

Issue Number 49 - Spring 2013



FEEDBACK



WATERLEAT, ASHBURTON, DEVON TQ13 7HU - (01364) 653026 - www.barnowltrust.org.uk Reg Charity No: 299 835



**2013 - The Year of the
Devon Barn Owl Survey**

**Happy Birthday BOT
25 years of
Barn Owl Conservation**



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

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*Cover Photo: Ed MacKerrow,
Mountain Horizon Photography*

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words and pictures for this issue.*

*Editorial team: Frances Ramsden and Marianne Bryan
Proofing Sandra Reardon and the BOT team*

*Copy date for issue No 50. 18th July 2013. 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

Welcome to Feedback. 2013 is a very special year for the Trust. Not only is it our 25th Birthday this summer, it is also the year of the Devon Barn Owl Survey. Our first survey was way back in 1993 and made the County almost unique, (we did Cornwall in 1994). This will be the 3rd time that we have carried out a 'population health check' of all known Barn Owl sites. Our 2003 survey highlighted the significant decline in the Barn Owls of West Devon leading to practical conservation in the area with the 'Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme' in 2009 -2010.

If you live in, or visit, Devon this year, you can get involved by reporting any Barn Owl sightings, roost or nest sites or you can become a Survey Volunteer - see page 11 for more details. For those of you outside the County, we are launching our new website www.barnowlsurvey.org.uk in early summer - page 4. We will run the Cornwall Survey in 2014.

In this issue we have a step-by-step article on 'How to Towel-wrap an Owl', these instructions can be used for most birds. We hope you never need to use them but that you'll find them useful if you do. There is also an article from the Shropshire Barn Owl Group explaining the effect that the provision of nestboxes has had on their county's Barn Owl population.

With our failure to secure significant funding for the County Survey and the continuing drop in donations and grants from charitable trusts due to the general economic situation, we are calling on our Friends and supporters to make an extra special effort in our 25th year. Help us spread the word about our work and raise funds to support it.

We are inviting you to come along to celebrate our Birthday on 2nd August or to attend one of the other events we are holding during the year - page 15. If you can't make any of these dates, you could hold your own, or sponsor 25 year old Hannah who is spending more than a week of her holiday walking across two moors to raise funds for the Trust - page 14. This is quite an undertaking over rugged terrain, so she needs all the support she can get. You can join her for part of the route to lend encouragement (contact the office for details) or follow her progress on our website. She starts her challenge on April Fools' Day and finishes on Monday 8th April.

Back to our Birthday, we have persuaded some very talented musicians to come and play for our acoustic music evening. There will be a draw and BOT sales goods available. We've found a great venue providing easy parking, good food and a bar. There is also accommodation so you don't need to drive home afterwards. We hope that you can come along and join us.

The next issue of Feedback will be '50'. So to celebrate this we will be producing a slightly bigger one, hopefully with some colour! We'd like to include your Barn Owl stories and details of anything you have done to mark our 25th Birthday, so take some photos and put pen to paper (or email us) to make it an extra special issue.

We hope that you enjoy reading this copy of Feedback. Thank you for supporting the Trust and its work - it really does make a difference.

Frances Ramsden & Marianne Bryan

Email Recipients

Those of you who have elected to receive Feedback by email may have noticed some problems last time. Several of you had copies in the post as well as by email and some of your email postboxes couldn't cope with the size of the attachments. Hopefully we've sorted these things now and as a benefit for you this time we are using colour pictures. The benefit for us is a big saving in postage costs - thank you.

However it does mean that we don't include draw tickets or a sponsor form for Hannah's walk. But, you can buy your tickets or make a donation to support Hannah via our website www.barnowltrust.org.uk just go to the 'making a donation page' found in 'Supporting the Trust' and put the reason (e.g Draw) in the 'reason for donation box' and we'll do the rest - thank you. ★

Celebrate our 25th Birthday
join us on
Friday 2nd August 2013
at
The Dartmoor Lodge Hotel
Ashburton
for an evening of
acoustic music
plus
BOT information, sales goods and a draw
tickets available from the Trust
£7.50 each
Ample parking, bar and food available

Evi Vine



Owly Dave



Jasmin Ramsden



and others



News Bites



Wildlife photographer Ed MacKerrow from Mountain Horizon Photography has kindly provided our cover photo and the picture above. Luckily for us Ed is a huge fan of the Barn Owl Trust and has used our online information to set up a network of Barn Owl nest boxes in New Mexico. He has also generously offered to donate 20% to the Trust of the profits from the sale of any of his Barn Owl photographs and provide images for the BOT 2013 Christmas cards. They should be amazing! We'll include details in the autumn issue of Feedback which we hope to send out in late September.

The news page on our website has a link to a series of Ed's Barn Owl photographs in full-colour, including the ones we've used, featuring a Barn Owl hunting in snow. You can see the owl catching a vole and then carrying its prey as it flies towards the camera. All of his photos are of wild owls catching wild prey. You can then explore the other wonderful photographs on his site including some stunning landscapes. ★



The water was far higher than we'd ever seen it before - the arrows show where the water reached and the dotted line where the pole was Photo: Frances Ramsden

Extreme weather is no longer unusual in the UK. The Met Office recorded both April and June 2012 as the wettest of these months since records began and March as the 3rd warmest! The ground has been constantly wet here since September. The torrential rain turned our gentle stream into a raging torrent in November when part of 'Riverbank Walk' was completely rearranged. Huge rocks and a telegraph pole were moved and the abstraction pipes that feed the ponds were buried. ★

Devon Barn Owl Survey

2013 – the year of the Devon Barn Owl Survey. You can get involved by reporting your Barn Owl sightings, becoming a Survey Volunteer, by making a donation or holding a fund raising event to support the survey. The last Devon survey was in 2003 so this is a vital population health check for the species. More details in the article on page 11.

BOT's 25th Birthday

This year the Barn Owl Trust will be celebrating twenty-five years as a registered charity. See page 15 to find out how you can get involved.

Rodenticide Campaign

Well done guys. The RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts and the Hawk and Owl Trust all signed up to the BOT's response to the Health and Safety Executive Chemicals Regulation Directorate. They were asking for comments from 'stakeholders' on proposals for environmental risk mitigation measures to be imposed in the UK on rodenticide bait products. See article on page 13.

New Survey Officer

The Trust is currently recruiting a Survey Officer on a short-term contract to help with the Devon County Survey. If funds allow we'll have one for the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey next year too.

In Print

The first BOT article to be published in Italian has recently appeared in the journal of the Italian conservation project Skua Nature. The April issue of BBC Wildlife magazine will carry a ten page feature on Barn Owls. Much of it by Peter Dommert who was the winner of their Travel Writer of the Year competition in 2012 and was a member of our conservation team in 1998.

487 Trained To-date

The Trust has been running its 'Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys & Signs' course 3-6 times a year since 2005. The vast majority of the attendees are ecological consultants and we have trained 487 to-date. Our 'Advanced Barn Owl Survey and Mitigation' course was introduced in 2011 due to popular demand. The next courses will be run in July.

Latest Wildlife Wonders

A ten inch fish was seen in the Flo Pond by torchlight, probably a Brown Trout that came in as an egg or fry through the abstraction pipes from the river. A bat was seen hunting in sunshine in January. It provided a stunning acrobatic display for almost half an hour. ★

BOT & GPS - GIS

In September, David and Matt went on a GPS-GIS training course, run by not-for-profit organisation Ambios Ltd, and funded through the EC's Leonardo da Vinci 'Transfer of Innovation' project fund. The training was the first of its kind in the UK, but with similar courses being delivered in Hungary, Poland, Norway and Portugal. The main aim was to standardise the approach to training and qualifications across Europe in the use of GPS and GIS for biodiversity conservation, monitoring and management, particularly in light of the expected impact of climate change on flora and fauna.

It involved learning how to use a hand-held GPS (Global Positioning System) unit, which is a device that tells you where you are on the surface of the Earth, with accuracy down to 3m. It also included input on how to use a GIS (Geographic Information System); a computer-based mapping tool, into which complex spatial data can be imported. Although it was only a two-day training course, there were several pre- and post-training exercises to ensure that the newly acquired skills were practised and perfected.

The GPS unit, a Garmin GPSMAP® 62, was provided free of charge and we were allowed to keep the units after the training. The GIS software, Quantum GIS (QGIS) is a free, open-source software package available for all operating systems and to anyone with a computer and internet connection.

The obvious advantage of such training is that we can now map, down to the nearest 3m the exact locations of any Barn Owl evidence that we find whilst out surveying, nestboxing or monitoring. It will be particularly useful for the planned county surveys, this year and next.

The systems will also assist in the recording of features in the LLP, including the locations of any notable species. In fact, it has already helped us map the location of nettle and bramble patches, and future recording should help us monitor the extent and spread of these species, if any. More information on the EuroGIS-GPS project can be found at <http://eurogis-gps.eu/> ★

Towering Update

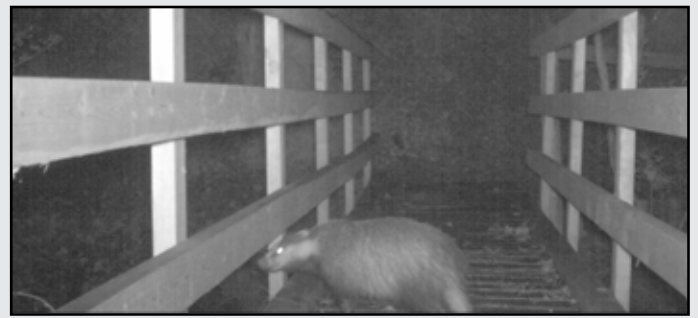
The first ever wildlife tower was built in 2006 as part of a Channel 4 series 'Wild thing I love you' hosted by Bill Bailey at a nest site that was very dilapidated and due to be converted. The owls soon started using the tower for roosting but they still seemed to prefer the old barn as a breeding site.

However in 2010 Barn Owls successfully fledged 2 young from the wildlife tower. On the other side of the tower a pair of Kestrels also bred and apparently fledged 3 or 4 young from their purpose-built provision only 2 metres from the owls' nest.

In 2011 the Barn Owls bred in the barn but in February 2012 the roof blew off, leaving it unsuitable for breeding any more.

Fortunately they had the tower to move back to and in 2012 a brood of 2 was fledged. As the old barn is developed, more permanent provision is due to be put in place. This will give the owls several options on site for safe, secure and above all permanent provision.

The Trust's own wildlife tower on the Lennon Legacy Project land has provided an occasional roost site for Barn Owls since its completion in December 2010 and Lesser Horseshoe Bats have also been using it. ★



Caught on Camera



We've thought for a long time that the local Badgers were regularly using the lower bridge on the Apprentice Path in the LLP. But it wasn't until we set up the night vision camera that we caught them in the act! Another great example of how wildlife takes advantage of opportunities we humans provide. We look forward to capturing more nocturnal activity with the camera donated by www.wildlifewatchingsupplies.co.uk



Spotted from our office window on 22nd January, this fine vixen and her mate were on opposite sides of our river in spate. What is normally a gentle trickle was in full-flood due to the almost constant rain. ★ *Photo: Marianne Bryan*

Owls On-line

Coming soon - the latest way for everyone to get involved. The Trust is launching an on-line recording form to coincide with the Devon Barn Owl Survey.

You will be able to log on and report your Barn Owl sightings and roost/nest sites instantly and see your reports plotted on a map. There will also be an owl id page to aid novice owl observers and links to relevant pages on our main website. Look out for www.barnowlsurvey.co.uk sometime in May. ★



Hungarian trainees on placement in November plant the new hedge below the solar panels Photo: Matthew Twiggs

The period between autumn and spring always sees more management tasks being undertaken in the LLP - the Trust's 26-acre reserve, not least because there always seems to be more to do after the growing season. We also tend to get more volunteer help, and many hands make light work, as they say . . .

The grazing regime started early this year, on the 19th July with 15 head, in an attempt to remove some of the grass growth, a result of all the wet weather. The LLP came out of the Dartmoor Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) Scheme that it had been in for ten years at the end of July and entered Defra's Upland Entry Level Stewardship Scheme. This means we can continue to draw down (smaller but regular payments) for managing a proportion of the land for wildlife, as we have done previously. The livestock were removed at the beginning of October, leaving a diverse sward structure, as per the UELS grassland management prescriptions.

In August we started tidying up the orchard by pulling some invasive species, with Creeping Thistle being the main target. During the task, at least 5 Great Green Bush Cricket, a Devon BAP species, were counted in just one small area, constituting only a small proportion of what must have been a healthy population. At the same time, and although an unseasonal task, we also pruned some of the side branches from the fruit trees as some of them had succumbed to wind throw due to the terrible wet and windy weather we were experiencing. It shouldn't do them any harm in the long run.

In September the orchard received its annual mow, with all the arisings raked up and 'dead-hedged'. Leaving it so late meant that most of the flowers had gone to seed, so raking should have ensured the seeds were widely distributed for next summer (if we get one). The scrubby slope by Corner Wood continues to grow bramble for a pastime but its extent and thickness decreases every year as we cut it. This was done on the 9th January by one person on a lovely warm(ish) sunny day in only a couple of hours where, two years ago it would take two people nearly two days. The most amazing thing about the slope when cut was the sudden appearance of a large bat which appeared to be hunting insects in broad daylight occasionally at ground level, before disappearing into the nearby woodland canopy and then returning. Perhaps making the most of the clement weather and taking the rare opportunity to feed up, it had disappeared within about half an hour. In stark contrast, 3-4" of snow fell on the morning of the 18th and although it had started to melt by nightfall as the temperature moderated and it started to rain we still had some snow hanging around for about five days.

The first combined University of Plymouth Students Union and Zoological Society group visited in November for a presentation and tour of the LLP. Subsequent groups came in December and January, and good progress was made on the inevitable scrub control tasks that are always on the list of things to do. They helped sweep the paths, bridges and boardwalks along River Bank Walk and reinstated the path by the cattle drink that had been washed away (photo page 3) during the flooding (read on).

A seemingly optimistic search for Brown Hairstreak eggs in December resulted, remarkably, in the discovery of one egg low down in some young Blackthorn growth in Kiln Close after only an hour's searching. This was quite a shock and is the first time any evidence of this rather retiring species has been recorded on site. The eggs are like miniature sea-urchins, white, 1mm in size and laid singly or occasionally in pairs at the base of one and two year-old Blackthorn growth. Apparently, searching for eggs is often the best way of proving the existence of this butterfly which, as an adult it is said, can spend the vast majority of its time at rest or high up in a 'Master' Ash tree. Unfortunately, it's also extremely difficult to get a photo of something so small so forgive the lack of decent images.

The 4th Hungarian cohort also gave us a week of their time in November, and amongst a number of tasks, they, along with another intrepid volunteer, helped remove the turfs from the site of the proposed new hedge behind the barn, and plant 260 new hedging whips as a visual screen for the solar panels. These consisted of Holly, Beech, Field Maple, Rowan, Hawthorn, Hazel, Dog Rose and Guelder Rose, with the odd Alder and Oak. They also helped Diana, our hedge-layer, with the laying of Pennsland Lane hedge, making good progress and leaving with some useful rural skills.

The abstraction pipes blocked for the first time in many months in October but were easily cleared. However, by the end of November, the huge amount of rainfall we had experienced had put the Ashburn in full spate. In fact, there was so much water coming down the river that some of the larger boulders had been moved, some of the waterfalls had been washed away and new ones created. This really blocked the pipes by covering them with silt and rocks. The 5th Hungarian cohort helped move rocks to uncover the pipes in early February during their week with us. They also got involved in hedge laying and brash clearing.

The small bird nestboxes were checked and cleared out in September, with three dead Blue Tits found, presumably having failed to fledge; not uncommon. A first winter Wheatear was on the roof of the North Park polebox briefly about the same time and by the month's end the first of the wintering Meadow Pipits had appeared. The flock eventually peaked at over 50 in January. In November, the first Dipper for several months flew up-river from Riverbank Wood towards Pennsland Bridge and a Brambling flew over northwards calling, another LLP first. A male Tawny Owl gave good views as it hooted in the Ash tree by the barn. In December one or two Woodcock were flushed from the field at dusk, having previously flown in from nearby woodland. A ringing session re-trapped a Blue Tit, ringed originally as a chick in one of our nestboxes on June 1st 2008, making it 4.5 years old. By January a very vocal pair of Dippers had been heard calling several times along the Ashburn, raising hopes of birds on territory in time for the breeding season. A Barn Owl has been putting in regular, albeit sporadic appearances, almost all winter as it flies out of the barn at dusk.

We lost one of our biggest Oak trees in Corner Wood in the strong winds at the end of January. It fell blocking the path but fortunately narrowly avoided taking a Tawny Owl and tit box off adjacent trees. We hope the weather will dry up enough for us to get it cleared before our first guided walk of the year in March. ★

Mathew Twiggs
Conservation Officer

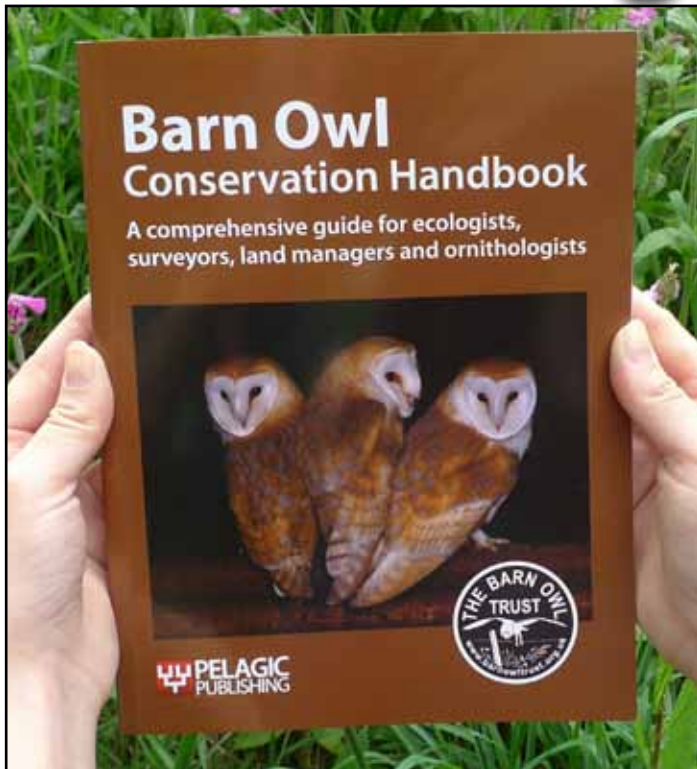


Photo: David Ramsden

Regular readers of Feedback will no doubt be aware of the Barn Owl Conservation Handbook. This epic tome written over two years by the Trust was published in July last year. The reviews have been rolling in and we've included a few here. Eds.

The Barn Owl Trust has an excellent reputation for providing high-quality advice about this species, and their website is full of leaflets and information notes covering a wide range of subjects. This book brings together all that advice and guidance in one place, providing an invaluable resource for anyone involved in Barn Owl *Tyto alba* conservation. The book covers everything from legal and planning aspects, habitat management, nestbox design and installation, through to measures to reduce mortality from threats such as rodenticide poisoning and major roads. The text is balanced and well organised with a handy summary of key points at the start of each chapter, and excellent use is made of photographs and drawings throughout. The level of detail included is impressive and it is clear that the authors have gone to some lengths to try to make the guide as comprehensive as possible. There is even a series of plates to help determine how long a Barn Owl corpse may have lain undisturbed at an indoor roost site, culminating at an impressive 17 years after death, all recorded for posterity by the same photographer. This information could be useful to planners in helping to determine whether or not a site has been recently occupied by Barn Owls.

While the book will appeal mainly to professionals and volunteers closely involved with this species, there is also much information that is relevant to birders more generally. Armed with the information in the book, anyone who has contact with farmers or landowners can help to spread the word about Barn Owl-friendly farming. And the book covers situations that almost any birder could encounter, such as stumbling across a nestling Barn Owl out of its nest-site. The usual advice, including for the Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*, is to leave well alone but it does not apply in this case! The book also tackles a number of issues that will be of wider interest than just to Barn Owl devotees. To give one example: many of us put food out for garden birds every day but is it acceptable to provide food for wild Barn Owls in order to try to boost survival rates?

A handbook of 395 pages might seem rather a lot to devote to just one species, albeit one of our most popular and iconic birds. Wildlife on farmland has fared badly in recent decades and a whole range of once familiar species are struggling and in need of assistance. However, as the authors point out, focusing conservation efforts on popular, high-profile species, particularly those towards the top of the food chain, can encourage measures that will ultimately benefit a wide range of other wildlife. If a farm has plenty of old trees for Barn Owls to nest in, rough grassland full of small mammals to feed on, and if poisons are used carefully to avoid accidental poisoning, then it will be a good place for a wide range of wildlife. This volume is the definitive guide for those involved in Barn Owl conservation but will hopefully help to achieve a great deal more besides.

*Ian Carter, ornithologist with Natural England.
Reproduced by kind permission of British Birds ★*

The Barn Owl Trust has long been publishing practical guidance on Barn Owl conservation via leaflets and pamphlets; over 30 are available to download from their website. This book brings together all this information, thoroughly updated and expanded, into one concise and well-structured 400-page volume. Split into nine chapters, over two thirds of the book is dedicated to practical, up-to-date guidance on topics including habitat creation, nest box provisioning, mitigation and enhancement at development sites, care and rehabilitation of found birds, and carrying out Barn Owl surveys. A whole chapter is dedicated to legal considerations in all these areas and two chapters are given to Barn Owl natural history and ecology. Essential for anyone with an interest in Barn Owl conservation.

Carl Barimore – British Trust for Ornithology ★



The Barn Owl Conservation Handbook is available from the Trust website at £39.99 plus p&p www.barnowltrust.org.uk or telephone the office on 01364-653026 for details of how to buy. Each copy directly from the Trust comes with a BOCH bookmark. You can save the postage by collecting your copy when you attend a BOT event (page15). ★

Found in the LLP

Brain teaser - all of these things can be found in the LLP.

1. Female flier - 8
2. A sad ringer - 8
3. He is close to the edge - 5
4. Large, colour, scrub, with teams of eleven - 5,5,4,8
5. A climbing girl's name - 3
6. No buckets or spades for this one - 5
7. Fire breathing insect - 9
8. Tanned Samonid - 5,5
9. Very proper flower - 8
10. Bodies of water - 5
11. Grassland with love - 5,4
12. The taming of the plentiful - 6,5
13. Male species of grass - 7
14. Regal gatherer of aquatic life - 10
15. Umbrella with pulp in part of a building - 7, 8
16. Creamy spread, mug - 9
17. Gulp - 7
18. Stormy existence - 8
19. Agricultural building with some nocturnal - 4,3
20. Angry medicinal plant - 9
21. A tunnel boring machine - 4
22. Pester - 6
23. This one can outwit you - 3
24. A light brown nut - 5
25. Got up, trendy - 7 ★

*Answers available
on receipt of an
SAE marked LLP
Brain Teaser or in
Feedback 50.*

The second half of 2012 got off to a much busier start than the first half as far as our bird hospital was concerned. This is to be expected, as juvenile owls disperse from their parents' nests in the autumn, and inexperienced individuals are much more likely to meet with trouble. At the beginning of October we were contacted by a vet in Cornwall who had a Tawny Owl that had been cut free from a sheep-netting fence. The bird had been hanging upside-down for some time before it was freed and was slightly underweight as well as being very stressed. Its only injuries were slight abrasions caused by its struggles. After being fed and given time to recuperate, the owl was released back into the wild.

At the end of the month, we had three Barn Owls brought to us within the space of a week. The first was found in a garden, slightly underweight with an unidentified head wound. It made a rapid recovery and was released shortly afterwards. The second, which had been hit by a car, was very badly injured and unfortunately died the next day. The last owl which was found by the roadside with a broken wing, took quite some time to recover completely, but was eventually released from one of our mobile aviaries in the New Year.

November was a less hectic month, as many of the dispersing juveniles would have gained in experience and established a home range, or in the case of Tawny Owls, a territory for themselves. We only had a single bird admitted in the whole month. This was a Tawny Owl which was found concussed by the side of the road. Fortunately, there were no other injuries. It took the bird a little while to recover fully, but was released back into the wild after just under a month with us.

The winter was fairly quiet with only a single bird brought in. Following a phone call, we were expecting a Little Owl but when it arrived it turned out to be a Tawny. This poor bird had been found in a cattle shed, covered in manure. Apart from being cold, wet and dirty, it seemed to be in good shape, so we were hopeful of releasing it very quickly. Unfortunately it developed an eye infection and some sores on its feet, probably from the manure. After being cleaned up and given a short course of antibiotics, he was fit for release. As I am writing this we are waiting for a volunteer to collect and release him at his original finding place.

There is very little to report from our resident owls. Rose, an unwanted captive Barn Owl that we took in, developed an eye infection. After spending five days in our bird hospital (which she was not pleased with) and a course of antibiotics, she was returned to her aviary, none the worse for wear.

Our mobile aviaries had a record year in 2012. For the first time, all three were in use at once. In total, we released six birds at four different locations across Devon, from October 2012 to January 2013. In August 2012 we received four female Barn Owls from the Gower Bird hospital; these were split into two pairs and released in November at two different sites in the eastern half of the County. All of these birds stopped returning to the aviary after a very short period of time and have not been seen since. We can only hope that they have dispersed successfully.

A Barn Owl that was mentioned last issue, which was found with a broken wing, was the next to be released. When we take in birds we always ensure that we take contact details for the finder and an accurate grid reference for the finding place, to ensure that we can return the bird to where it was found, should it be fit for release. If we take on birds via third parties this information is sometimes simply not available. Unfortunately, this was one such case, with no finding information available, all we can do is take the owl to an area of good habitat, and hope for the best. The outcome is never certain. However, in this instance, there is only good news to report. The bird has taken to roosting in one of the barns on-site and is being seen regularly three months later, even after the mobile aviary was closed.



One of our three mobile aviaries with the roof open for release
Photo: Jasmin Ramsden

The last bird to be released was another Barn Owl that had recovered from a broken wing. This time we knew exactly where it was found and as it was very close to a known nesting site, we suspected that we knew exactly where it came from. This bird stopped returning to the aviary very quickly, hopefully because it was familiar with the area and simply resumed foraging in the wild.

Unfortunately when it was time to collect the aviaries, we had some problems. The persistent rain had made the ground very wet. At one of the sites, we struggled to get the aviary into position when ground conditions were comparatively good, so we decided to wait for a dry spell before trying to retrieve it. That was back in October and we are still waiting.

At another site, we positioned the aviary without any trouble and assumed that we would be able to recover it with similar ease. That proved to be somewhat optimistic. Even Kim, our trusty volunteer, who after decades of service in the army and extensive experience of getting 4x4 vehicles unstuck from the mud, was not able to get the job done. Eventually we had to ask the landowner to help with his bigger, more capable vehicle. He very kindly got us out but we had to leave the aviary behind. That means two out of our three mobile aviaries are currently stuck! Fortunately, the third is ready for use should we require it.

In early 2012, we released a Barn Owl in West Devon from one of the mobile aviaries. This was the 'hitchhiking' owl, that was found oiled in the back of a lorry in South Wales. In January of this year we received some photographs from the landowner, showing a ringed bird that was perched on the nestbox we erected at the site in 2009 as part of our Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme. While we cannot be sure that it is the same bird, it seems likely that it is, which is great news.

Stuart Baker
Assistant Conservation Officer

How to Towel-

In the last issue of Feedback we featured a 'Guide to the short-term care of a Barn Owl' and promised an article on how to towel-wrap an owl for single-handed rehydration and force-feeding. We don't expect you all to have to do this, but just in case you ever need to we've prepared a step-by-step guide with photographs to illustrate the technique.

Before wrapping the owl, prepare everything you will need (fluid, cut-up food, etc.) and place everything within reach of a chair or a stool with a foot rest (see final picture).

1. Start by laying out a thin folded towel on a table, so that it is a little wider than the owl's length and about three times as long.



2. With the owl restrained around both legs and wings, hold it very gently chest-down on the towel, close to one end of the towel, with its legs lying straight out behind it and its face level with the folded edge of the towel.

3. At the base of the tail, wrap the legs, wings and tail reasonably tightly using the short end of the towel.



4. Roll the first half-turn, keeping the wrap tight (the tightness is mainly around the legs).

5. Roll the owl through one complete rotation, wrapping tightly around the legs but keeping no tension on the rest of the wrap. The owl is now on its front again.



6. You are now ready to do the final wrapping which will be much less tight. Position your hands as shown.

7. Cross the towel over the owl as shown.

wrap an Owl



8. Pick the owl up holding the tight part of the wrap and complete the looser wrap as shown.





9. Your owl-wrapping is now complete! The owl will be unable to wriggle out as long as the leg-wrap remains reasonably tight.



10. Now sit down, placing the wrapped owl vertically between your thighs, so that your legs are keeping gentle pressure on the leg-wrapping - see picture above. Position the owl side-on so that it faces the hand that will feed it (or administer the fluid). Your other hand will start this procedure by coming in from behind, over the owl's head, and grasping the upper mandible between thumb and index finger.

This method of towel wrapping works so well because the legs are kept straight. If the initial wrap is allowed to slip loose the bird will raise one of its feet, grip the towel, and push its way out.

If this happens, simply re-wrap the bird, paying more attention to the tightness of the initial wrapping around both legs, 

 wings and tail. It is perfectly acceptable to towel-wrap a bird with a wing injury (because the wing will be kept in the naturally folded position). However, great care obviously needs to be taken when wrapping a bird with a leg injury (because the legs will be straightened). In such cases, getting a helper to hold the bird (rather than wrapping it) may be necessary.

These photographs and instructions are taken from the Trust's Barn Owl Conservation Handbook which was published in 2012. See the Handbook reviews and how to get your copy on page 6.

For more information our website has pages on:

- Owl id
- Owlet id and ageing
- Picking up or receiving an owl
- Assessing its condition
- Deciding if it needs to be passed on
- Short-term care of a wild owl
- Finding someone/somewhere to take it
- What to do with a dead owl or ringed owl ★

All Photos: Kevin Keatley

In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies from the estates of the late Susan Lang

and

Mary Collis Higgins and



donations in memory of

Reginald Louis Welsh, Milda Marburg,

Joan & Wally Keegan,

Mary Jane Baker, Elaine Jones,

Kathleen Jones

Jim 'Chief' Denham

and Johnny Wearing

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

They all now have a leaf on our Memory Tree

The Winning Words

We were delighted with the response to our second open poetry competition which closed on 16th January. There were 53 entries on the topic of wildlife and conservation. Last year's winner, Isobel Thrilling, kindly agreed to judge them for us.

The competition raised £163 to support our work but more importantly, encouraged contributors to record their appreciation for the natural world.

First Prize: Winnowing (for Richard Mabey) by Jackie Bennett
 Second Prize: Barn for Sale - Jennifer Hunt
 Third Prize: Umbellifera - Hilary Jupp

Highly commended entries:

Fifteen Ravens - Mark Totterdell, Owls Feather - Anita Thorpe,
 The Wild Cats! - Lena Walton, Straight - Gabriel Griffin-Hall,
 The Gatekeeper - Philip Burton & Summer Contract - Eleanor Vale

Wildlife Words Volume 2 has been produced by the Trust and is available from the Trust for £5 plus p&p. It contains all of the winning and commended poems plus:

The Last of the Few - Dawn Lawrence, The Hunter - Ruth Bies,
 Garden Joys Too - Heather Buswell, Picture This - Dorothy Waite,
 Soon They Will Fledge - Ruth Bies, Creek Heron - Helen Boyles,
 Contrasts of Autumn - Rob Hamar, Dormouse awakes -
 Jennifer Hunt, Autumn roar - Eugene Butterworth and
 The Shape Of Things To Come? - Alan Carter. ★

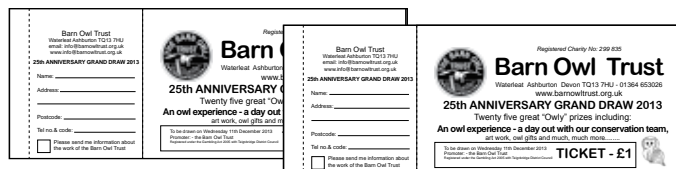
More Prize Winners

Our Annual Grand Draw and our first ever Holiday Lottery took place on Wednesday 5th December here at the Trust. We combined the events with our Christmas afternoon tea for staff and volunteers.

The winner of the Holiday Lottery at The Old Shippon, Dunsdon Farm, Holsworthy, Devon was Laura Pratt from Southampton. A huge thank you to Paul and Kirsty Stenning for providing this wonderful prize – the Holiday Lottery raised £395 to support our work.

Our Grand Draw raised an amazing £1,360 this year (£1,271 in 2011), a very big thank you to everyone who bought tickets.

Enclosed with this issue are tickets for this year's **25th Anniversary Draw** with (you guessed it) 25 prizes so please support us by buying them or pass them to your friends. We are happy to send you more if you can sell them.



The winner of last year's first prize – A day out with the Conservation Team was Lecia Foston – Devon. Other winners were Brenda Scull, H Muldoon, Julia Bowhay, A M Fox, Mrs L Helcoop, Mrs J Hummel, Mrs P West, Mrs Cran, Mrs M Hegarty, S Childs, Ms Squire, Linda Chorlton and last but not least Ian Newitt. Congratulations all of you and thank you for your support.

We are now collecting prizes for this year's Grand Draw – so please contact us if you would like to provide one. ★

Winnowing (for Richard Mabey) - Jackie Bennett

The nature writer wrote: The owl winnowed the corn
 But the critics said: "Do owls winnow? We think not."
 And the writer was tormented

For he had meant to capture, not the owl
 but the essence of owl.
 So the writer fretted and fussed
 Trying this word and that,
 to better the image of owl.



The reader, who also loved owl,
 Read the words and watched the bird
 hunting the field on a dusky evening.
 Strong in flight, noiseless,
 the owl made its way up and down the rows of wheat,
 now and then alighting in the fork of a tree
 to consider the merits, or otherwise, of winnowing.

While below, the power of the passing wings
 had caused a movement in the air
 The slightest rustle of the stems hardly felt.
 Then a grain fell slowly to earth,
 the chaff blown away on the breeze ★

Gift Aid Explained

When you make a donation we ask if you are a UK taxpayer and to tick a box if you would like us to be able to claim Gift Aid on your donation. This generates a Gift Aid declaration - one form can cover every gift made to the Trust from the date of your donation for whatever period you choose. It can also cover any gifts you may make in the future.

We can reclaim the basic rate tax you have **already paid**. We do this from HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). Basic rate tax is 20 per cent, so this means that if you give £10 using Gift Aid, it's worth £12.50 to the Trust at no extra cost to you. The calculation is £10 x 20 ÷ 80.

You can use Gift Aid if the amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax you've paid for the tax year, in which you make your donation, is at least equal to the amount of basic rate tax, the Trust and any other charities you donate to, will reclaim on your gift. A tax year runs from 6 April one year to 5 April the next. If you make a number of Gift Aid donations, you will need to consider the tax you've paid on each donation on an accumulative basis.

In order for us to claim Gift Aid on your donation we need to have a Gift Aid declaration from you. If you have previously made gifts to the Trust that you wish us to claim Gift Aid on please let us know so that we can date your declaration accordingly.

If we hold a Gift Aid declaration for you please let us know if you no longer pay enough tax for us to reclaim on your gift.

A Gift Aid declaration must include:

- your full name
- your home address
- the name of the charity
- details of your donation, and it should say that it's a Gift Aid donation

Check if you've paid enough tax:

To work out if you've paid enough tax to cover your donations, divide the donation value by four. For example, if you give £100 in a particular tax year you will need to have paid £25 tax over that period. (£100/4 = £25). (Note that this calculation is based on the basic rate tax of 20 per cent)

If you don't think you've paid enough tax this year, you may be able to carry back your donation to the previous tax year. More advice is available from HMRC. ★

Devon Barn Owl Survey



Devon Barn Owl Survey 2013
WANTED



Barn Owl Information
Where and when did you last see one?

Barn Owls are rare and we are making great efforts to ensure their survival. Your information is important to us. We need to track the main and current distribution of Barn Owls in this area.

**BARN OWLS ARE WHITE
THEY FLY AT DUSK AND DAWN
AND SCREECH**

Barn Owl Trust
Registered Association Number 7011794
Contact us: 01364-653026 or info@barnowltrust.org.uk
www.barnowltrust.org.uk



Yes, it's that time again: it's the Devon Barn Owl Survey 2013! Third time around...

Following previous surveys in 1993 and 2003, this year will see Devon's Barn Owl population surveyed by the Barn Owl Trust for the third time. This one-calendar-year survey aims to record as many nest and roost sites as possible and mainly involves re-checking all of the places where Barn Owls were recorded during the last survey (281 nests and 348 roosts) plus all occupied sites recorded during the intervening nine years. In 2003 we checked/recorded a staggering 1,176 sites and this year we expect to be checking even more. As in previous years, this year's survey is a joint project with the Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society. DBWPS members are invited to contribute information on nest/roost sites they know of or may have discovered in the course of their fieldwork for the Devon Bird Atlas Project. All of the sites recorded by the Barn Owl Trust will be included in the Devon Atlas. However, as the Barn Owl is a Schedule One species, site names and exact locations are never published.

Please report your sightings!

Although the main thrust is to record occupied nest and roost sites, we are always interested in recording any one-off sightings or perhaps the white owl you occasionally see but have no idea where it roosts. We even record dead Barn Owls! (Road casualties and fallen nestlings a speciality).

Why bother?

The amount of resources available for Barn Owl conservation is, to a large extent, a result of their rarity so evidence of Barn Owl decline can help unlock funding for conservation work. This was amply demonstrated following the last survey when a significant decline in the area between Dartmoor and the River Tamar

resulted in the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme. During this project we spent two years targeting practical and advisory work paid for by Landfill Tax Credits from Biffa. The Devon Barn Owl Survey is certainly not just research; it's a vital population health check. When sites are visited or reported we always check to see if they are under threat and identify any opportunities for pro-active conservation work. So, as well as producing a new population estimate and distribution map, the surveys allow us to target our conservation work at sites where the birds most need our help.

How you can help

If you live in Devon, have transport, and a day or two to spare between July and the end of the year, you can become a Barn Owl Survey Volunteer! (See below). If you see a wild Barn Owl in Devon you can call 01364 653026 or print off a recording form from our website, fill it out and post it to us. Check out our new on-line recording form which should appear on our new website in May; www.barnowlsurvey.org.uk You can print off a colour poster from the link on the News page of our website to help spread the word about the survey. How about making a donation to support the survey or holding a fund-raising event to help support the project?

Volunteering for the Devon Barn Owl Survey

During July to the end of 2013 trained Survey Volunteers will be visiting farms in their local area to interview farmers (farm workers etc.) to ask if they have seen a Barn Owl or have noticed signs of roosting or nesting. We will organise a training day during June for Survey Volunteers.

All interviews will take place in tetrads (2x2km squares) that have been selected by the survey organisers. Generally these will be squares close to your home where no Barn Owls have been recorded recently. However, this doesn't mean you won't get a positive response! There are always unrecorded sites to be discovered and even 'empty' squares can give a good idea of overall coverage. If you'd like to take part, please register your interest as soon as possible by post, or email info@barnowltrust.org.uk

Note: Physical detailed searches of farm buildings and trees can only be carried out by people who are capable of using large heavy ladders and who have been trained to work safely whilst avoiding disturbance. A licence from Natural England is also required. This is not expected of Survey Volunteers.

For those who live west of the Tamar; 2014 will be the year of the 3rd Cornwall Barn Owl Survey. ★



Surveyors will interview farmers and landowners
Photo: Sarah Nelms

Here we have two very different development stories - Eds.

Perilous Planning

In May 2012 the Trust received a nesting observation from the owner of a traditional agricultural building. We're always delighted to receive observations of Barn Owls from Devon, Cornwall and Dorset, but even more so when it involves breeding. He reported that Barn Owls were apparently nesting at the site for the first time since he had erected a nestbox on the outside of the building 4 years previously. Adults had been seen food carrying, and begging calls from owlets had been heard emanating from the nestbox. Although boxes on the outside of buildings are not as good as permanent provision created within the roof void, we were nevertheless really pleased that the box was providing a nesting opportunity.

Provision inside buildings is generally more permanent, and with sufficient maintenance will last indefinitely, in comparison with outside provision, which typically only lasts 10-12 years. Provision inside also confers bio-energetic advantages to owls in terms of conservation of metabolic heat energy, in other words, they stay warmer (and with the weather in 2012, no doubt drier) indoors! Many people in rural areas can and do build this type of provision during conversions or new build. With the cost of a webcam installation a comparatively modest expense these days, owners can watch their owls comings and goings, and if lucky enough to have nesting, the growth and development of the owlets from the comfort of their own living rooms. Magic!

A second phone call in September was not so enjoyable however. Apparently the building had been converted to living accommodation without planning permission. An application had been submitted in 2007 and permission had been refused yet despite this, conversion had, rather surprisingly, still gone ahead. In the spring, the Local Planning Authority served the owner with an enforcement notice. The owner had taken this to appeal but had lost. The resulting non-compliance notice had expired in June and the owner contacted the Trust in desperation to ask for advice. Was it possible that the presence of the Barn Owls could somehow change the LPA's course of action?

There was little we could do. There is a wealth of existing planning guidance for LPAs on protected species issues, which specifies their obligations to biodiversity during the planning application process. Many people think that the presence of a protected species will stop them getting planning permission but this is simply not the case, (as long as suitable compensation and/or mitigation measures are put in place). However, the LPA also has a duty of enforcement and it would seem on this occasion that they were taking this duty seriously. The resulting impact on the birds is unknown, but any enforcement action is likely to focus on the internal renovations rather than the external nestbox. We hope therefore that the birds will continue to breed successfully in the years to come irrespective of the barn's future. ★

Getting a Shelter

Here at the Trust we've been working towards creating an Implement Shelter in Forde Orchard to provide a home for our tractor and accessories since early 2011. Western Power donated some used telegraph poles for the structure and we set about looking for recycled materials to keep the costs to a minimum.

However our local planning authority suggested we withdraw our initial 'Prior Notification' and eventually deemed that the LLP "is not an agricultural holding" so we needed to apply for full Planning Consent. Towards the end of 2012 this came through and we

managed to locate a quantity of relatively inexpensive second-hand steel box section roofing sheets.

Supporters of the Trust *Richleigh Carpentry* from Gloucester gave us a great quote for a weeks' labour and we ordered 1.8 tons of new timber. Getting the materials to the orchard was a challenge with the ground conditions but, by the last week in January we were ready to start..... and it rained.

Below; Monday morning - this was how it looked



Richard and Leigh-Anne Boucher worked with our Head of Conservation David for five days in wet, cold and extremely muddy conditions. By Thursday afternoon they were up on the roof.



By the end of the week the roof was complete and all the timbers to support the wall panels were in place. They all did really well. The next day the sun came out! All photos: Richard Boucher ★



Shropshire Barn Owls



“How many Barn Owls are there in Shropshire?” This is a question the Shropshire Barn Owl Group is often asked. Another is, “how are they doing?” Conscious of the fact that these were the sort of questions that would be asked when we set up the group in 2002 one of our first tasks was to scrutinise the existing Barn Owl records and to come up with an estimate of breeding pairs - which was 121 to 140 pairs, a loss of 150 pairs since the first estimate in 1935 and roughly the same as in the 1992 Shropshire ‘Atlas’. So, eleven years and over 300 nestboxes later how are Barn Owls faring?

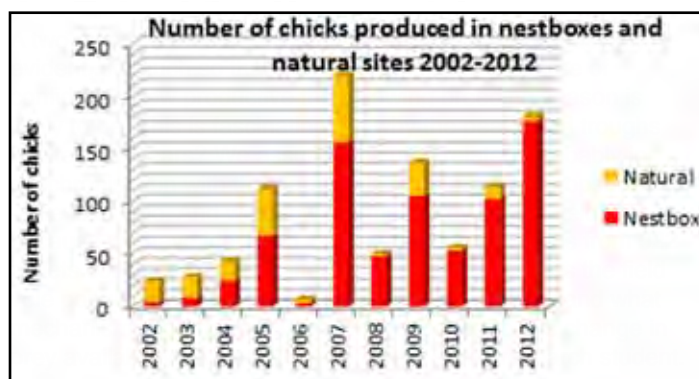
Since 2002 our nestboxes have produced 741 Barn Owl chicks with 226 at natural nest sites. Nestboxes have been installed on trees or in internal sites on farms and other land that supports suitable Barn Owl hunting habitat – permanent, rough, tussocky grassland. Our policy of siting nestboxes only in areas of good Barn Owl hunting habitat has established new breeding pairs in hitherto unoccupied sites. This is a gradual and long-term process and the occupation of new nestboxes is often tentative.

Our records show that the shortest time lapse for occupation of a nestbox by a breeding pair of Barn Owls is eight months. The average lapse time is 17 months. Nestboxes installed in ‘Hot’ sites, that is with Barn Owls known to be present in adjacent 1km grid squares, are occupied in 13 months on average compared to 25 months for ‘Cold’ sites (no known Barn Owls in adjacent grid squares). Roosting Barn Owls can be enticed to use nestboxes quicker than breeding pairs: for example, a pole box succeeded in attracting a roosting Barn Owl within 28 days and tree nestboxes have been occupied by roosting Barn Owls within 2 months.

By targeting nestboxes in good Barn Owl habitat and working in partnership with others we have been able to produce results quickly. Working on our Whixall project, for example, with Shropshire County Council Countryside Service and the Parish Environmental Action Project, SBOG identified areas of suitable habitat in the Whixall area and helped install 11 nestboxes in 2007. At that time we had no records of breeding Barn Owls in the designated area but three years and twenty-eight nestboxes later four pairs had produced 13 young.

2012 was a peak year for breeding Barn Owls in Shropshire and the second highest in terms of owlet productivity since we began. See chart. Nestboxes produced 172 chicks and natural nest sites produced 5 chicks. Laying began early, around 12th April, and broods ranged from 2 to 6 chicks, mean 3.2, and were higher than the average brood size for all years combined of 3.0. Studies elsewhere suggest that a long-term average productivity of about 3.2 young per pair is required to maintain viable populations, so 2012’s average of 3.2 chicks was precisely on target. Interestingly, eight pairs were double-brooded, usually at sites where we had two nestboxes closely sited to each other. It appeared that when the chicks reached ten weeks old or more the female laid a second clutch in the second nestbox while the male continued to provision the young in the original nestbox. Chicks were still present in a second brood nest site when monitored on 20th October.

The nestbox occupancy rate for breeding Barn Owls in Shropshire in 2012 was 28%, significantly above our average occupancy rate of 22% and the highest so far. The nestbox occupancy rate for both breeding and roosting Barn Owls combined was 41% and was also significantly higher than the average occupancy rate of 32%. The average yearly nestbox occupancy rate is greater for tree nestboxes, 34%, than building nestboxes, 30%, and pole nestboxes, 30%. Clearly, nestboxes in Shropshire are now playing a key part in the conservation of Barn Owls in Shropshire and new Barn Owl pairs are constantly becoming established at nestbox sites.



So, can we answer the question “how are Barn Owls doing in Shropshire?” Quite well according to the above statistics and the signs within the farmed landscape are encouraging. When we started out, farms enrolled in agri-environment schemes and offering the required permanent rough grassland for Barn Owls as part of their farm conservation plans were few and far between. In recent years we have noticed a definite surge in grassy margins, either wide arable margins several metres in width or more recently, one metre wide margins following the lines of hedgerows. As they mature and attract field voles, and so long as we continue to provide nestboxes and there are no sudden adverse climatic conditions or unforeseen environmental problems detrimental to Barn Owls, we are optimistic that the breeding population in Shropshire can recover. And of course, money must remain available from the EC pot, which is not a given, for agri-environment schemes.

The next year is going to be an interesting and exciting one for Barn Owl conservation in Shropshire. After six years of intensive fieldwork the Shropshire Ornithological Society will be publishing its Atlas of breeding and wintering birds. SBOG has provided extensive data on the distribution of breeding pairs of Barn Owl in Shropshire and their breeding productivity and in combination with contributions from atlas fieldworkers we will arguably have in 2014 the most definitive account of the status of the Barn Owl in Shropshire yet.

Glenn Bishton & John Lightfoot
Shropshire Barn Owl Group

You can contact the Shropshire Barn Owl Group via their website www.shropshirebarnowlgroup.org.uk or by contacting the Trust and we'll pass your details on to them. ★

Name These Birds

And now for something completely different, try these **Ornithological Anagrams** with your morning coffee.

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Lug Sale | 14. Raw Spor |
| 2. Torn Armco | 15. Where Rota Sold |
| 3. Keep Rod Cow | 16. Ripe Green |
| 4. Racy Fletch | 17. Bald Brick |
| 5. Elk Rest | 18. Pip Red |
| 6. New Grid | 19. Pride Span |
| 7. Peg Aim | 20. Wit Paid Poem |
| 8. Hunt Chat | 21. Smith Hurtles |
| 9. Last Grin | 22. Shout Airmen |
| 10. Hello Mary Mew | 23. Start Him |
| 11. Lite Tub | 24. Trail Way Egg |
| 12. Lob Warn | 25. Deaf Flier |
| 13. Go Pine | |

Answers available on receipt of an SAE marked Bird Names or in Feedback 50. ★

Rodenticide Campaign

Rodenticides (rat and mouse baits) kill Barn Owls. Since BOT was founded 25 years ago, we have been urging rodenticide users to avoid using the most toxic (second generation) poisons because of the risk they pose and in the 90's we supported Dorset gamekeeper Tony Jacques in his campaign for improved product labelling. In 2007 this type of pressure eventually resulted in the words 'Harmful to Wildlife' being added to labelling requirements. Although this was certainly a step in the right direction, the information on product containers was still dreadfully inadequate. Over the years, each time new figures were published on the proportion of Barn Owls that contain these poisons the levels had increased causing more and more concern. Currently 91% of Barn Owls are contaminated.

In 2011 during production of the Barn Owl Conservation Handbook we decided to tackle this issue head-on and included thirteen pages on the subject. The book:

- ❑ Exposed the role of Rodenticide Manufacturers in the poisoning of Britain's remaining Barn Owl population.
- ❑ Identified the misleading information on product containers.
- ❑ Pointed out the 'sins of omission' committed by the rodenticide industry.
- ❑ Exposed the truth behind claims that 'approved use' rarely causes unwanted poisoning.
- ❑ Posed the question "Who is guilty? The rodenticide industry- the Government's regulatory body (HSE)- or the user who was not provided with enough information about the risks?"
- ❑ And for the first time, we provided the wording that we want to see on product labels. In April 2011 this wording was sent to the Health and Safety Executive Chemicals Regulation Directorate who are responsible for UK pesticide licencing:

As usual, nothing happened. Then in August 2012 HSE requested comments from 'stakeholders' on proposals for environmental risk mitigation measures to be imposed in the



Rodenticides are easily available from most agricultural merchants Photo: David Ramsden

UK on rodenticide bait products. This consultation was, in theory, a rare opportunity to be listened to and we set about the task of fitting all our comments into the HSE's 'Stakeholder Response Form'. It was impossible; HSE had been very canny indeed!

The response form severely restricted the scope for comments. Undeterred, we got HSE to agree that the contents of a covering letter would be included in the review and set about the task of getting our message across to maximum effect. Then we had a brainwave! Let's get the really big conservation organisations to support our letter. But would they?

The Hawk and Owl Trust agreed without hesitation, after some communication and a little nail-biting, news came through that the mighty RSPB had agreed and soon after the Wildlife Trusts followed suit. This was the first time we had asked the 'big boys' to support a Barn Owl Trust campaign and we were absolutely delighted to have their signatures and logos on our letter. HSE received a total of 50 response forms and we are waiting to hear their response..... ★

Hannah Walks 2 Moors

Hannah, who is 25, has worked here at the Trust since January 2012 and in April this year, during her holiday, she is taking on the challenge of walking for a week to raise funds for the Trust in its 25th year. You can support her by joining her for part of the walk or by sponsoring her, either on-line or using the enclosed form. To join Hannah for part of her route call the office for details. Good luck Hannah - Eds.

Well here we are, by the time you read this I will only be a couple of weeks away from my formidable walk! Back in August I decided to set myself this challenge. I began to increase my exercise and started walking to work (when the weather wasn't too awful). Not much but 3 miles each way was certainly better than nothing. When I began doing this in September, it took me nearly an hour (with two stops for breath up the steep hills). By the time December rolled around, I had managed to shrink that down to a solid 45 minutes, with no stopping for breath!

There has also been a calamitous reduction in the walk team! Some of you may remember I was hoping to do the walk with my dog Cato. Unfortunately whilst tearing around the woods one day, he fell head over paws down a slope and into the stream. He came out the other side still smiling, but with a limp. Our vet advised that he must be walked on a lead until the limp cleared up, and against any long walks until he was 2 years old. And so we walked a very unimpressed bundle of energy on the lead for a couple of weeks. The limp has cleared up thank goodness, but we don't want to harm his joints whilst he's still growing so he will only be joining me for a few stints along the way.

Which brings me to you lot. If any of you would like to join me along the way, you would be more than welcome- 4 legged friends included! I will be starting on Monday the 1st of April (call me a fool!) at Lynmouth. The path starts opposite the main car park in Lynmouth, and will also be the longest day of the walk - 19 miles to reach Withypool. From there on I will be averaging 16 miles a day. The final leg of my journey will be from Ivybridge to Wembury on Monday the 8th of April. The final 16 of 117 miles.

Although I am looking forward to this challenge, I'm also rather nervous. If you would like to join me for a stretch, perhaps wave me off, or see me in for the final mile, that will be great. I'll need all the encouragement I can get by that point. Even better, perhaps you could make a donation to help the Trust in its 25th year. (Personally I'll be waving goodbye to 25 a few days after the walk!) Please support me and the Trust if you can, thank you. ★



Hannah's route takes in both Exmoor and Dartmoor - 117 miles Photo: Chloe Wills

Hannah Bosence
Conservation Assistant

25th Anniversary



As you've read through this issue of Feedback you can't have failed to notice that this year is the Trust's 25th Birthday. Incidentally, one of our staff will also reach 25 this year. Handyman Jasmin will be 25 in August - Happy Birthday.

We are planning a special edition of Feedback for the Autumn, as we did for the 20th birthday, extra pages and some colour. We'd like to include photos and news items from **you** to record the way **you** marked this special anniversary.

It would be great if all our readers could do something specific to support us during the year. Why not have a de-clutter then:-

- At work you could hold a lunchtime sale, take in the books you have read, DVD's and other bits and pieces you don't want any more, and sell them to your colleagues.
- At home you could have a coffee morning/table top sale for your friends and neighbours.
- Bake some cakes and decorate with owl faces and sell to your colleagues/neighbours.
- Hold a Quiz night, plant sale or a cheese and wine party
- Make and sell Owly gifts – cushions, doorstops, cards.

It would be great if everyone who reads Feedback could raise at least £25 for the Trust during the year

OR you could 'get fit' and raise money by getting sponsorship - try one of the following:

- Sponsored swim minimum of 25 lengths.
- Cycle 25 miles – on a static bike maybe.
- Organise a badminton/squash/bowls/skittles competition.
- Your own sponsored dog walk

We can help with sponsor forms, posters, BOT leaflets and publicise your event.

You can always think of something we haven't suggested, the important thing is to make sure you have fun whilst you are raising funds and that you help to spread the word about our work.

If you really can't manage anything else please sponsor Hannah as she walks the Two Moors Way - see page 14.



Live Music Night

We are planning to celebrate the Trust's 25th Birthday on Friday 2nd August at the Dartmoor Lodge Hotel, Ashburton. There will be live acoustic music from performers who are giving their time and talents to support the Trust. On the bill will be Evi Vine, local singer songwriter Jasmin Ramsden, our very own Owly Dave and more yet to be confirmed.

Tickets, available from the Trust, are just £7.50 with all proceeds to the Trust. The venue has ample parking, a bar and food. We will be holding a draw and have BOT sales goods and information available. Doors open at 7:30pm for music between 8:00 -11:00pm.

This is an opportunity to have a great night out in good company, to hear talented singer/songwriters and support Barn Owl conservation. Do join us to celebrate 25 years of the Barn Owl Trust. ★



Over the last quarter of a century we have been lucky enough to have lots of different people (and their pets) organising and participating in events to help us - jumble sales, marathons, cycle rides, raffles, plant sales.

This is a great opportunity to say a huge thank you - you all helped the Barn Owl Trust become the internationally recognised organisation it is today. We couldn't have done it without you. Here's hoping that we have the support to achieve as much in the next 25 years. ★

Pictures: Joyce & Harry Blake (above) held an annual coffee morning in aid of the Trust for many years Photo: BOT. Sock owls and 'cress heads' (left) made and sold by Leonna Walters and owly cupcakes by Michelle Poynter.

Hythehill Primary 3 raised funds with sales of an owl tea towel

Diary Dates 2012 - 2013

Come and join us at one or more of the following events:

April 18th Thursday - Gentle Walk & Spring Garland Workshop - 2pm

May 8th Wednesday - Conservation Work Party Day - 10am

May 16th - 18th Come and see us at the Devon County Show

June 6th - 8th Come and see us at the Royal Cornwall Show

June 19th Wednesday - Mid-summer Walk & refreshments 7:30pm

July 18th Thursday - Butterfly Walk & refreshments 2pm

August 2nd Friday - 25th Birthday Celebration - Acoustic Music Evening 7:30 for 8pm - 11pm

August 22nd Thursday - Evening Walk & refreshments 7pm

September 7th - 8th Come and see us at the Dorset Show

September 11th Wednesday - LLP Talk & Ploughmans Supper 7pm

October 24th Thursday - Autumn Colours Walk & refreshments 2pm

Contact the office for more details or to book a place at an event - booking is essential as places are strictly limited. There may be a charge for some of the events listed. Check out Forthcoming Events on our website for dates of other LLP events: www.barnowltrust.org.uk ★

Thanks and Things

Thank you to all our Friends who sent us items for recycling, so far we have raised £511.57 this year. We are also very grateful for the Barn Owl pellets we've received to send out to schools and of course all of the things from our Wants List.

Thank you David & Gwyneth Parish, Margaret & Derrick Crocker, Kim & Ed McNeil, Nina Coombes, Richard & Leigh-Anne Boucher, Sue Plowright, Miss H J Davies, Marion Mant, Honey Ingram, Margaret Rhodes, Melanie White, Brian & Lynne Larard, Patricia & Terrence Bird, Rob Hamar, Ann Long, Mark Botham, Nigel Reid, Peter & Carole Large, Marsh Christian Trust, Rachel Edwards, Ashburton Post Office customers, David Moor, Jennifer Thorne, Melanie White, John & Shelagh Prickett, Stella Robinson, Mr & Mrs Brook, Tracey Morris & Shelley Wright, Elizabeth Waites, Louise Anquetil, Jo & Lester Reed, Miranda Coleman-Cooke, Pat & Norman Dunham, Michael Clark, Caroline Lewis, Beryl Welsh, Gro Company, Clayden Associates, the Forestry Commission and Fred Sterns. We are grateful for all your support.

Well done and thank you to all our fundraising stars out there; Janice Walsh & friends sent us £20 from a Quiz night, Darrel & Lucy from Eco Cottages donated £158 by giving a £1 donation to BOT for each booking in 2012, Alan Duns gave us a van which we sold for £3,000, Margaret & Derrick Crocker sold plants at their gate and raised £50.55, Jonathan Carr gave us £60 from the sale of eggs from ex-battery hens, Cator Cricket Club donated £100 and Paul & Kirsty Stenning donated the Holiday Lottery prize which raised £395 from ticket sales.

As usual we have included a list of items we would be delighted to receive either new or used. Please take a look and see if you can help.

- 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 25 x 50mm tanalised batten
- Bath towels (not hand towels) for owl hospital
- A4 and A3 recycled paper and card both coloured and white
- Padded envelopes & bubble-wrap
- Anabat detector
- Hand held hetrodyne bat detector
- Waders - for working in the ponds
- Petrol leaf blower
- Carpet - large enough & suitable for the office
- Metal detector
- Wild Barn Owl pellets (we can never have too many)
- Small Plate Compactor
- Emulsion Paint (pale colour) sufficient to paint an office
- Brown Packaging/parcel tape 50mm x 66mm
- Small DAB radio
- Used roofing sheets (steel or clear GRP, box profile)
- Chinagraph pencil
- Good quality pencils – 2B/HB/B
- Foreign change – please make a note of the currency
- Telephones suitable for connection to a switchboard
- Empty ink and toner cartridges for recycling
- Owlly items (books, ornaments etc.) to sell on our ebay pages
- Grand Draw & raffle prizes ★



Tail piece ...

At last the rain has stopped here, albeit briefly. The ground has been waterlogged since September but is now starting to firm up. When I walked the dog this morning (Maizie the Working Cocker pup joined us in August), it was cold and hard, no longer sticky and slippery like the last few months. There is frog-spawn in the ponds but not as much as usual, the frogs arrived late, almost the end of January and stayed less than a week. Much of their spawn has been frosted so there will be fewer tadpoles this year.

The river is still swollen and noisy; I could see the rocks and branches it had moved whilst in full-spate and the changes made to the banks and river bed. As I stood on the bridge the world was filled with the sound of the water as it rushed frenetically down the valley. It reminded me of a recent trip to London, seeing people in the streets and on the tube, swarming purposefully in the same direction and apparently unaware of anything other than getting from a to b. In a river you find the occasional calm pool or back-eddy and this is true of London too. Sometimes folk stop and look around or listen for a few moments to a busker, but like the river, so many rush onward oblivious to their surroundings and fixated on their purpose.

As I left the river and walked into Corner Wood I sat for a while on the recently fallen Oak tree and pondered on the sights it had seen during its all too brief life in the valley. The two World Wars and the trials and tribulations of human-kind were less important in this small corner of the world than the wildlife or stock that may have grazed it as a sapling.

In the field the Primroses have been joined by the occasional brave Celandine and Red Campion, a sign that spring is on its way despite the low temperature. A Buzzard atop one of the remaining telegraph poles pauses in its search for breakfast to watch us wander past and the air, cold and fresh, is filled with sound of birdsong and the scent of bonfire drifts up the valley.

Earlier in the week we met five of the sixty plus people who applied for the Survey Officer post we'd advertised and it was interesting to see that three of them were not only applying for a new job, but rather like the river, had chosen to change the direction their life was flowing in. We humans, unlike the Oak in Corner Wood, can make choices about where we live and what we do. Things don't always work out the way we would like them to, but those people who see a glass half full are almost always happier and more content than those who see the same glass half empty. There was only one job and so at the outset we knew that four of the five applicants we met would be disappointed. Hopefully they all had a good day, will feel positive about the experience and see that just by making it to interview they did really well.

We are all incredibly lucky, we live on an amazing planet and most of us have food, shelter and freedom of choice. However there are so many distractions, television, the internet, mobile phones and the power of advertising constantly telling us what we need to make us happy, (we need more, bigger, better, newer), that it isn't easy to find a quiet moment to reflect on the things that really matter, but we can.

We don't have to rush blindly on like the river, we can turn off the TV and take a walk; we can smile at the people we pass, we can reach out and help others, we can be aware of our impact on the natural world after all "We did not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors; we borrow it from our Children".

We can do all of these things and more if we choose to, we can make the most of every moment and appreciate the good things in our lives, it's up to us.

Together we can make a world of difference. ★
Frances Ramsden