

feedback

Issue 59 Spring 2018



Reg Charity No: 299 835
www.barnowltrust.org.uk

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Diary Dates 2018

April - Fri 27th - 5:00am - Dawn Chorus Walk

May - Thurs 10th - 2:30pm - Wild Flower Walk

May - Thurs 24th - 11:00am - Coffee and Cake

June - Mon 25th - 11:00am - Coffee and Cake

July - Thurs 5th - 2:30pm - Butterfly Walk

July - Tues 17th & Weds 18th - BOESS Training Courses

July - Thurs 19th & Fri 20th - ABOSM Training Courses

July - Tues 31st - 11:00am - Coffee and Cake

August - Fri 3rd - 8:00pm - Bat Walk with Louise Woolley

September - Thurs 6th - 2:30pm - Walk and Cream Tea

Booking essential. Places limited. Please contact the office.

Please visit www.barnowltrust.org.uk for details.

Welcome to issue 59 of Feedback. This is a rather special issue as we have articles from nine different owl conservation groups from across the world, this is the 2nd international issue we have published, the first was number 17 back in 1997. It was whilst attending the World Owl Conference in September last year that we met all these wonderful people working tirelessly in their own countries to conserve and protect owls there, see page 7 for a write up of our time at the conference. The international articles are spread over pages 8-16. A huge thank you to all the contributors.

In addition to being an international issue this edition of Feedback is also extra special because the Barn Owl Trust is now in its 30th year! What a milestone! The Trust has really developed and grown over these years.

The Barn Owl Trust officially "hatched" on the 30th July 1988 with the arrival of its registered charity number and a donation of £25 from one of its founding Trustees. That was all we had: a number, twenty-five pounds, and a few highly committed and very active volunteers. We've evolved into, what is probably, the main source of Barn Owl information in the UK but our grass-roots work goes on. We have a small dedicated team who still care for individual birds hands-on, advise farmers face-to-face, erect nestboxes, and carry out practical land management tasks. This has all been possible due to the kind donations from our generous supporters. Turn to page 21 to see a time line of the Trust's history.

In celebration of our 30th anniversary we will be holding coffee and cake events here in our Norman Anderson Meeting Room. Check out the Diary Dates below and see if you can make any of the events. If not maybe you can do something to celebrate our 30th birthday and let us know.

We are delighted to have heard from some supporters who are planning on fundraising to celebrate our 30th anniversary, hear about their events and how you can get involved on page 22. The Trust's Legacy Support Officer Judith will be walking to fundraise again this year, along with Midge the dog, and this time she'll be walking 1,500 miles for the Barn Owl Trust and Dementia UK. At the time of writing Judith and Midge are already 204 miles in and feeling positive, details on how you can sponsor them can be found on the enclosed flyer and you can read about Judith's last fundraising walk on page 23.

Like many of you we were affected by the 'winter weather' in March, which resulted in the cancellation of one of our training courses and the closure of our office for a day and a half. With the snow now (mostly) melted we are seeing Primroses starting to bloom and hope that Spring is really on its way at last. Unfortunately the bad weather did affect Barn Owls. Our phone line was rather busy with many reports of dead birds being found. If you spot a Barn Owl (alive or dead) please report your sighting at <http://www.barnowlsurvey.org.uk/>.

On page 19 you can read about an interesting new idea we are planning for 2018, we will be ploughing up some of our rough grassland. This is to create a winter bird food crop and flower rich margins for nectar lovers. We expect it to benefit foraging Barn

Owls too. It's an exciting project that we will be recording and reporting on in future issues. Visitors to the Lennon Legacy Project this year will be able to see for themselves how it progresses.

Thank you all for all your support, we couldn't have reached this amazing milestone without our wonderful supporters. Here's to another 30 years!



Frances Ramsden & Marianne Bryan ★

BOT News



Image courtesy of Manchester Evening News

HS2 - A Major Concern

The construction and operation of the HS2 high speed rail line between London and Birmingham is going to destroy 80 Barn Owl nests - either through direct destruction or the extremely close proximity of the trains – despite the fact that HS2's stated Environmental Policy is to "seek to achieve no net loss in biodiversity there". The onus therefore, is on HS2 to boost Barn Owl numbers by an additional 80 nests at a safe distance from the line and to prevent an annual toll of juvenile Barn Owls killed by the new 225mph trains during dispersal.

In December 2017 the Barn Owl Trust joined the HS2 Barn Owl Group to consider the companies so-far unpublished Draft Barn Owl Mitigation Plan. We were extremely concerned to find that their entire proposal consisted of little more than the erection of 240 wooden nestboxes on trees. The fact that the nestboxes were expected to last for 20 years when the planned life expectancy of HS2 is 100+ years was not mentioned. Additionally, in the planned nestbox erection area, nestboxes already exist and the main factor limiting Barn Owl numbers is food supply, not the lack of nesting places. We advised them therefore, the erection of 240 additional nestboxes is most unlikely to result in the recruitment of 80 additional nesting pairs.

We also advised the Group that the creation of an additional 80 nesting pairs in areas that already had nestboxes and resident Barn Owls could not be achieved without the creation of substantial areas of additional foraging habitat (prey-rich rough grassland). Whilst HS2's draft document acknowledged that "(compensation) is usually achieved by bringing land into conservation management" there was no Barn Owl habitat creation in the Plan.

On top of all that, it is well known that many juveniles die every year on Britain's trunk roads and that total population size is to a large extent determined by the survival rate of juveniles. We were very concerned, therefore, to discover that the risk posed by HS2 to dispersing juvenile Barn Owls had been almost entirely ignored. Under the plan, screening of the line in order to reduce owl-train collisions would only be "considered" and owl deaths would not be monitored.

We have since advised HS2 that an appropriate Mitigation Plan should include the building of not less than 80 stone-built Wildlife Towers, the creation of not less than 20 hectares of permanent prey-rich rough grassland within 1.5km of each tower, that at least 50% of the overland route should be screened on both sides, and that mortality should be monitored. Importantly, we also pointed out that all HS2 mitigation measures must be as long-lived as HS2 itself.

We await with interest a second draft of HS2's Barn Owl Mitigation Plan. ★

News Bites

Snow Postpones Courses

As you may know we hold regular training courses here at the Trust designed to teach ecologists, and those working in conservation, about Barn Owl ecology, legislation, surveying and mitigation. Unfortunately the 'Beast from the East' brought a red weather warning to Waterleat on 1st March forcing us to postpone our final day of training. We look forward to welcoming back our attendees later in the year to complete the course.

Goat Arrival

November saw the arrival of two new volunteers, Annie and Clarabel, our Golden Guernsey/Saanen goats! With a portable house on wheels the girls spent the first few weeks grazing on bramble in a pen opposite the office before heading up to North Park where they are enjoying the brambles and other scrub. This is a grazing experiment and we'll be monitoring their impact on the invasive scrub as time progresses.

Videos Go Down a Storm

In October 2017 we launched 10 new instructional films on to our YouTube channel and social media pages. These short videos cover many areas of Barn Owl conservation, from nest box construction to habitat management and have proven to be very popular. As of the beginning of March they have been viewed almost 38,000 times Fantastic! Head to [youtube.com/BarnOwlTrust1](https://www.youtube.com/BarnOwlTrust1) to watch the films in full.

Eradibait taken off Market

We have been recommending Eradibait as a non-toxic rodenticide for a long time but were recently informed that it, along with The Big Cheese-Natural Active product, will sadly be withdrawn from the market in June this year. Our first advice with a rodent problem would always be to reduce the rodent carrying capacity of the environment, principally by reducing food and harbourage, before resorting to any other methods - see our website for lots more information.

New Conservation Officer

Rick Lockwood joined us back in January 2016 as Assistant Conservation Officer after Stuart Baker left in October 2015. He has been a real asset and we are pleased to announce that from 1st April 2018 Rick will become a Conservation Officer!

Time for a new Tractor

In February we received a phonecall from the Hatcher Animal Welfare Trust informing us we would be receiving a grant for £30,000 towards replacing our old and rather unreliable tractor. What fantastic news! Our current tractor is 27 years old..that's almost as old as the Trust itself!

More BOT News

Dormice in the LLP

One of the many surveys the Trust conducted soon after securing the LLP in 2001 was to look at chewed Hazelnuts for evidence of Dormice presence. The way a Dormouse chews a Hazelnut is slightly different from other small mammals; the empty nut casing can look a bit like a clog, with chew marks on the surface of the nut at an angle to the hole. This is quite unlike the way Field Voles and Wood Mice tackle one. In November 2002, chewed Hazelnuts indicative of Dormice activity had been found in several places in the woodland along the River Ashburn. Half a dozen Dormouse boxes were consequently erected along the Ashburn at that time, but little subsequent monitoring was undertaken. All the original boxes had rotted to pieces by 2014, so new ones were erected in the same locations. It's worth saying at this point that a specific protected species licence is needed for Dormouse work, and none of the staff held one until Tony, one of our fantastic volunteers, was granted one in 2016 after finishing his training.



Fast forward to October 2017! Whilst emptying the small bird boxes in adjacent woodland, one of the Conservation Team found something out of the ordinary inside. Funnily enough, there had been no small bird activity in this box in June so it looked like something had moved in since. Inside was a carefully constructed cocoon of dried leaves, some chewed and shaped, and others completely untouched but placed over the top like a roof. Tony was asked to take a look in the box and he quickly confirmed it looked very much like a Dormouse nest. This was extremely exciting news, so a decision was made to source and erect more Dormouse nestboxes across the LLP.



Volunteer Tony erects a Dormouse box

Not long after, on a cold, grey, wet lunchtime in early November, one of the residents of Waterleat appeared in the office with a box. Concerned that the gift one of her cats had left her in the bath (of all places!) looked unusual, she asked the Conservation Team to have a look. Amazingly, what they saw was a Dormouse, curled up asleep in the bottom of the box. Joy soon turned to anguish as the reality dawned; this individual had presumably been dragged from its hibernation, and its future was hanging in the balance. After a few rushed phone calls to various people, a Dormouse rehabilitator in North Devon was found, and the Dormouse collected and whisked away. Unfortunately, we

received news a day later that the poor thing hadn't made it – not unsurprising given the circumstances.

By the end of January, a survey had been conducted to assess potential locations for the new Dormouse boxes, and they had started going up. These would extend and increase the original half a dozen boxes replaced in 2014, which were also checked at the same time. Remarkably, one of the boxes erected on a mature Hazel stool in Corner Wood again showed strong evidence of Dormouse presence, with the same chewed and whole leaves, and some fine Honeysuckle bark slivers for good measure!

The optimum habitat along the Ashburn, where the old Hazel stools are intertwined with masses of Honeysuckle growth, received a high density of the boxes, and we're optimistic that they will prove positive when they're checked in the summer. A more organised scheme of systematically coppicing some of the older Hazel stands is planned in the near future in the hope that we can further increase the local Dormouse population. We'll let you know how we get on in the next edition of Feedback of course so watch this space. ★

Matthew Twigg

Senior Conservation Officer

All Photos BOT Staff

Barn Owl Study

In February we had a visitor here collecting data for her research project. Ana is a Portuguese student living in Switzerland. We asked her to write a short piece about her visit. Eds



Ana taking small samples of muscle and feather from the Barn Owl casualties we have stored in our freezers

Photo: David Ramsden

Hello everyone! I'm Ana and I've spent 3 great days at the Barn Owl Trust in late February. I'm currently doing my PhD at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland) studying how Barn Owls on islands differ morphologically and genetically from those in the mainland.

British Barn Owls are, as you know, mostly white-breasted, a stark contrast with the dark rufous-breasted owls one finds in the Netherlands, Belgium and France. With my research, I intend to retrace the history of the British population using genetic data and understand the natural mechanisms responsible for maintaining this difference in colouration. During the days I spent at the BOT, I collected 100 muscle and feather samples from frozen Barn Owl carcasses that will be of great use for my work.

Thanks to David, Jaine and all the amazing staff (human and canine) for giving me such a warm welcome! See you soon! ★

Ana Paula Machado

Other Barn Owl News

Owl Killed by Mouse



Photos: Mark Sloendregt

We all know Barn Owls kill and eat mice, but in October in The Netherlands there was a really unusual case of an owl being killed by a mouse!

A 2nd year female Barn Owl was found in an orchard near Gemert, a village in The Netherlands, with the mouse's tail sticking out of its beak. Mark Sloendregt and Christien Hermsen from the Netwerk Uilenbescherming Brabant took the owl to Dr Arnold Van den Burg and Kas Koenraads of the Biosphere Foundation to determine the cause of death at the University of Wageningen (Alterra).

A post-mortem revealed that the mouse had been alive when swallowed and had bitten the owl's oesophagus wall near a large artery in the neck. It was thought that this bite could have pinched off the artery for a short time which probably caused the blood flow to the owl's brain to be stopped for too long. They consider this to be a rare phenomenon and pure coincidence that the mouse was still alive AND was able to pinch off a relatively important artery. As you can see from the photographs the mouse didn't survive the encounter either. ★



Dr Arnold Van den Burg and Kas Koenraads carry out the post-mortem

Man-Made Mortality



Three Barn Owls found trapped in a pipe

Some years ago BOT Trustee Keith Grant found a dead Barn Owl floating in a water trough; he emptied it and found the remains of another Barn Owl, 2 Little Owls and a Kestrel in the same trough. We experimented with ways to avoid this problem in the 1980's and by 1997 were routinely fitting floats to water troughs at sites where we ran our Barn Owl Schemes. One of the new videos we launched last year shows how to make a float and detailed instructions are available on our website.

It's not just bathing that can cause problems for the birds. Over the years we've received several calls because of owls and other birds found down chimneys. It's worth remembering that Barn Owls are hole nesting birds and are attracted to cavities. Sometimes these cavities are death traps!



10 Barn Owls and one Little Owl drowned in a molasses reservoir along with 48 other birds

At the World Owl Conference last year a presentation by Martin Šálek from the Czech Republic highlighted other man-made hazards for the species. Birds becoming trapped in hay blowers and other agricultural apparatus and horrifically, a case of 59 drowned birds found in a molasses reservoir, including 10 Barn Owls, one Little Owl, two pigeons and songbirds.

Most of these man-made fatalities could have been avoided with a little forethought. Raising awareness of the problem is the first step towards stopping these unnecessary deaths. Martin and his colleagues have recently submitted a paper on the 'non-natural mortality of Barn Owl and Little Owl in the Czech Republic' which we look forward to reading when it's published.

We are grateful to photographer Karel Poprach (www.tyto.cz) who provided the photographs for this item. ★

Overseas Owls in Trouble

The 'Harry Potter' Effect

We recently received an impassioned email from Honor Pennant, a 10 year-old boy from Hampshire expressing his concern about the high proportion of owl species on sale as pets in markets throughout Indonesia. We followed this up and the situation is indeed alarming.

Researchers at Oxford Brookes University (OBU) have concluded there has been a 'Harry Potter effect' on owl keeping in countries where keeping wild birds as pets is considered commonplace. In the recently published study, Professors Vincent Nijman and Anna Nekaris at OBU turned their attention to Indonesia, where a wide range of species can be bought at bird markets in most major cities. By comparing data from market surveys from 1979 to 2016, thus including the period before and after the release of the Harry Potter novels, the researchers were able to show that there has been an increase in the owl trade. Furthermore, they have highlighted that where owls used to be called Burung hantu, which translates as ghost birds, now they are referred to as Burung Harry Potter (Harry Potter birds).

Professor Nijman said: "In the 1990s, when surveying the bird markets I would typically see one or two owls for sale amongst the thousands of wild-caught birds on offer but equally often not a single owl was on display. Now, returning to those same markets we can see dozens of owls for sale of a wide range of species and owls are always present, all taken from the wild."



Barn Owl on sale in bird market, Central Java province.
Photo: SCORPION - www.scorpionmonitor.org

While at least in Indonesia, Harry Potter may have had some effect on the normalization of keeping owls as pets, blaming the increase of the owl trade solely on the little wizard or its creator paints too simplistic a picture. "What we have seen in Indonesia is a massive increase in popularity of owls in general and pet owl lovers organise themselves on social media to exchange information on how to keep owls, what owls are available as pets, and where to obtain them", added Prof Nijman. "Only a year prior to the publication of Harry Potter the first public Internet café opened in Indonesia and the increase in use of social media coincided with the rise of Harry Potter as a phenomenon."

Professor Anna Nekaris said: "It is particularly heart breaking to see nocturnal animals like owls in the markets. Looking stunned and stressed under the bright sun, they are often only fed water and rice, making the situation all the more pitiful. About half of the 2,000 or so owls we encountered in the markets were downy chicks, taken from their nests, and we expect the majority of them to die within weeks; this does not appear to be a sustainable trade."

With limited information available on the status of wild owls in Indonesia it is difficult to gauge the effect of the increase of owl

trade. "Few researchers venture out at night making it possible that the trade affects some species very negatively without us knowing" added Prof Nekaris.

Eight species of owl in Indonesia are listed as globally threatened, and with traders offering a wide range of species, these are the ones that need to be monitored to ensure the unsustainable trade is not an impediment to their conservation.

The paper, entitled *The Harry Potter Effect: The rise in trade of owls as pets in Java, Bali and Indonesia*, is published in the open access journal *Global Ecology and Conservation* and can be found online. The organisations primarily focused on finding solutions to this issue are Birdlife International and their in-country partner Burung Indonesia. The wild bird trade is a complex issue and the most recent and measured conclusion reached by Birdlife is that a market-based solution may be the best way forward. **Source - OBU**

Thank you Honor for bringing this to our attention. ★

Source - OBU

Rick Lockwood

Assistant Conservation Officer

Sewer Rescue - India

The Barn Owl Trust deals with enquiries from all over the world. Hari from Vizagapatam, Andhra Pradesh, India got in touch via facebook messenger ...

Best wishes to the Barn Owl Trust from India... this is Hari. I recently came across a Barn Owl which had been stuck in a sewage drain. I watched your video regarding owl handling and feeding. It's really useful. Can you please tell me how often I should feed and hydrate the owl? She cannot stand on her own but she is very alert and defensive. Could you kindly guide me regarding its well being.



Photo: Harikrishna Varma

Poor thing! Please take a look at our video: **How to Rehydrate and Feed a Starving Owl** - it gives detailed instructions about how to give fluid and food. As soon as you think she is able to hunt for herself, it's best to release her back into the wild, near where she was found if possible. Please see our web page: **Wild Owl Release Methods** This might have to be adapted for your particular area and circumstances. Thank you so much for taking care of this owl! Please let us know how you get on. Good luck!

It is very helpful thanks a lot. She is doing well now. I followed your videos and the owl is doing really well. I have rescued birds before. I used to hand them over to the local zoological park but this is no longer possible. I will follow the instructions on your website and hope to release her soon. Thank you.

World Owl Conference



Delegates at the World Owl Conference - Photo: Assen Ignatov

The World Owl Conference (WOC) 2017 took place in Evora, Portugal between the 26th and 30th September last year.

Because of the limited number of flights from Bristol to Lisbon, our trip to the conference started at 2:15am on a Sunday morning! This did mean that we had plenty of time to travel, acclimatise and explore the city before the conference began on Tuesday morning.

The last WOC was held in Groningen, The Netherlands in 2007 so we were delighted to have the opportunity to meet up with owl researchers, ornithologists and conservationists from around the world again after ten years.

The walled city of Evora is a UNESCO World Heritage site and has the second largest number of national monuments in Portugal, second only to Lisbon. The University of Evora (originally established in 1559) hosted the conference at the Colégio do Espírito Santo.

The weather for the week was fantastic, with temperatures of up to 35°, 8° higher than the average for the time of year, although during the conference there wasn't much time in the day to take advantage of the sunshine.

The conference started at 9:00 each morning and was packed with presentations about many species of owls with speakers from around the globe.

The first day was a workshop with some sessions running concurrently so David and I had to attend separate sessions to ensure we didn't miss anything. "Effective Owl Education Methods", "Telemetry, Nestcams and Data Analysis", "Impacts of Human Infrastructure on Owls", and "Barn Owls Know No Boundaries: the Role of Nature Conservation in Peace" were the subjects covered in the workshops.



David's 2nd presentation Photo: Frances Ramsden

After that, each morning had a keynote speaker followed by four, five or six presentations between breaks. Presentations were grouped together under headings e.g.: Conservation, Culture, Breeding Biology and Behaviour, Monitoring and more. Fortunately for us, all of the presentations were given in English, for most of the participants this wasn't their first language so we were very lucky. The moderators of each session had their work cut out trying to ensure that everyone stuck to their allotted time but inevitably several overran.

David Ramsden (Barn Owl Trust Head of Conservation) gave two presentations at the conference. "The role of small NGO's in owl conservation: case study – The Barn Owl Trust." and "Juvenile Barn Owl dispersal: a radio tracking study."

David's first presentation asked the question, "Can small NGOs make a significant difference?" The answer was "YES if enough people get involved". He then went on to deliver an unexpected message to the audience full of scientists, he said "We also: research, publish papers, attend conferences, but what's the point? Is it just for the pursuit of knowledge? Or to influence policy?" He then talked briefly about; Human population growth, Habitat destruction, Intensive farming and the predicted impacts of Climate change. His next slide stated: We are in a (proposed) New Geological Age the 'Anthropocene' which is characterised by "Biological Annihilation". We are witnessing "Earth's 6th Mass Extinction Event". "Humanity needs to address anthropogenic population extirpation and decimation immediately". David ended his presentation saying "Ultimately, we will fail to conserve owls unless we engage people in the cause of nature conservation. Judge research by its conservation value".

We were heartened by the number of delegates who made a point of coming to congratulate him on his presentation. "That needed to be said," was a common theme amongst the remarks and his presentation was referred to several times by other speakers and chairmen throughout the conference.

The 2017 World Owl Conference brought people together to share information and ideas. We all now need to find ways to work together to achieve our common goal of conserving owls and the other incredibly diverse wildlife that shares our planet.

On a lighter note, the conference organisers also hosted some additional events for participants. We enjoyed a Cultural Evening; a wine tasting of a locally made wine from a vineyard that was sponsoring the conference, followed by a Fado concert by Ana Roque. Fado is a type of Portuguese singing, traditionally associated with pubs and cafés, that is renowned for its expressive and profoundly melancholic character. Another evening there was an owl walk around the city where we were treated to the sight of a couple of Tawny Owls flying over our heads from the roof tops into an immense Jacaranda tree.

Frances Ramsden ★

The Netherlands



I started 18 years ago with Barn and Little Owl conservation in the Province of Utrecht, the central region of the Netherlands. It was a small part-time, but paid job as junior-ecologist. There was some nationwide coordinated volunteer activity, but the western and central regions (Utrecht, North- and South Holland) lagged far behind in this development and the authorities wanted to speed it up. Both owls were relatively rare in the region at that time. Barn Owl populations in the Netherlands were slowly recovering after the crash in the seventies that nearly made it extinct. Little Owls were a species with a 'high concern' status.

Regional volunteers had placed some nest boxes years before, but from lack of results their activity had dwindled. After two years my employers decided that there were insufficient results and therefore I was not suited for the job. I had the idea that I had just started warming up and making contacts in the field! So, hard-headed as I can be, I ploughed on. I was going to show them that they had no idea what it takes! Being unemployed part-time has the advantage that you have lots of time! But as well as lack of support from authorities I had to fight an uphill battle against some of the older Barn Owl conservationists. Barn Owls were very rare in Utrecht at that time (estimated at 5-10 pairs in a good year) and the old guys were extremely secretive about locations and suspicious towards 'young' (I was forty-three!) puppies like me. It was an old agreement that locations of nesting Barn Owls were never shared with 'outsiders' to prevent disturbance.

Activity and certainly research meant disturbance and therefore was a no-go area. It happened that I placed nestboxes without knowing that there was an occupied nest at the neighbours barn! It is not that I did not communicate, but cooperation on local level was very sparse. However on national level coordinator Johan de Jong had a broader vision and did what he could to support and train me! Luckily my other work in meadow bird conservation



Marc with Barn Owl

brought me out in the country and the presence of Barn Owls in a shed is hard to miss! Slowly-slowly I built up my own database of occupied locations of Barn Owls and an occasional Little Owl too.

There were some neglected nest boxes I 'adopted' and I started making my own ones, usually from recycled wood I picked up from builders waste containers. The first few years remained slow, and I was happy with occasional

successes. Thirteen years ago I found my first 'own' nestbox with chicks in it. Luck had it that there was a meeting in the area, attended by a certified ringer and so the first young were also the first ones ringed within my 'project'. One of the young remained in my 'territory' and was found as a breeding female in 2013. In 2008 I got my own ringing licence. (A good reason for me to ask my girl-friend if she would like to be ringed too. She said yes. So now I am also a married man because of the Barn Owls!).

From 2000 things seemed to pick up and the breeding population has been growing on spectacularly ever since. Of course we have years with higher and lower numbers, but the new boxes (about 400 by now!) keep on getting occupied. This year we had over 100 clutches!!! I almost became a victim of the success of the project. You can't properly manage 400 nestboxes on your own! Luckily, publicity, trust and support have greatly improved and I trained some younger (>40+) volunteers for the nestbox project and two of them became certified bird banders. A third is on its way!

2017 was the absolute crown on the work of 'my team'. We ringed 440 Barn Owls, and 160 Little Owls, most of them chicks. Numbers I thought impossible ten years ago.



The Owl Workgroup Team

I have a strong feeling, although I cannot back this up with scientific data, that the numbers at the start were so low that the Barn Owls, apart from lack of sufficient suitable nesting locations, had problems finding partners. When one of a pair vanished (supposedly died) there were no suitors to fill the gaps and the remaining birds may have left the area in search of a partner.

Previously good breeding sites were regularly abandoned. Around the year 2000 the population may have sufficiently grown to solve this problem. Since then we see regular replacements. I have ringed females in March and found unringed ones with a clutch on that location in May. Another female was breeding on the remains of her predecessor. Nowadays we find broods from April in to November and second clutches occur regularly.

The success is remarkable since Utrecht (and the Netherlands in general) is a very densely populated area, with very intense traffic. Traffic being the main cause of death (60-70% in first year Barn Owls). The average Barn Owl lives 3-5 year, with some exceptions 8 years and even 11 in areas away from main roads.

Marc van Leeuwen

All Photos Provided.

(Kerk)uilen Werkgroep Utrecht

Thanks for their unrelentless support: Johan de Jong, Johan Tuls, Bertus v.d. Burg, Henk Lichtenbelt, Marita Flikkema, Jan de Lange, Ton Janssen and Marion Braakman. ★

Owl Conservation in Nepal



Owl Conservation camps for students
All photos:(FON) Nepal

Located in the lap of the mighty Himalayas, Nepal is a small yet extremely rich country in terms of biodiversity, cultural and social diversity. Despite its minuscule size (0.01 % of earth's total landmass), it provides refuge to an unbelievable number of owl species (23) including the Barn Owl. Though none of them are listed in global threatened categories, the government has kept eight species in various threats category nationally. Long-eared Owl is considered a vagrant for the country while Oriental Bay Owl is presumed extinct with nothing reported about the species in the country for more than 160 years.

Ornithological research in Nepal dates back to around two centuries however there is very little information at species level. We only know the total number of species, their distribution and threats. Exact status of individual species and their ecology isn't properly known.

Habitat loss, illegal hunting and trade, keeping as pets, superstitious beliefs, use of pesticides and less attention by conservation stakeholders are all threats to owls in Nepal. The important reason for their decline in the country is hunting and illegal trade.



Approximately 2,000 owls of different species are annually traded to India and China. They are basically for medicinal purpose and magicians use them. Owls are mostly traded alive and are seldom sold when dead.

In collaboration and with support from the World Owl Trust, The Global Owl Project, Accordeos Foundation and The International Owl Center, Nepal has initiated several conservation activities successfully.

To date, Friends of Nature (FON) Nepal has completed a baseline survey, conducted 500 school based and many public owl conservation camps, organized six events of 'Nepal Owl Festival', collected hunting and trade information, printed and distributed more than 2,000 owl conservation posters. More than 15,000 students and 21,000 general people are thought to have benefited from these efforts directly and millions indirectly from various radio and tv programs.

Owls of Nepal

1. Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)
2. Eastern Grass Owl (*Tyto longimembris*)
3. Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)
4. Mountain Scops Owl (*Otus spilocephalus*)
5. Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*)
6. Collared Scops Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*)
7. Eurasian Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*)
8. Indian Eagle Owl (*Bubo bengalensis*)
9. Spot-bellied Eagle Owl (*Bubo nipalensis*)
10. Dusky Eagle Owl (*Bubo coromandus*)
11. Brown Fish Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*)
12. Tawny Fish Owl (*Ketupa flavipes*)
13. Collared Owlet (*Glaucidium brodiei*)
14. Asian Barred Owlet (*Glaucidium cuculoides*)
15. Jungle Owlet (*Glaucidium radiatum*)
16. Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)
17. Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*)
18. Brown Hawk Owl (*Ninox scutulata*)
19. Brown Wood Owl (*Strix leptogrammica*)
20. Himalayan Wood Owl (*Strix (aluco) nivicolium*)
21. Mottled Wood Owl (*Strix ocellata*)
22. Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*)
23. Oriental Bay Owl (*Phodilus badius*)



Temporary Owl Museum during Nepal Owl Festival (above)
Owl conservation camps for the public (below)



A radio program named as 'voice of owls' was broadcast from various FM stations, two owl related books were produced and distributed.

In Nepal 23.39% land is set aside by the government as protected areas. The Central Bureau of Investigation has special pillar for illegal wildlife hunting and trade control. However there are not any government organisations working for the research and conservation of owls in Nepal.

Raju Acharya and Yadav Ghimirey
Friends of Nature (FON) Nepal

Read updates about Nepal's owls:
<https://www.facebook.com/fonnepal2005/> ★

Disappearing Owls in Canada



Photos: Provided

The Western Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*) is found in Western North America down to Central America, however they have been disappearing throughout this range. In Canada Burrowing Owls are endangered, and in British Columbia (BC) they were deemed extirpated in the 1980s (Blood and Low 1998). Populations in Alberta and Saskatchewan are still decreasing, and the population in Manitoba was also deemed extirpated in the late 1990s (DeSmet 1997).

In early fall (September and October); the Canadian owls migrate to the Southern United States and Mexico (Wellicome et al. 2014, Holroyd et. 2010). These owls then return from their wintering grounds in March and early April to the breeding grounds of BC. There are many potential reasons for declines in Burrowing Owl populations. Some of the more commonly accepted are: loss of habitat, use of pesticides affecting prey species, and the loss of burrowing animals (badgers, ground squirrels, and prairie dogs) which dig the holes Burrowing Owls utilize. Factors deemed likely responsible for the decline of this species, when combined with possible effects of climate change, make this a complex multi-level conservation issue.

The Burrowing Owl is a small ground dwelling owl (150 to 180g) with long legs. They have a round head, no ear tufts, white eyebrows and bright yellow eyes with a prominent white chin stripe. Sandy coloured on the head, back and upper parts of the wings, with a brown and white mottling on the breast and belly, there is little colour or size difference between males and females. Burrowing Owls make a wide range of calls.

The main call is a soft *who who* sound usually given at the burrow entrance. Males use this main call for attracting females to the burrow. The sound is also associated with breeding and identifying the territory of a pair. Over 17 calls have been identified, including *rasp*, *chuck* and *chatter*. They also have unique alarm calls. Adults will emit a piercing scream but juveniles give a rattlesnake like *buzz* when threatened in the burrow.

In the early 1990s a group of dedicated volunteers lead by Mike Mackintosh initiated a captive breeding and re-introduction program for Burrowing Owls in BC. In 2000, the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC (BOCS) was established to facilitate recovery through captive breeding, field activities, education programs and increasing scientific knowledge.

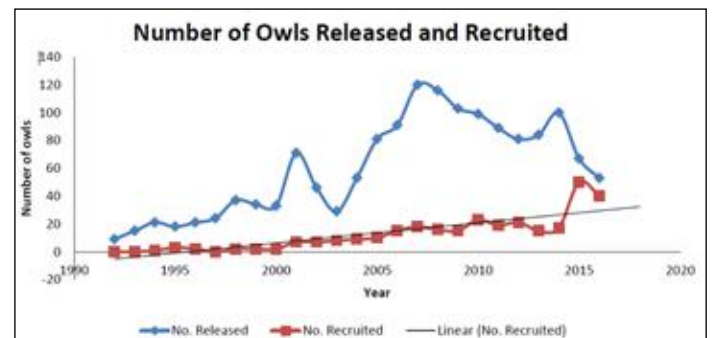
Three breeding facilities are located in three distinct geographical areas to ensure the protection of the genetics. The founding owls were from or descended from wild burrowing owls caught in the states of Washington and Oregon. The first release of captive-bred owls in BC occurred in 1992 when 9 owls were placed into artificial burrows in the Thompson-Nicola region. The breeding and release program has flourished over the last 20 years, and now close to 50 pairs of yearling owls are released each year in the Thompson-Nicola and the South Okanagan.

Most Burrowing Owl recovery strategies take into account the possible need to provide burrows, the belief being that natural

burrows are limited. With the general decline in BC of many fossorial mammals the presumption is that there is a lack of natural burrow systems. Since 1991, the society has built and installed over 800 artificial burrows on grassland habitat. Working closely with the landowners where we place the burrows has resulted in successful stewardship relationships with 14 private cattle ranchers, provincial crown land, The Nature Conservancy of Canada, The Nature Trust of BC, the Upper Nicola Indian Band and the Penticton Indian Band.



Soft-release caging developed by Aimee Mitchell in 2005 (Mitchell 2008) has increased the survivability of the released owls and increased the production of wild-born Burrowing Owls. Biologists monitor the released owls and their offspring; each owl has a USFW band (US fish and Wildlife) and a green/black (alpha numeric) band on each leg. The green/black band is specific to BC Burrowing Owls. These bands help us to identify the returning owls to the breeding sites and also when they are sighted during migration. Each year more owls are migrating (recruited) back to BC, see graph below.



Ongoing Burrowing Owl recovery work in BC will focus on increasing our knowledge of their migration route, expanding public education concerning grassland conservation, continuing to monitor and survey released and returning owls and supporting landowners and ranchers in their stewardship efforts.

Protecting existing grasslands is of paramount importance to the survival of Burrowing Owls, not only in BC but across their migration paths. Working on this conservation issue with our international partners will increase our knowledge of burrowing owl and grassland protection.

For more information on the program and to volunteer please visit our website: www.burrowingowlbc.org

Lauren Meads, BSc, MSc
Executive Director ★

Hungary - 20 Years On



The Barn Owl Foundation (Hungary) and its first 20 years

Let's travel back in time 20 years in Hungary. A bunch of enthusiastic teenagers established a conservation association in 1997. Not a very extraordinary action, as a few years after the communist regime had collapsed NGOs grew out of the fertile soil of democracy as mushrooms do

after a long period of drought once they get a refreshing shower. The name of the organisation was and still is The Barn Owl Foundation. A farsighted young conservationist (Tibor Nagy) created a little charity that was not too likely to survive 20 years with such a narrow scope: the practical and research based conservation of the strictly protected and vulnerable Barn Owl in the Carpathian Basin.

The past twenty years show some great results the BOF has achieved. In the database there are 7,355 Barn Owl conservation related records stored. The most broods were found in the year of 2002 (169), and since then the largest number of successful breeding was 64 in 2009. Both survey effort and the Barn Owl breeding population has dramatically changed since the last big population bottleneck occurred in 2003-2004. A total of 5,174 Barn Owls were ringed over the past 20 years (584 adult, 4,590 juvenile or young). Out of the more than 400 conservation actions 180 nest boxes were installed in church spires, 18 pole boxes were erected and several other methods were used to make various buildings suitable for the birds. 124 buildings were reopened and we are aware of 59 cases where Barn Owls could make their way back to their traditional nest sites only because the BOF took a conservation action. We published some significant scientific papers in peer-reviewed journals that have received great citations since then.



These numbers encourage us to both stop and celebrate, and contemplate the future. First, most of these numbers arose from those several years when jobs

were done by volunteers. The first full time paid employment took place in 2011 with the help of some European Union grants – note: the grant money wasn't given to carry out Barn Owl conservation! Solely endangered building dweller animal species have never deserved to be regarded important enough to be properly funded (the Barn Owl is not a Nature LIFE priority species, so conservation interest shifted towards the big emblematic species as Imperial Eagle and Saker Falcon).

So our tributes and the credit go to the volunteers, to all those who carried on regardless...

Second, the conservation effort we invested in Barn Owl conservation needs to be harshly evaluated. By 2018, people who are interested in environmental problems might suspect, that the main (or only?) purpose of conservation biology is to gain some time before the hoped, 'better times' arrive.

Mainstream global processes still drive the political decision making, and they can easily wash away all the conservation achievements (we could cite so many examples). This of course does not give us any excuse to stop biodiversity conservation, but we need to understand, and make people understand in which context conservation work does make sense. It must be clear that conservation biology cannot be the ultimate purpose of our environmental activity. Preserving as many life forms and the force of evolution is a moral obligation, but understanding what underlying global phenomena must be altered in order to make conservation biology redundant in a happier future is essential. A handy toolset to understand the connections between the global problems is the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To understand SDGs and become deeply and morally involved in their implementation is one possible way out of the narrow-mindedness we all suffer from.



The construction of new dual carriageways = Barn Owl road deaths, the enhancement of economic growth = green-field investments, the blind hope that an even denser and more complex infrastructure brings welfare to the citizens = habitat-loss, the unconditional happiness when people hear about the re-industrialisation of Hungary = environmental pollution. After twenty years' of work these things leave a bitter after-taste.

Plenty of questions arise when you think about the future. What is the right proportion between hands-on conservation and the 'theoretical and moral training' of our fellow citizens? How can we deal with such a diverse cultural world population knowing that the only thing every nation, religion and culture share is global environmental, social and economic crisis?

The overused but great sentence, act local, think global is still true, but needs to gain a new depth in order to bring some real changes to the future. Act local: yes, place out nest boxes, but also do participate in local politics (politics in its most noble sense). Raise your voice when local environmental and social justice is endangered. Think global: see the bigger picture. Get familiar with the global sustainability goals. Find your place among the big goals! Re-tailor your career, your life in order to be able to serve some of the good goals. And respect LIFE. Because all are your relatives!

Akos Klein PhD

All Photos Provided.

Barn Owl Foundation - Hungary ★

Switzerland & Ireland >>

Agriculture is by far the most represented land use throughout Europe with nearly half of European plant and animal species directly reliant on agricultural ecosystems. In response to increasing demands on food production, the intensification of agricultural systems over the past century has resulted in dramatic changes to the European landscape. The typical habitat mosaic of traditional agricultural management has been transformed to highly productive homogenised crops and pastures, which has led to reduced species diversity, population declines and localised extinctions of wildlife.



A typical Barn Owl nest box in Switzerland

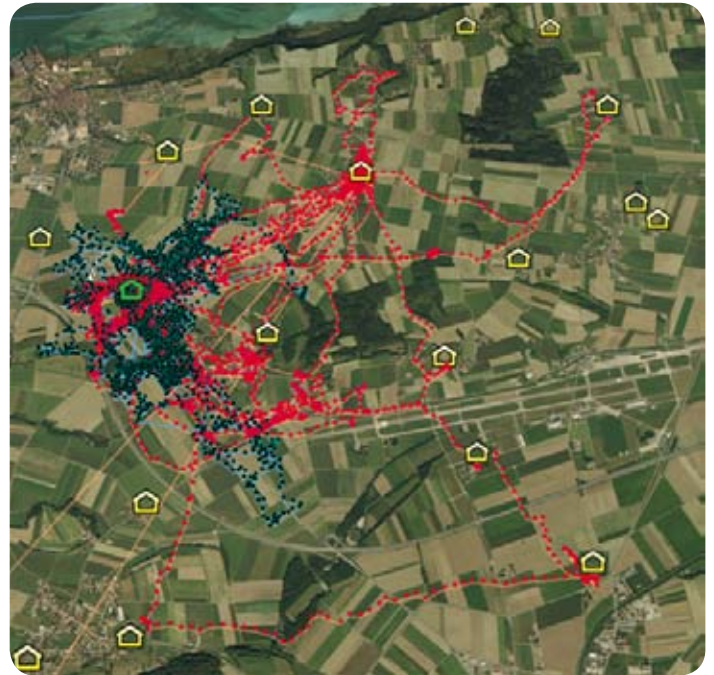
The Barn Owl - a farmland raptor which hunts small mammals in open and semi-open habitats, is one species which has been affected by these changes in agricultural landscapes. Barn Owls require suitable prey-rich hunting grounds to breed successfully and their populations fluctuate in parallel with small mammal abundance. To counter the threat of the increased use of biocides, and the reduction of suitable foraging habitats and breeding sites, Barn Owls currently benefit from a variety of conservation programs.

Probably the most widespread measure is the installation of nest boxes to provide secure roosting and breeding sites. This conservation measure can have a direct quantifiable effect on Barn Owl populations, however other aspects are not as straightforward. For example, the need for suitable foraging grounds is more difficult to evaluate, as is implementing concrete measures to increase the abundance of such habitat types.

To address these issues, Robin Séchaud and Kim Schalcher of the University of Lausanne have studied a population of Barn Owls in western Switzerland, a region of intensive agriculture. To determine the habitat composition of home ranges and the hunting grounds preferred by Barn Owls, they have equipped over 80 breeding pairs with GPS tags since 2016.



GPS datalogger fitted to a Swiss Barn Owl



GPS tracks of a male (blue) and female (red) in Switzerland, including their nest box (green)

Combining the high resolution of the GPS locations with a fine-scale monitoring of the habitat composition within each home range, they have been able to determine the habitats Barn Owls select for foraging. There is a clear preference for the few extensively exploited areas, such as forest edges, wildflower strips, grasslands and pastures (See picture above).

Moreover, nestlings raised in extensive habitat-rich home ranges fledged in significantly better physical condition, highlighting the direct link between environment suitability and breeding success. These results also raised new questions however, such as, how connectivity between patches of suitable areas affect feeding rates and hunting behaviour? Whether Barn Owls have a hunting routine or do they set out randomly each night, and, what dangers do birds encounter when foraging at night?

We know that major roads represent a significant danger for Barn Owls, as they are especially susceptible to vehicle collisions due to their low flight and hunting behaviour. Mortality on roads is a significant cause of death and contributing factor in the decline of Barn Owl populations in Europe.

Despite knowledge on the extent of road mortality and the route and landscape characteristics which influence collision, the implementation of effective and evaluated mitigation solutions to minimise negative effects of roads on Barn Owl populations remains a significant challenge. In addition to knowledge on the nature and effects of road mortality, an understanding of the individual behavioural response and interactions of Barn Owls to road networks would help to identify the potential for and direction of evidence based mitigation solutions.

In Ireland, John Lusby of BirdWatch Ireland has been investigating Barn Owl interactions with roads in relation to mortality patterns. The research has shown that road mortality on motorways is influenced by the proportion of grassland on roadside verges, and verge width. Assessment of small mammal populations in verges showed that these linear habitats supported a similar overall abundance and greater species richness of small mammals compared to the surrounding landscape.

GPS Shows Barn Owl Foraging

The movements and foraging behaviour of 13 breeding Barn Owls assessed using the same GPS dataloggers as in Switzerland, indicate that roadsides are an important foraging resource within the context of the wider landscape, and that birds frequently crossed and foraged within proximity or along roadside verges. It is hoped that this new information on Barn Owl behaviour and foraging selection in relation to roadsides will help inform the direction of future mitigation strategies.

Finally, the comparison of Swiss and Irish Barn Owl behaviour revealed some surprising differences. Firstly, there is a noticeable difference in flight speed and contrasting movement patterns. Irish birds have much larger home ranges than in Switzerland. One can probably assume these are adapted to be locally efficient in their specific landscapes. In Ireland, females also play a stronger role in provisioning young, whereas in Switzerland males provide most of the hunting effort while females search for free nest sites to produce their second clutch. This is likely a consequence of the harsher weather conditions in Ireland that result in a shorter breeding season thus pushing the parents to invest their maximum to provide for their single clutch.

These studies provide new insights into the life of these captivating birds from their own perspective and illustrate how new tracking technologies are advancing the fields of ecology and conservation.

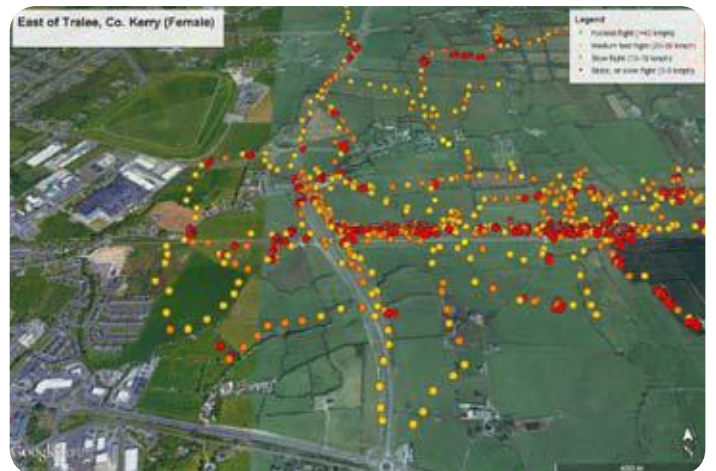
**Robin Séchaud, John Lusby, Kim Schalcher
& Alexandre Roulin ★**

All Photos Provided.

Videos showing movements of Barn Owls in Ireland using GPS dataloggers can be found at: youtu.be/Eg9rTiXBhG4 & youtu.be/UNE-VhtXCoA



The Tralee Bypass, Ireland Photo: Michael O'Clery



Thailand - Scops Owl Rescue



Crop field with mist nets in place

In late November 2017 I received an email from Moses Lopez in Thailand. He had been given an Oriental Scops Owl that had been caught in a mist net put out by local villagers to protect their rice harvest. He believed if he hadn't taken the owl in it would have been killed; owl species are thought to attract bad spirits in this part of the world.

Moses had found our website and wanted to know how to care for the owl with a view to eventually releasing it back into the wild. We stayed in correspondence as I gave him suggestions on what and how to feed it. He tried it with various foods and found it liked eating small fish(!) and pieces of cut-up chicken.

Moses was concerned about re-releasing the bird where it was found and it succumbing to a similar fate. Knowing that the Scops Owl prefers to hunt near forest edges or in open country he suggested a nearby Buddhist temple that was surrounded by forest, where he knew there was little human disturbance and bird-hunting.

I gave him further advice on the best way to release the bird and on the 1st January 2018 he successfully released the owl into its new environment.



*Rescued Scops Owl
All Photos Provided*

'Nothing could have been possible if it wasn't for your help. Caring for the owl wasn't an easy task and time consuming to say the least but a very rewarding feeling after its release'
Moses Lopez

We were so pleased to be able to help and advise. Well done Moses - fingers crossed the owl is now thriving back in the wild.

Rick Lockwood
Assistant Conservation Officer

Owl Species in the Ukraine



Bird provision in a building / Photo Provided

13 owl species are noted in the Ukraine. 11 among them are breeding and 2 are rare vagrant. Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) invasions happen mainly in the winter period and Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*) in the autumn.

Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*), Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) and Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*) are the most numerous and widespread owl species in the Ukraine. The Tawny Owl is a common species of old mixed and deciduous woodlands; its population is rather stable and fluctuates according to the prey density. Little Owl is common, sometimes not numerous owl species in the human settlements. In the city of Lviv, its quantity consisted about 0,6-0,8 calling males per km² (2005-2006). Trends of the number decreasing are noted in the last decade, probably caused by disappearance of large farms, which were suitable habitats of the Little Owl. Long-eared Owl is rather common breeding and wintering bird of the country. Winter aggregations counted up to 100 inds. in the settlements. They are strongly dependent on the climate conditions and feeding base richness.

Population decrease is noted in Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) and Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*). The Barn Owl was a common breeding species in the western Ukraine and not numerous in the central and eastern ones at the middle of 20 century. A significant decrease of the species happened during the second half of the century. This species is very rare in the Ukraine now, mainly occurs in the western part. Short-eared Owl was common species in the past. Current status of the species is described as very rare breeding (northern and western parts) and rare wintering species (in the south). The breeding density of the species consists maximally about 1.0 pairs/km² on some meadows of the western part of Ukraine and 1.93 pairs in some parts of the east.

Eurasian Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*) and Scops Owl (*Otus scops*) are characterised by stable low density populations. Eagle Owl was not a numerous breeding species here in the middle of 20 century. Their current state is determined as rare and caused by degradation of the natural habitats and decreasing of feeding base. The Scops Owl is not a numerous breeding species in the southern parts and rare in the western one.

Only two species showed clearly positive quantitative trends during the last decade: The Great Grey Owl (*Strix nebulosa*) in the northern part and Ural Owl (*Strix uralensis*) in the western part of the country. The Great Grey Owl is rare breeding species, occurred in the Polissya area (northern Ukraine) only. South and south-westwards expansion of the species has occurred over the last years. Current population numbers may consists up to 50 breeding pairs, and depend significantly on the food supply.

The Ural Owl was rare and not numerous species in the mountains and foothills of the Carpathian region and very rare vagrant one in the plain areas about 20 years ago.

Their breeding range has expanded east and north-eastwards during the last years. This expansion of the owls' range was noted in all the sub-Carpathian and neighbouring area. The density of the Ural Owl reached till 1,7-2,2 pairs/10 km² in some newly occupied habitats (e.g. in the forests of the vicinity of Lviv city areas).

Because of the low numbers, the population trends of Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*) and Pygmy Owl (*Glaucidium passerinum*) are unknown. The Pygmy Owl is typical boreal species, which prefers coniferous forests. It occurs in the Ukrainian Carpathians and in the northern and north-western forests of the country. The highest breeding area of Pygmy Owl is situated at 1450 meters above sea level in the Carpathians. The Boreal Owl is rare and poorly investigated species as well.



The Long-eared Owl is rather common breeding and wintering bird of the country / Photo Provided

Majority of observations are from the coniferous and mixed forests of the Ukrainian Carpathian Mountain area and Polissya. Eight owl species are included in the Red Data Book of Ukraine (2009): *Bubo bubo*, *Aegolius funereus*, *Glaucidium passerinum*, *Strix uralensis*, *Strix nebulosa*, *Tyto alba*, *Otus scops* and *Asio flammeus*.

Species	Population trends	Red Data Book (2009)
Barn Owl - <i>Tyto alba</i>	-	II
Eagle Owl - <i>Bubo bubo</i>	0(+)	IV
Pygmy Owl - <i>Aegolius funereus</i>	?	IV
Boreal Owl - <i>Glaucidium passerinum</i>	?	III
Ural Owl - <i>Strix uralensis</i>	+	V
Tawny Owl - <i>Strix aluco</i>	0	-
Great Grey Owl - <i>Strix nebulosa</i>	+	IV
Scops Owl - <i>Otus scops</i>	0	IV
Hawk Owl - <i>Surnia ulula</i>	0	-
Snowy Owl - <i>Bubo scandiacus</i>	0	-
Little Owl - <i>Athene noctua</i>	-	-
Long-eared Owl - <i>Asio otus</i>	0	-
Short-eared Owl - <i>Asio flammeus</i>	-	IV

Table. Current state of the Owl species in Ukraine
Notes: - - decreasing, + - increasing, 0 - stable, ? - trends not known, II - threatened; III - vulnerable; IV - rare, V - not investigated

Andriy-Taras Bashta
Institute of Ecology of the Carpathians
National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine ★

India - Ela Foundation



Ela Centre for Ornithology and Research / Photo Provided

Ela Foundation is a registered non-government society and charity located at Pune, Maharashtra, India. For the past 17 years, Ela Foundation has worked with the objective of nature conservation through education and research. Safeguarding and creating suitable and safe habitats for birds and other animals through peoples' participation.

Our researchers work on diverse avian subjects like bird flu, airport ornithology, wind farms, thermal power, migration etc. Our avian research includes owls, falcons, eagles, swifts, and other species. We publish 'Ela Journal of Forestry and Wildlife' (the official open access e-journal of Maharashtra Forest Department and Ela Foundation). We also work on mammal species like otters, Striped Hyena, Indian Porcupine, Indian Giant Squirrel, Indian Fox, wolf, crocodile, bats, etc. and flora like orchids, mangroves, etc.

We work with government agencies, corporate houses and non-government organizations and communities. To achieve our goals, Ela Foundation has two establishments.

OENSL – Ornithology, Ethno-ornithology and Natural Sounds Laboratory, at MES Garware College Campus, Pune. Here, apart from research, Dr. Suruchi Pande also conducts teaching programs on conservation principles in Indian Culture. In addition to our 60 publications, we have a library (including Prof. Reuven Yosef Ornithological Collection) of important and rare books. Ela Foundation has produced 14 video films on eagles, owls, elephant, slender loris and conservation. Our researchers have over 78 scientific publications in national and international journals.

Ela Habitat at Pingori village, Pune - At 'Ela Habitat', on 8 acres of land, indigenous trees are planted and nurtured. It is located at the eco-tone of two bio-geographic zones of India, the Western Ghats and the Deccan plateau; hence we have species from both the regions offering excellent research opportunities. Our location in rural region attracts and benefits grass root level communities. A Stone Museum and Museum for Rural Life is slowly coming up in Ela Habitat. At Ela Habitat we have two centers: 1) 'Ela Centre for Ornithology and Research'. and 2) 'Education and Training Centre for Habitat Conservation'.

Collaboration with other agencies - We have permission from the Maharashtra State Forest Department for conducting various faunal studies. 'House Sparrow Assisted Breeding and Conservation Project' is ongoing with community participation. The forest department sends its grass root level staff to our 'Training Centre'. We work with the National Institute of Virology for bird flu monitoring in wild and migratory birds. We interact with other government departments like electric power, irrigation, and enforcement agencies like police and revenue for sensitizing them for habitat conservation and protection. We also work with local communities and NGO's. This holistic approach is already giving us positive feedback and effective conservation results.

Engaging with local communities - We have involvement and participation of communities from the village of Pingori (where Ela Habitat is located) and various adjacent villages and towns. We work with shepherds, farmers, businessmen, women, teachers and children and we target a wide community base. We invite people to our 'Training Centre' equipped with audio-visual facilities and accommodating 100 participants.

Health and Hygiene - We reach out to 50 village schools where conservation, hygiene and sanitation are taught in collaboration with Kirloskar Foundation. We conduct health camps for the benefit of local communities and our 'Rural Community Health Center' at Ela Habitat with Rotary Club of Poona West will be operational by June 2018.

Fauna in Ela Habitat - We have a rich vertebrate and invertebrate diversity including butterflies, reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals. We have over 130 species of birds including resident, migratory diurnal and nocturnal species. In the surrounding 5 km, we have recorded on our camera traps mammals like Striped Hyena, Wolf, Wild Boar, bats etc. We endeavour to conserve them.



Children visiting the centre in a trailer / Photo Provided

Constant Effort Site - At Ela Habitat, we have the only 'Constant Effort Site' in India, as per the norms of British Trust for Ornithology, where under the supervision and guidance of Prof. Dr. Satish Pande and with the permission of the forest department, bird ringing and tagging is done by researchers. Simultaneously, bird photography, avian disease monitoring, migration studies, physiology and ecological studies, bio-acoustics and ethno-biological research are also carried out.

Technology for Conservation - Ela researcher Anant Gokhale, has developed GPRS based transmitters for studying migration. We use camera traps and CCTV cameras for study of species like vultures, owls, ibises, eagles, hyena, porcupine, leopard, etc. We use molecular and biochemical tools and histopathology for avian studies.

Certificate Courses - Ela Foundation conducts a range of training courses including Basic Ornithology, Rural Bio-diversity Conservation Programs' in villages and Intensive courses on soil conservation, water conservation, planting indigenous trees, treatment and management of snake bite, first aid for field workers, first aid for birds, etc.

Field Study - At Ela Habitat, we encourage visitors from urban areas and schools for bird watching, tree identification; bee keeping, sericulture, vermiculture and composting. Interestingly, after we held the first ever bee-keeping workshop at our training centre, the local farmers realized the importance of honey bees and have purchased bee boxes to augment pollination and crop yield. We are promoting mixed crop farming and are discussing new techniques of organic farming and appropriate technology.

Prof. Dr. Satish Pande
MD, DNB, PhD, FMASci., FLS
Director - Ela Foundation ★

Greece - The Thessaly Plains



Thessaly Plains, Greece

The Barn Owl is a species widely distributed in Greece throughout all the mainland, from northern Greece and Evros Delta to the southernmost regions of Peloponnese, it is also present and breeding in many Greek insular ecosystems, including major islands such as Crete, Kerkyra, Chios, Samos, Rhodes, Mytilene and many more.

Although a frequent occupant in agricultural areas of Greece, its population has started to decline in the country due to one main reason: Lack of available breeding sites. The Barn Owl, is a cavity nester in human settlements, it has been recorded breeding in human constructions in Greece, such as silos, old warehouses, barns, abandoned rural houses, old agricultural constructions, it has very rarely been observed to breed in churches and natural cavities such as caves. In addition, it has never been recorded to nest in trees.

There are three main agricultural plains in Greece, the Macedonian plain in the north, Thessaly plain in central Greece, and the Peloponnese plain in the south. The largest one in the country, which is also the most intensively exploited and widely known as the "granary of Greece" is the Thessaly plains (pictured above). Thessaly is host to the main bulk of Barn Owl population in the country. Thessaly is also the region where I have grown up, lived, worked, and where I now conduct research on Barn Owl ecology and implement conservation projects.

Apart from the problems of desertification, water resources and soil quality degradation that Thessaly is facing due to intensified, non-sustainable agriculture, combined with a very low uptake of scientific research results, Barn Owls in the region are facing nowadays a silent but serious threat: They cannot find places to breed. Most old and abandoned rural houses, warehouses and constructions, have by now completely fallen apart, most were built between 1850's and 1950's. Moreover, the remaining ones have been renovated and offer no entry to Barn Owls, denying them access to possible future breeding sites. During my PhD research which I defended in Spain in 2009, I visited more than 300 villages in Thessaly plains, in Greece.



A typical Barn Owl breeding site on the Thessaly plains

I monitored intensively many active breeding Barn Owl sites along with a large number of roosting sites, during the period 2003-2007. According to an extensive monitoring that I realised again in 2016, 50% of these old breeding sites have collapsed and disappeared by now, under the weight of heavy winters and many years of life...

I have now found Barn Owls breeding in inadequate places, very low and small constructions, where they are exposed to predators, climatic conditions, and of minimum safety for the owlets. Therefore, offering the Barn Owls a safe place to breed, is essential for the species' survival and its successful conservation in the region. Furthermore, many regions of Thessaly are "thriving" with rodent populations which present cyclic population explosions, such as the Harting's vole (*Microtus hartingi*), which is also an optimal prey for the Barn Owls during their breeding season. Thus, having a broad range of food resources in the agricultural ecosystem (a total of 14 different small mammal species have been found in Barn Owl diet in Thessaly), the main concern is a place to breed!



The breeding site of these two siblings was demolished. The owls had a short stay in the headquarters of NGO ANIMA, a rehabilitation centre for wildlife. They were checked over and proved to be healthy and fit. Immediately they were released into the wild and a nest box was provided

My work in Thessaly since 2015 focuses now on the initiation of a long-term conservation project, which will create a network of nest boxes in order to support the Barn Owl population, and secure its viability. My work is conducted in cooperation with the "NGO Stork" whose help and support is enormous, and the "Research Institute of Bio-economy and Agro-technology (iBo)". By now, 60 nest boxes have been installed in the field, and 60 more were constructed by the end of December 2017. Eastern Thessaly is our "initiation geographical" point for installing the new "Barn Owl houses", a region heavily plagued by rodent population outbreaks that destroy the crops, and also a region traditionally hosting important Barn Owl populations in the past. Research is conducted in the field on Barn Owl ecology and its interactions with small mammal populations, agricultural landscape structure and management.

During the first Barn Owl breeding season after the nest boxes were erected, more than 25% occupation rate was observed in Thessaly and our work will continue. Barn Owls, those magnificent species, as top predators in agricultural ecosystems are ambassador species of our agricultural plains. They are also a top ally for the farmer, reducing rodent populations as natural, biological pest-control agents, and "lethal" predators of the night. It is our duty to protect them. We are all, after all, equal parts, of a changing ecosystem: our home.

Dr. Vasileios Bontzorlos ★

All Photos Provided.

Winter Work for BOT

During the winter months the Conservation Team are out and about visiting sites in Devon, and sometimes into Cornwall attending to our main body of conservation work. We do the work at this time of year to minimise disturbance to breeding birds at nesting sites.



Barrel box taken down - owlets had fallen from it

A lot of the tasks come about from talking to farmers and landowners at the county and agricultural shows we attend during the summer. This is our best opportunity to meet people face-to-face and we often hear stories about nestboxes that need repairing or cleaning out, or of sites where owlets have fallen from an unsafe nestbox. People also phone us at the office to ask for our help or assistance, and further work is identified in the summer months as we visit our eighty Annual Monitoring Sites when we assess breeding productivity and ring young owlets.



An old nestbox in need of replacing

This winter Rick and Matt ably supported by our long-term volunteers Michael Parks, Kim Baker, and Tony Hulatt have so far visited 42 sites and have erected 14 deep indoor nestboxes and one treebox, cleared debris out of 11 nestboxes, blocked off or removed three boxes because of their unsafe design, and repositioned 2 nestboxes so they are more likely to be used in future.



Rick erecting nestbox supports for a new indoor box

Six site visits were made to give habitat advice. Sometimes this is requested where people want to make changes to their land use in order to attract Barn Owls.



Rick erects a Tawny Owl nestbox

Also if they are involved with building projects and want advice on how to incorporate permanent provision for Barn Owls within their developments. At other times we are able to call in to give advice on the best locations for nestboxes when we are doing other work in the area.

Because of Working at Height Regulations and as many of the sites are remote and derelict we always go out in pairs to ensure we can work safely at height. We have a variety of safety equipment that we use to protect us if we were to fall from a ladder. Ropes and pulleys are used to safely lift heavy nestboxes into place or lower them to the ground if we are removing them. ★

All Photos BOT Staff

Rick Lockwood
Assistant Conservation Officer

Caught On Camera!

On the 12th February the Trust saw our first fluttering of snow this winter, preceding the heavy snowfall which started to fall on 1st March resulting in the BOT offices closing from lunchtime on the Thursday until the following Monday.

Our two new grazers, Annie and Clarabel, were caught on camera by the gates leading from the Orchard into North Park by one of our staff on the 12th. These Saanan/Golden Guernsey goats seemed unperturbed by the snow and when the snowfall was light they were spotted taking shelter under the eaves of the Wildlife Tower, pictured behind them. However when the snow fell heavy at the beginning of March, completely covering the brambles and thistles from sight, they chose to stay safe and warm in their goat house!

See all the latest LLP news by heading to our Wildlife Diary at <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/wildlife-diary/> ★



Lennon Legacy Project News

The first of the usual volunteer groups from Plymouth University arrived at the end of September. They cut the summer's bramble growth out of North Park ready for our contractor to replace the rotten fence posts when the ground eventually dries out. They also came in October and November when more scrub control was undertaken but missed December due to a small turnout and appallingly wet weather.

The small bird boxes in Corner Wood and adjacent woodland were emptied out in early October, when a possible Dormouse nest was discovered. More Dormouse evidence was quickly forthcoming and a specific article detailing our findings can be found on page 4.



Our new grazers, Annie and Clarabel, below one of the newly erected Dormouse boxes in North Park

The annual grazing regime started on 20th October with the arrival of the now usual dozen or so Belted Galloways. They were eventually removed mid-December. Coinciding with the introduction of two goats into North Park. This new grazing regime is serving as an experiment to monitor the impact on scrub, as the goats should preferentially browse bramble and other vegetation, rather than the grassland. We'll see how that goes and report in future editions of Feedback.

The abstraction system from the River Ashburn to the ponds continued to be challenging on several occasions. The first slowdown was at the beginning of November when the pipes in the river unsurprisingly got covered in leaves and other debris. Fortunately there was a rapid improvement when they were cleaned off. However, by mid-month the flow had dropped again. This time mud appeared to be the cause of the blockage, probably as a result of the recently arrived cattle stirring things up in the cattle drink in North Park. After experiencing another blockage in January plans are now afoot to provide an alternative watering site nearby.



Belted Galloways in the cattle drink

More problems were identified between the two ponds, also in November. The flow from the top pond was finding its way around and underneath the large boulder at the egress to the stream, resulting in a drop of the water level. This hole was plugged with foam and clay and stayed good in the long term. However, by January another hole had opened up on the other side of the egress. Again this was successfully plugged with foam. A more permanent solution is being sought, with works likely to be carried out in the autumn.

Two of the cider apple trees on the lower part of the upper slope in Forde Orchard showed signs of bark damage. Interestingly, there have been a number of sightings of two Roe Deer in the LLP, and these are no doubt the culprits. A pair of foxes has also been seen, suggesting the very vocal vixen heard barking in January was successful in finding a mate.

Another 10 yards of hedge above the barn was laid at the end of November with the help of volunteers from Ambios, a not-for-profit organisation providing work experience for those wanting a career in conservation. This international group included representatives from Spain, Italy, France, Portugal and the UK. Another group is scheduled to come in March.

The orchard and slope outside Corner Wood was eventually brushmowed in mid-December, with the bluebell patch in Corner Wood brushcut the other side of Christmas. More hedge laying took place in January, and again in February, this time along the North Park double comb. It is hoped that a Mid-tier Countryside Stewardship application, if successful, would provide direct funding for this hedgerow management in the future.



Happy Hedgelaying with Ambios Volunteers

About two dozen reed mace plants were pulled from the Flo pond at the end of January, and left on the pond edge for any invertebrates to crawl back into the water. Later the same day a Woodcock was accidentally flushed from Corner Wood, whilst at rest in a small clearing in a bramble thicket.

A tour of the LLP was given to the Torbay U3A Bird Group in October. Buzzard and Sparrowhawk were noted, along with a flock of Meadow Pipit. There was also a good turnout for the Autumn Colours walk but the rain started just as the group set off and got heavier and heavier. The walk was cut short at Corner Wood and participants returned to the Meeting Room to dry out and have a cream tea and a presentation, 'The role of small NGO's in owl conservation: case study – The Barn Owl Trust', which had been prepared for the World Owl Conference.

Weather

The first frost was recorded overnight at the end of October. However, the average monthly temperatures hovered around the average for the rest of the autumn and winter.

LLP News Continued ...



Frog spawn in the Flo Pond

Rainfall was way above the monthly average in September, but thereafter, despite our impressions, both October and November were much drier at half the monthly average. Most interestingly, the strongest gust of wind for many years was recorded in December at 44mph, exceeded immediately afterwards in January by a 49mph gust. This is the second highest wind speed on site since records began in 2006 after gusts of 51mph recorded in March of 2008 and 2015.

Wildlife

The now quite rare sight of a foraging Kestrel was reported over the field on a calm October morning. Also that month a Green Woodpecker was heard calling over towards Corner Wood one afternoon. Large white droppings were noted on the gate into Pennsland Lane and on Camera Post 5, suggesting that there could be a Barn Owl about. A Kingfisher was heard calling on the Ashburn behind the office.

Typical late autumn migrants recorded at the end of October included about 15 Redwing and 5-10 Goldcrest in the hedgerows, a small flock of Skylark moving overhead, with 2 Song Thrush, 5 Meadow Pipit and a late Red Admiral.

By the end of the month most of the apples were off the trees in the orchard, although the Germander Speedwell was still in flower. After a severe frost in December, the LLP's first record of a pair of Reed Bunting was observed perching on tall grasses above the North Park hedge, presumably having been frozen out of their wintering site on the higher moor.

After a largely uneventful December several clumps of frog spawn had appeared by the 21st January, the second earliest arrival since 2008;

- 30th January 2017
- 24th January 2016
- 27th January 2015
- 24th January 2014
- 30th January 2013
- **19th January 2012**
- 4th February 2011
- 9th February 2010
- 28th January 2009
- 23rd January 2008

An unseasonably mild afternoon towards the end of January resulted in serious signs of spring; the first Celandine in flower, and a Small Tortoiseshell on the wing whilst Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush and Blackbird were all in song around the LLP. ★

All Photos BOT Staff

Matthew Twiggs
Senior Conservation Officer

Latest News



The proposed 1Ha area bordering North Park
Photo: David Ramsden

Introducing an exciting new proposal for the LLP. In an effort to provide better habitat for insect pollinators in spring and a more diverse range of farmland bird species in winter we plan to create a 1Ha area (2.5 acres) of combined winter bird food crop mixed with wild flower seeds (see above map). This is just less than 10% of the total land-holding.

The location was selected because it is a relatively discrete area between existing hedgerows and paths, easily fenced off from annual grazing. North Park hedgerow acts as cover for farmland birds to fly back into, and as a windbreak from westerly winds. There is also a proposed 4-6m field margin along the hedgerows.

We propose that this area is ploughed, drilled and raked in April this year as an experiment. This should provide arable weed flowers in the spring and summer, and winter bird food through the autumn and winter. It will also provide food for Wood Mouse, potentially benefiting Barn Owls in the process.

Proposed mixes;

Winter bird food (as per the Natural England Mid-tier Countryside Stewardship option AB9)

Barley, triticale, quinoa, linseed, millet, mustard, fodder radish and sunflower

Arable weed flowers, to include;

[to be confirmed] hopefully poppy, cornflower, corn cockle, corn marigold etc.;

We hope to start making preparation for this shortly and we'll give you up an update on this new proposal in the next issue of Feedback...watch this space! ★

Bird News



Rick releasing the rehabilitated Tawny Owl that was impaled on a barbed wire fence. Photo Provided

Bird Rehabilitation

It was generally a quiet period for incoming birds until late September and early October when a number of birds then arrived. An emaciated 2nd year Barn Owl arrived from a vet in Sherbourne, Dorset on 27th September but died 2 days later. Another 1st year Barn Owl came from a vets in Totnes on 4th October but sadly died the next day, probably due to starvation. Both birds had been immediately re-hydrated with glucose and warm water and hand fed, we were devastated to lose them.

A male Tawny Owl arrived on 16th September with a badly broken wing which was set in the Bird Hospital. Unfortunately it did not heal sufficiently for the bird to be released, so is now a permanent resident at the sanctuary, happily sharing our largest aviary with 30 other Tawny Owls.

On the 29th September BOT decided to accept two captive-bred



Barn Owls from a defunct owl sanctuary in Hampshire. As many of the staff were caught up with Game of Thrones at the time these were named Tormund and Tyrion after characters from the TV programme. They are both available for adoption via our website.

Found by a road in Bishopsteignton and taken to a vet's in Paignton, another Tawny Owl with a broken wing arrived on the 5th October and was introduced to the Sanctuary after being successfully nursed back to health and deemed unreleasable.

An emaciated Barn Owl arrived on 12th October. Complete with jesses and swivel, it had obviously escaped from somewhere. The bird, who was in very poor condition when it arrived, despite our best efforts sadly passed away.

On 31st October 2017, a Tawny Owl that had impaled himself on a barbed wire fence was brought in from near Okehampton. Despite extensive treatment he sadly passed away on the 3rd November.

On 3rd November a second Tawny found impaled on a barbed wire fence was brought in from Chudleigh Knighton. Thankfully, this time the injuries were not as severe, she was successfully rehabilitated and released where she was found on 1st Dec 2017.

BOT Sanctuary

On 3rd and 4th October the annual health checks were carried out. We had help from our regular volunteers Kim Baker and Tony Hulatt and were pleased to see all our feathered friends in fine condition, no trace of the nasty bacterial infection 'Bumblefoot' and not a flat fly in sight!

New roosting boxes were kindly made by our volunteer Alan Sloman and were installed by Kim and Tony in the Field Aviary in early December. Since the last issue of Feedback sadly two much loved Barn Owls, Flinty and Barley died of old age. So with the new additions we currently have 18 Barn Owls and 30 Tawny Owls in residence at our Sanctuary. ★

Rick Lockwood
Assistant Conservation Officer

In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies
from the estates of

Jane Margaret Bateman, Maureen Patricia Heaton,
Dulcie Margaret Hunter, Margaret Patricia Taylor and
Florence Joan Verney

and donations in memory of

Sheelagh Grace Batley, Arthur Birkenhead,
Barbara Bousfield, Hugh Brewster, Gladys Cecilia
Busbridge, Sylvia Irene Cox, John William Hayes,
Christopher Ronald Mayhew, Peter & Phyl Monks,
Wendy Nicholson, Rev John Schofield, Sir John Swire
and Fred Towers

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

They all now have a leaf on our Memory Tree

30 Years of the Barn Owl Trust

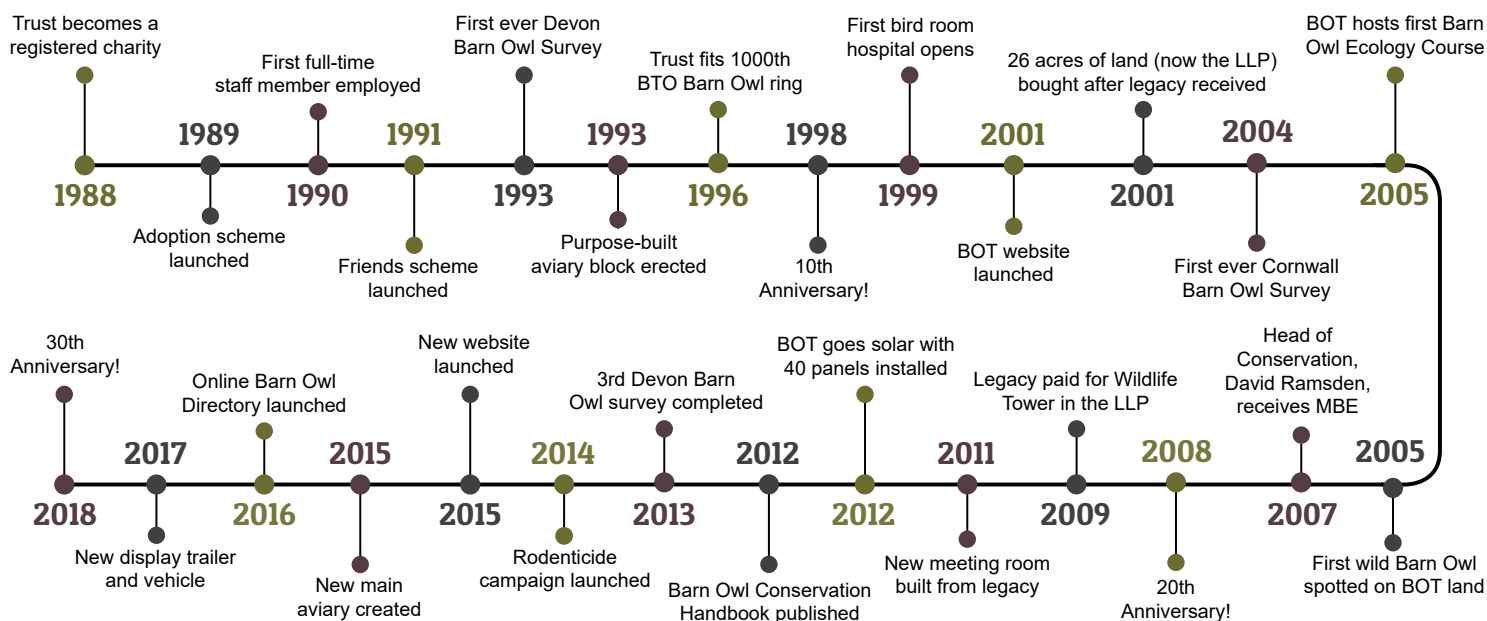
The Barn Owl Trust was officially 'hatched' on 30th July 1988 when a letter from the Charities Commission confirmed that our application to register a new charity had been accepted. One of our founding Trustees gave a £25 donation with which to open a bank account in the name of the Trust and that was all we had: a name, a number, twenty five quid, and most importantly a small team of willing volunteers including our five founding Trustees. We also had long lists of people who'd expressed an interest – mainly farmers who wanted to have Barn Owls on their land.

So, the work we'd initiated in 1984 under the name 'Devon Barn Owl Scheme' continued under our new name – visiting sites, searching for signs of Barn Owls, providing advice, erecting nestboxes, and now the additional task of applying for grants.

Our first grant income supported our first member of staff in 1990 on the princely sum of forty pounds a week to carry out the Barn Conversion Research Project. The rest, as they say, is history!

We launched our Barn Owl Adoption scheme in 1989 to help us care for the increasing number of owls in the sanctuary, this was over 10 years before the launch of our website in 2001. Now you can visit our website and see photos of all the owls in our scheme before choosing your adopted owl...how times have changed!

Please take a look at our timeline below for a brief overview of the last 30 years of the Barn Owl Trust. Many thanks to those who supported us way back when and all of you who support us now, we couldn't have done it without you. ★



Come Celebrate with us!

We have supporters all over the UK and over the years we have often been asked the question 'Can we come and visit?'...this prompted us to start organising regular events focused around our Lennon Legacy Project and making use of the wonderful space in the Norman Alderson Meeting Room. We started running guided walks, craft workshops and cream teas as a way for you to be able to visit the Trust and meet our small dedicated team. It is always a real pleasure to meet our supporters and it's a great chance for you to see some perfect Barn Owl habitat and pick the brains of our Conservation Team!

This year, along with holding our usual guided walks and cream teas, we invite you to attend one of our three Coffee & Cake events being held in May, June and July. These will be held in our Meeting Room and if the weather is good a stroll around the LLP could also be included. 30 years really is a fantastic achievement and some of you will

have been with us from the very beginning, and many for over a decade, we could not have got this far without you so please pencil the dates in your diary, book on a Coffee & Cake event and let us thank you in person! For the dates of these special events please see Diary Dates at the bottom of Page 2 and contact the office to secure your place. ★



GRAND Prize Draw

We are delighted to announce that the Grand Prize Draw for our 30th year really is grand, with fabulous prizes up for grabs thanks to very generous support from some fantastic organisations. You could be in a for a chance of winning a £350 voucher towards a holiday with Naturetrek, a 3 nights glamping experience in the South West, a Tipi Holiday in Cornwall, 2 tickets for a wine tasting and vineyard tour at Sharpham Estate and much more! There are even more prizes still to be confirmed and a full list will be available on our website shortly.

Check for your little green book of draw tickets enclosed in this copy of Feedback. A ticket for the draw costs £1 or £5 for a book of 5 tickets. For those of you who receive your copy of Feedback by email do not fear...you can still purchase tickets for our draw! You can do this by either making a donation via our website - www.barnowltrust.org.uk/support-us/donate/ putting 'Draw Tickets' as your reason for the donation, we will then send you your ticket numbers by email and put your stubs straight into the pot. Alternatively you can always pop us a cheque in the post made payable to the Barn Owl Trust. If you should require additional books of draw tickets please contact the office on 01364 653026. Thank you. ★



Supporters News

Raising £30 for 30 Years!



Tracey with a tree full of 'Hootlets'!

We were thrilled to hear from our regular supporters Tracey Morris and Shelley Wright when they contacted us to let us know they had already started raising £30 each for our 30th birthday. Shelley has been selling homemade Jam and Tracey has been busy knitting these fantastic 'Hootlets'. A huge thank you goes out to both of you!

Tracey and Shelley are not the only ones who have started fundraising; Ashleigh Harrison from Blackpool is planning on losing 2 stone in 4 months and has already raised over £30 on her BT MyDonate fundraising page. Well done Ashleigh! We look forward to hearing how she gets on later in the year. You can support her sponsored slim by visiting www.mydonate.bt.com/fundraisers/ashleighharrison.



Shelley selling Jam for BOT

In honour of our 30th year, local supporter Jayne Hartley will be holding a cream tea event at her home in Ashburton on 16th June. What a lovely way to celebrate! Please contact the Trust for more details if you would like to attend.

The Barn Owl Trust have been working hard for the last three decades to conserve and protect the Barn Owl and its Environment. We work to increase awareness of our impact on the Earth and find ways to communicate our passion for owls and the environment to everyone who can help. Can you help us make a difference?

We're now inviting you to raise £30 for 30 years! Perhaps you could hold a fund-raising event at work or in your local community? You could have a cake sale, coffee morning, a sponsored dress-down day, quiz or raffle. We'd love to hear from you should you wish to get involved. We can help you with sponsor forms, posters and BOT leaflets, and – if appropriate – we can share your event or fundraising page on our website and on social media. Drop us an email – info@barnowltrust.org.uk.

Don't forget to send us a photo of your event so we can inspire others to follow in your fundraising footsteps! Thank you. ★

Make 2018 the year you have fun Fundraising for Barn Owls!

Five Barn Owl Boxes!

It was a real pleasure to receive this email and photo from BOT Friend Leonora Smith that we wanted to share it with you. Eds.

We have had barn owls here in boxes we have built into our house and barn, five in all, so they can choose! We have had barn owls nesting here since 1982 when we first moved here and put two boxes in. My house was built in 2001, and we had three boxes installed (with cameras linked to our TV) and it was very soon that owls came and investigated. On 10th August 2004 we saw that the female had a ring on her right leg, though we have never been able to see the details as she is very much a wild owl. She has bred here every year except one a couple of years ago, but the year before that she successfully reared 3 broods (of 4, 3 then 2).



Now that I have more knowledge and experience from many years of owl watching, I believe she was quite young when she arrived. If she was 1 year old when she arrived, that would make her 14 years old now, but she may well be older! She has had 3 different mates in the time she has been here. The current mate was very young when he arrived as he was still exhibiting some very juvenile behaviours, a lot of head turning etc. Having found an owl dead from starvation during a bad winter we vowed we would never let that happen again. We now keep day old chicks in our freezer, so that if the weather is very poor, or we think the vole population has dropped, we feed the owls. They readily come for them, usually within seconds of them being put on the platform outside the nest box! "Our" owl raised two healthy young this year. Two years ago, we had barn owl nesting in the top box, a tawny nested in the box on the left of the photo, and jackdaws in the other box, so full house! ★

Leonora Smith
BOT Supporter

In Memory of Granny Ida



Congratulations to Seb Dimmock who took part in the Great North Run in September 2017 with a goal to raise £200 for the Trust in memory of his Granny Ida who passed away in 2016.

The 13.1-mile race from Newcastle to South Shields - now in its 37th year - had 43,127 runners cross the finish line including Seb. This was Seb's first half-marathon and he completed it in 2 hours 16 mins. He also exceeded his fundraising target by collecting an amazing £683.18 for the Trust. Well done and thank you Seb, your Granny would be proud of you. ★

Team Talk

Lexie Leaving

After 22 months at the Barn Owl Trust I am heading off on a new adventure. By the time you read this, I will have swapped Barn Owls for marketing; something I have always had an interest in. My new role is close enough to home that I can walk to work – so I will no longer be contributing (quite so much) to global warming!

Whilst working for the Trust I have certainly been challenged, learning new things like hedge laying and owl rehabilitation. I particularly enjoyed organising our training courses and heading out on school visits with Baley the Barn Owl. I also liked getting stuck in with the LLP's more dirty tasks. Some of the highlights(?) included being pooped on by a Tawny Owl, sprayed with a pressure washer by the naughty volunteers and falling down the hedgebank whilst trying to hedge lay (much to my colleague's amusement) - I will be leaving with a few scrapes and scratches (mostly from the resident owls).

I feel I have achieved a whole world of new things, for both myself and the Trust including digitising the Wings of Change talk to fit with the curriculum & creating display material for the new trailer, although there is still so much more that needs to be done. I have been very fortunate to work for the Trust and whilst I am sad to be leaving, I am hoping to use my additional 'spare' time to pursue my wildlife photography. ★

Lexie New
Former P.A. to Head of Conservation



Meet Mateo

I am really excited to be joining the Barn Owl Trust team in a role that combines being PA to Head of Conservation with work as Conservation and Education Assistant. I see this as a wonderful opportunity to contribute to an organisation that I admire. I have done voluntary work in Devon with Barn Owls, Dormice, and habitat management. I love travelling and have also volunteered with raptor care in Germany and with the Iberian Wolf Recovery Centre in Portugal.

I am a British/Mexican dual national and in recent years I have been living in Oaxaca, Mexico, next to the Pacific Ocean. The landscapes there are as fascinating as they are beautiful and my work with the community project Servicios Ecoturísticos La Ventanilla put me in contact with sea turtles, crocodiles, mangroves and a host of other flora and fauna. I became a specialised birdwatching guide and then went into ornithological research on species diversity, patterns in habitat use and the impact of hurricanes.

My experience with the Barn Owl Trust has come full circle, because in 1987 we were lucky enough to participate in the Breeding and Release Scheme at my family home near Dartmoor. At that time I never imagined that I would be able to work with the Trust, and now, here I am! ★

Mateo Ruiz
P.A. to Head of Conservation



Midge Walks for BOT

You may remember from Feedback Issue 58 that Judith was planning on walking 1,000 miles for Bardsey Lodge and Bird Observatory in 2017. This year Midge & Judith will be walking for the Barn Owl Trust's 30th Anniversary - please see the enclosed flyer for details of how you can sponsor her. Eds.



We did it!! Well, I did 1,000 miles, or 1,028 to be precise. Midge did a lot more than that! The target was reached on 17th December with a walk from Bennett's Cross on Dartmoor to Grimspound and finishing at the Warren House Inn for a warm lunch and a mulled wine.



Despite the fact that the weather was not kind to us there was a celebration at the actual completion point with a banner and Prosecco. As if that was not enough, the walk raised a total of £1,124 for the replacement of the boardwalks on Bardsey for which there is a huge thank you to all those who sponsored us.

So what now? Well, having 'got the bug' my target for 2018 is 1,500 miles. Which probably means that Midge will do at least 4,500 miles!!! Once again we are going to raise funds for charities. This time for the Barn Owl Trust and for an Admiral Nurse for the Honiton area through Dementia UK. It seems that the rain has not deterred us from getting out and about and as at 30th January I have walked 101.1 miles. I cannot wait to get out there and enjoy the scenery, company, birds and hopefully some good weather. ★

Judith Read
Legacy Support

Thanks and Things

A huge thank you to all our kind supporters who have sent us items from our Wants List, bits and bobs for recycling, goods to sell on eBay and prizes for this year's extra special Grand Prize Draw:

Aerosaurus Balloons, Jenie Allen, Heather Allery, Mr Brooks, Heather Collins, Judy Cummings, J. Dilnot, Vanessa Farbrother, Myfanwy Ford, Peter Goodsir, Ann Green, Rob Hamar, Jayne Hartley, Honey Ingram, Harvey Kendall, J. F. Lavelle, Marsh Christian Trust, Chris Moncrieff, David Moor, Barbara Moran, Jennifer Muir, Robert Murray, Naturetrek, Beryl Parnham, Nigel Reid, Annie Rhodes, Janet Rutter, Sharpham Estate, Smith & Co., Paul Stenning, Linda & Geoffrey Tilbury, Tipi Holidays, TorcEcology, Elaine Underhill, Mr & Mrs Wallis & WWT Slimbridge.

Not forgetting our invaluable volunteers:

Ambios Volunteers, Diana Baker, Kim Baker, Diane Hawkings, Harry Hingston, Tony Hulatt, Michael Parks, Plymouth University Students, Margaret Rhodes & Alan Sloman.

To those Fantastic Fundraisers...we cannot thank you enough!:

The World Indoor Rally championship at Dartmouth raised just under £500. Stephen Hicks & Jennifer O'Dea donated their cars to the Trust via the GiveaCar scheme. South Molton Apple Fair held a draw and raised £52. Tracey Morris and Shelley Wright were fundraising for our 30th year and exceeded their £30 target and raised over £160 through sales of homemade jam and knitted items. Joan Davies also raised £23 from selling her own homemade jam. Ken May built two Barn Owl boxes for free

and donations totalling £55 were received from the recipients on Ken's recommendation and Bob Hessian donated his fee from playing the organ at a funeral.

Can you help with:

- Postcards and pre1970 envelopes with stamps on
- Used stamps, including any foreign stamps & currency
- Mobile phones for recycling/sale
- 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 / 12mm tanalised ply and lengths of 25x 50mm tanalised batten
- Green Oak rough-sawn planks for making bat boxes
- Anabat detector
- A4/A3 recycled paper/card both coloured and white
- Padded envelopes (new or used)
- A3 sized laminating machine
- Socket set (48 pc 1/2 inch drive)
- Empty 35mm Film Cannisters
- Wire cutters
- Drill-driver bits (for screwing)
- Quick grip clamps
- Fiskars/Felco loppers & shears
- Garden forks & spades
- Caravan levelling ramps (for our new trailer)
- Small plate compactor
- Wintery Barn Owl images for Christmas cards
- Prizes for our Grand Draw (postable i.e. not heavy or bulky)

Thank you for your help. ★

Tail Piece ...



Thirty years ago a small group of volunteers had just sent off an application to create a new charity. The Barn Owl Trust received its registered charity number at the end of July '88. It would be another 18 months before we had our first member of staff and converted an old caravan into our first office. In those days we had an ever growing list of people who wanted to encourage Barn Owls and a stack of cardboard boxes to keep our records in. Almost all of our nestboxes were made from tea-chests and we hand-wrote information leaflets which we photocopied at the local solicitors. We held a very popular annual jumble sale and ran a local newspaper recycling scheme to raise funds. Our first talks to both adult and school groups started in '89.

The Trusts aims were and still are, conservation of the Barn Owl and its environment and we believed that the two things were inextricably linked. We began to use the plight of this iconic species to raise awareness of other environmental issues. Over the intervening years we've seen recycling become a 'normal' activity for most people and, a growing understanding amongst the general public of how we, as humans, affect our planet and the wildlife that we share it with. Obviously we can't take much credit for this but as an organisation we've been encouraging it now for 30 years.

When we started out we had no idea of how the Trust would develop and grow. To a large extent it's been an organic process, influenced by the different people involved at different times as trustees, volunteers and staff. These days we have 12 staff and are the main source of Barn Owl information in the UK. We've done a lot of things over the years and if you don't know what we've achieved, our website is the easiest way to find out.

There have been many wonderful folk that have played a part in the Barn Owl Trusts journey to its thirtieth year, some of whom have been around for a long time, others that just crossed our

path briefly and rather wonderfully, most of our supporters are people we've never even met, although we have done our best to thank everyone personally. Vivien Lennon's legacy in 2001 had, and is still having a tremendous effect on the work of the Trust and on all of the visitors to the Lennon Legacy Project. For me, seeing this project develop and the land change from a 'green desert' to a wildlife haven has been both an honour and a privilege.

At a recent Trustees Meeting when we were talking about the future, we decided that we should be looking out for potential new Trustees to work with us and hopefully continue our conservation of the Barn Owl and its environment in future years. With any luck those people will appear and will bring their ideas and skills to benefit both the Barn Owl and the natural World.

In my last Tail Piece, amongst other things, I wrote about the vast amount of plastic littering the Earth's oceans and I have been gladdened by the recent increase of awareness of this issue in the media. Our local town, Ashburton, now has a 'Plastic-free' group, a refill scheme for reusable water bottles and our local Co-op has stopped offering their 5p single-use plastic bags. Instead they will offer more ethical alternatives. Another local initiative that has nothing to do with plastic, but is a heart-warming example of how people can work together to make a difference, is the purchase of the old Methodist church to create a Community Arts Centre.

To celebrate the Trusts 30th year this summer we are holding extra events and we would be delighted to see everyone who has supported our work so we can say a personal thank you. If you can't come you might like to hold your own event to spread the word that when people come *together we can make a World of difference*

Frances Ramsden ★