

Issue Number 53 - Spring 2015



FEEDBACK

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



**Looking out
for the new
Barn Owl Trust website**

Conserving the Barn Owl and its Environment

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Cover Photo: Rob Haynes

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

Diary Dates 2015

- April 29th Weds** - Wild Flower Walk 2.30pm
- May 15th Fri** - Dawn Chorus Walk and Breakfast 4.30am
- June 18th Thurs** - Mid-summer Evening Walk 7.30pm
- June 30th Tues** - Calendar photo entries - page 14
- July 8th Weds** - Butterfly Walk 2.30pm
- August 19th Weds** - Family Mini Beast Safari 2:00pm
- September 9th Weds** - Bat Walk, weather permitting TBC
- October** - Family Halloween Event, details TBC
- November** - Autumn Colours Walk, details TBC
- December** - Festive Wreath Making, details TBC

Contact the office for more details or to book a place - booking is essential as places are strictly limited. There may be a charge for some of the events. Check out our 'Events Diary' on our website for more details & dates of other LLP events:

www.barnowltrust.org.uk ★

Welcome to Feedback. After last year's wonderful breeding season, less extreme winter weather than we've had recently and fewer winter casualties than expected, we are hoping for another good Barn Owl year. However so much depends on what the weather does and as we all know that is fairly unpredictable!

Climate change is now an accepted phenomenon, as are extreme weather events - basically we have no idea what to expect for us or for the owls. The New Scientist puts it very clearly: 'The world is warming, this warming is due to human activity increasing levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and if emissions continue unabated the warming will too, with increasingly serious consequences'.

Despite this, most of our species doesn't seem to see that how we live affects our environment. These days the 'worst offenders' in the environmental damage stakes are the developing countries that aspire to the standard of living we already have, but there are still a remarkable number of people in our own country that are either unaware or unconcerned about it. Locally, fly-tipping and littering are examples, but internationally:

☞ Deforestation in the Amazon has increased dramatically in the past year - *Do you buy any products that contain Palm oil? It is an edible plant oil much of which is produced on cleared rainforest sites. It is a common ingredient in about 50 percent of the goods we use every day, from processed foods to candles, grooming products and 'biofuels'.*

☞ Waste plastic is literally everywhere in the oceans; it has been found in the deep sea and buried in Arctic ice. It has been ingested with dire consequences by some 700 species of marine wildlife - *Do you take your own bags when you shop and recycle your plastic waste?*

☞ Radioactive isotopes are still draining into the Pacific from the Fukushima nuclear plant which was damaged by a tsunami in March 2011 - *How energy efficient are you at home and at work? How is the power you use created?*

There are things we can all do to limit our personal environmental impact, but the most important things we can each do is to raise awareness and to lead by example. With an election imminent we should certainly be looking at the environmental credentials of our politicians and the sustainability of their policies, *after all there is no Planet B.*

On a brighter note, this issue of Feedback has some inspirational tales of folk who have made a *difference* to their local owls (pages 12-13) and our Fund-tastic pages have news of how some of our supporters have helped to raise funds to support our work. There is good news on how the birds did in different parts of the UK last year (pages 3, 8 and 9), Tawny tales in Bird News on page 7 and for those of you who use the internet we have built a new website packed with information and some wonderful photo galleries for you to explore - page 5.



As this edition of Feedback goes to print spring is rapidly approaching and here at the Trust Primroses and Celandines are appearing in the LLP every day; the Daffodils are beginning to bloom, the frogs have begun to spawn and even the neighbourhood geese are starting to get amorous! Amongst the owl population we have already had our first young Tawny Owl brought in! This is very unusual as most don't lay their eggs until March. Another symptom of our unpredictable climate? Let's hope these young owls go on to survive the hazardous journey to adulthood and who knows maybe this will be another year of bumper broods for all owl species.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Feedback. Maybe when you've finished with it you can pass it on and spread the word about our work. Thank you for supporting the Barn Owl Trust, we really do appreciate all of the support we get. After all we couldn't do it without you.

Frances Ramsden & Emma Moxham ★

News Bites

New BOT Website

The Barn Owl Trust website has been rebuilt over the past year. Find out more on page 5 and see for yourself. Visit www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Solar Panels

Our solar panels installed in February 2012 with a legacy from Peggy May Fullman have been a great success. In addition to covering the cost of the electricity we have to 'buy in', they have also generated more than £2,000 a year to support our work.

2015 Calendars

Our 2015 in-house calendar was a big hit this year and raised £455 for the Trust. This was our first calendar for several years and one that we will definitely be repeating next year. For more information about how you can be involved have a look at the article on page 14.



Media

Jo Plant (from the conservation team) made her TV debut in February when she travelled to the Midlands to film for the BBC Inside Out programme which was broadcast on BBC One West Midlands. She talked about our 2014 State of the UK Barn Owl Population report.

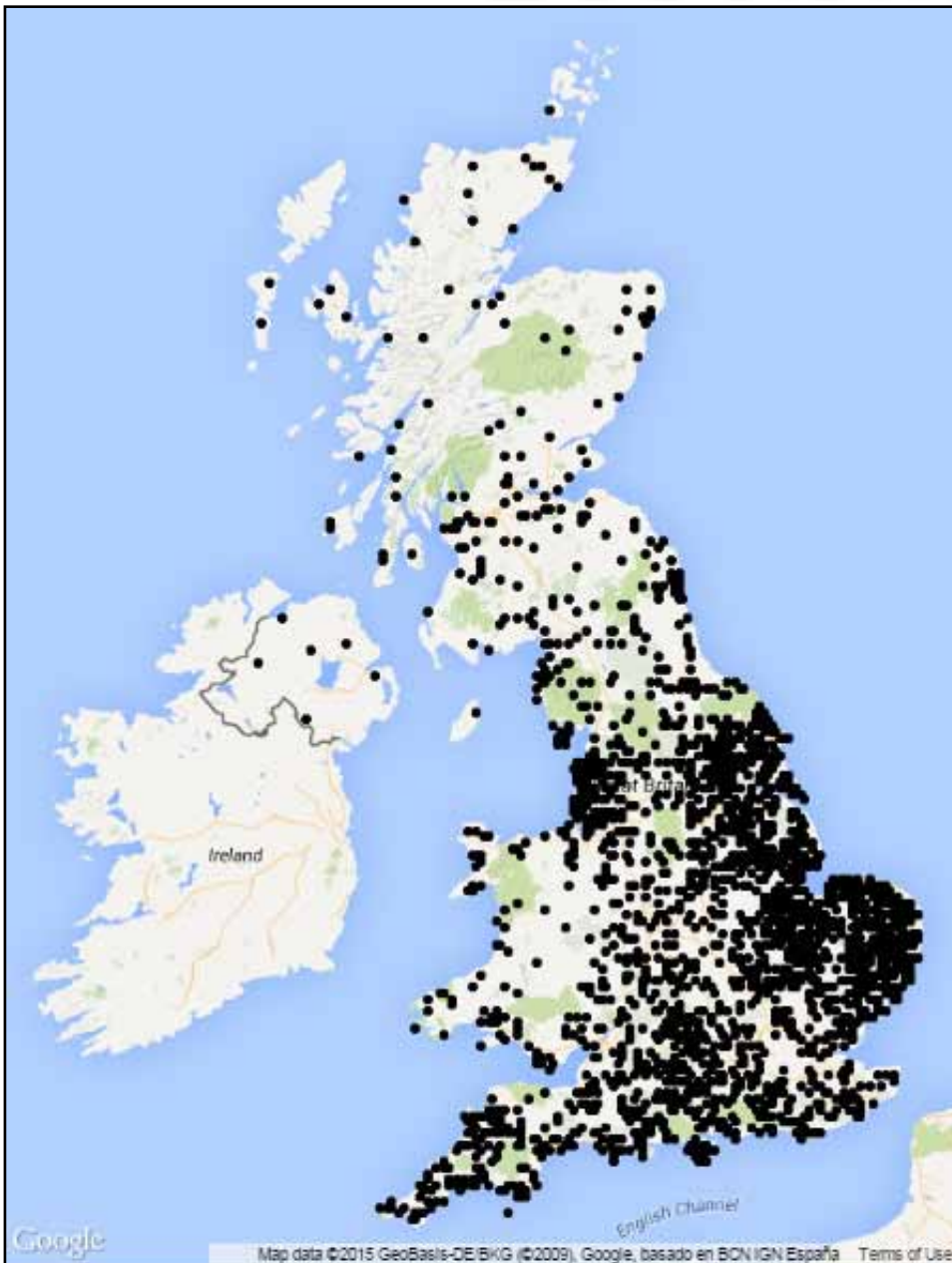
In March David was invited to talk about the impacts of rodenticides on wildlife, during a piece on BBC 'Look North,' a regional television news programme.

On a lighter note, the popular daytime television show 'Escape to the Country' visited us in September - this has so far not been aired, so keep an eye out for us.

Barn Owls in Ireland

With only 400-550 pairs left in the entire Republic, BirdWatch Ireland are working hard to restore numbers.

We are very pleased to have given a helping hand with their new 36-page booklet 'Barn Owls in Ireland: Information on the ecology of Barn Owls and their Conservation'. See <http://www.birdwatchireland.ie> ★



UK Barn Owl distribution based on 3,488 records provided by the public to the UK On-line Barn Owl Survey (www.barnowlsurvey.org.uk) comprising 2,489 sightings and 999 roost/nest sites occupied in 2014.

2014 Barn Owl Survey Data

During 2014 our UK Barn Owl Survey website recorded a staggering 3,488 Barn Owl sightings from the general public. In no small way, this was due to BBC Springwatch asking their viewers to report sightings to us (thank you BBC!).

In some ways it would be great if all the dedicated Barn Owl groups dotted around the UK decided to input all their Barn Owl records but this hasn't started happening yet. However, NOT having those records is actually an advantage! It means that the UK Barn Owl Distribution Map you see above is not biased to any particular area and therefore gives a pretty good indication of relative abundance of Barn Owls from region to region.

You can record your Barn Owl sightings, roost and nest sites, it's quick and easy to do and you can add to and review your own records at any time. If you're an internet user and you've seen a wild Barn Owl in the UK any time in the past two years please report it at www.barnowlsurvey.org.uk

For more information on how Barn Owls' fared in the UK last year see the article on the *State of the UK Barn Owl Population 2014* on pages 8 & 9 or visit our website to find the full report www.barnowltrust.org.uk ★

Replacement Nestboxes

Our big practical initiative this winter was a replacement nestbox project. Back in 2013 the Devon Barn Owl Survey involved us visiting over 1,300 known Barn Owl sites across the county. During the course of this work, we identified numerous sites that had an old-style nestbox, which we refer to as a flatbox. These have the entrance-hole level with, or only slightly higher than, the floor of the box.

Owlets are capable of walking from about two weeks of age, several weeks before they can fly. If they are in a flatbox, they can simply walk straight out and they are in danger of falling. We receive several calls concerning fallen owlets every year, and the vast majority have fallen from flatboxes. Barn Owls will typically only feed owlets that are in the nest. Fallen owlets are usually ignored and sadly, without human intervention, will almost certainly die. ⇒



The new box is placed higher than the old one which will be removed once the owls have started using the replacement

Fortunately, there is a solution to this problem. Since 1997, all of our nestboxes in buildings have been of a deep design, with the entrance-hole at least 18" or 46cm above the floor of the box. Owlets are usually around seven weeks old, before they can reach the entrance hole. As they can fly from about eight weeks old, the danger period, where they can get out of the box but are not able to fly back in if they fall, is significantly reduced.



Photos: David Ramsden

We are very grateful to the Belsize Charitable Trust and the Hatcher Animal Welfare Trust (set up by Roberta Hatcher who loved animals), who have funded the replacement of 32 flatboxes with new, safer deep boxes.

This is carried out in a two-step process. Firstly, we will erect the new box, making sure that it is at least as high as the existing box, as Barn Owls will almost always use the highest space available. At this point, we leave the old box where it is. Once the birds have had a chance to become familiar with the new box, we will return to the site and either remove or block off the flatbox.

At the time of writing all 32 deep boxes have been erected, mostly in Devon, with a couple over the border in Cornwall. By this time next year, the second visits should have all been completed. This will mean safer nesting, with fewer avoidable casualties, and more fledged Barn Owls dispersing through the countryside. ★

Winging Away

A fledgling Barn Owl was brought to us in July, unable to fly. Bizarrely, it had got its wing trapped in the window frame of a derelict building when the glass broke. Fortunately, the falling glass hadn't actually broken the owl's wing but it had cleanly cut through 5 of its primary wing feathers. Initially we thought we'd wait for the broken feathers to moult and for new ones to grow.

Sadly, after a few weeks of monitoring there was still no sign that this natural process had started. We really wanted to get this bird back out into the wild but couldn't release it as it was – its flight was one-sided, noisy and laboured.



Before imping

In a conversation with Dave Scott, local bird rehabilitator and renowned wildlife artist, he suggested 'imping', a technique originally developed for repairing falconry birds. It involves replacing the damaged feathers with good ones either collected from moulting birds or taken from a dead bird of roughly the same size.



Replacing the feathers



*The finished wing
Photos: Matthew Twiggs*

A suitable donor carcass was chosen from our freezer and the feathers cut to length. These were then joined with a cut down length of feather quill (Dave used the moulted tail feathers from a Harris Hawk), and glued into place. As you can see, he did an amazing job. Thanks ever so much Dave. We gave the bird a supported (mobile aviary) release on the 4th November and hope it survived the winter.

If you want to see some of Dave Scott's fabulous wildlife artwork please take a look at his website; <http://www.dascottartist.com> ★

More BOT News

www.barnowltrust.org.uk

"It's going to be amazing!"

Since Spring 2014 we've been extremely busy behind the scenes building a replacement for our main website. Indeed, by the time you read this the switch-over may already have occurred. (If the first tab says "About us" you are on the new website. If it says "About the Trust" then you're still on the old one).

A huge amount of thought and hundreds of hours have gone into the project to make the vast range of information more accessible and to ensure that folk can easily find the information they need to help Barn Owls.

Last year our main website reached the grand old age of eight and, by modern day standards, that's very old indeed. Content was designed to be read like the pages of a book. These days, most people don't have the time or inclination to plough through text-heavy pages to find the info they want. Indeed, studies have revealed that modern-day users 'scan' rather than read and if they can't find the answer they seek within a few seconds they look elsewhere.

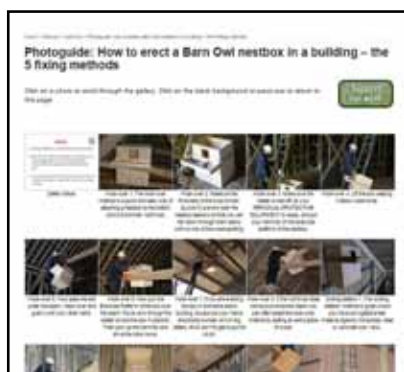
Our massive project began with "writing for the web" training sessions. This prompted a grass-roots review of the entire website. Indeed the only thing that hasn't changed is the overall appearance of the front page and the headers.



Please take a look and tell us what you think. Although there's a massive 186 pages and 43 image galleries, finding stuff is generally much easier due to an improved navigation system, snappy titles, and much greater use of sub-headings, bullet points, images, and videos. For example; the section previously called Information and Downloads is now split into four - Nestboxes, Habitat, Hazards & Solutions, and Owl Care.



Our on-line shop is all new as well and on most of the main information pages we've placed little appeals for support along with adverts for products and events. We're hoping this will increase our income so we can continue the grass-roots practical conservation work and the hands-on owl care that are the basis for the information and advice we share. ★



Farmwise



*The pellet dissection activity went down a storm
Photos: DWT*

Farmwise is an event for schools run by Devon County Council and the tenant farming community, held at Westpoint Arena near Exeter. This was the second year the event had run and, following in Hannah's footsteps, the latest member of our Conservation Team, Jo Plant, went along for the day to promote Barn Owls in the Wildlife Zone.

To say it was hectic would be an understatement! There were over 1,000 children attending the event, split into groups of 15. Each group had just 5 minutes at each stand within the zone so Jo had to squeeze as much information into those 5 minutes as possible.

The pellet dissection activity was a great hit with groups really getting stuck in. Jo had also taken along some 'frozen volunteers' (owls and rodents) so everyone in each group had a chance to get 'hands on' with something. Children love slightly weird and gross things(!) so the dead animals were received with great interest and fascination.

Thanks must go to Devon Wildlife Trust and the RSPB, who had stands either side of ours, for helping Jo out quite a lot during the day. All-in-all the day was a great success and well worth doing. Hopefully we will be invited back again next year and this time Jo will go prepared with a band of volunteers (plus the frozen ones of course)! ★

Shows

This year the Trust will be at the following events:

- 21st - 23rd May - Devon County Show
- 4th - 6th June - Royal Cornwall Show
- 27th June - Ashburton Fete
- 18th July - Ashburton Ale Tasting
- 26th July - Totnes Show
- 29th July - Yealmpton Show
- 6th August - Honiton Show
- 5th September - Kingsbridge Show
- 8th September - Widecombe Fair

If you're going to any of them do come along to our stand and say hello to the team. ★

LLP Update

The autumn and winter periods were again busy times for us, with lots of management tasks needed. This started in August with the continued control of invasive species such as Creeping Thistle, Nettle, and Docks which have slowly been steadily increasing across the site. The patch of Himalayan Balsam that seemed to come out of nowhere in Kiln Close in late June required another four visits extending into late August. Hopefully the majority of plants were removed before the seed set, resulting in far fewer plants to come this summer. Another dozen or so plants were removed on the roadside boundary towards Pennsland Lane.

In September our attention turned towards the orchard we re-created (Forde Orchard) where the slopes and pond fringes were cut back. The Plum and Cherry trees were also pruned during a warm, dry spell. The annual grazing regime commenced in early-September with 15 bullocks and 1 cow. These did a good job of taking off much of the year's grass growth whilst retaining most of that all-important litter layer. The cattle were gone by late October before the worst of the weather kicked in. Early November saw management of the slope by Corner Wood; we're finally beginning to win this battle, with the bramble requiring only a couple of hours with the brushmower, rather than the couple of days it used to take.

Another cohort of four Hungarian trainees removed several thousand small saplings and masses of brambles from Corner Wood in mid-November to ensure the spring Bluebells had space to thrive. A couple of days later our regular group of Plymouth University students carried on with this work, and then cleared the vegetation from the island in Flo Pond.

In early December the flow into Flo Pond had dropped to a trickle, but clearing the leaves off the abstraction pipes in the river seemed to improve it. However, the situation reoccurred in early January, and by the end of the month no amount of leaf clearing was making any difference, so the inspection covers were lifted and the screen originally inserted to stop debris blocking the system was replaced. Once the abstraction pipes were rodded through the flow was fully restored, in fact, it was positively gushing! In the smaller Oakley Pond, the stone bund designed to allow the flow of water back into the River Ashburn had also sprung a leak. We found the leak and blocked it with clay. This seemed to work for a few days before the leak re-occurred. The process was repeated but was again unsuccessful so a more extreme solution is needed as soon as possible.



*The Heron has had a huge impact on the amount of frogspawn we've had this year, this frequent visitor has been picking off the frogs as they come into spawn.
Spot the dog, coming around the corner of the tractor shed!*



The Kingfisher was spotted by the ponds several times during the autumn. Seen here on the island it has something in its beak.

The Tawny Owl nestbox in Corner Wood fell down in October and was reinstated at the end of January, secured with ratchet straps rather than nailing into the tree.

Autumn was good for migrating birds. Three pipits that were flushed from the top of the field in early August went up silently but were probably Tree Pipits, as there were three vocal Tree Pipits accidentally flushed a few days later in the same general area. At about the same time a Clouded Yellow butterfly was seen again. By late August a juvenile Hobby was spotted over the solar panels, and towards the end of September a Kingfisher was seen flying over the ponds a couple of times before disappearing down the Ashburn River. It was photographed with our trail camera shortly afterwards, then subsequently seen or heard a further five times up until the end of November. The LLP's second record of Wryneck was flushed from bramble along North Park hedge at the end of August, but disappeared almost immediately. By mid-October a Barn Owl was putting in regular appearances hunting over the field; three times in the late afternoon and once at 9.00 in the morning.

A Roe Deer was also seen in a couple of locations at this time. A pair of Mandarin ducks was on the ponds in November but didn't stay long. As the New Year began the usual flock of Meadow Pipits had risen to thirty individuals, and a Grey Heron had taken a liking to the ponds, being seen every day for at least a fortnight. The frogspawn that appeared on the 27th January probably had something to do with it. ★

Matthew Twiggs
Conservation Officer



Bird News

The second half of 2014 saw plenty of work for our owl hospital. In the last issue, I was able to report that none of our resident birds had passed away or required any treatment at all, which is unusual to say the least. Unfortunately, things averaged out in the second half of the year. In August, one of the Barn Owls in our disabled owl aviary was found dead. Three of our Tawny Owls passed away in consecutive months from August to October and in December, we lost Maxine who was almost certainly our oldest owl. At 39, she was older than many of our staff! While these deaths are all very sad, unfortunately, it is an inevitable consequence of providing a home to a large number of elderly and infirm birds.

Things were also busy on the wild owl front. We received two fallen owlets within a few days of each other, one at the end of May, and the other in June. As is often the case with fallen owlets, they were both underweight and dehydrated. After undergoing treatment, they were soon eating unassisted and moved out into an aviary. They were released together from one of our mobile release aviaries in September.

In July, we collected a Barn Owl that had had most of its primary flight feathers cut off in a freak accident. This remarkable story is covered on page 4 of this issue but suffice to say that by early November the bird was back in the wild.

In September, someone brought in a very thin Tawny Owl that was probably a dispersing juvenile that had failed to establish a territory. Unfortunately, it was so far gone there was little we could do for it and it died a few days later.

At the end of the month, we had a Tawny Owl brought to us that was already ringed. After making a few enquiries, we discovered that the bird had originally been found several months before as a fallen owlet. It had been taken in by the RSPCA and, in due course, ringed and released. It seems that this was another Tawny that may have failed to establish a territory, as it was very thin and sorry-looking when it arrived. It spent five weeks with us, putting on weight and getting back into condition, before being given a second chance out in the wild.

In mid-October, we received a Tawny that had been found on a road. Fortunately, there were no serious injuries. After being given a few days to recover, it was released within a week.

At the end of October, we received our last fallen young Barn Owl of the year. Fortunately this was another success story. After a month or so with us, it was released from one of our mobile aviaries. Mobile aviaries are a fantastic facility as they allow us to release each individual in the best possible place, its home range if it's an adult or an area of fantastic habitat if it's a youngster.

Our final Barn Owl of 2014 was not such a happy story. It arrived in mid-December in a very poor state and there was nothing we could do to save it.

On Christmas Eve we received a Tawny Owl from the Veterinary Hospital in Plymouth. Due to its arrival date, we rather imaginatively called it 'Eve'. It had been hit by a car and had a badly broken leg. The vets had operated and had pinned her leg and fitted an external brace before sending her to us for rehabilitation. One night whilst feeding her we had a brief power cut in the Birdroom and Eve promptly hooted! This determined that he was in fact male, so 'Eve' became 'Steve'!

Since Christmas, Steve has had two further operations to remove different parts of the pin, and now has full use of his leg although he needs to build up his strength.



Steve is now in our large rehab aviary to build up his strength
(Inset) His leg after the removal of the pin
Photos: Jo Plant & Stuart Baker

Unfortunately, after more than a month in captivity, and despite being physically fit and healthy, Steve had not eaten voluntarily and was still being hand-fed daily. We were mightily relieved after 44 days when he started eating by himself. He's now in one of our hospital aviaries and is flying pretty well, most landings are coordinated and in sensible places! He is using the leg that was broken but he's not quite fit enough for release yet. Look out for an update next time.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at the Veterinary Hospital Group at Estover in Plymouth for all their help and support. ★

Stuart Baker
Assistant Conservation Officer

Jail Bird

Possibly a first for Dartmoor prison... a resident trying to get in!

'Porridge' the Tawny Owl, as he has been nicknamed, came to us after being found between the inner and outer walls of the prison by one of the dog handlers.



Photo: Jo Plant

There are no trees or bushes anywhere nearby, and more surprising still, we were amazed to find that he still had his owlet fluff. He was discovered in late February, so would have hatched around the middle of January making him approximately 6 weeks old when he came to us. This is a very unusual time of year for owlets to hatch, both because of the cold temperatures and because Tawny Owls in particular tend to rear their young in the spring (laying their first eggs around mid-March). This little fella really has broken all the rules!

Porridge was in good condition, if a little on the skinny side, but after a few meals and a bit of tlc he will live with other Tawnies until he is released back into the wild later in the year..... despite preferring life behind bars! ★

State of the UK Barn Owl

First produced last year, the State of the UK Barn Owl Population was originally conceived as a one-off report to draw together the shockingly poor results collected in 2013. Following its initial publication, two further versions were produced as more and more groups wanted their data included. Remarkably, 2014 turned out to be an exceptional year for Barn Owls across the UK, so we decided to do it all over again.

Twenty five independent Barn Owl Groups kindly provided their results for 2014. Between them, they monitored a staggering 6,100 potential nest sites and recorded 1,839 active nests.

Despite winter 2013-14 being the stormiest and wettest for 250 years, it was mild and therefore quite a good one for Barn Owls (except where long term flooding was an issue). An early spring was followed by a long and pleasant summer. Indeed, September 2014 was the driest since records began. The National Climatic Data Centre showed that 2014 was the warmest year on record.

Not only was the weather good (for a change!) but Field Voles seemed to be abundant, particularly in the rough grassland habitats they prefer. The result: Barn Owls had a very productive year in many areas. Rob Salter of the East Riding Barn Owl Conservation Group said, "I have been involved in barn owl conservation for 24 years and have never seen a year like it, amazing!", and Major Nigel Lewis of the Imber Conservation Group on Salisbury Plain, with 31 years' experience said it was his "best breeding year ever".

Although not every 'dependable' nest site was occupied (probably due to high mortality in 2013), many groups were surprised to find so many pairs nesting. So where had all these birds come from? There is no doubt that lots of adults died in 2013 and fewer young were produced, so, the only possible explanation is good over-winter survival. This fits well with the fact that winter '13/14 was exceptionally mild with good small mammal abundance.

Overall, the number of nesting pairs in 2014 was 16% above the all-years average. Even more impressive was the number of young they produced. Steve Piotrowski of the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project said, "We had eight chicks fledged from one nest - a record for the county. We also had four nests that fledged seven chicks which is exceptional for Suffolk". The Manchester Raptor Group recorded mean brood size that was almost double their all-years average (+96%) and the Hawk and Owl Trust in Somerset were not far behind with an increase of 84%.

However, it is important to note that 2014 was not a particularly good year for Barn Owls in some areas. Ayrshire & Galloway, parts of east Wales, and the Isle of Wight all bucked the trend with mean brood sizes no higher than usual.

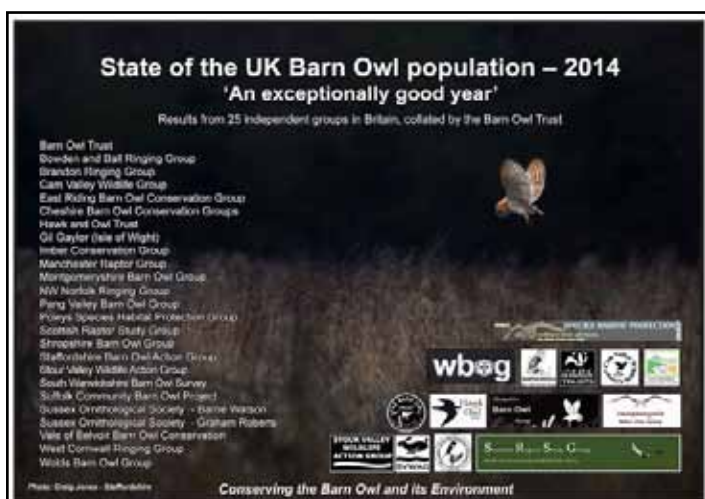
Counties containing groups/projects that contributed their results.



Overall, the average number of young found in nests in the UK during 2014 was 3.7. That's 35% higher than the all-years average of 2.7, a tremendous short-term gain. In the words of John Dellow (Pang Valley Barn Owl Group, Berkshire), "It would be great to have another mild winter now that we have such a good stock of birds ready to breed next spring".

Many thanks to all the independent groups that provided their results:

- Barn Owl Trust
- Bowden and Ball Ringing Group
- Brandon Ringing Group
- Cam Valley Wildlife Group
- East Riding Barn Owl Conservation Group
- Cheshire Barn Owl Conservation Groups
- Hawk and Owl Trust
- Gil Gaylor (Isle of Wight)
- Imber Conservation Group
- Manchester Raptor Group
- Montgomeryshire Barn Owl Group
- NW Norfolk Ringing Group
- Pang Valley Barn Owl Group
- Powys Species Habitat Protection Group
- Scottish Raptor Study Group
- Shropshire Barn Owl Group
- Staffordshire Barn Owl Action Group
- Stour Valley Wildlife Action Group
- South Warwickshire Barn Owl Survey
- Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project
- Sussex Ornithological Society - Barrie Watson
- Sussex Ornithological Society - Graham Roberts Vale of
- Belvoir Barn Owl Conservation
- West Cornwall Ringing Group
- Wolds Barn Owl Group ★



Population 2014

Results	NO. OF SITES CHECKED		NESTING OCCUPANCY			MEAN BROOD SIZE			* Notes - see appendix
	County / group	all-years average	Actual in 2014	all-years average	Actual in 2014	% change from norm	all-years average	Actual in 2014	
Ayrshire & Galloway - Scottish Raptor Study Group – Geoff Sheppard	75	73	70	39	-43%	3.50	3.45	-01%	
Berkshire – WBCS - Pang Valley Barn Owl Group, John Dellow	114	125	14	45	193%	2.48	3.84	55%	1
Cheshire – Mid Cheshire Barn Owl Group / Andrew Duncalf	600E	600E	80E	87	09%E	2.50E	4.20	68%E	2
Cornwall – West Cornwall Ringing Group	33	44	18	24	0%	2.86	3.5	22%	3
Devon & Cornwall (east)- Barn Owl Trust	84	72	39	32	-04%	2.63	4.10	56%	
Isle of Wight - Gill Gaylor	44	44	42 E	40	-05% E	3.00 E	3.00 E	00% E	4
Leicestershire - Vale of Belvoir Barn Owl Conservation (VBOC)	140	135	26 E	30	20% E	2.70 E	3.15	17% E	5
Lincolnshire - Bowden and Ball Ringing Group	1,200 E	1,200 E	180-230 E	354	73% E	3.10 E	3.5	13% E	6
Manchester Raptor Group	49	73	17	28	11%	2.13	4.17	96%	7
Montgomeryshire Barn Owl Group	330 E	330 E	48 E	37	-23% E	3.10	3.88	25%	
Norfolk - NW Norfolk Ringing Group - John Middleton	472	410	200	198	14%	2.20 E	3.30	50% E	8
Powys Species Habitat Protection Group	34	48	20	16	-43%	4.00	4.00	0%	9
Shropshire Barn Owl Group	200	201	32	55	71%	2.90	4.10	41%	10
Somerset - Hawk and Owl Trust – Chris Sperring	46	51	37 E	34	-17% E	2.50	4.60	84%	11
Somerset NE - Cam Valley Wildlife Group	78	162	10	12	-42%	2.54	3.58	41%	12
Staffordshire Barn Owl Action Group	244	264	30	33	02%	2.33	3	29%	13
Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project (inc. Suffolk Owl Sanctuary data & others)	930	1367	172	325	29%	2.39	3.75	57%	14
Sussex - Barrie Watson (team)	c. 90	127	60 E	73	-14% E	2.90	4.10	41%	15
Sussex - Graham Roberts	40 E	28	12	10	19% E	3.00	4.10	37%	16
Warwickshire - Stour Valley Wildlife Action Group / South Warwickshire Barn Owl Survey / James Rushforth (Brandon Ringing Group)	145	230	18	63	121%	2.88	3.78	31%	
Wiltshire - Imber Conservation Group Major Nigel Lewis MBE (with volunteers)	c. 488	407	144	119	-01%	2.20	3.40	55%	17
Yorkshire – East Riding Barn Owl Conservation Group	580 E	530 E	150 E	170 E	24% E	3.00	4.20	40%	18
Yorkshire – Wolds Barn Owl Group	90	37	27 E	15	35% E	2.70	3.33	23%	19
TOTALS (zeroes are excluded)	6,106 E	6,558 E	1,471 E	1,839E	19% E	3.18 E	4.53 E	21% E	

E = Estimate * Appendix Notes available in full report - www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Rodenticide Campaign Update

Our Rodenticide Campaign goes on. There is no doubt that the 126,000+ signatures to our petition early last year have made a difference to the process. Hopefully wildlife, including Barn Owls will face less risk of secondary poisoning although unfortunately 'Stewardship' proposals do not go far enough and labelling of products has yet to be determined by HSE.

Background

Government figures show that 87% of Barn Owls contain highly toxic Second Generation rat poison (SGARs). A significant proportion of Kestrels, Red Kites, Foxes, Pine Martens, Scottish Wildcats, Hedgehogs, Otters, Buzzards, Sparrowhawks, Peregrine Falcons, Polecats, Weasels, Badgers, White-tailed Eagles, Stoats, Tawny Owls, and Golden Eagles also contain SGAR's.

Some Barn Owls die as a direct result and we are extremely concerned about the possible effects of sub-lethal doses. For many years, our Rodenticide Campaign involved talking to farmers and other rodenticide users about safer ways of controlling rat numbers. Then in April 2011, whilst carrying out research for the Barn Owl Conservation Handbook we were shocked to discover a) how toxic SGARs are, b) the full extent of wildlife contamination, and c) that product labels are totally inadequate and even misleading

Campaign timeline

- April 2011 – BOT wrote to the government regulators (Health and Safety Executive (HSE)) asking for improved labelling and proposed specific wording for inclusion on all SGAR product labels.
- June 2011 – HSE agrees to 'consider' BOT proposals as part of their work to 'mitigate the risks associated with all SGARs'.
- June 2011 – In Brussels, European Commission Member States failed to reach agreement on how to mitigate environmental contamination by SGARs.
- September 2011 – HSE agreed to include BOT in consultations on changes to SGAR use.
- August 2012 – HSE invited 'Stakeholders' to respond to their 30-page consultation document 'Environmental Risk Mitigation Measures for Second Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (SGARs)'.
- November 2012 – BOT submitted a detailed response to the HSE's consultation. For the first time ever, BOT's recommendations were supported, in writing, by RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts, and Hawk and Owl Trust. A total of 50 stakeholder responses were received by HSE.
- March 2013 – HSE invited BOT to provide a 10-minute presentation at a Stakeholder Seminar to be held in Crosby, Merseyside.
- April 2013 Seminar - BOT delivered a hard-hitting presentation to representatives of SGAR manufacturers, SGAR users, and government regulators.
- June 2013 - Issue 95 of Pest Control News carried a hard-hitting article by BOT entitled 'SGARS and Barn Owls – Let's get the information right'.
- June 2013 – The Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU), a 'campaign' set up by SGAR manufacturers, agreed with HSE that they would coordinate a Steering Group,
- September 2013 – HSE circulated a 'Development of a Stewardship Regime' document to all stakeholders.
- January 2014 – Petitioning organisation Avaaz teamed up with BOT and launched BOT's first on-line petition.
- January 2014 – RSPB 'tweeted' BOT's SGAR Petition to all its Twitter followers!
- January 2014 – HSE informed BOT that an essential part of 'an acceptable way forward' for Stewardship will be to 'demonstrate responsible use of SGARs - and their use as a last resort.' (Last resort use was one of the things BOT was campaigning for.)

- January 2014 – BOT pointed out to HSE that in the formulation of the Stewardship Regime, wildlife interests were insufficiently represented.
- February 2014 – The first Stewardship Regime Proposal (V1), a 44-page document produced by CRRU, arrived at BOT and BOT provided a 4-page response containing 8 recommendations.
- February 2014 – Chris Packham and Bill Oddie both agreed to help publicise BOT's petition. Number of signatures reached 100,000.
- February 27th – 45-minute meeting with the Minister at Westminster, BOT and Avaaz presented the petition containing 120,915 signatures to Mike Penning MP.
- March 2014 – Following comments from BOT HSE told CRRU that the membership of its Steering Group needed to be endorsed by HSE 'to ensure a suitably broad range of stakeholders were represented'. RSPB subsequently joined the CRRU Steering Group.
- June 2014 - June 2014 – from Natural England joined the Government Oversight Group.
- June 2014 – Number of signatories to BOT's petition reached 126,641.
- June 2014 – The BOT obtained a copy of V2 of the Stewardship Proposal, now 77 pages long due to the addition of a lot of 'justification material'.
- June 2014 – BOT again provided wide-ranging comments on the V2 Stewardship Proposal. We found much of the draft Code content was inadequate and provided HSE with 13 checks to conduct and 14 specific recommendations.
- June 2014 – RSPB told the CRRU Steering Group they were unable to support the V2 Stewardship Proposal.
- July 7th 2014 – HSE cancelled the full meeting of the Government Oversight Group and instead, met CRRU and sent them away to revise their Stewardship Proposal and Code of Practice yet again.
- November 2014 – CRRU submitted updated Proposals (V3) to HSE containing a 'Best Practice and Guidance for Rodent Control ...' (rather than rodenticide use). This was a fundamental change in emphasis that BOT had recommended.
- January 2015 – HSE circulated the Stewardship Proposal (V3) and an HSE Information Document setting out the timescale for the future authorisation of SGARs and implementation of 'Stewardship'.
- January 2015 – BOT provided seven pages of comments on the latest Stewardship Proposals (V3). BOT's detailed comments included 11 recommendations.

At the time of writing (Mar. 2015) **What we do know is that:**

1. Amateur users will be restricted to small packets of SGAR and will be outside Stewardship.
2. Professional SGAR users (including Farmers and Gamekeepers) will have to be able to prove they are qualified to use SGARs in order to purchase them.
3. SGAR levels in Barn Owls will continue to be the principal indicator of the success or failure of Stewardship.

The prospects for the three things BOT petitioned for are:

A ban on preventative / permanent baiting

This practice, which has been a huge money-maker for many Professional Pest Controllers, is now widely accepted as being bad practice and Stewardship is very likely to help reduce it.

Last Resort Use

The removal of food and harbourage and the deployment of safer methods of control do now feature quite strongly in the Stewardship Proposal but there is still room for improvement.

Labelling

We have not yet seen any draft proposed wording. We therefore remain hopeful that our proposed wording (or words that serve the same purposes) will be used.

Our website - www.barnowltrust.org.uk has more details and information on safer rodent control. ★

Team Talk

New Year, New Baby!



We are very pleased to announce that Marianne, who has been a member of the team since November 2009, had a baby boy on January 19th.

Nathaniel Leos Morris, as he has been named, was in no rush to be born and arrived almost three weeks late!

Both are doing really well and we wish them every happiness for the future. We hope to have Marianne back in the team later in the year but are meanwhile recruiting maternity cover for her maternity cover! (See below). ★



Photos: Jasmin Ramsden

Is it the water?

Some of you may have had contact with Emma, who started working in our office in September to cover Marianne's maternity leave. But ... she is leaving us in May to have her first baby!

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my time working here at the Trust. The team are brilliant and really passionate about what they do.

Of all my different hats, I particularly enjoy answering the phone, as every call presents a new and often unusual enquiry! My favourite was perhaps the gentleman who phoned from Argentina and wanted some advice about a horned owl, although the dog handler who found an owlet at Dartmoor prison takes a lot to beat!

Our supporters are always a real pleasure to chat to and I am always stunned by their generosity, not just in terms of donations but also in giving up their time or skills.

I will be sad to leave the Trust and in between changing nappies I will be keeping a keen eye on what the Trust is up to." ★

Emma Moxham



Photo: Paul Moxham

Mark Ellison has been volunteering with the Trust since August 2014. He plans to do his university work placement at the Trust starting later this year.



Photo: Provided

I have been interested in birds of prey, especially owls, since I was 15, when I started working with them at a local public farm. This love for owls and nature resulted in me taking an Honours Degree at Plymouth University in Conservation Biology.

I first started thinking about volunteering at the Trust in April 2014. I was in a lecture on British conservation and the Trust was mentioned in a case study. After my exams had finished I decided to contact the Trust about volunteering with them to try and gain some skills to supplement my degree.

I started in August helping Jasmin with building the nestboxes that the Trust sells. My technology A-level really came in handy so I picked it up fairly quickly. I volunteered for 2 days a week over the summer but now I'm back at university I try to help out 1 day a week.

To encourage volunteering at University, we are rewarded for the hours that we log. When I collected my 25-hour award at the start of term, I was told about ViP (Volunteering in Plymouth) Student Led Volunteering. (As I'm writing this I'll be collecting my 200-hour award from the President of the University at a function tomorrow). There was a voluntary role available as the Barn Owl Trust Project leader. This involved taking a group of up to 15 students to the Trust once a month to help work on the Lennon Legacy Project. I really liked the sound of the role so applied and got the position.

When we are at the Trust, Matt from the conservation team and I spend the day with the volunteers working on different projects around the site. I really enjoy volunteering at the Trust. It doesn't feel like work, which is why I'm always happy to help when I can. ★

Mark Ellison

In Memoriam

The Trust has received donations in memory of

Jan Coppack,
Phyllis Winifred Short,
Leslie Sutton, Mabel Rainford,
Edna Beryl Arnold,
Leslie Atkinson, Julie Jeffrey
Maureen Anne Short,
Margaret Quick
and
Leonard Howell

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

They all now have a leaf on our Memory Tree

Your News from

Bringing back the Barnies

Mike Tucker tells us about his community Barn Owl project in Berkshire, together his group are making a difference and enjoying the process!

"Two readers kindly supported an appeal made by our Parish Magazine for funds to build Barn Owl boxes. The resulting £40 was matched to provide enough material for an initial quantity of eight boxes, but I found myself not up to hitting the deadline of year end, to provide shelter for visiting owls through the winter. In consequence a wider appeal in a letter to the Advertiser brought an outstanding 14 responses of help, most of which materialised into long term support, and further donations.

The positive responses from readers wanting boxes installed was heartening, and created a need for more materials. To provide the necessary capital, a grant application was made to the Louis Baylis Charitable Trust, who kindly granted £900 in mid year. Building on the foundation of parish support, reader goodwill, the grant, and 10-12 continuing 'members' building and installing boxes, we have made over 50 boxes to date, 30 of which have been installed so far, with installation work continuing through to year end. The box range has been extended also to include Tawny Owl and Kestrel boxes.

Furthermore, a follow-up Advertiser article in September resulted in over 50 requests for boxes, a backlog that fills our 'order book' and pipeline for a few months. We are still inviting donations to cover the material and installation costs. With this income, and building on the capital backing of our original 'backers', we have a stable cash flow, the demand and materials and help to continue, (but we would always welcome more!)

For the members of our team of retired DIYers, there is the satisfaction of a job well done, a great team spirit, not a few laughs, free coffee mornings and, especially, the appreciation of those who take our 'products' and donate so generously. All in all, a very satisfactory Christian, and 'win win' situation to end the year on. My Christmas wish will have been granted when, hopefully, we hear of boxes being taken up in the Springtime. My sincere thanks to the readers who were our initial backers, all helpers, and takers, of our 'product'. It has been a very heartening journey, I wonder where it will take us in 2015! ★

Michael Tucker
Berkshire

Sad news from Cheshire



A key member of the Mid-Cheshire Barn Owl group, Andrew Duncalf sadly passed away on 4th January 2015 aged only 51.

An advocate for Barn Owl conservation, a BTO ringer/trainer and an important contributor to Barn Owl monitoring in Cheshire, he will no doubt be sorely missed by all. We would like to express our condolences to all involved in the Mid-Cheshire Barn Owl group and Andrew's family. ★



Photo: Nicholas Watts

Voles - Ups & Downs

Lincolnshire farmer Nicholas Watts has been acting as a Local Contact for the Trust since 2003. His company Vine House Farm Wild Bird Food (www.vinehousefarm.co.uk) produces a range of wild bird foods and provides fantastic habitat for Barn Owls. Nicholas has erected over 20 Barn Owl boxes and in 2006 he was awarded an MBE for services to farming and conservation.

Some years there are a lot of Field Voles and other years there aren't many at all. Further north these population changes are cyclic in nature with a peak every 3 or 4 years. Down here in Lincolnshire vole numbers go up and down quite randomly. This may be influenced by the weather and how many creatures there are to eat them.

2014 was a great year for voles and consequently most pairs of Barn Owls had two broods in 2014. The 13 pairs that bred on my farm reared 87 young and at least 119 fledged in the parish of Deeping St Nicholas alone. This winter (2014/15), there were more Kestrels around, probably because there were so many voles last summer. Unlike Barn Owls, Kestrels only have one brood a summer, they probably laid an extra egg to make a brood of 5 or 6 instead of the usual 4 or 5 but because there were so many voles around the youngsters all survived whereas in a normal summer probably half of them would die. When there's a surplus of food inexperienced young birds do a lot better.

In my area, the wet summer of 2012 was disastrous for voles, it either drowned them or just stopped them from breeding. The spring of 2013 was very cold which meant the voles were late to start breeding and by that time most of our Barn Owls and Kestrels had died because they couldn't find any food. The summer of 2013 was a good summer and the voles bred well but there weren't many birds around to eat them so a lot survived the mild winter and there were more around in the spring of 2014 than usual. 2014 was also a good summer so the larger number of voles than usual bred huge numbers and made a surplus of food for the Barn Owls and Kestrels. Weasels, Herons and rats have also done well because of the surplus of voles.

I think 2015 is not likely to be a good vole year because there are so many birds and animals eating the voles. I'm starting to see Barn Owls flying in the day now, (mid-Feb), which means that they didn't find enough food the night before. All these birds have been gaining experience of catching voles through the autumn and there are still two or three months before they start breeding and there are more of these vole catchers around than usual.

My forecast is that there will not be a surplus of voles around this year even if it is a good summer because there are so many creatures around to eat them and most of the Barn Owls will have small broods. Kestrels also catch young birds in the summer so they will have normal size broods but there will not be a surplus of food around late summer for the young to survive in good numbers as they did in 2014.

Nicholas Watts

[The causes of vole population changes are not fully understood. There is a general consensus that predator numbers and weather are not the main causes but they may well play a part and there is still much to learn. Eds.] ★

Around the U.K.

Don't ask me what was on TV !



If you have ever seen a Barn Owl in the wild, it is quite likely to be an experience you will never forget. You may be a complete wildlife nut like me who is happier standing out in the freezing cold until it goes dark, even in the dark, watching their graceful silhouette and listening for their eerie call, rather than sitting in front of the TV or staring at a computer screen.

One cold winter's night, driving along a country road, a Barn Owl flew out in front of me, swooping low, its white feathers illuminated in my car headlights. It is something I have never forgotten and started a fascination and indeed love of these beautiful birds. In researching the species, I began to realise just how endangered they are, what a privilege it is to see them, and how very like us they are in their day to day habits.

On moving to rural West Wight, into a tiny thatched cottage with a sprawling garden overlooking fields, it soon became clear there were a large number of rodents also living with us. So, we made a Barn Owl nest box, and placed it high up in a large tree. Within two weeks, we had a visiting Barn Owl, and within two more weeks, our little rodent residents were gone! Our Barn Owl was earning his keep, and watching him coming and going became an all-consuming pastime.

Four years on, our male Barn Owl has been through hard times, having found a mate, and lost her and his first brood to starvation in prolonged wet weather, been evicted from his own home by Jackdaws and having a 'duel' with a rival male Barn Owl over his new mate, who he had won so valiantly with his incredible aerobatics in front of our bedroom window whilst she watched on from the safety of the nest box.

In 2014 at last, he is the proud parent of three 'owlets'. All healthy and with full tummies. It was a good year for Barn Owls on the Island, especially in the unspoilt landscape of West Wight, and we will do our best to keep his nest box in good order and leave the odd bit of long grass in the garden for him to hunt over.

Don't ask me what was on TV last night, I couldn't tell you! ★

Joanna Cowan
Isle of Wight Garden Designer



Photos: Joanna Cowan

2015 Calendars

In mid December 2014 we received a box of stunning calendars from Trust supporter Russell Savory to help us to raise funds. He had previously provided the Trust with images for use as Christmas cards and our lovely A6 magnetic puzzle. Thank you Russell.

All of the stunning images were taken by Russell at Stow Maries Aerodrome, the last existing WW1 aerodrome and home to the 37 Squadron Royal Flying Corps. It is still a working aerodrome and a haven for wildlife.

We still have a few of these beautiful calendars left - 12" (30.5cm) square. They can be purchased for £8 plus £2.80 p&p on-line at www.barnowltrust.org.uk or by post - send a cheque for £10.80 ★



A Towering Success

Some of you may remember the article on the newly-constructed wildlife tower in Warwickshire in the previous issue of Feedback that was based on our design, the one with the sedum roof (Feedback 52, page 5). Well, in January 2015, and only 7 months after completion the owner contacted us to report white faecal splashes on stonework, pellets inside and on the platform of one of the specially-provided bird spaces, as well as a dead Field Vole.

Having sent the pellets to us for specific identification, we were delighted to report that a Barn Owl has found the tower and appears to be using it as a roost site. What's more, there was also evidence a Tawny Owl had been in the tower! This is fantastic news and just goes to show what can happen at carefully chosen sites where surrounding habitat is favourable. ★



Photo: Provided

Fund-tastic!

Enterprising Abbie

Some of the most ingenious and inspiring fundraising work often comes from our youngest supporters. Enterprising Abbie who is 13 years old and comes from Dorset raised the money herself to adopt an owl.



Photo: Karen Wells

To raise the money Abbie saved up some of her own pocket money and also did a car boot sale where she sold white chocolate and cranberry fudge, which she had made herself - yum! She sold the fudge in jars, which she decorated herself and charged £2 a jar. Another time, along with her younger brother, she set up stalls in the garden and invited her mum and dad to spend their money on the lucky dip, hoopla and other traditional games.

Abbie is a massive fan of Harry Potter and has read all of the books at least half a dozen times each! This is where her love of owls stems from. She is such a big fan that when the family visited the Harry Potter studios she was the first person ever to get one particular question right. (What is Aragog's wife's name?). Abbie's other great love is guinea pigs. She has one called Rascal who is about 4 years old and very cute!

Abbie's efforts are greatly appreciated by us all and it is always lovely to see the Barn Owl protectors of the future getting involved - Thanks Abbie, we hope you are enjoying adopting 'Rose' after all your hard work.

... and we have plenty more resident owls to adopt if you, like Abbie, have a great fundraising idea! ★



Thanks to Waitrose's Community Matters Scheme, the Torbay store raised £195 for the Trust, so a big thankyou to everyone who added their token to our cause!

Art Exhibition

Another group which has been raising funds for us is the St Wilfrid's Art Group in Hampshire. The artists held an exhibition and split the profits between the Trust and two other charities.

Apparently there were quite a few Barn Owl paintings displayed in the exhibition and Mrs Cooper, the group's treasurer's 15 year old captive bred Barn Owl had proved to be an excellent model! A huge thankyou to all the artists who helped to raise us £150. ★



Snap Happy!

Calling all photographers! Our last year's in-house calendar was a great success and this year we would like your help and to get more of you involved.

Naturally we don't want you to go disturbing any nests, but perhaps you have managed to snap an owl in flight or perched on a post. We would love to see your photos and thirteen will be selected for our 2016 calendar.

Please send your Barn Owl photographs as a jpeg, either on a CD, or attached to an e-mail to info@barnowltrust.org.uk.

The deadline for photo submissions is the 30th June in order that the calendar can be produced ready for Christmas... so get snapping! ★

Donation Boxes

Donation boxes bring in much needed funds. We currently have more than 80 donation boxes spread throughout Devon and beyond.

Over the last year we have collected £1,418 from these boxes thanks to the local businesses that host them and their kindly customers that donate to us.

If you have a suitable location and you think you might like to support us by displaying one of our lovely handmade boxes, please get in touch with Pete. ★



Photo: Pete Webb

Going, Going, Gone

From time to time we get some very unusual items donated to the Trust.

Before Christmas a supporter from Paignton offered us a pair of stained glass windows to do with what we wished. As usual, Pete, who fancies himself as something of an entrepreneur, jumped at the opportunity to make some money from the windows.

After a tense few days of fierce bidding on our ebay auction site the windows sold for £120. The gentleman who bought them was very pleased and plans to install them on either side of his front door in his barn conversion project.

An excellent result! ★



Photo: Pete Webb



Walkies!

Once again the Trust's canine team were put to work to raise funds for the Trust. Maizie (pictured below), Poppy and Biscuit joined David, Frances, Jasmin and Marianne to walk from the Trust's office near Ashburton to Totnes... and back!

'Goodness, that must have taken days' you might be thinking. In fact the team were helped out by the generosity of the South Devon Railway who provided them with a free ride for part of the journey.

As Biscuit was only born in March 2014 this was her first sponsored walk, she proved to be a great addition to the team.



Who could resist? Photos: David Ramsden



As you can see the humans also played their part by dressing up as Barn Owls and collecting donations along the way.

Thanks to all our lovely supporters, the walkers raised £745 for the Trust. A good time was had by all and humans and dogs alike earned themselves a well deserved rest... and possibly a few biscuits! ★

Christmas Crafts

These adorable little chaps (opposite) were made and donated to us by one of our very creative supporters, Sandra Stewart from Barnstaple.

Sandra regularly gives us her creations so that we can sell them through our online shop. As well as these delightful owl tree decorations, Sandra also made us a range of beautiful cards and some lovely beaded owl keyrings. Thanks Sandra! ★



Photo: Emma Moxham

Poetry Competition 2015

Our previous wildlife poetry competitions have proved so successful that we have decided to run another one this year. You have plenty of time to swat up on Keats and Wordsworth however, as we won't be collecting entries until the Autumn. More details in the next edition of Feedback.

Have a read of last year's second place winner, Pesticidal by Susan Richardson, for inspiration!

Pesticidal

In her early weeks as a bee
she learnt to thrive in a colony of thousands,
to defend the hive, and clean.
She revealed her dream of world pollination,
sought an audience with the queen.

In her waggle dance class,
she threw the sharpest moves,
soon knew where to choose the juiciest nectar,
how to cruise the rural sector for foxgloves,
clover, borage, and how to lose herself
in the intoxicating forage
for pollen from oilseed rape.

Hard to say when she first sensed
that petals seemed less bright,

when she first felt compelled
to embrace the varroa mite. Hard to know
when she first noticed drones
trying to mate, mid-flight,
with cabbage whites, golf balls, crows.
In time, though, the line she was making wavered
diverted
reversed
till she began to return
with fag ends, ring pulls, plastic
in her pollen basket –
and finally, burbling workers' rights,
she went on permanent strike.

Now she's stopped co-opting bonnets,
crawls on flawed knees
through her hive of inactivity,
waxes hysterical in spherical combs –
Honey, I'm home. ★

Thanks and Things

As always we would like to take this opportunity to thank all our supporters who are either Friends of the Trust, Barn Owl adopters or who donate much needed funds. As well as those who give us financial support, we also owe a huge thanks to everyone that gives up either their time or expertise to support us. And of course there are all the supporters who send us items to use, recycle or sell. So a massive thank you to:

Heather Buswell, Margaret Taylor, Sarah Dimmock, John Rae, Hazel Savage, Audrey Fox, Melanie White, Hannah Nutbeam, Honey Ingram, Brian & Lynne Larard, People's Trust For Endangered Species, Elizabeth & Brian Stone, Marshall and the Green Team (St David's Primary), Louise Brown, Torc Ecology Ltd, Buckfastleigh PO, Ashburton PO, Jenie Allen, Annie Rhodes, Trevor Goodfellow, John Clipson, Lynn Green, Richard & Leigh Boucher, John & Sue Gibbon, Rob Hamar, Dan Gibbons, Nida Al-Fulaij, David Moor, Jane Marshall, Nigel Reid, One stop Sealing Ltd, Jayne Hartley, Nigel Morley, Mrs Shelagh Prickett, Ruth Westall, Chris & Susie Hancox, Mrs Sutton, Elliot Veale, Elaine Underhill, Jake and Ali Ramsden, Nina Fenner, Sandra Reardon, Diana Smurthwaite, Tracey Morris and Stephen Hicks.

Thank you to our wonderful volunteers: Kim Baker, Mark Ellison, Alan Sloman, Nic Butler, Beth Smith, Sally McCarter, Louise Toy, all the Plymouth UPSU students and everyone who has helped with the mailing of this issue of Feedback.

A special thanks also to those who have helped with fundraising: Sandra Stewart, Abbie Wells, St Wilfrid's Art Group Exhibition and The South Devon Railway (find out more on pages 14-15) The Barley Sheaf at Gorran, the Leeds Steampunk Market and Derek and Margaret Crocker.

Finally we'd like to thank Bill Bishop, Carol King and Margaret Rhodes for their help with transporting birds. Dave Scott for his expertise with feather imping, Ian Sayers at Silverton Vets in Paignton, Veterinary Hospital Group at Estover in Plymouth and Mark Yeates for his assistance with the survey website.

Can you help with:

- ✧ Postcards and pre 1970 envelopes with stamps on - they are worth much more to us intact
- ✧ Any used stamps, including any foreign stamps
- ✧ Wild Barn Owl pellets (we can never have too many)
- ✧ Wild bird food - mainly sacks of black sunflower seeds, also peanuts & plain canary seed
- ✧ Wood for making outdoor nestboxes - sheets of 9 or 12mm tanalised softwood ply and lengths of 25x 50mm tanalised batten
- ✧ A4 and A3 recycled paper and card both coloured and white
- ✧ Anabat detector
- ✧ Hand held hetrodyne bat detector
- ✧ Waders (size 10) - for working in the ponds
- ✧ Carpet suitable for the office
- ✧ Metal detector
- ✧ Pliers
- ✧ Drill-driver bits (for screwing)
- ✧ Set of sharp circular hole cutters (large sizes for cutting neat holes in plywood)
- ✧ Small plate compactor
- ✧ Emulsion paint (pale colour) sufficient to paint an office
- ✧ Bubble wrap
- ✧ Brown packaging/parcel tape 50mm x 66mm
- ✧ A3 rotary trimmer for paper and card
- ✧ Landranger and OS maps of Devon. Particularly Torbay/South Dartmoor area

Thank you for your help ★



Tail piece ...

It's a damp and drizzly morning here on the edge of Dartmoor but spring is in the air. The Snowdrops are almost over and the Primroses and Daffodils are starting to flower. Hazel and Alder are dripping catkins and our flock of Sparrows are chirping away madly. It's hard to believe that there were no Sparrows at all in this part of the valley until 2005, it's just one of the amazing changes the Lennon Legacy Project (LLP) has made to our local wildlife.

As you will have read elsewhere in Feedback, we are hopeful for another good breeding season after a mild winter and less casualties than we expected. We need another good summer to build up numbers. However, as we know from recent years the weather isn't always seasonal. Extreme weather events are more frequent and climate change is making things worse.

I was recently astounded to discover that a lovely young man I had known since he was a child had absolutely no awareness of climate change or any of the other environmental issues that threaten our planet. In this age of 'information overload' it's hard to believe that someone can get to their mid-twenties and have no idea that their life, or that of their children is being affected by mankind's day-to-day activities.

Earlier this week on Radio 2 I heard a broadcaster read out a message from a listener that said amongst other things; "I don't care about the environment"! How is it possible that anyone can feel this way or that they don't need to be concerned? All things are connected and we rely on the earth for the air that we breathe, the food that we eat and for everything we own.

How about the folk who load up their old furniture in the car and drive it to a remote rural location and drop it in a gateway instead of taking it to the dump? Or those that throw their rubbish out of cars as they drive along? How on earth does someone feel that doing this is ok? Don't they care? Or rather is it that they

don't think! And if so what sort of society has our 'civilised world' created where individuals are so unaware of the effects of their behaviour?

To survive as a species and to protect this wonderful planet that we call home, we must feel connected to the natural world. Fortunately for the planet and for all its inhabitants, there are a lot of people that are aware and that do care. Folk that pick up rubbish, encourage wildlife, care for others, that think about the way they live and how they spend their money, people that want to conserve our environment and the incredible diversity of the natural world for future generations. But we all need to spread the word, to make sure that everyone is aware of the environmental issues and the challenges that face us all.

We need politicians that think beyond the next election, who will develop sustainable policies for conserving the environment, the wildlife and the green spaces we have left. When we vote we all need to ask ourselves if continuous economic growth and short-term gain is more important than our environment. Personally, I want a diverse natural world for my grandsons' to grow up in.

Nature is amazing and given the opportunity wildlife can thrive as we've seen here in the LLP. We can't all manage land for wildlife, but we can make sure that those around us have the chance to learn about and connect with the natural world. I'm sure that this connection will also help with some of the social problems that plague our country. People that care about the countryside don't tend to dump old mattresses and bags of dog poo!

Education is the key to saving the planet, teaching and learning, in and beyond the classroom, and understanding that we are all part of an incredible interdependent web of life. *Together we can make a world of difference.* ★

Frances Ramsden