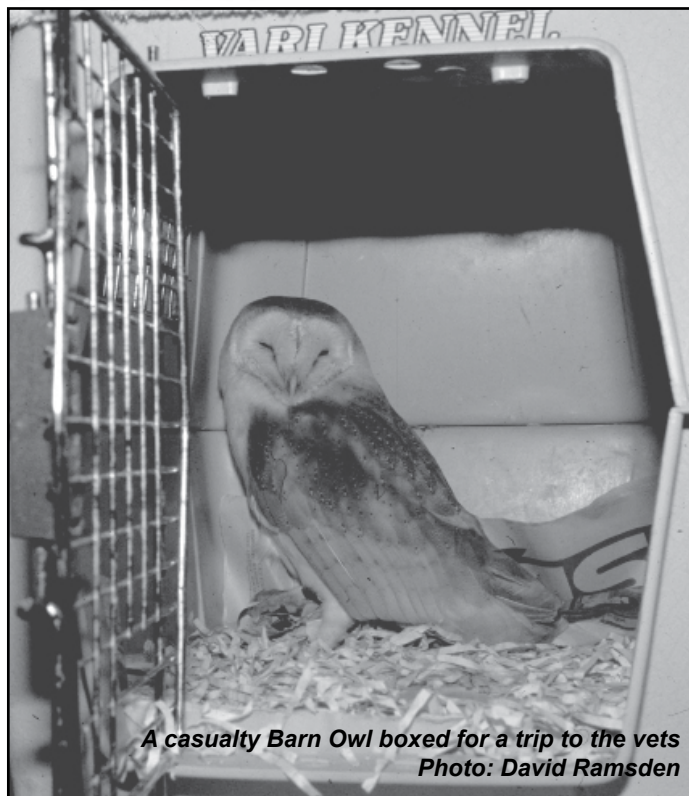
Shortly after the release, we were brought another Tawny Owl that had been found in similar circumstances, by the side of a small country road. This time very close to the A38 dual carriageway. The owl seemed to have some inflammation around its eyes. After being treated with eye drops, the problem cleared up very quickly and the bird was ready for release. There was some debate in the office about the release site. Usually we release Tawny Owls as close as we can to where they were found, as they are very territorial and releasing them elsewhere would severely reduce their chances of survival. At the same time, releasing a bird right next to a dual carriageway didn't seem like a good idea either. Eventually, we decided to release the bird a short distance away, where the road was screened by a stand of trees. After having a good look around, the bird appeared to get its bearings and decided to fly off away from the road, so another happy ending.

At the end of a busy October, we received a very unusual casualty, a Short-eared Owl with a very badly broken wing. After a lengthy period of treatment, including two operations and many ups and downs, the vet decided that, despite our efforts, the kindest thing to do would be to put the bird to sleep, see article on page 14. In the middle of November, we collected a Barn Owl from a house in Plymouth. The owl had been found on a windowsill, wearing leather straps. It was obviously an escaped captive bird which would not have the skills to catch its own food. It was very thin and probably would not have lasted much longer on its own. After being given a good meal the bird was reunited with its grateful owner the next day.

Our last casualty bird of 2011 was a Barn Owl which was found in the back of a lorry. As the lorry had been all around the country prior to the bird being discovered, it was impossible to be sure where it had hitched a ride. We received the owl a few days before Christmas and after spending the worst of the winter weather with us here at the Trust, it was due to be placed in a mobile release aviary at the beginning of March, at a site that was originally a part of our Westmoor Scheme. This was delayed by the 'chomping crisis' - page 5. By the time you read this, the hitchhiking owl should be back in the wild.

Unfortunately we have lost a number of our resident birds over the last few weeks. Two of the elderly Tawny Owls that originally came from the Three Owls Sanctuary have passed away, and while this is still sad, given the ages of the birds concerned, it is only to be expected. Towards the middle of January, one of our Barn Owls, Robin, was found dead in his aviary. He was a good weight with no signs of disease or injury. Many of the birds we keep here at the Trust arrive as adults with an unknown background and very often we have no way of knowing their precise age, but Robin had been with us for a number of years. Exactly a week later, another Barn Owl passed away. This time it was Batman, who had arrived here with Robin. They had lived together for a very long time.

At the beginning of February Holly, one of our most severely disabled birds, was found with injuries from a fight. All of the



*A casualty Barn Owl boxed for a trip to the vets
Photo: David Ramsden*

birds in our Disabled Aviary have been there for many months or even years with no signs of a disturbance in the past. After having her wounds cleaned and a short course of antibiotics, Holly was moved to another aviary.

At the end of February another Barn Owl, Sandwell, or Sandy as she was often called, was found on the floor of her aviary looking very poorly. She was a good weight and there were no signs of injury, but she was at least fifteen years old, only a few years short of the oldest Barn Owl we have ever had. Sadly she passed away a short time later.

We would like to say a big thank you to everyone at the Veterinary Hospital Group at Estover in Plymouth, particularly for all their hard work and dedication in treating the Short-eared Owl that we looked after. They treat all of our birds free of charge and for that we are extremely grateful. ★

Stuart Baker
Assistant Conservation Officer

In Memoriam

The Trust has received a legacy from the estate of the late Richard Mervyn Bocking and donations in memory of Simon John Dunsford, John Jones, Enid Jones, Rory Sambrook, Lucy Nailor, Fred Green and Leslie Billington



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

They all now have a leaf on our Memory Tree

What to do if

Have you ever wondered what you would do if you found an owl? This article is a step-by-step illustrated guide to help you to deal with the situation.

Any owl that is easily approachable is either very young or there is something wrong with it and a grounded owl is likely to be killed by a predator or scavenger. Provided that it is safe to do so, an easy-to-approach owl should always be picked up. As long as you are reasonably gentle, picking it up will not cause any further injury. In the case of very young owls, people are sometimes concerned that if they touch the bird its parents will reject it. Don't worry - owls have little sense of smell and will not reject their young simply because they have been handled.

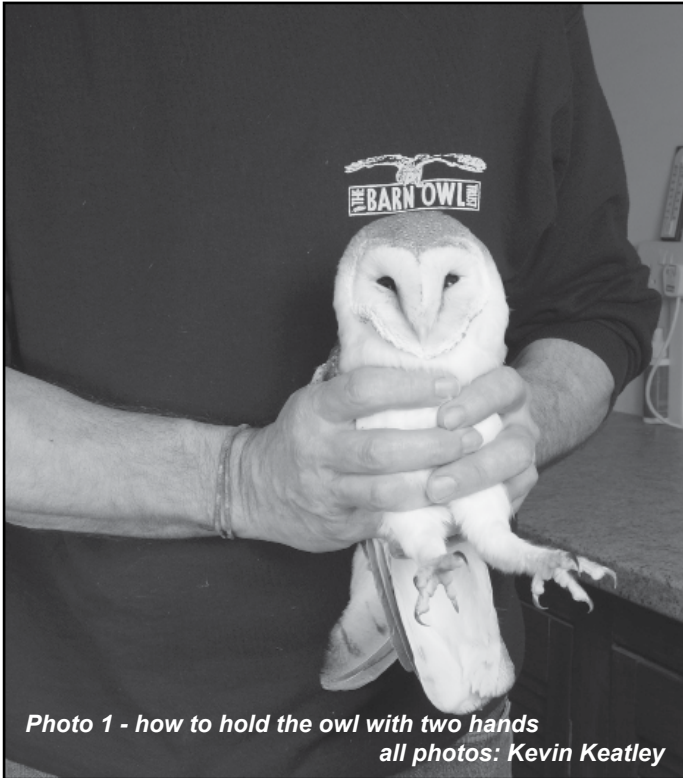


Photo 1 - how to hold the owl with two hands
all photos: Kevin Keatley

To determine the species and age of the owl, compare it with photos on the Trust's website. Most of the young owls picked up by members of the public in Britain are young Tawny Owls. If you know that the owlet you have just found is definitely a Tawny and you are reasonably confident that it is not injured, starving or too young to be out of the nest, you should find the highest large tree-branch that you can reach nearby and place the bird there rather than take it away. Unlike Barn Owls, Tawny Owl adults will feed their young wherever they are, so there is usually no need to return such birds to the nest. For detailed information on dealing with young Tawny Owls please refer to Barn Owl Trust leaflet no 48 'What to do if you find a young Tawny Owl' available online at www.barnowltrust.org.uk.

How should the owl be picked up?

If the owl is lively don't try to pick it up from the front unless you are wearing puncture-resistant gloves (i.e. thin leather). Without gloves you could try gently throwing a towel or something similar over it and whilst it grips the towel try to get your hands around it from behind. Inactive owls are usually easy to pick up, but you should still use the most effective method:

Gently grasp the owl from behind so that your thumbs lie together on its back (up its spine), your fingers fully encircle its folded wings and its legs extend outwards between your fingers (see photo 1). If you need to hold the bird for some time and it appears very docile you may change your grip but always keep control of the feet – they can do more damage than the beak.

What should the owl be contained in?

The ideal container is a solid-sided pet carrier with a large folded towel inside for the bird to grip. A secure cardboard box, roughly 30 cm x 30 cm x 60 cm, with a towel in and a few ventilation holes, is fine. The owl in its container should be kept somewhere quiet and at room temperature or slightly warmer. If the bird can see out of the container through anything larger than a small hole, it may become unduly stressed and may keep struggling to get out. Draping something over the container will usually pacify it. Be careful not to chill or overheat the owl and avoid keeping it anywhere it is likely to dehydrate. Irrespective of its condition, always make sure that the owl is in a secure container – it may become more lively at any moment.

What if the owl is tangled or trapped?

Owls sometimes become tangled in soft garden netting. Disentanglement can be extremely difficult; if necessary the netting around it should be cut and the bird quickly passed to an experienced vet or rehabilitator for it to be removed. Chances of full recovery are reasonable. Owls are sometimes found hanging on barbed wire. Often one or more barbs have punctured the wing between bone and tendon and a prolonged struggle results in severe tangling, major soft-tissue damage, multiple puncture wounds and quite often a wing fracture as well. Cutting the wire does not usually help and untangling on-site, although difficult, is the usual procedure. Badly damaged victims should receive immediate veterinary attention but even so a full recovery is extremely unlikely. Owls often become trapped in chimneys and have to be extracted via a removable panel in the flue or by removing part of the stove or fire surround. This happens far more often to Tawny Owls than Barn Owls and they generally make a full recovery.

Recording the circumstances in which the owl was found

Always record exactly where and when the owl was found, ideally using a six-figure grid reference plus other information on the finding circumstances, such as how long it might have been there, if there is a known nest nearby, if it is a road casualty or if there was some other danger nearby such as overhead wires. If the bird is passed on to a vet or rehabilitator, make sure that all this information goes with it. When choosing the best option for a bird's release, knowledge of the bird's original finding circumstances is vitally important. If the owl is obviously injured or you are unable to assess it yourself, you should contact a bird-experienced vet or a bird rehabilitator as soon as possible.



Photo 2 - changing your grip on the owl

you find an Owl

Assessing the owl's condition

If the owl has an obvious injury or a strong, unpleasant odour you should contact the nearest available bird-experienced vet without delay. If it is apparent that the owl is not badly injured but is surprisingly docile, barely conscious, obviously underweight, very young or active but 'not quite right', it needs assessment before any decision is made. In the case of a nestling Barn Owl that appears to be uninjured and is not too thin, it may be far better for you to deal with it and get it back into the nest before the following evening, rather than pass it to someone who may keep it for an unnecessarily long time. If you are not prepared to check the owl over by carefully following all the instructions below you must pass it to a vet or wildlife rehabilitator without delay.



Photo 3 - a one-handed grip to facilitate assessment

If the owl you are about to assess is already in a container, look to see what position it is in before picking it up. If it is standing facing you, check to see if one wing is held lower than the other – a wing held low suggests a possible injury to that wing. Notice if both eyes are open to the same degree or if one is more open than the other. Also look in the bottom of the box. If the owl has produced a dropping, notice what colour it is (white/black is good) and check to see if it has regurgitated a pellet (a sign that it has eaten recently). Also check to see if there is any sign of blood. All of the above are indications of the owl's condition so write them down. Some casualties when stressed will 'pretend' to look fitter than they really are and it is only when quiet and undisturbed that their true state of fitness may be demonstrated.

Now pick the owl up from behind (as described on page 8). There is no rush. Take your time. What you are going to do next is change your grip so that you have one hand free to check the owl over.

Starting with the owl in both hands (see photo 1), move it towards your lower chest, then slowly let go with one hand so that the owl is held in one hand against your chest, while keeping the upper part of its legs between your fingers so that the feet are pointing away to one side (see photo 2). Keeping the owl gently pressed against you, slowly move the back of the owl onto the palm of your free hand, so that the back of its head is on your wrist or forearm with its legs and folded wings

encircled by your thumb and index finger. Do this firmly but gently so that the owl cannot escape by wriggling nor injure you, the handler, with its feet (see photo 3). If the owl starts to struggle, pull the bottom of your jumper up and over its face, or lay a small towel or cloth over its face.

With your other hand, move your fingertips slowly and lightly onto its chest and feel its breastbone – the raised bony ridge running down the middle (see photo 4). Feel the breast (the wing muscles) either side of the breastbone. How far does the breastbone stick up above the muscles on either side? A few millimetres is normal; more than about 4 mm suggests that the owl has been underfed for a significant period. Now run the tips of your fingers right down the breastbone and lightly onto the stomach (the lower part of its front, between its legs). Does the stomach feel like an empty hollow of loose skin or can you feel a solid lump? Does the skin feel warm or cold?

Still with the owl on its back and using your free hand, hold the leading edge of one wing between your thumb and index finger and gently release that wing from the grip of your other hand so that it can be extended. Spread the wing slightly and with your thumb and index finger hold the leading edge of the wing and feel the bone inside it - (see photo 5). Slowly feel your way along each bone (from the body right down to the base of the furthest wing feather), checking for a swelling, a wet patch, or movement part-way along a bone. Dislocations are quite common so remember the amount of flexibility in each joint. Check the other wing in an identical manner and compare the feel, flexibility, appearance and movement of one wing to the other. When you are quite sure that the wings are identical, or that you have found a definite difference, return to the holding position (as in photo 3).

Keeping control of the feet, hold one leg and gently release it from the grip of your other hand so that it can be extended. Feel along each leg bone, again checking for a swelling, a wet patch, or movement part-way along a bone. Check each leg in turn (be aware of the feet) and compare. Look out for unusual movement or perhaps a lack of movement.

Continued on page 10 →



Photo 4 - use your free hand to gently feel the breast

What to do if you find an owl - continued



Photo 5 - checking the left wing

When you are quite sure that the legs are identical, or that you have found a difference, return to the holding position. Now check the eyes – make sure they both look the same. If they are closed you can gently open them in turn; place your index finger against the feathers below one eye, gently rest your thumb on the upper eyelid and gently move it up to open the eye (see photo 6). Initially, the eye may be covered by a nictitating membrane (known as the third eyelid). Simply wait a few moments for this to rise. Both eyes should look the same. If one definitely appears different from the other, then a visit to an experienced vet with an ophthalmoscope is needed. Blue eye colouration in some nestling owls is normal (although both eyes should look the same).

Look at the ears – an owl's ear openings are situated on either side of the head between the eyes and the edge of the facial disk and can be found by separating the feathers. It is normal for the size, shape and position of the left and right ears to be slightly different from each other. All you are really checking for is signs of bleeding.

Check the nostrils and the inside of the beak – the nostrils are small external holes in either side of the upper mandible (beak), check for bleeding. Look inside the beak, the easiest way to open it is to hold the upper mandible from above between your thumb and index finger and gently push your thumbnail into the side between the upper and lower mandibles. A little force may be necessary at first, BUT never open it more than about 25 mm (less for a Little Owl). When the beak opens, keep hold of the upper mandible and use your second finger to hold the lower mandible down (see photo 7) or place a finger in the corner of its 'mouth' to keep it open. Look inside the open gape for signs of bleeding. In a serious collision, the upper mandible sometimes fractures from the skull causing movement between them, but this is very rare. If you see any sign of bleeding or anything else that is obviously not normal, then the bird needs to be passed to an experienced vet or rehabilitator.

What to do if the stomach is empty and the breastbone is protruding

If the stomach is empty and the breastbone is very protrusive then the owl is underweight and probably emaciated. To confirm this you can weigh the owl by placing it (in its box) on kitchen

scales and subtracting the empty box weight. Bird weights vary according to species as well as size, age, sex, time of year and stage of the nesting cycle. Immediately after rearing a brood, a small adult Barn Owl might be perfectly healthy at 260g, whereas an unusually large individual may be dead at this weight. Assessments should always be based on the physical examination of the individual. As a very rough guide the weights of Barn Owls over six weeks old are:

- below 250 g = emaciated/dead
- 250–290 g = thin
- 290–310 g = okay
- over 310 g = good

An emaciated owl needs to be tubed by an experienced person. Tubing means giving a specific amount of warm water and glucose via a syringe and tube of specific length. Do not try this unless you have the right equipment and have been shown exactly how to do it. Take the bird to an experienced bird rehabilitator as soon as possible.

If the owl feels thin and its weight is less than about 260 g and it is impossible to get it to a vet or experienced rehabilitator, the priority is to get fluid into the owl followed by food. For at least the first few days the owl is most unlikely to eat or drink voluntarily; the carer must take full responsibility for its sustenance.

If you are going to re-hydrate/feed the owl yourself the bare essentials needed are a suitable container for the owl, old towels and newspaper, warm water (ideally with glucose) and a dropper or very small (artist's/child's) paintbrush. Glucose should be dissolved at the rate of one level teaspoon to half a cup of water warmed to 38–40°C. In an emergency, sugar can be used. The carer must be prepared to cut up dead mice or poultry chicks, although for the first three days raw chicken or beef can be used. If you have all these things and can spare half an hour roughly every eight hours you can keep and feed the owl for as long as it takes to put sufficient weight on – usually one or two weeks. If you have significant doubt about your ability or willingness to do this, you should pass the bird to an experienced bird rehabilitator as soon as possible.



Photo 6- examining the eyes

Photo 7 - holding the beak open



- It is a healthy nestling Barn Owl or nestling Tawny Owl that is only slightly underweight, you can feed it and house it for up to two weeks and will return it to the nest* following the instructions contained in the relevant Barn Owl Trust leaflet (no. 48 or 49 available from www.barnowltrust.org.uk)
- It appears to be a fit adult owl (you did not find anything wrong with it having carried out all the checks described above) and you will release it at or very close to the place where it was found, or
- It is a fit adult that is/was only slightly dazed or concussed and you will be releasing it at or very close to the place where it was found just after dusk within three days

* Note that nestling/fledgling Barn Owls must always be put back in the actual nest, but fledgling Tawny Owls only need to be placed near the nest or in an elevated position very close to where they were found.

How to find a local bird-experienced vet

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) website (www.rcvs.org.uk) has a search facility where you can enter your postcode and get an extensive list of vets in your area. Clicking on one gives you the details of what they treat and their phone number. The site also has an advanced search facility that enables you to search for wild bird specialists. Non-internet users can telephone the RCVS to obtain the same information on 020 7222 2001. Another option is to telephone your nearest vet and ask if they are experienced with wild birds or can recommend a vet who is. If this draws a blank, contact your nearest wildlife rehabilitator and ask them which vet they use.

How to find a local bird rehabilitator

Although there is no definitive directory of wildlife rehabilitators in the UK, the British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (BWRC) website (www.bwrc.org.uk) has a page with links to websites that list wildlife rehabilitation centres. The BWRC site also has a list of major rehabilitation centres across the UK, including the Barn Owl Trust. If none of the major centres are near you, try contacting the nearest one and asking if they know of a suitable rehabilitator in your local area. For non-internet users the best option is to look under 'animal welfare societies' and/or 'conservation organisations' in the Yellow Pages or ask a local vet if they know of one. At time of writing the BWRC did not have a telephone number for enquiries.

Contacting the RSPCA

If you cannot find a rehabilitator or vet who is experienced with birds, the RSPCA should be contacted on 0300 1234 555. However, please be aware that calls to the RSPCA's National Helpline number are currently answered by call-centre staff who primarily deal with enquiries concerning domestic animals. Experience shows that they sometimes have difficulty tailoring their advice to the needs of Barn Owls. RSPCA staff at wildlife centres are usually very well informed, but direct phone numbers for them can be hard to obtain. The RSPCA do collect injured wild birds, but their drivers cover large areas, are usually very busy and are sometimes unable to respond as quickly as they would like to.

Live owl emergencies – how the Barn Owl Trust can help

The Trust normally only receives owls found in southwest England; across the rest of Britain casualties are received by a very wide range of independent rehabilitators. For anyone with a casualty owl the Trust provides helpful information on its website (www.barnowltrust.org.uk) including highly detailed information for anyone dealing with a nestling/fledgling Barn Owl or a nestling/branching Tawny Owl. The website also provides the Trust's Live Owl Emergency telephone number. Outside normal working hours this number is also obtainable from the Trust's answering machine (01364 653026). Although the Live Owl Emergency telephone is usually answered, it is occasionally unavailable due to the limitations of mobile phone reception and staffing.

The next issue of Feedback will feature a do-it-yourself guide to the short-term care of a wild owl. In the meantime, if you need help don't hesitate to contact us on 01364 653026. ★

What to do if the owl is cold and wet

If the stomach is empty and feels cold, place the bird in its container somewhere slightly warm and let it warm up for a few hours before attempting to feed it. If the owl is wet, place it somewhere warm and uncover the box a little so it can dry off. A saturated owl can take over 12 hours to dry and will benefit from a little extra ventilation, but not a cold draft. Warmth can be very good for birds that are cold, wet and in shock BUT be very careful never to dehydrate the owl. Further dehydrating a bird that is already emaciated can be fatal. Owls get the fluid they need from their food and rarely drink; even an owl that is dying of dehydration is most unlikely to drink. Aim to keep the owl in an air temperature of 15–25°C.

Should I pass the owl on? Making the right decision

Pass the owl directly to a bird-experienced vet if:

- It has multiple injuries or extensive soft tissue damage
- Any part of it is infested with maggots and/or is foul-smelling
- Bone is protruding
- A long leg or wing bone is broken or dislocated
- One wing or leg does not appear to be broken but is limp, unresponsive or at a strange angle
- It has an eye injury
- It has blood in its beak or ear(s)
- It is obviously very ill (although please note that healthy owls are often subdued while in a box and can play dead while being handled)
- It needs veterinary investigation (such as an x-ray)

Pass the owl directly to an experienced bird rehabilitator if:

- You are unable to check it over as described
- It needs veterinary attention but you cannot find a bird-experienced vet
- It appears to have a broken limb but none of the long bones are broken
- One foot is, or both feet are, constantly clenched.
- It is clearly underweight and/or needs tube feeding
- It seems to only have a minor problem but you cannot offer it the best care

Care for and release the owl yourself if:

- You are confident that you can provide all the care the bird needs and you are certain that it would not benefit from better treatment, better care facilities or better release facilities
- It is a healthy nestling Barn Owl or nestling Tawny Owl and you will be returning it to the nest* before dusk, following the instructions contained in the relevant Barn Owl Trust leaflet (no. 48 or 49 available from www.barnowltrust.org.uk)

Team Talk

Since the Autumn issue of Feedback we've had three new folk join the team - they introduce themselves here.

I retired from the Army in August 2011, having completed a full career. I was looking for a voluntary job for a few days each month and I wanted it to be working with animals. On the Internet I found an advert from the Barn Owl Trust. They were looking for a volunteer to help look after the aviaries and with general odd jobs.



Kim - Photo: Maz Bryan

This sounded just up my street as owls have always fascinated me and the Trust was local. I visited in September and submitted my references soon after. My wife and I had planned to go on holiday at the beginning of October and on our return a letter was waiting for me informing me that I could start volunteering so I duly "reported for duty" at the beginning of November.

My initial task was to clean the aviaries so Maz showed me around. The first aviary that we went into contained a number of both Tawny and Barn Owls and as we cleaned the owls just sat and watched us with the odd one flying around, they were not really worried about us. I was quite wary of them at first but after the first aviary was completed I was let loose on my own.

The second aviary contained two beautiful Barn Owls who, again were not concerned about me as I worked. At one point I stood no more than two feet away from them and we were watching each other. I then knew that I had made the right decision to volunteer, as this was just fantastic.

During the rest of November I went to the Trust most Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Tuesday is normally spent cleaning the aviaries and the Wednesday general ground maintenance i.e. picking up leaves, cleaning the Trust vehicles or working with the Conservation Officer Matt.

In December Matt asked me if I would like to go with him to visit farms to erect nestboxes or to check sites looking for evidence of owls. I found it really interesting listening to him talking to the farmers about managing their land to encourage owls. My role was very important on our days out...making the coffee and carrying the ladders, but only under supervision.

January found me undergoing hard labour... moving rocks from point A to point B and digging out the bank of one of the ponds. This, I was told, was not to keep me amused but was part of a project to build a Kingfisher nest site. More about that next time. I would just like to take this opportunity to thank all the Trust staff members for their warm welcome to me and I now look forward to the spring and summer. ★

Kim Baker
Practical Support Volunteer

Hello, I'm Hannah. I joined the Trust at the beginning of this year as David's PA. Last year I completed an Environmental Education Foundation Degree and began looking for work in the conservation sector. When the opportunity of working for the Trust came up I jumped at the chance, as having grown up less than three miles from HQ I was aware of how highly regarded their work is.

Alongside my regular PA tasks, I am arranging the BOESS and ABOSM training courses and venturing forth into the local primary schools to give the Wings of Change talk with Baley our Education Assistant!



Hannah - Photo: Oliver Bosence

I have been very lucky to travel to some incredible parts of the world including an African Forest Reserve and National Parks in South America and New Zealand. I've also been volunteering locally for a couple of years, in and around Nature Reserves for the South West Lakes Trust in order to learn more about practical wildlife conservation.

I've been made to feel very welcome at the Trust, and I'm looking forward to learning more about Barn Owls and contributing to their conservation. ★

Hannah Bosence
PA to Head of Conservation

I'm Chris and I started a work placement at the Trust in September 2011, between my 2nd and 3rd years of University. I am carrying out a scientific research project and also assisting the conservation team with enquiries and practical conservation work.



Chris - Photo: Maz Bryan

Originally from Norfolk, I am currently studying BSc (Hons) Wildlife

Conservation at the University of Plymouth. I have always had an interest in British wildlife, bird ecology and conservation, with a particular interest in Birds of Prey. I am a very keen sportsman, playing table tennis, squash and racketlon competitively. ★

Chris Batey
Conservation Assistant - Student



It's a mystery - Stuart examines the chewed trailer lighting wires. What could have happened? See Chomping Crisis item page 5
Photo: David Ramsden

Wildlife Words

Feedback 46 saw the launch of the Trust's first ever open Poetry Competition. We were delighted to receive 85 entries creating a difficult job for our two judges Rebecca Gethin and Miranda Egan who really had their work cut out to decide on a winner. The competition was the brain-child of ex-trustee Heather Buswell who, like us, was thrilled with the number of entries we received.

We are pleased to announce that the winners are :-

1st Prize – “Red” by Isobel Thrilling

2nd Prize – “Pantoum:Beautiful and Cursed” by Graham Burchell

3rd Prize – “Tyto” by Mark Totterdell

Our judges also selected six Highly Commended poems - in no particular order they are: *The First Butterfly* - Eleanor Vale, *Windfall* - Seamus Harrington, *The Wild Geese* - Carolyn Taylor, *Murmuration* - Matt Goodfellow, *Riddle* - Kathryn Dixon and *Waiting* - Carolyn Taylor. A further six entrants will receive certificates of commendation. Everyone will be receiving their prizes and certificates shortly.

To celebrate the success of this poetry competition a collection of twenty of the most inspirational poems - 'Wildlife Words' will be produced. To purchase your copy please send £5 plus £2 p&p to the Trust or go to Gift Ideas at www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Supporting BOT

Did you know you can help Raise Funds for the Barn Owl Trust when you search or shop on-line – at no cost to you?

The Barn Owl Trust is trying some new ways to raise much-needed funds on-line. You can help us – at absolutely no cost to yourself or to us - by using either of these charity search engines or going via the websites below when you shop on-line:

With EveryClick Search [www.everyclick.com/barnowltrust] and EasySearch [barnowltrust.easysearch.org.uk] you can raise money and help support our work every time you search the web – it's easy to set them as your home page, then use them instead of Google, or other search engines.

Or if you're doing your shopping on-line, try using Give as You Live [www.giveasyoulive.com] or EasyFundraising [www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/barnowltrust]. Both of these websites offer links to hundreds of retailers – including many of the big high street stores. When you shop via either of these two sites, the retailers make a donation to your chosen charity. It costs you nothing and the small amounts raised quickly add up to a huge difference for us, and for Barn Owls!

Free Money! -Some companies make donations just for signing up for their e-newsletter, participating in free trials or even simply registering on their site – so you don't even have to buy anything. See 'Raise Funds for Free' on Easy Fundraising. [www.easyfundraising.org.uk/deals/raise-funds-for-free]

These are useful ways for our supporters to help out without having to dip into their own pockets at a time when we are all having to tighten our belts. Please give it a try, and let us know what you think. (Please note that the Barn Owl Trust offers these services in good faith, but we have no control over the content or management of these external websites or organisations.)

JustTextGiving by Vodaphone – Donate direct from your mobile phone! There are now 50 million mobile phone users in the UK JustTextGiving by Vodaphone enables you to give instantly and

The winning poem selected by our judges is:

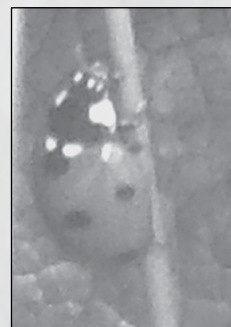
Red - Isobel Thrilling

All winter, bundles of ladybirds
have slept in the hinges
of our windows,
undisturbed by our
occasional need for more air.

Not the new, harlequin species,
no exotic,
messing about with colours
and dots,
just red with
the regulation spots in black.

Today,
when I shook out the mats,
they'd gone,
change announced
by an absence not a presence.

They'll be back like swallows,
reversing seasons,
lodging their
own bits of kindling in the house ★



spontaneously to your chosen charity, simply by sending a text from your mobile phone. The donation amount is then charged to your phone bill as usual (or deducted from your Pay as You Go credit). If you'd like us to claim Gift Aid on your donation just follow the instructions in the reply text from Vodaphone. JustTextGiving is a free service for charities to use with no running costs and no commission or fees to pay. Every penny of every donation goes to your chosen charity (plus Gift Aid where appropriate.) There's no cost to you for sending the text message and your free allowance/bundle won't be deducted. You can use JustTextGiving from all of the UK mobile service providers.

You can choose to donate between £1 and £10 (Donations can be in amounts of £1, £2, £3, £4, £5, and £10 up to a maximum of £30 per day.) To donate to the Barn Owl Trust by text: Text OWLS08 £10 (or other amount) to 70070 - (You can leave the £ symbol out – it's not needed for the transaction to work.)

To find out more, go to: justtextgiving.vodafone.co.uk

Don't forget that you can also donate on-line and find out all sorts of fascinating facts about beautiful Barn Owls and their environment by visiting our website: www.barnowltrust.org.uk ★

Vanessa Lewis

Pass it on ..

When you've finished reading this issue of Feedback help us spread the word by passing it on.

You could leave it in your local doctor's or dentist's surgery, or give it to a friend or family member so that more people can read about our work. Hopefully this will encourage them to do their bit to help *Conserve the Barn Owl and its Environment* or to support the Trust and its work.

If you know of anywhere we could put a leaflet dispenser or a donation box that you could keep an eye on, we'd love to hear from you.

Thank you. ★

The Owl that didn't make it



SEO - Photo: Stuart Baker

On 26th October last year we received a call from someone telling us they were bringing in yet another injured Tawny Owl. Imagine our surprise when it turned out to be a beautiful Short Eared Owl!, only our second in over twenty years of receiving casualty owls! We promptly gave her the not-very-imaginative name of SEO. The poor bird was desperately thin with a badly broken wing. After assessment, tubing and force-feeding the owl was taken 25 miles to our friends at The Veterinary Hospital Group, Plymouth (where almost all our seriously injured owls go). The vets discovered that the wing fracture was by no means a fresh injury, worst of all, the ends of the broken bone had started to die off, greatly reducing the chance of a full recovery. She had probably been hit by a car and then spent five or six days wondering around on the ground before being found.

We agonised over a difficult decision: should SEO be put to sleep, have her wing amputated, or should we ask for the wing to be pinned? In the end we opted for pinning even though the chances of a full recovery were slim. Four days later SEO returned to the Barn Owl Trust for a period of TLC and rehabilitation. She had external metal pins holding her fractured humerus in the optimum position and oral antibiotics and painkillers to be administered twice-daily.

By 4th November SEO had put on 77grams, almost a third of her body weight and was becoming quite "feisty". She had to be kept boxed to allow the wing to mend but after a couple of days we moved her into a larger box in the hope that she would calm down a bit. Fortunately she did! A full twenty-five days later, another x-ray revealed that the wing was healing, but more slowly than expected. We were advised that SEO required physio (!) - the wing required daily stretching by a member of staff. Although she continued to gain weight, SEO didn't enjoy the physio at all and found it very stressful, as did some of our staff. On the 12th December we conferred with the vet and suggested that rather than continue the physiotherapy we should move her into a small aviary where she could exercise her own wing. Unsurprisingly, she seemed much happier in the aviary than in a box.

Over the Christmas period SEO ate extremely well and moved around the aviary quite well too. The New Year brought another x-ray at the vets and we were devastated to hear that the bone had not 'knitted' at all and there was no chance that the wing would ever heal. It was now a choice between euthanasia or

amputation and a life in captivity. After much soul-searching it was decided that the vets should operate and SEO would spend the rest of her days in the Barn Owl Trust sanctuary - however this was not to be.

Whilst opening up the wing under anaesthetic, it was discovered that an infection in the bone had spread up the wing. The vets advised that this was unlikely to respond to treatment and that the kindest option for this brave soul was euthanasia. We agreed. After 73 days in captivity there was nothing more we could do.

With hindsight, one could argue that the bird should have been euthanased as soon as she was deemed un-releasable. Equally, one could say that she showed every sign of adapting well to life in captivity and we know that in specially adapted aviaries even amputees can learn to cope. Such life and death decisions are unavoidably subjective and all we can do is what seems best for the individual.

We'd like to thank The Veterinary Hospital Group, Plymouth for all the time and resources they put into helping SEO and the other owls we've taken to them over the years, the staff and volunteers here that care for all our casualty owls and our Friends and supporters who make it possible for us to care for these wonderful creatures. Thankfully most of the casualties we receive have stories with a happier ending. ★

Recycling News

Our income from items donated for recycling has continued to creep upwards. Our links to the Giveacar Scheme have resulted in over £650 being donated since May last year for recycled cars – wonderful. A big thank you to everyone who chose to support us in this way.

At the Dinky Toy Auction in November 5 out of 6 lots were sold and raised £460. The lot that didn't sell is being re-entered on 06/03/12 so hopefully there is more to come. Vanessa continues to put our donated owly bits and pieces on ebay. If you collect owl items just go to ebay uk and put Barn Owl Trust into the search to see what is currently available.

We have found a new contact for selling foreign coins & notes and £75 was raised in Nov 2011. Ink cartridges are now going to the Recycling Appeal along with larger cartridges, and also records, DVDs & CDs (with bar code). EAH Recycling has now stopped taking our cartridges as the numbers have dropped too low, we have raised a total of £1,623 through them since August 2008.

Stamps n All is still taking all our stamps, 1st day covers, early envelopes & postcards with stamps, keys, jewellery, trophies, gold & silver, pre-1940s birthday cards, silk & WW1 silk cards. These have raised £1,832 since August 2009. Unused British stamps are worth less than face value for collection so we are using them for postage which can make for colourful envelopes and packages. We had a large batch of them along with a stamp & 1st day cover collection donated in December.

If you have access to the internet you can check out the items we can recycle to raise funds by looking at our Green Links page <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/infopage.html?id=169> You can also find links there for other organisations that provide information on all sorts of things from composting to eco-friendly food packaging. If you have any queries about donations for recycling do call the office on 01364 653026 – thank you for your support. ★

Pete Webb
Recycling/Admin

Walk for Wildlife



Poppy - Photo: Frances Ramsden

Last year Whisky the Westie walked to raise funds for the Trust and collected an amazing £1,380, certainly our biggest fund raising event of the year thanks to your generous sponsorship. Unfortunately last autumn Whisky became seriously ill and is currently undergoing treatment and therefore cannot commit to being able to Walk for Wildlife this year, although we are keeping our fingers crossed that he will join in if he can - get well Whisky.

Poppy the Springer Spaniel has leapt to the rescue and picked up the baton (or stick). She spends a lot of time at the Trust with her owner Jasmin, one of our practical support team and is a firm favourite with our staff and volunteers. Always up for a romp Poppy will be leading the Walk for Wildlife this year during the week of 2nd - 9th June. At just over a year old Poppy is full of energy and enthusiasm and keen to take on the challenge of encouraging other dogs to take their owners for a walk to increase awareness of the Trust and raise funds to support our work.

If you are a dog owner and would like to walk your own faithful four-legged friend during the Walk for Wildlife week to collect sponsorship for the Trust, plan a walk together between 2nd - 9th June. We can send you a sponsor form to personalise with a photo of your pet.

Please support Poppy on her very first Walk for Wildlife by sending a donation with the enclosed flyer or online via our donations page, please put Poppy in the 'reason for donation' box, she will be walking at least 7 miles.

Following in the footsteps of delightful dogs like Megan, Lupe, Dolci, Hugo and Whisky who have supported the Trust over the past 12 years Poppy has a lot to live up to. But with your help she really could raise lots of funds to help us conserve the Barn Owl and its Environment. ★

Thank you ★

Competition Winner



The winner of our T-shirt slogan competition is Rob Hamar who came up with the 'educational' wording "I don't give a hoot.... I screech". Rob will be receiving his very own T-shirt featuring the BOT logo and a cartoon owl by Phil Knowingling.

You can order your heather (grey) or pink Screech T-shirt on-line or via the office. Only currently available in children's sizes - sizes 20", 22", 26", 30" & 32" at £9.00 plus £2 p&p. ★

Raptor Persecution

Raptor persecution may be perceived largely as a thing of the past but it continues today throughout the UK, including here in the South West. In 2010 alone, 227 incidents of bird of prey persecution were reported in the UK (RSPB, 2010) and in the South West, 29 incidents of bird of prey crime were recorded. Last year, 8 raptors including 3 Peregrines, 4 Goshawks and 1 Buzzard were victims within Devon and Cornwall, an area that has been described by the RSPB as a 'hotspot' for persecution. Frequently targeted species across the UK include Hen Harriers, Peregrines and Golden Eagles.

Although the legal protection of nests, eggs and live birds, from killing, injuring or taking has been in place since 1954 (except the Sparrowhawk, since 1961), the continued acts of crime towards birds of prey have led to a call for stronger legal protection. An e-petition on the UK government website is calling for the introduction of an offence of Vicarious Liability for raptor persecution in England. Already introduced in Scotland, the offence would mean those who turn a blind-eye to, allow, or direct raptor persecution can be prosecuted for their actions.

The e-petition can be found at the web address: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/23089> and requires 100,000 signatures to be eligible for debate in the House of Commons.

The Barn Owl Trust fully supports this e-petition and would like to encourage everyone to sign up and make a difference to protecting birds of prey in England. ★

Chris Batey

Conservation Assistant - Student

Thanks and Things

We'd like to say a really big thank you to all our Friends and supporters who have sent us items for recycling since the last issue of Feedback, you can see from Pete's item on page 14 that it really adds up; Thank you Keith & Janice Dickinson, Ann Oxley, Helen Sinnett, Gwyneth Parish, Deborah Elton, Muriel Childs, Mrs Sweetingham, Mrs Dennis, Alan & Vanessa Lewis, Beryl & Reg Welsh, Mark Pountney, Chris Hancox, Peter & Fiona Oldham, The Marsh Christian Trust, Richard and Leigh-Anne Boucher, Betty and Jim Cotterill and anyone else we've inadvertently missed.

From our Wants List we have been lucky enough to receive the long wanted 'Manual for Wildlife Radio Tagging' from Matthew Brown, a bird spotting telescope from an anonymous donor, bird food from John and Sheila Prickett and Fred Sterns sent us a significant donation towards our new chopsaw.

Helen Sinnett and Lily Richards have sent us owl pellets - thank you and Earth Love Poetry Magazine sent us a donation along with poetry competition entries. Holsworthy Primary School raised £150 from collecting used stamps, foreign coins, jewellery etc. and Reg Wilkinson and the Bootleggers Walking Group sent us £100 from their sponsored walk. Well done all of you and thank you for your support.

If anyone would like information about setting up a recycling point at work (or school) or holding an event to raise funds to support our work please get in touch - we'd love to hear from you.

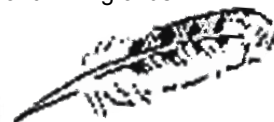
As usual we have a Wants List. If you have any of these things sitting around not being used, we can put them to good use:

- * Foreign change and notes (please enclose a note of the type of currency)
- * Wild bird food - mainly sacks of black sunflower seeds, also peanuts & plain canary seed

- * Set of 2 or 3 walkie talkie radios
- * 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 930C or Epson R300
- * Padded envelopes
- * Postage stamps (both new and used - especially commemorative and foreign) new for BOT use. Used includes larger gold and white "stamps" on parcels.
- * Anabat detector
- * Hand held hetrodyne bat detector
- * Waders - for working in the ponds
- * Night vision binoculars - generation 2
- * Petrol leaf blower
- * Carpet suitable for the office - no smaller than 8' x 14'
- * Metal detector
- * Good quality Barn Owl winter scenes either photographic or illustrative for Christmas card images
- * 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, at a reasonable rate
- * Small plate compactor
- * Emulsion paint (pale colour) sufficient to paint an office
- * Bubble wrap
- * New brown paper for wrapping parcels
- * Brown Packaging/parcel tape 50mm x 66mm
- * A3 rotary trimmer for paper and card
- * Tool belts
- * New or nearly new wood chisels, particularly wide/rounded
- * Wooden mallets
- * Large magnifying glass
- * Small DAB radio

Thank you for thinking of us . ★

Tail piece ...



Well Spring is well and truly sprung here. We have tadpoles in the ponds and primroses in the hedge banks. Out of the window I can see a flock of House Sparrows eating the hens' corn. It's amazing, there were no sparrows here at all until February 2010 and now we have a resident flock of over 30 birds. There was confirmed breeding in the nestboxes of the LLP barn for the first time last year and they love the hedges we have created. Their cheerful chirping as they move through the bushes is delightful. I am lucky enough to have a Great Spotted Woodpecker coming regularly to the bird table and last year I was privileged to have a Kingfisher perch briefly outside my window. We have created opportunities for wildlife and wonderfully, it has come to share our lives.

I recently watched a programme on the iplayer about creating habitat for bees and butterflies. It was great to see that so many people, including town planners, villagers and inner city residents embraced the project. By changing the management of city flower beds and open spaces they not only encouraged the bees and butterflies, they also inspired local communities and fostered an interest in the natural world.

Technology has changed our lives. Ofcom research revealed that UK consumers are spending almost half (45 per cent) of their waking hours watching television, using their mobiles, computers and other communications devices. We can now see the most incredible sights from all over the world, and beyond, from the comfort of our own armchairs - the natural world has become 'accessible' to us as never before, but in a very sedentary way. This technology also brings violence into our daily lives through the news, documentaries and thrillers, and

creates a sense of detachment from the real world. Many people now know more about the characters in their favourite TV shows than they do about their neighbours; lots of folk spend more time using IT than they do talking to their family!

Using these marvels of technology is affecting our physical health. We sit for hours using computers and watching TV and this lack of physical activity is just one factor that can increase our risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Turning the clock back is not an option but having a balance in our lives is a matter of individual choice. Being aware of what is happening in the world because you watch the news every night is OK but do you know what is going on in your own community? It's wonderful to know about exotic habitats and species but how about those on your doorstep? There is no doubt that getting out in the natural world provides a touchstone to reality. It's an education, it can be exciting - a gentle walk can be a voyage of discovery and best of all it is good for our physical and mental health.

We are lucky that we have time to do more than simply survive and have so many choices. We have an amazing home here on planet Earth and technology, particularly television, helps us to appreciate that. But watching a screen is no substitute for experiencing the magic for ourselves. We can choose to sit and watch or we can experience life, most of us will do a bit of both. For each of us and for every other species that shares this wonderful world it's a question of getting the balance right.

Together we can make a world of difference. ★

Frances Ramsden