

feedback

Issue 66 / Autumn 2021



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

Waterleat, Ashburton
Devon TQ13 7HU

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Cover Photo: 'Jane & Greta' - leaving the nest - Tony Utting

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A big thank you to everyone who provided words and pictures for this issue.

Proofing: Sandra Reardon & the BOT Team

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Find us on:



Diary Dates & Information

Dec - Tues 7th 2021 - Annual Prize Draw

- Fri 17th 2021 - 10:00am - Winter Bird Walk

- Fri 24th 2021 - Office Closes 4pm

Jan - Tues 4th 2022 - Office Reopens 10am

- Fri 14th 2022 - 10:00am - Winter Bird Walk

Feb - Wed 2nd 2022 - 10:00am - Winter Work Party

(practical work with the Conservation Team in the LLP)

COVID 19 - Events may be cancelled. See our website.

Contact the office (details above) for more information or to book a place at an event - booking is essential as places are strictly limited.

A very warm welcome to the 66th edition of our magazine, 'Feedback'. As the Summer draws to a close, and Autumn begins to settle in, we get a chance to reflect on the year so far. Weather-wise it's been an odd sort of Summer with soaring temperatures interspersed with some weeks of truly miserable weather. Once again, the Barn Owl Trust has also had a bit of an up and down year, due mostly to the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic. We have now recalled all our team from furlough, and we are back in the office, working in bubbles and adhering to strict Covid guidelines and we are nearly back to normal.

How nice it is for us to be all together again, after such a long period working from home, or indeed, not at all. Waterleat is set in such a beautiful part of Devon, on the edge of Dartmoor, that its always a pleasure to come to work amid such wonderful surroundings. It's hard to let go of Summer but the golden light and colours of Autumn are surely a great compensation. The beginnings of Autumn can be seen this week, with the leaves just starting to turn and the lanes being littered with leaves and twigs. The hedges are being cut back now and the countryside begins to take on the mantle of the golden season.

We continue to see a great demand for our nestboxes and our team of builders has been temporarily strengthened to four. This is very good news, as the revenue from the nestboxes contributes significantly to our general funds. It's good news for Barn Owls too, of course, that so many of you are choosing to purchase and install nestboxes to encourage these wonderful birds to breed. Good luck to all nestbox installers in attracting a breeding pair!

The Conservation Team have been working hard on a research project with a major highways service provider looking at reducing the number of Barn Owls killed on our roads. Ensuring our free enquiries service continues is vital and we have worked hard to ensure that this happens. Regrettably we had one very short period this year when, for staffing illness reasons, we were forced to suspend the service. Fortunately we were able to resume enquiries before too long. You might be interested in Mateo's excellent article on **Solar Farms on pages 6-7**, illustrating some of the advice we are asked for.

The Admin team have lost a few good folk to retirement and career changes and we were truly sorry to see our friends go. However, we have taken on two more great people and we are really looking forward to the future with our newly invigorated team ready and willing to support our Conservation Team, and you, our lovely Supporters. Read about the team changes on page 18 and enjoy **Judith's Journal on page 15** – Judith has now left the Trust but remains a willing volunteer!

This Feedback contains the Annual Report and the Conservation Report, which I am sure you will find fascinating. At the end of the report, **on page 14**, you will find the all important list of Thank You's where we take the opportunity to show our gratitude to everyone who has supported us through legacies, in memoriam donations (see also **page 5**) and grants. A huge thank you to each and every one of you who continue to support our work in many ways and whose generosity has allowed us to see our way through this extremely difficult 18 months. **See page 20** for Thanks and Things.

With this copy of Feedback you will find Draw Tickets for our Annual Draw that takes place in December. Only £5 a book of tickets and all the funds raised go towards our work. You will also see this year's Christmas Sales leaflet showing you lots of fabulous Owl-y gifts to delight your friends and relatives including our new Calendar, Tea Towel and Christmas Card designs!

Thank you again for your support. With your help we can continue our vital conservation work.

Gill Gant - Office Manager

BOT News



New 2022 Calendar

New and exclusive to the Barn Owl Trust, this A4 hanging calendar features beautiful photos of Barn Owls in the wild. Professionally produced and printed in the UK using FSC Certified card with fully biodegradable and compostable vegan inks. It is a great environmentally friendly gift!

Available now for mail order through the enclosed sales leaflet or from our online shop: www.barnowltrust.org.uk/shop. Our grateful thanks go to Hamish Paterson, Jamie Skipper, Peter Warne, Russell Savory, Mike Pearce, Simon Wantling, Charlie Syme, Graham Clements and Ryan Dorling for their wonderful Barn Owl photos

Climate News

Climate Change is here and it's only going to get worse! It is already affecting not only humans, but all of the wildlife that share our beautiful planet and destroying vast tracts of natural habitat. At the beginning of September in the USA 78 large wildfires were burning across almost 3,000 square miles. Across the World tens of thousands are being affected by extreme weather, wildfires and floods, and most of these events are not making the national media. Unless directly affected, most people are unaware of what is happening globally.

On the right are just some of the places affected during just July and August this year.

For nearly three decades the United Nations has been bringing together almost every country on earth for global climate summits. COP26 ('Conference of the Parties') in Glasgow in November is a pivotal moment in the fight against climate change.



Wildfires July & August 2021

Albania, Athens-Greece, Bodrum-Turkey, Bolivia, Brazil, British Columbia - Canada 260 fires, Cairo, Calabria and Sardinia-Italy, California-USA, Canary Islands-Spain, Catalonia-Spain, Chirapchinsky Ulus-Russia, Finland, Southern France, Gaziantep-Turkey, Greece 100 fires, Lebanon, Lena Pillars National Park-Russia, Manama-Turkey, Montana-USA, Northern Algeria, Oregon-USA, Palermo-Sicily Italy, Plumas County-California, Algarve-Portugal, Siberia 170 fires, Sochi-Russia, Avila-Spain, Trogir-Croatia, Tunisia, Turkey, Utah-USA, Voronezh-Russia. Yakutia-Russia.

This list is by no means exhaustive

Floods July & August 2021

Anapa-Russia, Arizona-USA, Assam-India, Auckland-New Zealand, Bashkala-Turkey, Belgium, Bihar-India, Black Sea-Turkey, Cambodia, Cameroon, Carolina-USA, Sichuan Province-China, Dagesta-Russia, Dublin-Ireland, Ethiopia, Germany, Ghana-Africa, Guna-India, Haldwani-India, Hiroshima-Japan, Hubei-China, Indonesia, Jammu-India, Jashin-Yemen, Kavala-Greece, Kerch-Crimea, Krakow-Poland, Kuli-China, London-UK, Louisiana-USA, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Michigan-USA, Merida-Venezuela, Netherlands, New York-USA, Nigeria-Africa, Omaha Nebraska-USA, Perugia-Italy, Petersburg-Russia, Qauzvin-Iran, Sheopur-India, Sochi-Russia, Somalia-Africa, Southern Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Tennessee-USA, Texas USA, Thailand, Torreon, Mexico, Trinidad & Tobago, Turkey, Ukraine, Utah-USA, Valencia-Venezuela, Varanasi-India, Yemen.

Again this list is by no means exhaustive

News Bites

BOLT News

As we reported in Feedback 64 the Barn Owl Legacy Trust is now a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (Registered Charity Number 1190997). The Lennon Legacy Project land and the balance of the original legacy was transferred from BOT to BOLT at the end of the last financial year and the Barn Owl Trust continues to manage the land to maximise the benefit to wildlife. BOLT has seven trustees, three of whom are also BOT trustees.

Annual Prize Draw

This year's Annual Prize Draw will take place on Tuesday 7th December. Thank you to all who have donated prizes, your support is greatly appreciated. For details on how to purchase tickets by debit card and to view the list of prizes donated so far please visit the website: barnowltrust.org.uk/annual-prize-draw.

Thank you WPD

We do struggle with our internet speed here in the BOT offices and in an effort to improve this we are going to try a 4G connection. Big thanks to Western Power Distribution who have donated the pole and the ducting we need to get started with this. Fingers crossed this will help speed things up!

Dormouse Decline

The Dormouse population in the UK has dropped by more than half in the past 20 years. Our volunteer and Dormouse license holder, Tony Hulatt, has been conducting monthly checks on the boxes in the LLP. Sadly, other than the beginnings of one nest, he found no sign of breeding here this year. He does checks at other sites around Devon and has had similar results, it does seem to be a particularly bad year for Dormice, perhaps it was just too cold when they awoke from their winter hibernation?

Dangerous roads: What can we do?

We have identified 10 sections of the Southwest trunk road network where we have the highest recorded numbers of Barn Owl collisions with vehicles. Excitingly, this research was supported by a highway service provider as part of ongoing collaboration that aims to manage roadside vegetation in order to reduce the number of Barn Owls killed. We sincerely thank everyone who informed us of road casualties, either by contacting us directly or using the online Barn Owl survey: www.barnowlsurvey.org.uk.

LLP Update



Aerial view of the LLP
Photo: David Ramsden

As April rolled into May, Spring had very much sprung! By the 5th the Bluebells in Corner Wood were reaching their peak, the Hawthorn in the North Park hedge was starting to blossom and there were the first signs of the wild bird food crop germinating.

Small bird box monitoring was well underway, with several broods of Blue Tit, and a brood of Nuthatch ringed in their usual box by the top bridge. One pair of Great Tits clearly had ideas above their station when they chose to nest in the Duck Box on the Implement Shelter in the orchard! They were nevertheless successful. The first Hobby was recorded on the 15th, the first Cuckoo heard on the 25th and on the same day 5+ Swifts arrived over the field.



Sunflower and Peacock Butterfly
Photo: David Ramsden

Not that it was all plain sailing; in the 16 years of recording weather data, May was the coolest and wettest on record, with rain on 24 days giving a total of 187.6mm and a mean temperature of 10.1°C. The average for the month is 74.5mm and 11.7°C respectively. Unfortunately, the rainfall and cool temperatures took their toll and several of the nests failed.

Regular sightings of a Roe Deer in May extended into June and on into July. Butterflies seemed to be late, presumably because

of the weather, but sightings of one or more Small Heaths in June were a real treat. Green Woodpeckers were very vocal, and one was even seen foraging on the paths fairly regularly throughout the month. By mid-summer the Fodder Radish in the crop was in flower, turning the whole crop white. The Sunflowers were just popping their heads up and the Corn Marigolds were covered in buds. After postponing the Mid-Summer Walk due to bad weather, it went ahead on the 24th under a full moon. Some 10 visitors, both local and from further afield, enjoyed the walk and really appreciated the diversity of the reserve.

By July the Fodder Radish was in full bloom, and the Corn Marigold and Cornflower buds had started to open. The first Marbled White was sighted on the 1st, and the Butterfly Walk on the 7th recorded several more. Small Skipper, Six Spot Burnett Moth, Meadow Brown, Ringlet and numerous froglets, grasshoppers, other invertebrates including a Great Green Bush Cricket were recorded on the walk. Invasive species control was carried out when over 30 Himalayan Balsam plants which had crept across from an adjacent land holding were pulled up from near the Holly Hedge. The Roe Deer was still being seen, now most frequently in the crop where it had presumably found something to its liking.

Halfway through the month, the white of the Fodder Radish had been replaced by the yellow of the Corn Marigolds, many of which had spread into the crop itself, despite only being sown into a wildflower strip along the crop edge. Although it was warmer than normal, it was also certainly wetter, with 128mm of rain compared with a monthly average of 70.1mm.

By the beginning of August, the Sunflowers were standing proudly in full bloom and looked amazing in a strip along the North Park hedge. The Fodder Radish flowers had been replaced by big, fat seed pods that Linnets find particularly appetising. No wonder then that the 30 or so had started frequenting the crop by mid-month. By mid-winter we shall be expecting several hundred more.

Matthew Twiggs
Senior Conservation Officer

Bird News

Rehabilitation

An adult Tawny Owl found with a fractured left wing near Tavistock at the end of March was treated by a local vet who had to wire the radioulnar joint. He came to us mid-April and immediately went into rehab in order to get him back to fitness. Several weeks later the injury was assessed and despite some feather damage he had made good progress. He was flight-tested and remarkably, despite the injury, he was able to fly well so was deemed fit for release. Unfortunately, the vet was unable to give us the finder's contact details so we couldn't arrange to release him where he was discovered. However, he will be support released from Waterleat in the very near future.

Another Tawny Owl, this time a youngster, was brought into us from the Okehampton area on May 21st. She had been found in the middle of the road as a nestling and was otherwise healthy except for the feathers on her left wing. These had either been removed by a predator or were simply not developing as they should. Either way, this would make flying, and therefore a life in the wild, impossible. After several weeks of TLC in one of the hospital aviaries she received a final check over in mid-August before being permanently accommodated in our Tawny Owl aviary. It is highly unusual for such a young bird to go into sanctuary, but she would not have survived in the wild unable to fly and she certainly seems to have settled in well.

A brood of three Barn Owls was discovered when a landowner was dismantling a bale stack near Crediton on June 30th. Unfortunately, the nest had been destroyed and the bales sold by the time we were contacted. However, the three nestlings had been saved in a box and initially put on a Rayburn to keep them warm. We arranged for an experienced rehabilitator nearby to take them overnight until we could get them to Waterleat.



*Jane and Greta - almost 5 weeks old
Photo: David Ramsden*

At less than a week old it was always going to be touch and go, and unfortunately the smallest one died the same night. However, the remaining two nestlings arrived here on July 1st and went straight into a brooder which would keep them at between 30 and 37 degrees Centigrade. They were initially fed five times day and night but as they progressed this dropped to a couple of times a day, and once they could feed themselves, we made sure that they always had food if they needed it. On July 26th they were moved to the nestbox provision in the end of the barn and fed there. This is called the young brood release method; birds are able to leave the provision as soon as they can get to the hole, but are supported during their gradual release, with food put out for them every day until they eventually disperse and become independent. As I type, they are just beginning to venture outside and explore their surroundings.

The two owlets, initially called Pink and White because of the colour rings used to tell them apart when they were being fed regularly, were renamed by our Facebook followers just before they fledged. They are now know as Jane (after Jane Goodall the conservationist) and Greta (the teenage climate activist). Another brood of two Barn Owls was rescued from a failed nesting attempt in Wales and taken to the RSPCA at West Hatch in Somerset. They fed and cared for the birds until they were



*Jane and Greta in the nestbox provision in the barn - 7 weeks old
Photo: David Ramsden*

old enough to be considered for release at which point, they contacted us. We accepted them for release here at Waterleat on August 4th and they were moved straight into a mobile aviary situated in the LLP. After 2 weeks in the aviary, during a period of settled weather, the roof will be lifted, and the birds will find themselves able to get out for the first time. We will continue to put food in the aviary for as long as it takes them to start dispersing.

Sanctuary

One Tawny Owl was found dead of natural causes in the Tawny Owl aviary in July, which was sad but not surprising, considering the bird's age.

Matthew Twigg
Senior Conservation Officer

In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies
from the estates of

Richard Potter and Diane Rowland

and donations in memory of

**John Allen, Pam Booker, Don Hancock,
Patricia Johns, Edna May Rickards, Tim Stephens,
Mr D Tate & Peter Ronald Thurston**

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

They all now have a leaf on our Memory Tree

Solar Farms



*A newly established solar farm near Dartmoor
Photo: David Ramsden*

We have a long way to go if the UK is to comply with its legal pledge to become carbon neutral by 2050, and still further if we are to meet the more judicious deadline of 2030, as recommended by the Alliance of World Scientists. Renewable energy must play a vital role in accelerating our progress towards this essential goal and developing solar energy capacity should be contributing significantly to decreasing the huge quantities of fossil fuels that we currently consume, particularly in manufacturing and domestic heating. According to the sustainable energy promotion company GreenMatch, there is a 4% annual increase in UK consumption of solar energy. Nonetheless, solar energy only represents 4% of our total consumption, and total renewables are at 33%. The Barn Owl Trust strongly supports well-planned schemes that address global warming. If correct mitigation and habitat management are implemented, then solar farms represent a win-win situation for wildlife conservation and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Here at the Trust, we are approached for advice on solar farms by planning authorities, residents and developers. Once, we even received simultaneous enquiries from a Wildlife Trust involved with planning a solar farm and a local resident seeking advice because they were aware of an active Barn Owl nest site within 100 meters of the proposed site. We are never in a position to judge a proposed development on all its aspects and our chief responsibility is to consider the impact of the proposal on Barn Owls, and how any impact should be addressed. Nonetheless, we may be able to provide information on how to enhance the site's biodiversity potential, thereby involving other species of flora and fauna.

Before planning permission is sought, we recommend a thorough evaluation of the impact that a proposed solar farm could have on Barn Owl roosts or nest sites, and on their foraging habitat. If it transpires that a nest site will be disturbed or destroyed, with the resulting legal implications, then we can advise on how to avoid losing the nest site. This involves ensuring that there is always somewhere for the owls to roost and breed and making sure that any necessary construction work is done outside the breeding period. A solar farm usually includes ground-based racking systems, the mounted solar panels, power inverter stations, transformer stations, and security fencing. With adequate insulation on networks carrying electricity, these structures should pose no threat to the owls. In fact, the racking systems and panels are typically at a good height for Barn Owls to use them for perch-hunting and there may also be areas of open grassland where the owls can engage in their more usual foraging method of hunting on the wing.

The impact on, and mitigation for, Barn Owl foraging habitat within areas developed for solar farms is a highly relevant consideration. Because the home range of Barn Owls is so large

(up to 5,000 ha), it is entirely possible that extensive solar farms in rural landscapes will include some areas that are being used by owls as foraging habitat. While this may be difficult to prove directly, the loss of potential Barn Owl foraging habitat should be compensated for by the creation and maintenance of prey-rich, rough grassland areas, that is tussocky grassland with a litter-layer of dead grass that is deep enough for field voles to inhabit (>7 cm deep). If the landowner is keen to have intensive grazing around the arrays, then the presence of 4-6m wide field margins that are specifically managed as rough grassland is a good way of mitigating rough grassland that is lost.

We have also seen a proposal that includes a traditional orchard area. However, with the right design solar farms can not only successfully mitigate lost Barn Owl foraging habitat, but they can enhance the foraging opportunities for owls, and even give rise to a net gain in biodiversity. Enhancing farmland biodiversity is especially viable if development is taking place on land that has previously been used for intensive grazing. This is because improved grassland supports very few small mammals, making it very poor Barn Owl foraging habitat. The key is to allow rough grassland to grow all around the arrays of solar panels and ideally in strips left between the rows. Light grazing by sheep can be an ideal way of achieving the right type of grassland in this context. Alternatively, mechanically cutting grass at 13 cm means the grassland litter layer is never destroyed. This should be done in late July or August annually, every two years, or every three years depending on growth rates. In general, the aim is to maintain an average year-round sward height of 20 to 30 cm – a modest height that in no way harms the solar panels.

In a study undertaken by Hannah Montag and colleagues, biodiversity was measured in solar farm plots at eleven locations across southern England. In each location biodiversity was also measured in an undeveloped control plot nearby. The solar farms compared well with the undeveloped plots in terms of grass species, herbaceous plant species, bees, butterflies, and birds. Kestrels and Red Kite were seen quartering the grasslands within the solar farms and owl pellets were also found. Wildlife management included spot-spraying instead of wider applications, low-intensity grazing, establishing field margins, and seeding previously arable land with a diverse mix of grassland species.

Conservation grazing improved the botanical diversity in the solar farm plots, and the associated invertebrates too. The highest-ranking site for wildlife had a wide grassland buffer all around and extensive open areas within the fenced area.

Recently, the Trust was contacted by a small solar farm development team called Lightrock Power, who want to learn how to design their sites to benefit Barn Owls. We were able to use

Solar Farms Cont.

Geographical Information Systems to provide advice about Barn Owl conservation at some specific locations. Lightrock Power are committed to increasing biodiversity by various means, including wildflower grasslands.

Grassland management to specifically increase wildflower diversity can be quite different to what is required for achieving optimum Barn Owl foraging habitat (i.e., rough grassland). In fact, some management for wildflower diversity reduces the availability of prey at critical times in the Barn Owls' annual cycle. However, many plant and invertebrate species are also of conservation concern and we agreed that in the right circumstances different grassland managements should be implemented in complementary areas on their solar farms, thus achieving wider benefits to farmland biodiversity.

Chris Sowerbutts is the founding member of Lightrock Power and he left us with this parting message: "We've been learning about how we can optimise site design for biodiversity, with the objective of exceeding statutory biodiversity net gain targets across our projects. For Barn Owls in particular, we're seeking to establish diverse grassland management plans so that some areas provide tussocky grassland habitat, while other areas will have a richer wildflower mix to provide complementary habitat for pollinators and other wildlife."

Dr Mateo Ruiz
Conservation and Science Officer

Caught On Camera



Bat spotting! This fantastic photo captures our two owlets, Jane and Greta, watching an inquisitive bat from the nestbox provision in the BOT barn. The photo was taken by Tony Utting on the 17th August, just a few days before the owlets ventured outside for the very first time.

Jane and Greta also feature on the front cover of this issue and you can read all about their story in Bird News on page 5.

2021 Breeding Season

For many years the Trust has been undertaking a programme of Barn Owl nestbox monitoring in the late spring and early summer. This provides useful data on nestbox occupancy and absence rates and, where Barn Owls are nesting, productivity data on brood size and egg-lay date. Young are ringed at around 4-8 weeks of age and recoveries of birds ringed at the nest give information on longevity, dispersal distance and cause of death. This year, 65 of the 78 current Annual Monitoring Sites were checked.

After last year's monitoring was effectively abandoned due to the pandemic, we were extremely keen to get out to our annual monitoring sites in 2021 to see what was going on. Our first trip out, up to North Devon as it happened, suggested a good year could be on the cards, with good occupancy rates and promising brood sizes. As is often the case however, brood size generally decreased as the season wore on, although occupancy rates remained high.

Nevertheless, as you can see from the results, both nesting occupancy and brood size were very slightly above the long-term average. However, the absence rate was also above the average, meaning many sites were left untenanted.

It's not unusual for productivity to vary from year-to-year within populations, particularly for a specialist predator like the Barn Owl, whose diet consist mainly of 3 species of small mammal. Prey populations themselves fluctuate naturally both within and between years. This obviously exerts an influence on the success of the breeding population.

What is far less natural is the influence exerted by the effects of man-made climate change; extreme weather events such as spring/summer droughts, autumn storms and winter floods are forecast to increase in frequency.

Year	Nesting (%)	Mean brood size	Regular roosting (%)	Occasional roosting (%)	Absent (%)
Ave. 1990-2015	52%	2.9	14%	5%	29%
2007	58%	3.7	12%	4%	27%
2008	62%	2.6	11%	2%	25%
2009	61%	2.5	7%	3%	30%
2010	60%	2.35	12%	1%	27%
2011	42%	2.63	17%	5%	36%
2012	68%	3.23	6%	2%	25%
2013	17%	2.13	27%	14%	42%
2014	46%	4.15	12%	7%	35%
2015	59%	2.67	10%	1%	29%
2016	39%	2.42	17%	3%	42%
2017	48%	3.24	7%	11%	34%
2018	59%	3.0	0%	3%	38%
2019	43%	2.72	7%	4%	46%
2020	-	-	-	-	-
2021	54%	2.97	2%	6%	38%

Results of annual monitoring site visits in 2021, showing site status as a proportion of the total number of sites checked compared with the average, and mean brood size.

For a species like the Barn Owl, we're already beginning to see evidence that this won't be beneficial. It's therefore imperative that we do whatever we can to conserve the sites they use for roosting and nesting, the habitats they use to forage over and to address as far as possible the risks they face in their everyday lives.

Matthew Twiggs
Senior Conservation Officer



Charity Information

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Registered Charity number 299 835

BOT Environmental Enrolment Number 203 178

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 Simon Wilson (2000) Kevin Keatley (2010) Ed McNeil (2020) Hon Treasurer: Mark Pountney (2002)
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The stated objective of the Trust *'is to advance the conservation of wildlife, especially the Barn Owl and other endangered species, to provide them with a safe breeding environment, with the object of encouraging the re-creation and preservation of appropriate ecological conditions that they may be provided with the means to continue and flourish in as natural an environment as possible.'*

The main areas of the Trust's work are practical conservation, education, provision of information and research. The Trust also responds to live owl emergencies and provides a sanctuary and rehabilitation facility for injured owls. The Trust became a registered charity in 1988.

Practical conservation and rehabilitation work takes place in South West England (mainly Devon and Cornwall), but all other areas of work have national (and sometimes international) significance: e.g. the free information and advice service is available by post, email, telephone and via the worldwide web. Our research work is relevant throughout the UK and beyond.

The Trust also owns 26 acres of land purchased with a legacy and known as the Lennon Legacy Project, this is managed entirely for wildlife. What was once intensively grazed pasture has become a haven for birds, butterflies, flowers and insects under BOT management. Monitoring and recording the ever-increasing biodiversity and promoting habitat creation by others is a significant part of the Trust's work.

TRUST STAFF

OFFICE MANAGER : Jackie Atkinson
 HEAD OF CONSERVATION : David Ramsden MBE
 SENIOR CONSERVATION OFFICER : Matthew Twiggs
 CONSERVATION OFFICER : Rick Lockwood
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 SCHOOL VISITS/TALKS : David Ramsden
 Mateo Ruiz
 Rick Lockwood
 ACCOUNTS : Frances Ramsden

COMPUTER/IT SUPPORT : Alan Lewis

TRUST VOLUNTEERS

HONORARY SOLICITORS : Wollen's
 VETS : Veterinary Hospital (Estover)
 BTO RINGING COORDINATOR : Keith Grant
 EDUCATION VOLUNTEER : Baley the Barn Owl
 LIVE OWL EMERGENCY HELP & OWL TRANSPORTATION : Margaret Rhodes
 PRACTICAL SUPPORT : Kim Baker
 Tony Hulatt
 FEEDBACK : Aaron Kitts
 Marianne Bryan
 Frances Ramsden
 GENERAL ASSISTANCE : Diane Baker
 Jayne Hartley
 Di Hawkings
 Kim & Ed McNeil
 Harry Hingston
 Michael Park
 Ambios Trainees
 Sandra Reardon
 Margaret Rhodes

Barn Owl Trust staff and volunteers often have several roles, only their main areas of work are listed here.

Conservation task helpers are not included but not forgotten.

* Indicates those leaving during the period of this report

BOT Environmental

BOT Environmental is an Enrolled Body under the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. It was set up in 1998 to allow the Trust to apply for grants from landfill operators who can give money to community or environmental projects rather than pay tax to central government. There was no BOT Environmental activity in the year and both the opening and the closing balance of the fund at the year end was £0.

Cover photo: Charlie Syme

Annual Report 2020 - 2021



Welcome to our Annual Review of the last financial year 2020 - 2021 and what a very strange year it was!

Dominated by Covid and lockdowns we began the year with most of our staff furloughed and just a small group working part-time from home to maintain core services like emergencies, enquiries and owl care. Our training courses, shop, talks and nestbox building were all suspended, affecting our income, but generous donations from supporters and the furlough scheme got us through.

In July we began reorganising the office to allow for social distancing and started to gradually bring staff back at least part-time, to maintain social distancing. In April the Winter Bird Crop seeds were sown by a contractor and in June another contractor created a new path in North Park and put up a new fence to separate our new rewinding area. We continued to update our monthly Wildlife Diary throughout the year to keep folk informed about happenings with the Lennon Legacy Project. In August we introduced an internet-based telephone system to enable staff to answer calls from home (01364 255 256) However, in deepest Devon the bandwidth can be challenging. Poor connectivity has also caused issues for staff trying to work remotely and has restricted some areas of work. By September we were able to reopen our online shop and start selling nestboxes again. Jasmin and Natasha our two nestbox builders excelled themselves and, despite 5 months with no sales, increased the number of boxes going out by 4% over the year.

The Conservation Team, mainly working from home, have been focused on developing a new 'remote' way to deliver our training courses in a modular fashion and we are hoping to get these on-line during the new financial year; filming for the modules was 'Covid safe'. Health and Safety concerns about lone working and Covid safety meant that most fieldwork and monitoring was cancelled during the year. However, in addition to maintaining the two websites (Barn Owl Trust and Barn Owl Survey) and dealing with enquiries we continued the 'Creeping Thistle Management Research Project' and we produced the 'State of the UK Barn Owl Population 2020' report for the 8th consecutive year, this was published in April 2021. Talks have continued via Zoom instead of face-to-face meetings. This does have the advantage that we can reach a much wider geographical area and in fact participants from around the world, including Africa and India attended a talk on the climate and ecological crisis by our Head of Conservation.

Management Information

The Barn Owl Trust was constituted in December 1987 and became a national registered charity in July 1988, it is governed by a Trust Deed. The objectives of the Trust, as stated in our Deed, are 'the conservation of wildlife, especially the Barn Owl and the preservation and re-creation of appropriate ecological conditions to provide a natural environment for wildlife to flourish'.

The Trust has five Trustees. The year of their appointment is listed next to their names in the Charity Information. New Trustees are chosen by the existing Trustees, when required, on the basis of their relevant expertise.

The number of Trustees is required to be between three and five, and in the event of the number falling below three the remaining Trustees may only act for the purpose of appointing additional Trustees and for no other purpose.

The Trustees have full and unrestricted powers of investing monies as decided by a majority. The Trustees have adopted a formal policy on general financial reserves (see page 16).

Day-to-day running of the Trust is the responsibility of the Management Team (Senior Staff) who are line-managed by and liaise regularly with individual Trustees and report at quarterly Trustees meetings. ★

Going forward we are working with the Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society on a trial project to minimise disturbance and reduce travel time when monitoring wild Barn Owl sites and also with a highway service provider on behalf of the Highways Agency to develop Barn Owl mitigation measures on trunk roads both of which will begin in the next financial year.

During the summer we produced an e-version of Feedback to keep in touch with our supporters that we could contact by email; this kept them up to date with what was happening at the Trust. In the autumn our previous annual report and Feedback 64 went out by both email and post, the post part was challenging due to social distancing and Covid safety, but we managed. To improve our poor internet connectivity, we have set up a Community Broadband Scheme with local residents to try and access government funding. However so far no luck, we'll keep you posted!

In August the Barn Owl Legacy Trust (BOLT) became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation – No:1190997 - and we began the process of transferring the Lennon Legacy Project land and the balance of the original legacy (2001) from BOT to BOLT. Trustees meetings for both charities have been held via Zoom during the year.

In November Trustee Chris Robinson retired after 25 years sterling service with the Trust, first from 1995 as our Education Advisor and since 2007 as a Trustee. Thank you, Chris, from all of us for all of your support over the years. We are delighted that Chris will continue as a BOLT Trustee. Ed McNeil joined as a new Trustee in November 2020.

We had planned for staff to resume working their normal hours after the Christmas break, but the second lockdown in January meant that almost everyone continued to be partially furloughed to keep numbers in the office down. As we go forward, where possible we have decided to continue some homeworking to cut down on travel time and expense and of course carbon emissions. In the office we have now introduced a 'bubble system' with staff covid-testing if they cross bubbles. This does mean that fieldwork, where lone working is not possible, can now be planned.

After a year of being dependent on the furlough scheme to help pay our staff, towards the end of the year we received a generous legacy which provided the financial security to move into the new year with more confidence than we had expected.

Having seen the effects of the pandemic on the entire world and being aware of the impending challenges of the climate and ecological crisis, we want to move forward into a new 'normal' rather than revert to the old one. The Barn Owl Trust has always worked to raise awareness of environmental issues and the links between all living things.

Things are changing rapidly and as reported by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) "Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history — and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts". "1,000,000 species threatened with extinction". "Current global response insufficient; 'Transformative changes' needed to restore and protect nature; Opposition from vested interests can be overcome for public good".

Sustainability must be the key to everything we do now, not just at work but in our whole lives. We will, as always continue to give environmental and ethical consideration to all of our activities and to the purchase of resources.

On behalf of all of the Trustees I would like to thank our staff, our volunteers and everyone who has supported us during this challenging year. We couldn't do this without you and *together we can make a world of difference*. Thank You All and stay safe.

Keith Grant Chair of Trustees, July 2020 ★



Conservation Report

Staffing through lockdown

The start of the financial year saw the Barn Owl Trust office closed throughout the first lockdown. However, a limited amount of homeworking enabled us to continue dealing with enquiries as best we could. As the year unfolded more staff hours were transferred from the government furlough scheme into new homeworking arrangements and although gradually more hours were worked at our offices, even by the year's end most conservation staff were working most of their hours at home.

Initially, staff were brought out of the furlough scheme to do specific tasks rather than resume all previous work. The system of 'Restricted Roles' finally ended at the year's close although with the pandemic still raging and with most hours still being worked at home, there was no 'return to normal'.

State of the UK Barn Owl Population 2020

The most up-to-date figures on the UK Barn Owl population were published in our report: State of the UK Barn Owl Population 2020 based on results provided by 29 independent monitoring groups who between them checked 3,234 potential nest sites. 2020 was a relatively poor year for Barn Owls. Overall, the number of nesting pairs was 8.5% lower than average and the average number of young in nests was 11.4% below average. This was the most negative change in brood size since State of the UK Barn Owl Population reports began in 2013.

Although large broods of eight and nine were recorded in Northumberland and Staffordshire, other nests were found to have failed at the egg stage in Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Derbyshire, and the Tees Valley.



A brood of eight in Northumberland Photo: Philip Hanmer

Met Office data for 2020 showed that 10 out of 12 months were warmer than usual, sometimes markedly so, and that rainfall went from one extreme to another over the course of the season. Although winter 2019/2020 was fairly mild, February was the wettest since 1862(!), which must have left some female owls struggling to reach breeding condition. April and May saw a six-week drought (with very high temperatures) which inhibited vegetation growth, almost certainly reducing Field Vole numbers resulting in poor prey delivery rates that contributed to compromised incubation or starving Barn Owl nestlings.

In June the pendulum swung, but too far, and owlets would have been growing and fledging in very wet conditions right through to September. In conclusion, a clear message came from groups in north Berkshire/south Buckinghamshire, Leicestershire, north Norfolk, Shropshire, Suffolk, Warwickshire and Yorkshire: 2020 was a very bad year, and in some cases the worst recorded so far.



An owlet in Northumberland being ringed Photo: Philip Hanmer

The Lennon Legacy Project – our nature reserve

Away from main roads with no traffic and urban conurbations with clean air, human lockdown made little difference to wildlife which carried on regardless. There were differences though, on our reserve, due to the Climate and Ecological Crisis.

As regular readers will know, we are extremely fortunate to have a 26-acre nature reserve thanks to the generosity of Ms Vivien Lennon, who remembered the Barn Owl Trust in her Will, and due (by chance or good fortune) to the land becoming available shortly afterwards.



Our 26-acre nature reserve (The Lennon Legacy Project) January 2021 Photo: David Ramsden

In an effort to sequester even more atmospheric carbon, we decided to 'rewild' our steepest and most overgrown acre of grassland and allow it to develop into the woodland it so desperately wanted to be. As soon as lockdown restrictions allowed, a group of willing volunteers turned up to give it a helping hand by planting 140 native trees in gaps between the wild saplings.

In an effort to reduce soil-carbon emissions, we decided not to plough our 2.5 acres of Winter Bird Food Crop but rather to employ a no-tillage method using a contractor to rake, seed, and roll the soil surface. Unfortunately, it was not the success we'd hoped for! No-tillage methods are usually used after spraying with glyphosate to kill all other vegetation. We didn't do that and before most of our seeds had a chance to get away they were swamped by a thick carpet of Creeping Buttercup, some use for pollinators but no use for over-wintering finches. We did have a crop of sorts but only enough to support about 10% of the birds we were expecting.



A new fence protects our rewilding area

Photo: David Ramsden

On the plus side, our rough grassland looked fantastic once again with good numbers of wild flowers and butterflies, lots of signs of small mammal activity, and nesting Skylarks for the 4th year in a row no doubt attracted by the stacks of invertebrates it supports. We also managed to continue our 'Creeping Thistle Management' research project with thistle-counting and a variety of treatments in 36 10-metre squares, and our weekly butterfly transect surveys.



One of the many Marbled White butterflies counted on our weekly transect which continued despite Lockdown

Photo: Tom Williams

Core activities

Incoming owls

Through the first lockdown, the roads were so quiet that fewer Barn Owls were being injured and found. In fact, from the beginning of March until mid-June we received none. Then came a fallen owl and four more young Barn Owls arrived from the RSPCA which we released in August and September. Another four Barn Owls were brought in starving two of which were also injured. Sadly, only one of the four survived and was successfully released from one of our three Mobile Aviaries.

Fieldwork trips

Other than emergency owl rescues, no fieldwork trips were conducted though the whole year which is absolutely unheard of here at the Trust. Sadly, our advisory trip to Ulster Wildlife Trust had to be postponed.

Events

All planned events were called off although our Head of Conservation did manage to deliver his talk 'Climate and Ecological Crisis? What's all the fuss about?' via Zoom for the first time, and a further eight times during the year. These included a presentation to the Rotary Club of Edgware and Stanmore attended by Rotarians from Thane in India with invited guests from a wide range of African and the Caribbean countries.

Training

Needless to say, not one of our foundation and advanced courses for Ecological Consultants was run; this had a huge impact on the Trust's income and a significant impact on the 'industry', given that we are way-and-above the main training provider in the UK.

Having made the decision to take our foundation training course online, we spent quite a while researching the best way to do it – no easy task given the hands-on nature, both of the course and of Barn Owl surveying. Eventually we decided on a combination of short videos, voiceovers, and frequent re-cap questions delivered in five modules.

At the year's end the five modules had content-plans, a great deal of filming had been completed, and voiceover recording was well underway.



Work on our new online training courses included the creation of numerous short videos including the use of a drone-mounted camera to capture a birds-eye view of habitats and landscapes.

Photo: David Ramsden

Annual Reports such as these cannot possibly convey how much work goes on, even in times of lockdown. Thanks to our wonderful staff and volunteers all emergencies were responded to, our owl care continued, and even our enquiry service.

We would all like to express our sincere gratitude to all our supporters without whom none of this work could have been carried out. Thank you very much indeed.

David Ramsden MBE
Head of Conservation ★



A rehabilitated Barn Owl released on 13th January 2021

Photo: David Ramsden



Financial Report

After a very strange year with an often-deserted office, staff homeworking and several of our income streams completely disappearing it is rather wonderful to report that we ended the year with a surplus.

As you will see from the 'Statement of Financial Activity' (SOFA) we ended the year with a net surplus of £22,246 compared to the previous year's net deficit of £40,021. The total incoming resources for the year to 31 March 2021 were £432,896 (2020 - £307,159) an increase of £125,737, +40%. This was in the main due to a significant legacy received at the year end and the furlough payments which supported our staff for much of the year.

Income from grants, legacies and donations saw an increase of 113% on the previous year at £341,755 (2020 - £160,587) accounting for 79% of total income (2020 - 52%). Our restricted grants in the year dropped to £1,281 from £24,950 in 2020 but unrestricted donations from Charitable Trusts was up 19% at £18,000 (£15,095). We still have restricted funds towards an electric vehicle but raising the balance needed was put on hold during the year. We saw a 27% increase in individual donations to £47,630 and our Friends scheme remained relatively stable. We did see a 9% drop in income from Adoptions as we didn't have staff available to send out reminders. Volunteer fund-raising also decreased by a dramatic 48% to £857 (2020 - £1,640).

Legacy and gifts in memoriam income were up 180% at £120,756 (£41,626) together accounting for 28% of total income for the year (2020 - 14%). We are always extremely grateful for the legacies and the gifts in memoriam we receive.

It is previous years' legacies that enable us to bridge the difference between our income and our expenditure and to have the reserves to survive the years we have a deficit. Legacies not only enable the Trust to continue to achieve so much of our general conservation work, but they also allow us to invest in special projects including the Kingfisher wall, the building of our new website, the purchase of the Lennon Legacy Project land, the creation of the two ponds in the LLP, the Meeting Room and the Solar Project.

Our income from our charitable activities, which enables us to be less dependent on grant and legacy income, has been severely affected by the pandemic and lockdowns. Although our income from nestbox sales was just 2% less than 2020 at £62,878 (2020 - £64,332) we had no income at all from training courses which generated £38,988 in the previous year.

Our fundraising income was just 29% of 2020 at £902 (£3,162) most of which came from our Annual Draw. Income from sales goods was also down by 49% - £6,892 (£13,497). Our solar panels generated £4,785 (2020 - £4,318) an increase of 11%.

Our overall expenditure increased by 18% to £410,104 (2020- £347,180). Expenditure on Charitable Activities was mainly responsible for this increase due to the transfer of assets to BOLT which can be seen under 'Grants and Donations' - £106,960. If the transfer figure is removed the cost of Charitable Activities for the year is 12% less than the previous year - £290,134.

The cost of practical work decreased by 11% to £149,748 (2020 - £168,345). The information and advice service costs also decreased by 14% to £87,941 (2020 - £101,845). These savings were due in part to the pandemic curtailing our activities and one less part-time admin post when one of our staff retired during the year and wasn't replaced. Salaries did not increase during the year.

The cost of fundraising decreased by 13%. Fundraising accounts for about 3% of our total expenditure, and includes time spent applying for grants. We spent 57% less on promotional goods £2,639 (£6,116).

Support costs include telephone, repairs, overheads such as insurance, water & electricity, stationery, management, payroll, and

Continued on page 7

THE BARN OWL TRUST

BALANCE SHEET

AS AT 31st MARCH 2020

		2021		2020	
	Notes	£	£	£	£
Fixed assets					
Tangible assets	5		36,306		130,424
Current assets					
Stock	6	15,025		15,447	
Debtors	7	5,188		1,251	
Cash at bank and in hand			548,179		427,670
			568,392		444,368
Liabilities					
Creditors - Amounts falling due within one year	8	17,909		10,795	
Net current assets			550,483		433,573
Net assets			586,789		563,997
The funds of the charity:					
Unrestricted funds	9		547,482		504,899
Restricted funds	10		39,307		59,098
Total charity funds			586,789		563,997

SOFA Note 2.

Income

(a) Donations and legacies:

	2021	2020
	£	£
Grants and donations	220,999	118,961
Legacies	120,756	41,626
	341,755	160,587

(b) Charitable activities:

	2021	2020
	£	£
Nestboxes	62,878	64,332
Training courses	-	38,988
Other	14,703	21,065
	77,581	124,385

(c) Other trading activities:

	2021	2020
	£	£
Fundraising	902	3,162
Promotional goods	6,897	13,497
	7,799	16,659

(d) Other income:

	2021	2020
	£	£
Solar generation	4,785	4,318
Bank interest	756	992
Other	220	218
Sale of fixed assets	-	-
	5,761	5,528

432,896 307,159

S.O.F.A. Statement of financial activity



	Notes	Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total 2021 £	Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total 2020 £
Income from:							
Donations and legacies	2	247,907	93,848	341,755	135,637	24,950	160,587
Charitable activities	2	77,581	-	77,581	124,385	-	124,385
Other trading activities	2	7,799	-	7,799	16,659	-	16,659
Other Income	2	5,761	-	5,761	5,528	-	5,528
Total		339,048	93,948	432,896	282,209	24,950	307,159
Expenditure on:							
Raising funds	3	8,909	4,101	13,010	16,907	-	16,907
Charitable activities	3	307,893	89,201	397,094	325,171	5,102	330,273
Total		316,802	93,302	410,104	342,078	5,102	347,180
Net (expenditure)/income		22,246	546	22,792	(59,869)	19,848	(40,021)
Transfers between funds		20,337	(20,337)	-	17,014	(17,014)	-
Net movement in funds		42,583	(19,791)	22,792	(42,855)	2,834	(40,021)
Reconciliation of funds:							
Total funds brought forward		504,899	59,098	563,997	547,754	56,264	604,018
Total funds carried forward		547,482	39,307	586,789	504,899	59,098	563,997

Financial Report continued

office cleaning. These necessary costs have decreased by 9% over the year to £21,059 (2020 - £23,223) and account for 5% of expenditure.

Because of our volunteers we are able to keep our management costs at just 2.7% of total spend £10,934 (2020 - £8,054). Volunteers continue to be an invaluable asset to the Trust, assisting in every aspect of the work including practical tasks, administration, clerical work, and fundraising, as well as the provision of professional services.

Of the unrestricted funds available to the Trust, the Trustees have allocated £322,740 as a reserve for the next financial year, and £3,000 for other projects, leaving a general fund of £221,742 (2020 - £131,045). However, our fixed assets and stock account for £54,332 of this and in light of the regular shortfall in income vs. expenditure (excluding legacies) we expect to have to start drawing on these reserves as we bring staff back from furlough.

The Trustees continue to look carefully at all outgoings, it is a difficult balance - holding reserves to ensure you can continue through the lean times often makes your appeals to Charitable Trusts less attractive than those from charities with smaller reserves, particularly in difficult economic times.

It is these reserves that will allow us to continue in these post lockdown times and work out a way forward.

SOFA Note 3

Expenditure

	Activities Undertaken Directly £	Governance and Support Costs £	Total 2021 £	Total 2020 £
Raising funds:				
Fundraising	10,371	-	10,371	10,791
Promotional goods	2,639	-	2,639	6,116
	13,010	-	13,010	16,907
Charitable activities:				
Nestboxes	29,380	-	29,380	29,244
Training course	761	-	761	5,626
Practical work	149,748	-	149,748	168,345
Information and advice	87,941	-	87,941	101,845
Grants and donations	106,960	-	106,960	1,000
Support costs	-	21,059	21,059	23,223
Independent examination	-	1,245	1,245	990
	374,790	22,304	397,094	330,273
	387,800	22,304	410,104	347,180

Mark Pountney MAAT - Honorary Treasurer



Thank You

We are very grateful to the following charities, businesses and other organisations that have supported our work with grants, sponsorship or donations in kind during this financial year. Thank you!

Alice Noakes Memorial Trust
Blair Foundation
Charles Chadwyck-Healy Charitable Settlement
Cobalt Trust
Devon Birdwatching & Preservation Society
Dumbreck Charity
Ecclesiastical Insurance Office
Joan Cullen Charitable Trust
John Swire 1989 Charitable Trust
Keith Ewart Charitable Trust

Martin Wills Fund
May 1961 Charitable Trust
Mitchell Trust
Offenheim Charitable Trust
Scott (Eredine) Charitable Trust
UK Tea Academy
Verdon Smith
Veterinary Hospital Group
Walker Animal Trust
Walter Guinness Charitable Trust
Wildlife Watching Supplies

During this period we received legacies from:

Gloria Hazeldene Gertrude Morris, Susan Beardsley, M J & R W Curtis,
Martin Hallam, Barbara Lucas and Elizabeth Mary Knibbs

and Gifts in Memory of:

Alec Hutchison, Andrew Hill, Andrew Moss, Barnaby Taggart, Beryl Welsh, Betty Cox, Brenda Frances Weinand,
Christopher Mark Spiller, Connie Whybrow, Edna May Richards, Howard Kirk, John Colebrook,
John Webb, Keith Lynn, Marjorie Tame, Mary Yonge, Maureen Basford, Paul Yells, Peter Ronald Thurston
Ray Gunner, Shaun Armstrong and Winifred Sparkes.

Rest in peace



Photo: Peter Warne

Donations from sponsored events and other fund-raising were received from:
Rainham Community Orchard Kent,
Sharon James, Jean Jackson, Henry Bellamy, Shelley Wright & Tracey Morris,
the Axe Valley Runners -The Grizzly Run,
and Margaret & Derrick Crocker

Thank you all so much for your support

Judith's Ringing Journal

"Bird ringing is not just about putting rings on birds and taking biometrics."

Just a quick resume about the training process. A person wishing to train would firstly need to find a trainer. This can be done by word of mouth or visiting the BTO web page and checking under 'Find a Trainer'. Training has been hampered by Covid as trainer and trainee work in close proximity to each other. Generally there will be a trial period to find out if everyone gets on well together. Trainer and trainee spend a lot of time together, often at unsociable hours and possibly in remote locations. Anyone considering training should be aware that it can take several years to reach the next level. It can be very early mornings (Slapton can start at 5.00 a.m. during June and July) so the trainee will probably need their own transport. Not that anyone should be put off but these are important considerations.



Once both trainer and trainee are confident about the trainee's level of skill and confidence the trainee can go forward for a C permit. An independent trainer will do an assessment over several ringing sessions. Obtaining a C permit means that the ringer can ring on their own but will remain the responsibility of their trainer and is required to ring with the trainer on a regular basis. To reach this level takes the minimum of a year. In reality it will probably be 2 or 3 years. It will depend on the amount of time spent training and the capability of the trainee. Progression to the next stage will generally take about two years. Again it depends on the amount of time spent ringing, ability and confidence. The C permit holder will ideally need to attend a ringing course for assessment. Hopefully, at the end of this they will be recommended for an A permit. An A permit means that the individual ringer is responsible for their own ringing, equipment, permissions and submitting their records to the BTO.

Hopefully this gives an idea as to the training process. I have not done much ringing over the last few months. However, I am looking to the autumn migration and getting the nets up again!

If you are mist netting one of the first considerations is where the net is going to go. As a general rule there needs to be a hedge or tall vegetation to one side of it so that the net does not stand out like a sore thumb. On the other hand you do not want the net amongst tall trees as the birds will just move in the tops of the tree and not drop down to the net. Look at a couple of examples.

In my garden the net runs down the side of the lawn so that there is a flower bed and 5' hedge behind it with an apple tree towards one end. The birds do move in the top of the apple tree but feeders attract them down below the height of the net. In this case maintenance is limited to trimming back branches that

overhang the net and cutting back the brambles in the flowerbed. It is a different story at Slapton. Here the nets are set mostly in reed beds. Where the net is put up is known as a ride. Firstly, the rides need to be cut out. There needs to be enough space for the ringer to work but if the ride is too wide the birds will see the net and avoid it. Once that has been done pallets are laid down to give a firm surface to work from. These are brought in at the end of each season and put out again at the start of the next to stop them rotting and, more to the point, floating away. On a regular basis during the ringing season (May to October) the reeds need to be trimmed back as they fall in across the ride.

There is quite a bit of equipment required for any ringing operation. To go with the net, poles are needed together with ground pegs and guy ropes. Then there is a completely different set of equipment needed to actually process the birds. Ignoring the rings for the time being, the most essential tools are a set of small ringing pliers which will close ring sizes AA, A, B, C, CC and D. If you are doing sea birds or bigger birds there are a larger pair of pliers for this task. Other necessary tools are a wing rule, digital scales and a weighing pot - an old film cannister is perfect for most small birds. After that you will see a variety of adapted pots - baking powder pots and Pringle pots to name just a couple! A pair of circlips, just in case something goes wrong and you have to remove a ring safely. Bird bags, of various sizes can either be bought or made using a breathable material. Then a ringing book to record the information plus pens. The ringer also buys the rings from the BTO. So, as you can see, ringing is not a cheap interest.

However, the good news! When you start to train to ring you will be using your trainer's equipment and personal items can be obtained gradually.

Judith Read

Admin Assistant & BTO Ringer

Judith retired at the end of August and wrote this just before she left us:

I never dreamt when I joined the Barn Owl Trust in 2015 that I would be here 6 years later! Initially I was sending out Legacy packs to Solicitors, Undertakers and anyone else I could think of. The challenge became how many packs could be sent out in a week as legacies, hopefully, do not arrive until year's later.

In a slight re-shuffle I moved over to the Admin team. Well, that was a challenge! I learnt about spreadsheets and formulas. In the meantime Fran learnt just how much of a mess I could make of them! We have all survived (including the spreadsheets) and I am still finding out new things. There are many more elements to this job and it is a good team to work with.

Then there are the owls. There is nothing better in the spring than hearing all the resident birds hissing and calling to each other. During the breeding season I was lucky to be able to go out with the Conservation Team to ring Barn Owls and help Rick to achieve his C permit which was a real pleasure.

Now it is time to move on. There is plenty to keep me busy - a garden that needs lots of attention, wool to spin, miles to walk and, of course, birds to ring. I am looking forward to it.

Thank you to everyone at the Trust for putting up with me and for being so welcoming to Midge and Fizz. They will certainly miss all the extra biscuits! No doubt we will be back to help in some volunteer capacity.

Judith

The Owly Inbox

Barn Owls in Scotland?

The following correspondence just goes to show that one can never be too certain about where Barn Owls will take up residence. We exchanged the following emails in mid-January 2021:

*Hello,
I live in Scotland (in Balquhiddy on the borders of Perth and Stirling), and a barn owl has been visiting our stable (I have found the pellets). I would like to put up a nestbox, but the building is only 3m high, so the bottom of the nestbox would only be 2m high. All of your guidance says a minimum of 3m above ground, so would I be wasting my time? There are no other barns close by (within a kilometre) which would be suitable. Many thanks for any advice.*

*Hello,
Given the location and the fact that the Barn Owl has already been visiting the stable, I recommend you go ahead and erect a nestbox there. Interestingly, our online Barn Owl survey webpage only has one record of a Barn Owl within a 20 km radius of where you are. If a breeding pair could establish there it could lead to new recruits populating the locality. In fact, we would be very grateful if you could record your observation on the survey webpage at the following link:
<https://www.barnowlsurvey.org.uk/>*

*Best wishes and good luck with the nestbox.
Mateo*



Aerial photo of Balquhiddy, Scotland

The Barn Owl roosting and foraging in this upland landscape may not have many of its kind nearby. However, one possible consequence of global warming could be that the owls begin to breed at higher altitudes than was previously possible. The satellite image is provided by Google and spans just less than 5 miles from north to south.

Our contact duly logged their location on the survey webpage and sent some photos they'd managed to snap of a male Barn Owl

in the stable. Then, in early February we received the following, along with a video clip of the owl delivering a dead vole to the new nestbox:

*Mateo,
Thank you so much for your advice. Even though the box is only just a couple of metres up, we seem to have been successful.....! As has he.*

And our reply:

*Hello,
Congratulations on your new box being occupied so quickly, that's fantastic! Many thanks for sharing the video clips, too, which are very promising: Taking food to a potential nest site is an indicator that this owl certainly has aspirations!*

As the sole hunter during incubation and brooding, a male Barn Owl must demonstrate their capabilities by bringing food to the nest site during courtship. Let's hope the situation develops as the days lengthen...

Best wishes and many thanks for your generous support for the Trust.

Mateo

Owl in the Chimney



*Tawny Owl covered in soot after rescue
Photo Provided*

Dear Barn Owl Trust,

We just wanted to thank you for your advice and to let you know that the little Tawny Owl is fine after being rescued from the chimney, although smoky and sooty. After a thorough check up at the vet, it was recommended he undergoes rehabilitation at a local owl sanctuary so we drove him there, had a very interesting visit and we will be hearing back about his progress and when he will be ready to be released back into our area. The people we met there are amazing, and by coincidence the Penzance vet used to work there too so they were all so kind and knowledgeable, we learnt a lot!

Even though we have an "H" top on our chimney which is supposed to be bird proof, we are going to install an owl house so that he has a safer perch when he returns, if he stays in this area as you indicated.

Marie & Herbert

More Owly Inbox News

Nature Stars

During the first lockdown of 2020, brothers Henry (9), Arthur (6) and Edward (2) started doing regular litter-picks, clearing the countryside verges of years of discarded rubbish in their local village in Suffolk. They recently got in touch to tell us all about their conservation efforts!

Having always been interested in wildlife, they spent a lot of lockdown in their garden and meadow, identifying wildflowers, birds, butterflies and other insects and various grasses. They built bug hotels and made deadwood piles and were thrilled when they started to see their wild areas attract different creatures. Over the summer of 2020, they decided that it would be good to try and spread the word about how to make your garden more nature-friendly and asked for a slot in the local, quarterly parish magazine, which covers three surrounding villages.



*From left to right, Henry, Edward and Arthur
Photo Provided*

Their first article received much interest and praise from locals. It included wildlife advice, photographs of their litter-picking success and also their own wildlife artwork. During December of 2020, they placed a notice board at the end of the driveway and called themselves Colnet Conservation. The notice board included their newsletter article, plus further wildlife gardening advice, artwork, photographs and a list of local wildlife sightings. The notice board has become an attraction to both locals and people visiting the area, including cyclists from across the county.

Henry and Arthur update the board on a regular basis and very much enjoy telling people about what they have been doing to help nature. Arthur even made a lovely Barn Owl print at school. The feedback has been wonderfully encouraging, (including a lovely letter from Sir David Attenborough!) and they are keen to keep spreading the word about the importance of nature.

A big well done to Henry, Arthur and Edward!



Arthur's amazing Barn Owl Print

Nestbox Success



Photo: Peter Saunderson

Hello Barn Owl Trust,

I got in touch when I noticed we had two Barn Owls in the area and, after speaking to one of your experts about the fact they were living in a tree, I downloaded your plans and built a nest box for them.

It was a big effort to get the box where I wanted it as I am nearly seventy and not good at climbing trees. Luckily, I was helped by a wildlife photographer and between us we fixed the box to the trunk.

However, we are quite high up in the Pennines and the following day the weather turned bad, we got the lot: snow, ice, high winds, hail, you name it. The owls disappeared and I thought I had been too late, then early one morning I was walking the moor in the dark and I noticed a strange pale blob on the landing ledge of the box. As I got nearer it became clear it was a Barn Owl stretching this way and that, another owl came out of the box and joined in and then they both went back into the box.

I see them regularly now before dawn just standing on the ledge, then, as soon as the sun starts to rise, they go into the box.

They seem comfortable in their new home, so hopefully they will stick around.

Peter, Huddersfield

Get in Touch

We love sharing news from our supporters!

Have you had an owl encounter you'd like to tell us about?

Have you installed or made a Barn Owl nestbox, managed to capture a Barn Owl on camera, fundraised for the Barn Owl Trust or perhaps helped an owl in need?

We would love to hear from you!

Please get in touch at: info@barnowltrust.org.uk.

Perhaps your story could be featured in the next issue of our Feedback magazine?

Team Talk - Many Changes



Jackie at her farewell party
Photo: BOT Staff

The Barn Owl Trust was sad to say farewell to our Office Manager, Jackie Atkinson, who retired in July. Jackie had been with the Trust for 12 years and has been a great administrator for the organisation. An inveterate traveller, Jackie has visited many exotic places over the years and has kept us entertained with the stories of her travels to places far afield, including the Trans-Siberian Railway, South America and the Galapagos Islands. She is very much looking forward to further travelling in her retirement and also having more time to do her own thing.

We held a retirement 'do' for Jackie in July, just after the lifting of the Covid restrictions, and presented her with a hamper of travel related goodies and some flowers. We sent her off with our good wishes for a happy retirement. She will be missed by everyone at BOT, but assures us she will be returning occasionally as a volunteer. Good luck, Jackie, and enjoy your retirement!

We also said goodbye to Judith Read when she retired at the end of August. Judith joined BOT in 2015 and worked as part of the Admin team for two days a week. She is a registered BTO ringer and trainer and will now have more time to spend with the birds and her dogs Midge and Fizz who came to work with her.



Happy retirement to Judith
Photo: BOT Staff

Judith has written the item about ringing on page 15 along with a note about her time here. We were delighted to hear that Judith intends to come back and volunteer with BOT in the future and will of course be bringing Midge and Fizz back to see us.

As if that wasn't enough, Aaron Kitts who had been with us for over six years, also left in August when he was 'head-hunted' by another charity in Devon. Aaron who was our only full-time member of the Admin team has been a real keystone, particularly during Covid and Lockdown. He will be truly missed. We wish both him and Judith all the very best in their new ventures.



Goodbye to Aaron
Photo: BOT Staff

On a positive note, Gill Gant, who has worked for the Trust for the past two and a half years as part of the Admin team, has taken on the Office Manager role. Prior to working here Gill worked for the NHS as a podiatrist, a manager, and latterly a director in Clinical Commissioning. She also trained to be an independent civil celebrant. Gill shadowed Jackie for her last 3 months here and is very much looking forward to leading the Admin team into the post-Pandemic future.

In September Lisa Fordham, who has worked for the Trust one day a week since November 2018 as our Legacy Support Officer, increased her days to two to enable her to help with publications.

We've had two new staff join us since the last issue of Feedback. In June, Nathan Giles became part of the Nestbox team. Nathan is an experienced woodworker and joined Jasmin and Natasha in the barn to build our high quality nestboxes. Sales of our boxes restarted last Autumn, which was very good news for the Trust and for Owls across the UK.

In August Anne-Marie Glenn joined the Admin and Reception team. Anne-Marie is a very experienced administrator recently returned from living and working abroad. She and her lovely dog, Bentley, are now working in the office four days a week. Anne-Marie introduces herself on the next page.

Returning to the office after Lockdown has been a gradual process with staff 'bubbling' and regular testing. Where possible, some homeworking has continued, but the nature of many of our tasks and our poor broadband connection does limit this to some extent. We no longer share workstations and are now using our Meeting Room as 'desk space' to allow staff to maintain social distancing. Sanitisation of shared resources is part of our Risk Assessment protocol.

Being well ventilated in the summer is easy with doors and windows open to the the elements. The winter is likely to be more challenging!

Team Talk



*Welcome Anne-Marie
Photo: Provided*

Hello!

I recently had the pleasure of joining the Barn Owl Trust as an Administrative Assistant; my main duties include dealing with public enquiries, working on Friends and Adoption schemes and helping with fundraising alongside a variety of other responsibilities. My dog Bentley is able to come to work with me and spends most of the day dozing under the desk.

I was born and raised in Brighton and Hove, which I miss dearly, but in my late teens I left to go to the University of Plymouth which I enjoyed immensely. In 2010-2011, I took an Industry year as part of my degree where I volunteered abroad in both Australia and Malawi, working with rescued marsupials and primates respectively, as well as spending some additional time at the end of each placement travelling around both countries.

I graduated in 2012 with a First-Class honours in Animal Behaviour and Welfare; unfortunately I found the job market quite harsh after I left university so in 2014 I made the decision to move to Malawi to volunteer with an animal welfare organisation called LSPCA, which ran a rescue shelter for dogs and cats, as well as a private veterinary clinic.

Every August, LSPCA would carry out a Rabies Vaccination programme whereby a team of 100 people would strategically work their way through the Capital City vaccinating any stray and owned dogs or cats for free. The days were long and the welfare of these animals was poor but personally, I always looked forward to this time of the year as it was a great way to get to know the true Malawi and its citizens. In 2015 I was offered a job at the organisation and by 2017, I was heading up the clinic's reception, supporting the local and international volunteers as well as managing the rescue shelter.

In 2020, I made the decision to move back to the UK, but due to COVID-19, wasn't able to physically move back until June 2021. I now live in Newton Abbot and am excited to begin a new chapter in the countryside!

I love photography and walking so I hope to spend many days on Dartmoor taking photos of the breath-taking views. Saying that, I am cheekily enjoying all the UK luxuries including Netflix, Spotify and endless internet! Moreover, I am looking forward to becoming a well-established team member at the Barn Owl Trust and getting to know all of our supporters and friends!

Anne-Marie Glenn
Administrative Assistant

Trustee News

After 13 years as a Barn Owl Trust Trustee Chris Robinson retired in November 2020. Chris, then a teacher governor at a local primary school, attended her first BOT Sponsored Walk in 1992 with a group of children. She and her pupils organised and maintained a small area of ancient willow coppice with stream as a wildlife habitat. Her classroom acted as a bird hide with a winter bird count of over 30 species. Ex-pupils still comment on the fact that work would stop if a new bird or new bird behaviour was spotted. She encouraged the use of school grounds as a cross-curricular outdoor classroom long before it became mainstream.

In 1995 she began regularly attending Trustee Meetings as our Education Advisor and helped develop our first 'School Pack' and in 2007 she became a Trustee. She also participated in both the Devon and Cornwall Barn Owl surveys. We are all very grateful to Chris for her input over the years and are delighted that she will continue her involvement as a Trustee of BOLT (Barn Owl Legacy Trust).



*Former BOT Trustee, now BOLT Trustee, Chris Robinson
Photo: BOT Staff*

Ed McNeil became a Barn Owl Trust Trustee in November 2020, taking over from Chris. Ed is a Geordie who lived and worked in Australia and London for some years before coming to live in Devon. He has worked in a variety of areas, mainly in the public sector, ranging from buying electronics for the Phantom fighter/bomber, to finishing as a manager in the Devon Fire and Rescue Service.

Ed's involvement in the voluntary sector has included serving as a magistrate throughout the 1990's and working as a volunteer in the FORCE cancer support centre in Exeter for five years.

He became interested in the natural world at about the age of 12, with a particular interest in birdwatching, which has continued to the present day. A long-time keen gardener, he and his wife Kim now devote their efforts to making their garden as wildlife friendly as possible. Ed and his partner Kim became supporters of the Trust in 2003 and since then have attended many events and helped with lots of BOT tasks including packing our Feedback magazine.



*New Trustee Ed McNeil
Photo provided*

Thanks and Things

We would like to say a big thank you to all our wonderful supporters who have sent us bits for recycling, prizes for our annual draw, donated goods to sell and raise funds and items from our Wants List. Thank you so much for all your support:

Bamboo Clothing, Bill Bishop, Helen Broughton, Carol Courtier, Hilary Jane Davies, Keith Elworthy, Jude Gourd, Anne Harding, Pat Herissier, Simon Howell, Margaret Huggins, Honey Ingram, Kim & Ed McNeil, Nigel Morley, Annie Rhodes, Edward Righton, Guy Ropner, Janet Rutter, Pat Taylor, Western Power & Brooks Williams.

We are so thankful to have some amazing volunteers who kindly give up their time to help at the Trust:

Ambios Volunteers, Kim Baker, Mark Dyer, Harry Hingston, Tony Hulatt, Michael Parks & Celia Westrip.

Special thanks must go to our inspirational fundraisers:

Hilary Audus gave us a donation from the sale of her Barn Owl sculptures, Nigel Morley raised funds from a small artists show and Tracey Morris & Shelley Wright sold more of their wonderful owl mug cosies!

A big thank you to City Vets (Exeter), Estover Vets (Plymouth) and Westmoor Vets (Tavistock) for treating injured Barn Owls.

All support really is greatly appreciated - please take a look at our current Wants List opposite - Thank You.

Can you help with:

- Used stamps, including any foreign stamps & currency
- Postcards and pre1970 envelopes with stamps on
- 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 25 x 50mm tanalised batten
- A4/A3 recycled paper/card both coloured and white
- Padded envelopes (new or used)
- Waders - any over size 7
- Old newspapers (for owl boxes in our Bird Room)
- 2 covers for 50mm tow-balls
- Brightly coloured ripstock material for banner printing
- Outdoor PIR sensor LED lights (small)
- Socket set (48 pc 1/2 inch drive)
- Extra long drill bits (3,4 & 5mm)
- Wire cutters
- Quick grip clamps
- Caravan levelling ramps (for our new trailer)
- Box Trailer (minimum 2.4m x 1.5m x 1.8m high)
- 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 ...



So far this September the weather has been more like summer than August was here. This morning I was up in the Trust's nature reserve looking for Tony who was checking our Dormouse boxes. Unfortunately, he didn't find any and this is reflected in the other sites he checks. Apparently, they were adversely affected by the unusually cold April and May this year!

Anyway, the land was beautiful, the air almost still, the sun shining, the birds singing and flying up out of the grass which is mainly brown and full of seed. The trees, except the Ash, are still in full leaf but just starting to turn and it was just me and the natural world. A chance to enjoy a special moment. What a wonderful planet we have.

Unfortunately, it's not this beautiful everywhere. Earlier this month I was doing some research for an event and looking at the instances of wildfires and floods around the World in just July and August. Of course, almost everyone knows of the wildfires in Canada, California and Southern Europe, the flooding in New York, Germany, London and the subway in China because those stories, briefly, made our national news. But when you start to look into it, here in the UK we have been incredibly lucky. Every day somewhere on the planet there have been major floods and fires that have destroyed lives and property and killed vast numbers of wildlife which rarely gets a mention.

In the USA as of September 14th, the National Interagency Fire Centre (NIFC) reported that 44,647 wildfires in the United States had burned 5.6 million acres of land. Just for comparison, England is 32.19 million acres so that's equivalent to an area the size of 17%+ of England being burned this year! And the fires raging in Siberia are bigger than fires in Greece, Turkey, Italy, the United States and Canada combined.

In July, 'FloodList' recorded 920 deaths and 124 flood events across 385 locations in more than 20 countries. In August, France, Spain, Turkey, Malaysia, and West and Central Africa were amongst the places affected. In September, India, southern France, Sudan, and NE USA were impacted, also Mexico where 17 people died in a hospital that flooded.

In August, the United Nations said, "Human-induced climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. Many of these changes are unprecedented, and some of the shifts are in motion now, while some - such as continued sea level rise - are already 'irreversible' for centuries to millennia, ahead. But there is still time to limit climate change, IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) experts say. Strong and sustained reductions in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2) and other greenhouse gases, could quickly make air quality better, and in 20 to 30 years global temperatures could stabilise".

With COP26 in Glasgow on the horizon we can only hope that World leaders hear and heed the message that urgent action is needed now. We all need to do what we can to reduce our emissions but without huge economic, political, and social changes internationally the chances of seeing the changes needed are extremely slim.

Many people say, "What about China?" Well, consumerism in the first world has fuelled the growth of Chinese emissions; we buy from them because they produce products cheaper than we can. Unfortunately, the cost of cheap imports is 'costing the Earth'.

By thinking about what you buy and where it comes from you can have an effect. Do you really need whatever it is? If you do, can you get it second hand or source it locally?

The shortage of lorry drivers and the current scares about gas prices should help to drive home the message that we need to develop sustainable systems and stop measuring success as continuous economic growth.

If you have read this far, please write to your MP and ask them to lobby for urgent and meaningful action at COP26, it really does need to happen now. Meanwhile, despite Covid, it is important that we develop sustainable communities and support each other as we move forward in these uncertain times. Stay safe and *together we can make a World of difference.*

Frances Ramsden