

feedback

Issue 64 / Autumn 2020



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

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

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

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Send your contributions - news, letters, pictures and information to:

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Important Information

Whilst some staff continue to work from home, we have set up an alternative phone number allowing calls to be answered from the office or from home.

This new telephone number is **01364 255 256**. We are currently answering calls Mon - Fri, 10am - 4pm.

Please note, due to reduced staffing levels in the office, orders for nestboxes or sales goods may take slightly longer to dispatch than usual.

Responses to postal enquiries may also be slower. The best way to contact us at present is by email to: info@barnowltrust.org.uk

Welcome to the 64th edition of our bi-annual magazine 'Feedback', which includes a copy of our Annual Report.

We hope you are all keeping safe and well during these challenging times.

We've had to adapt to a new way of working very quickly here at the Trust. Lockdown meant communicating with each other via Zoom for a while. The first attempt at this was rather comical with cameras upside down or pointing at the ceiling and microphones muted so we couldn't hear anything! Thankfully even the most tech-phobic team members soon got to grips with the technology. It's great that most of us are now back in the office (you really can't beat talking face to face) but we are still using Zoom for meetings to avoid gathering in groups. Take a look at **BOT News** (pg3) to find out how else we've been adapting to the current circumstances.

Now the office has re-opened we are able to start selling our handmade nestboxes once again. These have already proved to be very popular and our nestbox team are working hard to fulfill orders as quickly as possible. You can learn more about how our nestboxes are made, and a little about how we started making them, by reading **News from the Workshop** (pg18). Our online shop is also open for 'owly' gifts and our charity Christmas cards. See our winter sales leaflet for the latest items or head on over to our website.

Those receiving this copy of Feedback in the post will find our 2020 draw tickets enclosed. You can also purchase tickets via our website by making a donation of £5 per book quoting 'draw tickets'. We have lots of great prizes this year including books, puzzles and clothing. Winners are to be drawn 9th December 2020. All funds go to support our work.

Our Conservation Team are currently working on digital versions of our popular training courses for ecologists and surveyors. These events would normally have been held here in Devon. You can find out more in **Moving Online** (pg19).

The birds at the sanctuary continued to be cared for when our office had to close due to lockdown. Staff and volunteers checked and fed them daily. When lockdown measures were relaxed members of the public brought in new casualty birds for treatment and rehabilitation. We are currently caring for 16 Barn Owls and 22 Tawny Owls. You can read all about how we navigated this tricky time in **Bird News** (pg5).

Work on the Trust's 26-acre nature reserve (LLP) has continued, albeit with some changes. Staff, along with volunteers, have all been working hard. We have decided to take a different approach given the current Ecological Crisis, making the decision to re-wild part of the reserve and allow it to return to natural woodland. Find out more in the **LLP Update** (pg4).

We always love to hear from our supporters and from the public. See **The Owly Inbox** (pg17) for the latest emails and letters. We particularly like the letter from Henry Day, a young nature enthusiast, who has written to tell us all about his recent experiences with Barn Owls and Barn Owl pellets.

Right Owl, Wrong Place (pg15) is a fascinating look at Barn Owls in Hawaii. Barn Owls there are in fact an invasive species. Mateo discusses current conservation efforts there to support and encourage native birds.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Feedback. Whether you adopt an owl, are a Friend of the Trust or give donations when you can, your support is greatly appreciated. Thank you for helping us to help Barn Owls.

BOT News

On Monday the 23rd March we made the decision to shut down the Barn Owl Trust office and furlough most of our staff. Three of our fourteen staff were able to work from home but poor internet access to our server made this a tricky process. Sales of nestboxes and other goods were suspended, and we were unable to deal with post or telephone enquiries. However email and social media enquiries were dealt with, albeit not as swiftly as usual. We were able to respond to live bird emergencies received through these channels and our resident birds were cared for by volunteers.

We were incredibly lucky to receive a very generous donation early in lockdown which covered the wages of the staff still working and other donations have helped towards ongoing costs whilst our income from training courses and nestbox sales completely ceased. These donations, the furlough scheme and our reserves have made it possible for us to avoid having to make any redundancies to date.

As you can imagine the Trustees were in regular communication (via Zoom) with each other and the working staff. We set up a WhatsApp group and fortnightly Zoom meetings for the whole team to keep them apprised of the situation. In April we liaised with the contractors who came and sowed our wild bird seed crop and during May arranged the contractors that came during June to fix the pond and put in a new fence line between North Park and Corner Wood. The weekly butterfly survey resumed in April and work on our Creeping Thistle research project took place in June and July.

Feedback 63 had arrived from the printers just before lockdown and although the envelopes had been printed, we didn't have staff and couldn't ask our usual volunteers to come in to pack and prepare the mailing. Luckily, a family group isolating together nearby volunteered to do this and so we did manage to send it out. In June a 'mini Feedback' was emailed to supporters with our latest news.

In July, having assessed the office for social distance working and bought vast quantities of sanitiser, masks, other PPE and a digital thermometer, we asked Jackie, our Office Manager and David, Head of Conservation to come back to work one day a week to plan the 'rebooting' of the Trust. This included looking at ways we could deliver more of our work in the new 'socially distanced' world. Financially it made sense to maximise the use of the furlough scheme until we could start generating income again so we decided that none of our furloughed staff would return to their normal working hours until November. Having moved desks around, in August other members of staff returned to the office part-time, nestbox sales and our online shop resumed in September and by October everyone was back at least one day a week.

Going forward, social distancing has significant implications for much of our work. This includes field work, particularly nestboxing, where Health and Safety requires two trained people, school visits and our training courses. Reducing the number of people in the office at any one time is a priority, particularly as we head into winter and need to have doors and windows closed. For some of our staff working from home is not a practical option but where possible we are trying to facilitate it.

We have now got an internet-based phone line so staff working from home can deal with enquiries. We have written to all our neighbours and together we are petitioning Open Reach to improve our broadband capability hopefully using grants available from the government's National Broadband Scheme. This would make a huge difference to the capacity for home working and of course reduce emissions caused by travelling. It would also allow us to deliver online training, seminars and educational work. We hope to be able to resume guided walks and outdoor events next year.

We are all living in uncertain times and the only thing we can be sure of is that we have no idea what is coming next! Not only are we all having to deal with the Covid pandemic, the Climate and Ecological Crisis hasn't gone away. We need to build resilience and sustainability into our recovery and we will continue to do everything in our power to keep 'Conserving the Barn Owl and its Environment'.

A huge thank you to everyone who has supported us during this challenging time.

Stay safe.

Frances Ramsden
Trustee

News Bites

BOLT - Barn Owl Legacy Trust

In August we received notice from the Charity Commission that our application for registration of BOLT - the Barn Owl Legacy Trust, a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) had been completed. The BARN OWL LEGACY TRUST is now a charity and it has been entered onto the Register of Charities with the Registered Charity Number 1190997. The new charity has 7 trustees, 4 of the 5 existing BOT trustees and 3 new ones.

The next step is to transfer the Lennon Legacy Project assets to BOLT and draw up an agreement for the BOT to continue managing the site. We can then begin the process of changing the BOT to a CIO. We hope that changing the Trust to a CIO and limiting the personal liability for future trustees will make it easier to find new ones.

New Clothing and Prints

Last Autumn we shared with you the launch of our very own Teemill clothing store. We are really pleased with the feedback we have received over the last year regarding the quality of the clothing, the packaging, and the designs. Thank you to all who have supported this new fundraising venture. Please do head over to barnowltrust.teemill.com and have a browse, we've recently extended our range to include ladies scoop neck t-shirts, Long sleeved tops. Now you can not only wear the designs but they're also available as prints for your wall! These prints come on premium quality 300gsm, 100% recycled heavyweight stock that's FSC certified, meaning it is made from responsibly sourced materials that comply with a wide range of social and environmental standards. Teemill hold regular 'Freepost Weekends' and the next is scheduled for December 4th so this is the ideal time to purchase any last minute Christmas gifts with free postage! We're always looking for new eye-catching Barn Owl designs for our clothing so do get in touch if you would like to help!

Friends and Adoptions

A big thank you to all our supporters who have continued to donate this year. We really couldn't do this without you. We are currently working our way through a small backlog of work. If you have not received a new adoption certificate or reminder letter as expected, we will get this out to you as soon as we can. Thank you so much for your patience.

LLP Update

As regular readers will know, LLP in our case doesn't stand for Limited Liability Partnership, it stands for Lennon Legacy Project – the name we gave our wonderful 26-acre nature reserve. Here's a summary of LLP News since spring 2020.

Weather and Wildlife

Here on the edge of Dartmoor we seem to get one or two months of hot 'summer' weather every spring and one or two months of cloudy wet weather most summers and this has profound effects on some of our wildlife. In fact, it's not just here. The Met Office announced 'the sunniest spring on record for the UK and the driest May on record in England'. By the end of this mini-drought our soil was extremely dry and the grass on our mown paths looked dead. Sward growth in our rough grassland was retarded which may well have delayed vole breeding; voles of course are a major source of food for Barn Owls and many other predators.

Birds, on the other hand, seemed to do very well. More than one pair of Skylark and Meadow Pipits were resident right through the nesting period which is fantastic – these are Red and Amber Listed Species of Conservation Concern.

For the first time we had clear evidence of Sparrowhawks breeding in adjacent trees – a positive sign that we had good numbers of small birds. Don't worry by the way, prey numbers aren't controlled by predators; generally it's the other way around. Predator numbers are controlled by their prey.

In spite of looking rather withered in the heat, the Early Purple Orchids in our grassland did really well. From the 35 rosettes we counted in March we had thirteen flowers by the 12th of April and 33 on the 26th!



Drought conditions ended on 3rd May and 16 out of the next 17 days were wet which freshened-up the bluebells throughout our three acres of woodland. In June we recorded 116mm of rain in 22 days, compared to a 15-year mean of 65mm so it was significantly wetter than most years.

Although drier, July was mainly overcast. This wasn't great for our grassland butterflies whose numbers peak in early July. Our highest one-day count of Marbled Whites for example was 68 compared to the record which stands at 287.

This year's 2.5 acre bird crop has not worked so well as the first two years. We tried a 'no-tillage' method (no ploughing) for the first time and basically what happened is that Creeping Buttercup grew faster than the crop, covering the soil before most of the seedlings had got away. The combination of avoiding ploughing (in order to minimise carbon emissions) and avoiding herbicide spray proved ideal for buttercup and creeping thistle although we did see lots of very small Sunflowers and small Fodder Radish, lots of lovely Corn Marigolds, and a good number of wildflowers from the seedbank such as Slender Mullein and our first Chickory.

Rewilding

We've always had about an acre of the reserve that's really hard to manage - The Slope by Corner Wood. Grazing animals don't like it much and it's too steep for the tractor. In our attempts to keep it as grassland we've had to use hand tools and occasionally a rather scary walk-behind brush cutter we 'lovingly' call The Beast. The grass has long gone and it's dominated by brambles and bracken which we have plenty of in other areas. It does also have a lovely patch of blue and white(!) Bluebells which are really woodland flowers.

Because of the current Ecological Crisis, we've taken the decision to re-wild it (allow it to naturalise into woodland) to help address climate change. It's generally reckoned that six trees will sequester (absorb) about one tonne of Carbon Dioxide in their first 50 years and the slope might accommodate ten times this number (10 tons). Just to put this into perspective, average CO2 emissions per person PER YEAR in the UK is 5.4 tonnes. The equivalent figures in China and India are 7 and 1.8.



The fence keeping stock out of Corner Wood was taken down and on 1st of June our contractor started work on a new fence line, reused the wire, and created an access path. Our Assistant Conservation and Science Officer Mateo said; 'It felt great taking down the fence and liberating the woodland which will allow it to spread'.

Sadly there were no Events to report on due to Covid-19 restrictions but hopefully, in years to come, you will be able to visit. In the meantime, monthly updates are posted on our website – look for 'Wildlife Diary' under 'News and Events'.

David Ramsden MBE
Head of Conservation

Bird News

While so many aspects of our day-to-day routines were altered during lockdown, the birds in the sanctuary still needed caring for and the breeding cycle of the wild owls carried on as ever. Luckily, at the Barn Owl Trust we were able to continue providing a safe and quiet refuge for those birds that will always live in captivity, as well as provide vital help to some wild owls. What follows is the update covering events in the owl sanctuary and rehabilitation facilities for 2020 so far.

Keeping the aviaries clean involves removing pellets, scrubbing perches, and generally washing down all the surfaces, including the areas with gravel on the ground. With up to nine aviaries in use, this task is not to be taken lightly and usually falls to two very capable volunteers: Kim and Tony. However, in their unavoidable absence, aviary hygiene standards were kept up by the Trust staff and it was a healthy reminder of what a huge asset the great work of the volunteers is. We are very grateful to Tony and Kim for having returned to their tasks as soon as possible. In addition to routine cleaning there was the job of removing a large fallen branch that had luckily missed an aviary with five male Barn Owls in it. Less fortunate was the damage it did to our Head of Conservation's zero-emissions electric car!

The sanctuary birds themselves have had an even quieter environment than usual, with most of the spring and summer spent in splendid isolation. There have been no new arrivals and when we carried out health checks in October we found all the 16 Barn Owls in good condition. This task was greatly aided by Di, who is a regular volunteer. In between busily writing down records for us, she had the opportunity to get to know the two birds that she supports through our 'Adopt an Owl' scheme. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Di warmly for her help and support.

While life for the owls in the sanctuary is generally much safer than life in the wild, there is of course a natural loss as time passes. Unfortunately, two Tawny Owls have succumbed over the course of the year: Sarah was found on February 24th having died of natural causes and Tim was put to sleep to avoid unnecessary suffering on October 20th, at which point his condition was deteriorating and death was inevitable. Both of these birds arrived at our sanctuary from the Three Owls Bird Sanctuary in Lancashire in 2010. Their demise leaves the current total of Tawny Owls that live permanently in the sanctuary at 22.

In early January we received a female Barn Owl from Westmoor Veterinary Hospital, after she had been found in the cemetery in the middle of Tavistock! We realised that 'Tavy' had a fractured wing, which meant she had to be confined to limited movement at first. Thankfully, she recovered well and was released from the static release aviary on March 15th. During her time in the aviary prior to release, she attracted the attention of a wild Barn Owl, which flew down to the aviary roof as Tavy ventured out on her first night of freedom. Sadly, on that same day, another Barn Owl was brought to us that could not be saved. The owl had been discovered in someone's kitchen with a damaged wing and the most likely explanation was that a cat had brought it in through the cat flap.

When lockdown came our telephone enquiry system was inevitably suspended and we were unable to respond to as many emails as usual. Few owls were admitted for rehabilitation throughout the spring period, when there is usually at least a couple of Tawny Owl owlets to be looked after.

Nonetheless, on June 16th we collected a Barn Owl owlet that had fallen from a nest site near Abbotskerswell. A concerned member of the public had found the owlet on a barn floor, and not having the means to get up to the nestbox above, she carefully caught it and placed it in a box. Her 5-year old daughter then named it Mr Fluffykins! Although we had hoped to return Mr Fluffykins straight back to the nest with no further intervention, on arrival we found that 'he' had already lost a lot of weight. (Was 'he' a he? At that age it is very hard to tell!) We took care of him for two weeks and were gratefully assisted by the original finder and their friend when the time came to reinstate him. The young bird joined its two siblings, although there was definitely a backward look!



The summer progressed and we received two young Barn Owls from West Hatch Animal Sanctuary, which were released from the static release aviary on August 8th. At least one of these birds continued to return for food for over two months. Pellets containing wild prey were found inside the aviary and on October 15th one was seen sitting on the aviary itself! This is an excellent result as it shows that a pattern of return was successfully established, meaning that the released owls had access to a steady food supply while they went through the vital transition to living in the wild.

On September 9th we received a further two young Barn Owls from West Hatch Animal Sanctuary and these were released from a mobile release aviary on the Lennon Legacy Project nature reserve on October 13th. These birds took food from the aviary for five days before they stopped returning. Could it be that they have already embarked on the dispersal phase that characterises the life of all newly independent Barn Owls?

Finally, another two young Barn Owls came into our care, a male and female, both with slightly damaged wings. After a prescribed period of confinement these two cohabited our larger hospital aviary for three weeks but only showed very slight improvement. However, on October 19th they were moved to the larger static release aviary whereby the female, Erica, immediately demonstrated a flawless vertical take-off and then showed considerable flying prowess around the aviary until she found the entrance hole to the roosting box and shot in. We are very hopeful that she will soon go into a mobile release aviary close to where she was found, near Silverton. Time will tell what becomes of her and her smaller companion, who is a male that hatched this year not far from Kingsteignton.

Dr Mateo Ruiz
Assistant Conservation and Science Officer

HS2 - FrontLine News

Phase One of the HS2 high speed rail line between London and Birmingham is not only destroying 80 Barn Owl nest sites (as reported in FEEDBACK issue 59) and 700 Wildlife Sites including 100 irreplaceable Ancient Woodlands, it is also abusing those who are standing up for wildlife.

A trusted friend sent us this update from the front line...

"Back home after an exhausting 4 days at HS2 and I'm feeling pretty shaken to be honest. What else have I learnt?"

HS2 staff are purposefully and systematically using violence and intimidation on a daily basis. Within the space of 24 hours... a young, kind, gentle, friend of mine was attacked in his car, far from a HS2 site by an off-duty eviction team member, who recognised him, opened the door and punched him in the face, leaving him with 2 fractures in his jaw. I stood by a young guy who was wrestled violently to the ground and knelt on hard, incidentally the only non-white male amongst a large group of us. I saw people dragged, thrown and pushed. And yesterday a group of us walking along the road outside an HS2 compound were repeatedly driven into by 2 irate HS2 security employees with their cars bumping into our legs multiple times to try and force us out of the way, to the point where my feet were taken out and I landed on the bonnet.

This is a land grab. HS2 are stealing people's land, with compensation being withheld, businesses lost, homes razed to the ground and crops going to ruin. The locals I spoke to were baffled as to the scale of destruction and why areas of woodland and hedgerow far from the proposed line are being felled.



The HS2 protestors living on camp are indefatigable. Despite living in increasingly challenging conditions they are resolute, warm and welcoming to all newcomers and go about their work with humour, creativity, joy and above all love for life. There is huge enthusiasm amongst those in our group who visited to return regularly and bring others with us."

There is a police investigation underway in connection with the main assault mentioned above.

We can all take action to try and stop this madness by sending a message to our MPs and key government ministers via this webpage: standforthetrees.org. Alternatively, you can put pen to paper and pop one in the post!

The Future for Barn Owls

According to the Met Office, 2019 was 12% wetter than average and 9% sunnier. We had six named storms and set 4 temperature records including the UK's all time high at 38.7 degrees C.

Extreme weather events, such as prolonged very hot or very cold weather which sometimes impact Barn Owl survival and nesting success, are increasing in frequency and severity due to changes in the jet stream caused by global warming.

Multiple weather records are being broken not only in the UK but across the World and we are currently on track to reach 3.2-5.4 degrees C of heating by 2100. That's more than enough to cause the ultimate collapse of civilisation.

To a significant extent, future temperature changes are already 'locked in' due to past greenhouse gas emissions and the 10-50 year delay between emissions and effect. Additionally, self-reinforcing feedback loops such as sea-ice loss have already been triggered which are practically unstoppable. Leading scientists have warned that nine out of fifteen climate tipping points are now 'active'.

To say the way we live is not sustainable is something of an understatement. Due to the doubling of human population level since 1970 and increased consumption, mankind is currently impacting natural resources 1.6 times faster than Earth can restore them.

Consequently we are now in the Sixth Mass Extinction Event the main causes of which are still increasing. For example, monitored vertebrate species have declined by an average of 60% just since 1970 and more than half of all the industrial CO2 that's ever been emitted in our entire history has happened in just the last 30 years.

Fortunately the small mammal species upon which Barn Owls depend are fairly adaptable and other species such as House Mouse, which in southern Europe are field-dwelling, could become more widespread. This might compensate to some extent for a future decline in Field Vole which is quite likely as our climate becomes more Mediterranean.

Unless sea defences are massively upgraded, Barn Owls in low-lying areas such as The Fens and The Levels will be negatively impacted by rising sea levels. By 2050 much of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, and Somerset will be inundated by seawater every year.

Let's make radical changes now and 'buy' more time for ourselves, our children, and for our wonderful wildlife.

Here are some ideas to get you started!

<https://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/the-climate-and-ecological-crisis-and-me/>

A Fitting Tribute

When Julia Barrott first told us that she was organising the build of a Wildlife Tower in memory of her Grandparents, we had to hear more! What a beautiful way to commemorate the life of a loved one, a long-standing tribute which will be enjoyed by wildlife for many, many years to come. Thank you, Julia, for sharing your story and for the fabulous photos. We hope you have many residents, big and small, moving in over the next few years...do keep us informed!

Remembering Pat Windeatt and John Marriott

How do you remember loved ones when they pass? When we lost our beloved mother and grandmother in January 2019, on her 92nd birthday, the choice came easily. Pat, like her late partner John, loved all animals, but the Barn Owl was a clear favourite. So began the online searches to explore what we could do for this wonderful bird, in her memory...

Fortunately, we own a steep bank of Cotswold grassland that is excellent habitat for owls. Even better is that this bank overlooks the Vale of Evesham towards the Malverns and Cleeve Common, which is quite a view. The downside to this of course was the difficulty in getting the building materials and builders up to the building site.

Thankfully, our builder and friend Roger Wood, to whom we owe huge thanks, was unperturbed by this and following the granting of permission for the build (we live in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) work started in spring 2020. The build took just 2 months and was completed in May.



It has proved an interesting, fun, and very satisfying project.

All of us have been amazed at just how many nooks and crannies the design incorporates. With the glorious weather we had at the time, and the view, it was a pleasure to build too, and a great focus to have through lockdown.

Regarding wildlife, we have had plenty of visitors, including a buzzard perched atop to take in the view and several other birds of prey investigating.

We cannot say for sure how many are permanent but look forward to monitoring this over the coming months and years (do get in touch if you are interested in supporting this).

Our monitoring efforts are not helped by the location of course - that bank is steeper than it looks! Though perhaps not steep enough for some: a key challenge now is keeping interested people - of which there have been many - at a distance from the tower, to allow the residents (including Pat and John, whose ashes will be scattered there) the peace and quiet they need.

The Barrott Family.





Charity Information

Barn Owl Trust

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BOT Environmental Enrolment Number 203 178

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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

COMPUTER/IT SUPPORT : Alan Lewis

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TRUST VOLUNTEERS

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VETS : Veterinary Hospital (Estover)

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Margaret Rhodes : University of Plymouth
Volunteers

SCHOOL VISITS/TALKS : David Ramsden
Rick Lockwood
Mateo Ruiz

ACCOUNTS : Frances Ramsden

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.

Annual Report 2019 - 2020



Welcome to our Annual Review of the last financial year 2019 - 2020. We ended a really busy year with the onset of the pandemic and the furloughing of most of our staff. Three have continued to work alongside trustees in order to keep things ticking over. I am writing this from 'lockdown', a situation none of us could have envisaged a year ago.

During the year covered by this report public benefit was provided nationally (and internationally) by the Trust as we supplied information and advice by email, post, telephone and via our website. Enquiries are a huge part of the work of our Conservation Team.

We continued to develop our website; this takes a significant amount of time to keep current, but it does provide a huge amount of information to a large number of people. During the year we received 1,086,104 (1,122,623 last year) page views by 475,657 (487,789) unique visitors, that's an average of 2,975 (3,000) page views a day – this is a slight drop from last year, probably due to the loss of our live Nestcam. We also continued our social media presence and have 17,000+ Facebook followers, 36,000+ Twitter followers. Our YouTube channel has had 195,000 views, Pinterest has 115,400 monthly unique viewers and in May 2019, we joined Instagram and now have 1,770 followers.

We continued to work on public engagement using the Lennon Legacy Project (LLP) site and our Norman Alderson meeting room for walks, talks and events. We also ran our training courses there and used the space to host volunteers. During the year we ran 8 foundation course training days (BOESS - 2005) for 94 trainees and 5 advanced course days (ABOSM - 2011) for 60. The training courses planned for July have had to be cancelled and we are looking at ways to deliver them in future in a socially distant way.

We sent out issues 62 & 63 of Feedback, the Trust's bi-annual magazine, to our supporters - back issues are available on the website.

During the year two of our staff left, Pete Webb retired after 16+ years and Joel Turnbull left to pursue other projects. Kaye Thomas joined us in May to take on the role of Conservation Team Administration Assistant and organisation of the Training Courses. Other than this our staff have been with us for between 3+ and 30 years. At the year-end we had 14 staff in post: four full-time and ten part-time. Volunteers have received training and work experience on placements with the Trust. Our Trustees have been

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. ★

in post for between 10 and 32 years. We have a great team here of both staff and volunteers.

Our plans to convert the Trust to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) have been slowed down by the pandemic but we have started the process of separating the Lennon Legacy Project into another CIO - the Barn Owl Legacy Trust (BOLT). The Trust will still be known as the Barn Owl Trust and all our work, aims and objectives will remain exactly the same with the BOT still managing the land. We hope that changing the Trust to a CIO and limiting the personal liability for future trustees will make it easier to find new/younger ones.

The new financial year holds some significant challenges for the Barn Owl Trust and all other voluntary organisations. We were fortunate that we began the financial year in a strong position thanks to the grants, legacies and donations received in the previous year. Despite the deficit in this years accounts and the predicted recession, we hope to eventually bring all of our staff back to work and find new ways of operating and raising funds to support our work in this new 'socially distant' world. Facilitating more home working is being investigated but is problematic with poor internet speeds. Delivering training, school visits and talks will have to be completely redesigned and fieldwork and monitoring visits have Health & Safety implications in addition to social distancing. Our general work of dealing with enquiries, practical conservation such as annual monitoring, site visits and nestboxing, school visits, adult talks and training courses have been on-hold, but dealing with live bird emergencies and caring for resident and casualty birds and management of the LLP has continued throughout.

Plans for this year have had to be completely rethought in the light of the pandemic. As well as developing remote learning opportunities we will continue the on-going development of our two websites www.barnowltrust.org.uk and www.barnowlsurvey.org.uk. We will also maintain our Barn Owl Directory to enable people to find local contacts for Barn Owl conservation, Barn Owl casualties and local Barn Owl surveys. We will continue to pull figures together and publish the 'State of the UK Barn Owl Population' results annually - the 2019 report was finalised and sent out in June.

We will also continue:-

- to work with other groups both in the UK and abroad to promote Barn Owl conservation.
- to deliver our training courses for ecological consultants: the Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys and Signs (BOESS) courses and the Advanced Barn Owl Surveying and Mitigation (ABOSM).
- to monitor the mitigation suggestions for HS2 and the Health & Safety Executive's (HSE) position on the future of second-generation rodenticides (SGAR's).
- to develop educational / training activities and resources.
- to target practical conservation projects whilst trying to ensure that any development is sustainable, thereby reducing the Trust's dependency on legacy income to support core costs.
- to lobby for the implementation of recommendations from research projects.

We live in strange times. Climate change and the ecological emergency are still threatening life as we know it, but if the pandemic has taught us anything it is that we can make drastic changes to the way we live when necessary. Environmental and ethical consideration will be given to all our activities during the year and to the purchase of resources.

On behalf of all the Trustees I would like to thank everyone who has supported us during the last year and indeed over the last 30! I would also like to thank our wonderful team of staff, volunteers and all of our Friends for continuing to believe that, together *we can make a world of difference* -

Thank You All and stay safe. ★

Keith Grant Chair of Trustees, July 2020



Conservation Report

State of the UK Barn Owl Population 2019

The most up-to-date figures on the UK Barn Owl population were published in our report: State of the UK Barn Owl Population 2019 based on results provided by 40 independent monitoring groups who between them checked 5,225 potential nest sites. 2019 was a relatively good year for Barn Owls. Overall, the number of nesting pairs was 21% higher than average but there was some huge regional variation. Gloucestershire recorded 101% more nesting pairs than average (just over twice as many as usual) whereas on Jersey numbers were down by 51% (just less than half the usual number).

Numbers in 'mid-England' from the eastern seaboard across to Merseyside and down to Gloucester were generally good, in the south from Wiltshire to East Sussex they were highly variable, whereas in western extremes, from Galloway down through Wales into the South West and on Jersey, there were relatively few pairs nesting. Although some large broods of young were recorded in many counties - Greater Manchester, Suffolk, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Shropshire, East Yorkshire, Northumberland, Staffordshire and Gloucestershire, the overall average number of young recorded in nests was barely any higher than normal at 2.8 compared to 2.7.

Weather that alternates between drought and wet/cold doesn't help! 2019 was unusually warm from Feb to April, very wet in March, very dry in April and May and yes, you guessed it, too wet in June, just when the young needed lots of food. Whilst some pairs seem to cope quite well, others appear to just give up. This weather pattern, one or two months of hot very dry weather in spring and one or two months of cool-unsettled-wet weather in summer, appears to be the new norm in our changing climate.



Another healthy chick ringed in West Berkshire *Photo: John Dellow*

Staff changes

On 1st April, Mateo Ruiz became our first 'Assistant Conservation and Science Officer' and a month later we were delighted to welcome new staff member Kaye Thomas as our first 'Conservation Team Admin Assistant'.

Lennon Legacy Project (LLP) – our nature reserve

We are extremely fortunate to have our nature reserve which is entirely thanks to Ms Vivien Lennon who remembered the Barn Owl Trust in her Will. During the year, the amount and variety of wildlife it supports continued to increase and plans emerged for yet more habitat creation on the 26-acre site.

The 25th of April saw us broadcasting seed by hand on the 2.5 acre Winter Bird Food Plot in order to produce the crop for winter 19/20. The wildlife however didn't wait. Birds arrived even before the crop had germinated(!) and we were concerned they may have eaten all the seed. We needn't have worried. The crop grew

fantastically, particularly the Fodder Radish and Dwarf Sunflower which both produced masses of seed. By early autumn we had an estimated 500 Linnets, up to 50 Chaffinch, 20 Greenfinch, 5 Goldfinch, 2 Reed Bunting, as well as good numbers of Wren, Robin, Blackbird and remarkable numbers of Dunnock.



Our sunflowers not only looked stunning but produced masses of bird seed *Photo: David Ramsden*

Bird numbers remained impressive right through to late winter and everyone who came on our Winter Bird Walk events in December and January had fantastic views. Not only the sight of so many birds but the sound too! This prompted us to publish a sound recording which you can find on YouTube by searching for 'The sound of 500 Linnets'.

In July we borrowed a bat detector from the Devon Wildlife Trust for three nights and recorded Common Pipistrelle, Lesser Horseshoe, Long-eared, Myotis species, Noctule, Serotine, and Soprano pipistrelle. On a separate occasion Helen Calver from the Devon Bat Group conducted an emergence survey of our Wildlife Tower and it was great to see individuals emerging and visiting including a Greater Horseshoe.



Recording the bats emerging from our Wildlife Tower which was built in memory of John Woodland *Photo: David Ramsden*

About 20 acres of the Lennon Legacy Project is managed as rough grassland and over the years we've struggled to stem an invasion by Creeping Thistle. With Dr Mateo Ruiz on our team, in May we designed and instigated a 3-year scientific research project which aims to publish a paper quantifying the efficacy of various control methods. This involves counting the thistles twice a year in 36 10-metre squares in four categories: control (do nothing), spot spray, top with the tractor, and pull by hand. By 2023 we should be in a position to update our advice to land managers. Since Creeping Thistles are beneficial to bees and butterflies, our aim is not to eradicate them but simply to prevent them from taking over in the most efficient and wildlife-friendly way.

Core activities

Incoming owls

During the year 2 Barn Owls and 7 Tawny Owls were received, of which 5 were released, 2 were euthanised, 1 died naturally, and 1 was passed to the RSPCA. Once again, our thanks go to the Veterinary Hospitals Group practice at Estover, Plymouth who kindly treat many of the birds we receive free of charge. Owl releases involved taking our Mobile Release Aviaries to sites in North Devon, Somerset, and up onto Exmoor. The owls in our sanctuary (16 Barn Owls and 25 Tawnies) had a peaceful year and all 41 were health-checked in October.

Fieldwork trips

Our winter work program started on 1st October with over 60 locations to visit and we are particularly indebted to volunteers Michael Park, Tony Hulatt, Kim Baker and Kate Downes. The emphasis was on completing jobs with the highest conservation priority first. 19 fieldwork trips were conducted which included 14 trips to install nextboxes. Annual monitoring of potential nest sites accounted for a further 12 fieldwork trips to 66 sites during which 114 Barn Owls were BTO ringed.

Events

Following a special request, we produced our first-ever talk on 'Safer Rodent Control' which was presented twice during the year along with 15 'Restoring the Balance' talks, 6 'Lennon Legacy Project' talks, 5 Lennon Legacy project walks, and 12 'Wings of Change' school visits.



Visitors on one of our Winter Bird Walks watching our flock of 500+ Linnets
Photo: David Ramsden

One-offs included a bespoke talk on encouraging Barn Owls to members of the Wild Roseland project by Mateo, Rick Lockwood ran a Nestbox Workshop day in Somerset, and we attended a 'Farmwise' event for school groups.

County Shows were attended in Devon, Cornwall, and Somerset, plus 6 local agricultural shows and the Bird Fair in Rutland. Although not exactly 'conservation work', we ran a very enjoyable benefit gig for the Trust – an evening of acoustic music at Ashburton Arts which raised £211.

Training

Our very successful courses 'Barn Owl Ecology Surveys and Signs' and 'Advanced Barn Owl Surveying and Mitigation' were run 8 and 5 times respectively and every course day was either fully booked (12 trainees/day) or virtually full.

Meetings

In addition to routine meetings (too many to mention), we had a very interesting meeting in December with representatives of Kier Highways and Highways England at their offices in Exeter to look at a proposed Feasibility Study to investigate the scope for reducing Barn Owl road mortality on trunk roads.

Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE)

Gill Gant, a member of our Admin Team, was appointed as CEE Coordinator and worked closely with us looking at a range of

measures to address the crisis. Further investment in renewable energy was investigated including the possibility of ground or air-source heat pump for heating our offices, increasing the size of our solar array, and the possibility of mains battery storage.

The practicality of switching to electric vehicles was also investigated when Kaye Thomas attended an Electric Futures event on our behalf. We decided to make the switch as soon as funds and suitable vehicles are available. In the meantime we added 'carbon offset' bumper stickers to our diesel vehicles and purchased an electric ATV for use in the field.



We pay the Environmental Transport Association to offset twice our annual mileage
Photo: David Ramsden

Given that carbon sequestration is an urgent priority we took the decision to allow an additional acre of our nature reserve to eventually become woodland and appointed a contractor to move the existing woodland edge fence. We also decided to add a section about the climate crisis to every BOT Talk using information from my presentation 'Climate and Ecological Crisis? What's all the fuss about?'

Lockdown

Just before the year's end, virtually our entire operation was closed down in order to limit the spread of Covid-19 and an advisory trip to Ulster Wildlife Trust had to be postponed. Most of our staff were furloughed but thankfully Mateo Ruiz agreed to work from home, along with skeleton staff from the admin team and a few wonderful volunteers so our owl care was maintained and we continued to respond to enquiries where owls were under immediate threat.

As usual, Annual Reports such as these cannot possibly convey just how busy we are most of the time! The time we spend on all the above activities is limited only by our resources.

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



Linnet in the hedgerow
Photo: David Ramsden



Financial Report

With all that happened at the end of the last financial year, the almost complete shut down for the first four months of this year and the challenges ahead facing all of us, it does seem very strange to be reflecting on the last financial year.

As you will see from the 'Statement of Financial Activity' (SOFA) the total incoming resources for the year to 31 March 2020 were £307,159 a decrease of £126,572 on 2019 (£433,731) -29%. This was in the main due to a 59% drop in restricted grants (from £61,200 in 2019 to £24,950) and a huge decrease in non-designated donations from Charitable Trusts -85% - £15,095 compared to £103,373 last year when £75,000 of this came from one charity. We saw a net deficit of £40,794 for the year compared to last year's surplus of £122,485.

Income from grants, legacies and donations saw a drop of 46% on the previous year at £160,587 (2019 -£295,290) accounting for 52% of total income (2019 - 68%). Restricted funds allowed us to purchase a lift for the barn (as due to Health & Safety legislation we can no longer carry nestboxes up and down the stairs) and a utility vehicle for use in the LLP. Both are wonderful assets to help our work. We hope eventually to raise the balance of funds needed to replace our van with an electric vehicle, thus reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. During the year we have seen a 65% increase in individual donations to £21,260 (£12,847). Support through our Friends and Adoption schemes remained relatively stable. Volunteer fund-raising decreased by 7% to £1,640 (2019 - £1,761), funds were raised for us in a variety of ways including marathons and plant sales.

Legacy income was 24% down on the previous year at £41,626 (£55,079) and gifts in memoriam were 28% down, together accounting for 14% of total income for the year. 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, like this one, when we have a deficit. Legacies not only enable the Trust to continue to achieve so much of our general conservation work, 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.

We have again worked hard during the year to increase our income from our charitable activities in order to be less dependent on grant and legacy income. Our income from Nestbox sales increased by 10% (£64,332). We sold 568 boxes during the year in addition to those we used ourselves. We also increased our income from training courses by 4% to £38,988 (£37,322).

Our fundraising income increased by 47% to £3,162 (£2,151) most of which came from our Annual Draw and our 'Lucky Dip' at shows but this year was boosted by our Acoustic Music Evening and our Poetry Competition. Income from sales goods dropped by 6% however our purchase costs decreased by 8%. We were unable to do a stock take at Year End due to the pandemic. Our solar panels generated £4,318 (2019 - £4,422) a decrease of 2%.

Our overall expenditure increased by 12% to £347,180 (2019 - £311,246). The cost of fundraising increased by 3% (mainly due to an increase in salaries). Fundraising still accounts for just 3% of our total expenditure, the same as in the previous year and includes time spent applying for grants. We spent 8% less on promotional goods £6,116 (£6,674).

Expenditure on Charitable Activities increased by 12%; to £330,273 (£294,120). The cost of practical work increased by 19% to £168,345 (2019- £141,740). The information and advice service costs also increased by 15% to £101,845 (2019 - £88,304). Salaries costs have increased by 17% due to pension contributions and wage increases.

Continued on page 13

THE BARN OWL TRUST

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31st MARCH 2020		2020	2019
	Notes	£	£
Fixed assets			
Tangible assets	5	130,424	139,088
Current assets			
Stock	6	15,447	15,490
Debtors	7	1,251	2,869
Cash at bank and in hand		427,670	463,763
		444,368	482,122
Liabilities			
Creditors - Amounts falling due within one year	8	10,795	17,192
Net current assets		433,573	464,930
Net assets		563,997	604,018
The funds of the charity:			
Unrestricted funds	9	504,899	547,754
Restricted funds	10	59,098	56,264
Total charity funds		563,997	604,018

SOFA Note 2.	2020	2019
Income	£	£
(a) Donations and legacies:		
Grants and donations	118,961	240,211
Legacies	41,626	55,079
	160,587	295,290
(b) Charitable activities:		
Nestboxes	64,332	58,688
Training courses	38,988	37,322
Other	21,065	16,486
	124,385	112,496
(c) Other trading activities:		
Fundraising	3,162	2,151
Promotional goods	13,497	14,406
	16,659	16,557
(d) Other income:		
Solar generation	4,318	4,422
Bank interest	992	829
Other	218	137
Sale of fixed assets	-	4,000
	5,528	9,388
	307,159	433,731

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



	Notes	Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total 2020 £	Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total 2019 £
Income from:							
Donations and legacies	2	135,637	24,950	160,587	233,590	61,700	295,290
Charitable activities	2	124,385	-	124,385	112,496	-	112,496
Other trading activities	2	16,659	-	16,659	16,557	-	16,557
Other Income	2	5,528	-	5,528	9,388	-	9,388
Total		282,209	24,950	307,159	372,031	61,700	433,731
Expenditure on:							
Raising funds	3	16,907	-	16,907	17,126	-	17,126
Charitable activities	3	325,171	5,102	330,273	286,882	7,238	294,120
Total		342,078	5,102	347,180	304,008	7,238	311,246
Net (expenditure)/income		(59,869)	19,848	(40,021)	68,023	54,462	122,485
Transfers between funds		17,014	(17,014)	-	15,280	(15,280)	-
Net movement in funds		(42,855)	2,834	(40,021)	83,303	39,182	112,485
Reconciliation of funds:							
Total funds brought forward		547,754	56,264	604,018	464,451	17,082	481,533
Total funds carried forward		504,899	59,098	563,997	547,754	56,264	604,018

Financial Report continued

Support costs include telephone, repairs, overheads such as insurance, water & electricity, stationery, management, payroll and office cleaning. These necessary costs have decreased by 2% over the year to £23,223 (2019 - £23,679) and account for 7% of expenditure. Because of our volunteers we are able to keep our management costs at just 2% of total spend £8,054 (2019 - £8,903). 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, £48,114 for the Lennon Legacy Project and £3,000 for other projects, leaving a general fund of £131,045 (2019 - £185,439). However, our fixed assets and stock account for more than this and in light of the regular shortfall in income vs. expenditure (excluding legacies) we will 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 these difficult economic times. It is these reserves that will allow us to continue and find new ways to operate in post lockdown times and work out a way forward.

Mark Pountney MAAT - Honorary Treasurer

SOFA Note 3

Expenditure	Activities	Governance	Total 2020 £	Total 2019 £
	Undertaken Directly £	and Support Costs £		
Raising funds:				
Fundraising	10,791	-	10,791	10,452
Promotional goods	6,116	-	6,116	6,674
	16,907	-	16,907	17,126
Charitable activities:				
Nestboxes	29,244	-	29,244	29,552
Training course	5,626	-	5,626	6,319
Practical work	168,345	-	168,345	141,740
Information and advice	101,845	-	101,845	88,304
Grants and donations	1,000	-	1,000	3,536
Support costs	-	23,223	23,223	23,679
Independent examination	-	990	990	990
	306,060	24,213	330,273	294,120



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!

29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
Barry Green Foundation
Birds & Bees
Blair Foundation
Bleyer Silver bullion
BMH Charitable Trust
Carron Charitable Trust
Cecil Pilkington Charitable Trust
Cobalt Trust
Cornwell Charitable Trust
Defence Infrastructure Organisation
Diana Symon Charitable Trust
Dumbreck Charity
Ecclesiastical Insurance Office
Gerrard & Audrey Couch Charitable Trust
Harbinson Charitable Trust
Hatcher Animal Welfare Trust
Ian Askew Charitable Trust
John Coates Charitable Trust
L J Walker Charity Trust
Lesley Mary Carter Charitable Trust
Lord Farrington Charitable Trust

Lowther Charitable Settlement
M T Chamberlayne Charitable Trust
Marjorie & Geoffrey Jones Charitable Trust
Marsh Christain Trust
Norman Family Charitable Trust
Oakdale Trust
P F Charitable Trust
Panton Trust
Pennycress Charitable Trust
Ratcliff Foundation
Really Useful Group
Robert Clutterbuck Charitable Trust
Seven Pillars of Wisdom Trust
Sir John Swire Charitable Trust
Spoonflower Inc.
Verdon Smith Family Charitable Trust
Veterinary Hospital Group
Walker Animal Trust
Walter Guinness Charitable Trust
Waterloo Foundation
Wildlife Watching Supplies
William Dean Countryside Trust

During this period we received legacies from:

D Burns, D M Cloake, George Zacariah, John Webber, Margaret Mason,
Sylvia Margaret Brown and Vanessa Farbrother

and Gifts in Memory of:

Andy Easy, Barry White, Brian Woods, Clifford Harding, Diane Tower, Dick Springs, Dorothy Ellis,
Dorothy Mellish, Gordon Bowman, Grace Upton, Jacqueline Groves, Janet Pring, Jean Street,
Jean Wordsworth, Joy Mills, Joyce Cox, Margaret Leahy, Mary Borlase, Mike Fiello,
Richard Boucher, Richard Spring, Robert Kift, Sylvia Margaret Brown and Winifred Stanbury

Rest in peace



During the year we received donations from sponsored events and other fund-raising from:

Falmouth & Exeter Students' Union - Eco Society, Sarah Buttle - Barbeque, Susie & Bill Tresize - Musical cream tea,
Judith Read - bell ringing, Noah's Ark Zoo Farm, Shelley Wright & Tracey Morris - sale of jams,
Axe Valley Runners -The Grizzly Run, Jeremy & Gill Hepworth - Garden Open Day, Terry Tunmore - sale of sunflower plants
and Margaret & Derrick Crocker - sale of plants and jams.

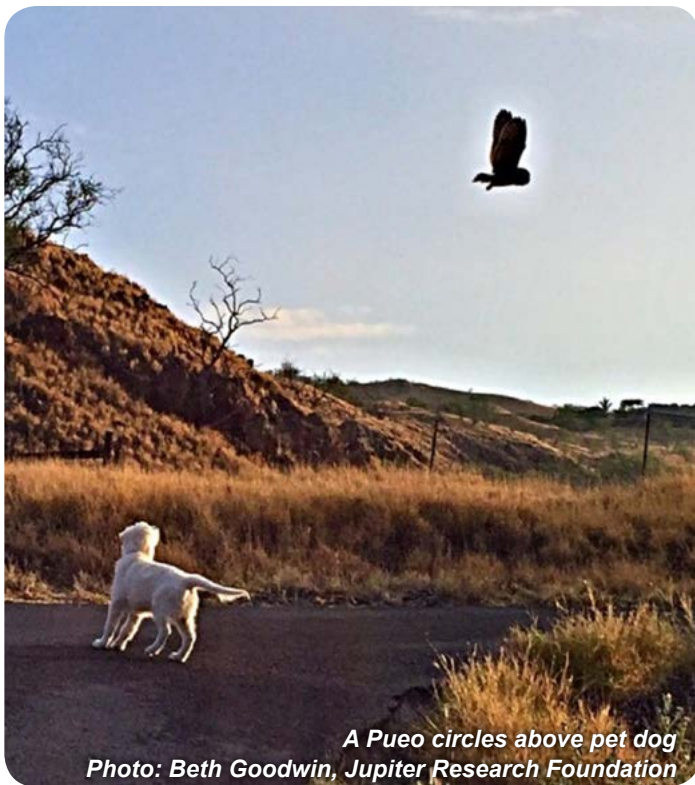
Thank you all so much for your support

Right Owl, Wrong Place

Conservation in Hawaii

As in many cultures, owls in Hawaii feature widely in myths and superstition. However, unlike the foreboding they evoke in some places, on these Pacific islands they are considered a protective guardian, or aumakua.

Unsurprisingly, Hawaiians who have contacted the Trust are usually keen to encourage Barn Owls to nest near their homes. However, there is a drawback because on Hawaii the Barn Owl is in fact an invasive species. This unfortunate circumstance stems from a governmental programme that introduced 86 Barn Owls between 1958 and 1963, with the objective of controlling rats in sugar cane fields and pineapple plantations.



A Pueo circles above pet dog
Photo: Beth Goodwin, Jupiter Research Foundation

Invasive species are a disturbing driver of bird extinctions across the globe. Invasive mammals such as rats, cats and mongoose are widely recognized threats, but birds themselves can also be part of the problem. It seems strange to think, but when they are in the wrong place the beautiful Mute Swan, Budgerigar or Collared Dove can harm native birds through aggression, competition, or transmitting disease.

Island endemics are particularly vulnerable to extinction and Hawaii is a case in point: of the 109 known endemic birds, 55 and 19 went extinct following the arrival of Polynesians and Europeans, respectively. All but four of the remaining endemics are listed under the US Endangered Species Act and predatory invasive species top the list of threats, that also includes development, exotic plants, disease and climate change.

What role do Barn Owls play in this troubling situation? Sadly, they are a serious predator of Newell's Shearwater and the Hawaiian Petrel, which are endemic ground-nesting seabirds that lay their eggs in burrows in montane forest.



Short-eared Owl, a close relative of the Pueo
Photo: Les Foster

Of course, the owls themselves are completely blameless in all this, for it is we humans who put them there. However, the seabirds have little or no defence against the introduced predator and are extremely susceptible. Research on Kaua'i showed that this island's Barn Owl population ranges from 500 to 1,000 pairs and the owls account for 4% of predation by invasive species.

Although cats, rats and pigs are a much bigger threat to the endemic seabirds, a wider study found that the Barn Owl's impact extends to eight sea bird species, with 379 cases over seven years. Barn Owls mainly prey on adult seabirds, which are caught outside their burrows or even in flight, but they will also enter burrows to take chicks. Kaua'i Endangered Seabird Recovery Project include removing invasive predators and monitoring the breeding colonies. The Project also encourages the public to keep their cats indoors and reduce the light pollution that disrupts the birds' navigation.

Here at the Barn Owl Trust we advise against providing nestboxes for Barn Owls on Hawaii and encourage conservation of their endemic subspecies of Short-eared Owl, the Pueo. The Pueo (*Asio flammeus sandwichensis*) is not a predator of the rare seabirds and to help this species we encourage Hawaiians to supervise their pets whenever they are outside, avoid the use of rodenticide, and leave areas of open grassland as foraging habitat. It is our hope that the right owl can be revered as an aumakua into the future, in its rightful place on the islands of Hawaii.

If you'd like to learn more about invasive species in Hawaii take a look at the links below.

www.mauinvasive.org/pueo-or-barn-owl-heres-the-difference/

www.hilo.hawaii.edu/news/kekalahea/the-irony-of-invasive-species-2017

You can also find out more about the Kaua'i Endangered Seabird Recovery Project by visiting www.kauaiseabirdproject.org/

Dr Mateo Ruiz
Assistant Conservation and Science Officer

UK Barn Owl Population

Conservation efforts for Barn Owls: Are they working?

At this time of year, we usually gather information on breeding from a network of contributors to the annual State of the UK Barn Owl Population Report. Unfortunately, because of COVID-19 a lot of nest site monitoring was impossible and there will certainly be gaps in the 2020 results. However, we take this opportunity to reflect on the bigger picture. How is the UK Barn Owl population faring, compared to 20 years ago, or 90 years ago?

On June 11th, a Guardian article on the Barn Owl reported: 'Now there are up to an estimated 12,000 breeding pairs in the UK'. This is much higher than results reported from the only thorough survey of UK Barn Owls, which estimated a population of up to 5,252 or as low as 2,769 pairs between 1995 and 1997. Based on precisely that survey, in 2013 the UK Avian Population Estimates Panel (APEP) reported 3,000 to 5,000 pairs. They did, however, refer to a substantial but unquantified population increase, which was based on the Bird Atlas 2007 – 2011, the Rare Breeding Birds Panel and nestboxing schemes. Perhaps it was on these grounds that the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use published the figures 9,000 to 12,000 UK Barn Owl pairs in 2019.

If there actually are around 12,000 pairs of Barn Owls in the UK, then the population size has been restored to something very similar to what it was before the drastic decline recorded between the 1930s and the late 1990s. A recovery of this magnitude would be greatly celebrated by everyone who cares about Barn Owls and not least by everyone who has taken action to conserve them. So, it is with great interest that we consider where these new figures come from and what they represent.

This year the APEP has formalised its optimistic position by tentatively giving a range of 4,000 – 14,000 pairs. The very wide interval means there is a lot of uncertainty about the real population size. Importantly, the APEP explains that the upper limit of 14,000 pairs was calculated by extrapolating trends from the Breeding Bird Scheme. They go on to clarify that the Scheme is quite unreliable for nocturnal or crepuscular species, because the counts begin after dawn. Nonetheless, informed opinions and information from ringing and nest recording apparently provide evidence for an increase of some sort. If there has been a 200% increase over the 22 years since 1997, then we might hope to see a 60% increase in nesting occupancy over the seven years of nationwide results collated by the Barn Owl Trust since 2013. Yet the nesting occupancy and brood size we have documented have remained within a fairly consistent range (Figure 1). We accept that there are reasons why nesting occupancy may not reflect change in population size. Nonetheless, we believe there is not yet enough evidence to know if the Barn Owl population has returned to what it was a hundred years ago. Therefore, we are strongly in favour of another thorough survey, not only to compare to the reference from the late 1990s but to uncover any regional differences in decline or increase.

Why are accurate estimates of population size so important to conserving species such as the Barn Owl? Population size is a key parameter with which to prioritise direct intervention conservation efforts. Where population size is monitored over time it may give clear evidence that a species' population is dwindling, ideally galvanising conservation action well in advance of it reaching a vulnerable size. Regardless of any baseline reference, if surveying reveals a critically small population size, then we know the species in question is intrinsically vulnerable to extinction.

Protection measures for species such as the Spoon-billed Sandpiper can be all that stands between them and their ultimate disappearance. Finally, updating information on bird populations can inform us not only of where we are still losing ground, but where conservation efforts have been successful.

We hope that one day clear evidence will make the UK Barn Owl a proven example of a species whose population size has been restored through successful conservation action. Such positive news would give us huge motivation to continue providing safe nest sites for the owls, tackling the many hazards they face, and creating foraging habitat that contributes to wider biodiversity conservation aims.

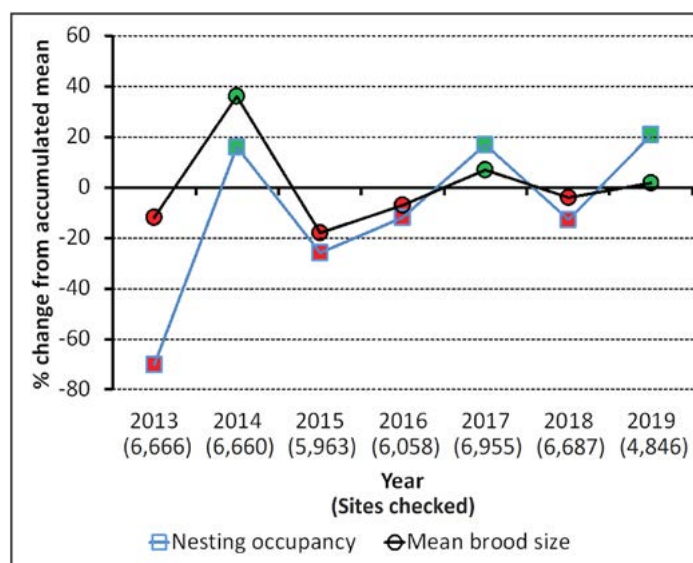


Figure legend: Figure 1. Variation in UK Barn Owl nesting occupancy and brood size from 2013 to 2019. The vertical axis shows percentage change relative to the accumulating mean of all previous years. Red and green points represent negative and positive changes, respectively. 'Sites checked' gives the sample size for calculating change in nesting occupancy. Please note that 2013 was a very poor year so the initial rise represents recovery rather than increase. Please see the State of the UK Barn Owl Population 2019 report for acknowledgments to the many groups that contributed information for this graph.

Dr Mateo Ruiz

Assistant Conservation and Science Officer

Update - Barn Owl's UK Conservation Concern Status

Assigning species to categories such as 'Endangered' or 'Vulnerable' is one way that population estimates can help inform conservation action and decision making. In the case of the Barn Owl, there has been a recent category change in the UK List of Birds of Conservation Concern. In 2009, it was in the Amber-listed category because of its status in the Species of European Conservation Concern scheme, which considered species rarity, localisation, moderate decline, and depletion. However, the species was dropped from the Amber list in 2015 because of changes in how the European assessment was carried out, rather than changes in abundance. Thus, moving the Barn Owl from the UK Amber-listed to Green-listed category does not reflect a change in abundance, either in a European context or nationally.

The Owly Inbox

Owl Be Watchful...

We love to hear from our supporters and were delighted when this lovely poem dropped into our inbox.

Liz Boys got in touch to tell us that she'd written this poem for her sister and placed it inside a Barn Owl book she had purchased for her from our online shop. What a lovely idea! She very kindly allowed us to share it with you.

Owl be watchful
Owl be wise
Downy feathers
Amber eyes.
Owl be still
Dead of night
Owl be silent
Swift in flight.
Owl the hunter
Prey pursued
Raising young
Hungry brood.
Winter moon
Fresh snow deep
Sheltered barn
Owl asleep.

Instant Success

To Whom it May Concern,

This is just a short message to say how happy we and the Barn Owls have been with the box we purchased from you at the end of 2019.

We installed the box in a big dutch barn, approximately 5m high, just after Christmas. By January a pair of Barn Owl were seen courting. They went on to successfully rear at least two chicks, at one point I saw about four barn owls, some obviously fledglings.

They have only just left and the box is now quiet after several months of being very loud with hungry snore like calls.

I never expected the box to be occupied so quickly.

Many thanks and keep up the good work.

Chloe
Consultant Ecologist

Naturetastic Reporter

Introducing Henry Day, a young nature enthusiast, who has written us this fantastic article about his experience of owl pellet dissection. He has a great YouTube channel documenting his many wildlife experiences, you can find it by searching for Naturetastic with Henry on YouTube. Well done Henry!

Hello, my name is Henry, I'm 7 years old and I live in Cambridgeshire. I love nature and I love owls as well because they're fascinating, and you don't really see them often. I sometimes hear them at night because where we live there is lots of farmland and hedgerows. During lockdown I started making videos about the nature I saw when we were out on walks. One of the videos I made was about owl pellets.

I first learned about owl pellets when I went to Paxton Pits Education Centre (run by the BCN Wildlife Trust). First, we were taught lots of facts about owls and then they gave me an owl pellet that had been collected. They showed me how to dissect it properly and to take out the bones very carefully so I can identify what animal the Barn Owl had eaten. The skulls are most important because they are the best way to identify what animal bones are in the pellet.



Henry with his BOT pellet ID chart
Photo Provided

At my grandparents' house there is a Barn Owl box and we were looking to see if there were any signs that the owl had come back this year. We spotted a Barn Owl pellet and I thought to do another dissection. I was really excited to investigate what they had been eating. I printed off a guide from the Barn Owl Trust and found two common shrew skulls and one house mouse skull. We filmed how I did it, and what I found, for my 'Naturetastic with Henry' YouTube channel. I sent my video to the Barn Owl Trust, and they shared it on Facebook which made me really happy!

I saw the Barn Owl that night going out hunting in the dark but my best sighting of a Barn Owl this year was at Watatunga Wildlife Reserve in Norfolk. We went on a deer safari there and saw loads of rare deer and they also have an owl box. We saw the Barn Owl hunting at dusk, and it flew over near us and it was amazing! We could see it very clearly. It was beautiful. I think it is really important to put up Barn Owl boxes, and to protect their habitat, especially areas for them to go hunting and find food.

Henry Day
Nature YouTuber

News from the Workshop

Natasha's Notebook

My average day in the workshop involves all kinds of jobs including cutting ply and batten, drilling, assembly and felting the roofs of our outdoor boxes. When you buy a nestbox from the Barn Owl Trust you are getting a handmade product that has had a lot of thought and hard work put into it! We use materials sourced with care for the environment and quality in mind. Our wood is FSC certified and the plastic we use for the hangers is recycled. We use high quality 4mm torch-on roofing felt, thicker than the felt typically found on ready-made nestboxes.

Our designs and practices are constantly evolving to minimise waste wherever we can. For example, we use offcuts resulting from making one box in the creation of another: pieces of 18mm ply left over from the Tawny box cut become small bird box floors and baffles for the Little Owl boxes, while pieces of 9mm ply left from the tree box cut are glued securely together and become small bird box lids. Short lengths of batten offcuts are turned into ladder rests and door handles for the tree boxes.

Our designs and systems have evolved over the years to meet a demand that grows consistently and significantly, year-on-year. We have to be as efficient and productive as possible! This has been helped in the last few years by very generous donations that have enabled us to invest in a lift for the workshop. This has revolutionised things for us, meaning we no longer need to carry all the wood we cut, and many of the finished boxes, up and down stairs to our storage area!



Every BOT Nestbox Design
Photo: BOT Staff

We have also benefited from other generous donations that have funded roller shutters for the open sides of the barn that houses the workshop. These not only make our tools and stock more secure but make the area a bit more comfortable for us on cold, windy days.

The boxes are an important source of income for the Trust and are particularly vital during this challenging time. We are pleased to report that since re-opening our online shop an encouraging number of orders have been placed. Take a look at our online shop for more details about each of the nestboxes we make. Please note that we are currently posting orders out one day a week, but this is likely to increase in near future as things start getting back to normal.

Did you know that we also provide full details of our designs on our website so that you can make a nestbox of your own? There are cutting plans, assembly instructions and video guides—everything you need to create the ideal owl nestbox! We offer our recycled plastic hangers as a kit for people who choose to make their own outdoor boxes. These hangers are more durable than wood, and they come with all the screws, nails, bolts, washers and nuts you need to hang your homemade outdoor box safely and securely.

Natasha Mihailovic
Practical Support Assistant

Jasmin's Journal

This year marks 10 years that the Barn Owl Trust has been making nestboxes for sale. We've always made boxes here in our workshop at Waterleat, but when I started at the Trust in 2008 it was limited to the odd tree nestbox for our Conservation Team to put up in prime locations and our indoor boxes were made externally by inmates at Channings Wood Prison. I started out by building what was then the new birdroom, hospital aviaries and a fleet of mobile release aviaries and after I landed a permanent part time contract building tree nestboxes.

Back then the whole process was done by hand. My sawing accuracy has never again reached the heights of those days. It would take all day to make one box; measuring and drawing out the plywood parts, hand sawing them out and cutting batten (also by hand), then putting it all together with my only power tool, a Makita 18v drill, the weight of which I was sure my wrists would never recover from. I learnt to use a blow torch for the roofing felt which was about the scariest tool I'd ever used, but with practice it all became very normal, and before long I could make 4 of these boxes over my 2 days a week at the Trust. 4 boxes a week, blimey!, that was more than our Conservation Team needed per week to put up, so the idea came about that maybe people would buy them from us and we could create some much needed funds.

Maybe people would buy them...well before long even my 4 boxes could not sate the needs of avid owl enthusiasts and thanks to generous supporters like Fred Sterns we were able to invest in power tools like a circular saw for ply cutting and our Dewalt chopsaw. Suddenly I could cut batten in seconds and clamp several sheets of ply together and cut them in one go, and in 2 days I could make 10 boxes!! I think you can probably see where this is going.. but before long it was too much to do on my own and we needed to take a risk, employ someone else and hope the nestbox sales kept up the pace! Just to be on the safe side we decided to start making some other kinds of boxes too, the Little Owl, Tawny and Small Bird Box. This was a great success and although mostly people come to us for our Barn Owl boxes we started to sell a lot of these others too.

Being able to make boxes in batches and cut parts for multiple boxes at a time really speeded up the process.

This meant we could produce a lot more without any compromise on quality. Each box was, and still is, put together individually by a highly skilled member of our team.



*Jas (left) and Natasha
Photo : BOT Staff*

Sales have increased each year but we are finally finding a limit on the numbers we can make.

Whilst it's been amazing to see our nestboxing enterprise grow, continuous growth is unsustainable and while we have a lovely workshop space, it's not any bigger than it was when we started. It's just fuller!

Natasha and I are glad to be back in the barn and making our boxes again, between us we build boxes 6 days a week, coupled with some general site maintenance tasks. The energy in the barn is always positive and we enjoy a fantastic working environment, aided by regular cups of tea and the occasional crumplet!

I am so chuffed to be a part of this story and to be able to work for such a great charity alongside so many skilled and dedicated conservationists.

Jasmin Ramsden
Practical Support

In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies
from the estates of

**Margaret Jean and Ronald Walter Curtis,
Martin Hallam & Gloria Hazeldene Gertrude Morris**

and donations in memory of

**John Chard, Mrs Betty Cox,
Jacqueline Groves, Howard Kirk,
Andrew Moss, Winifred Sparkes,
Barnaby Taggart,
John Webb & Brenda Frances Weinand**

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

They all now have a leaf on our Memory Tree

Moving Online

Our BOESS & ABOSM courses are going online!

We have been running professional training courses for Ecologists and Planners for many years:

- **Foundation Course**
Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys and Signs (BOESS)
- **Advanced course**
Advanced Barn Owl Surveying and Mitigation (ABOSM)

Our highly acclaimed courses have been very popular and successful. The courses are important because they provide ecologists with the necessary skills to use the planning system to protect Barn Owls and Barn Owl nest sites.

The income from BOESS & ABOSM also contributes to the Trust's funding. Since the lockdown, we have been unable to provide any face-to-face training and, given that we don't know when it will be safe to re-start the courses, we have begun creating online versions!

We will of course miss holding the training courses in person and miss meeting with Ecologists and Planners. We are determined to continue providing this training to help protect Barn Owls and their Environment.

Having the courses online will also significantly reduce the carbon footprint of the Trust. In the past professionals have travelled from all over the UK to get to us.

Our courses previously involved a mixture of PowerPoint presentations with Conservation Officers, workshops and site visits to local Barn Owl sites. We are working to re-create the same level of training online, by building interactive courses which will include virtual site visits.

Moving the courses online will also mean they will be much more accessible to people who would otherwise have not have been able to travel down to Devon or take the necessary time off work. The courses will also now be available to people working in other time zones!

Natural England accredited our BOESS course so that individuals who successfully completed the course could use their certificate as one of their two references towards their CL-29 class licence application; This licence allows the licence holder to survey Barn Owl nest sites. Natural England have agreed to continue accrediting our BOESS course after we go online, which is fantastic news!

Our team has a lot to learn and we are all working hard to make these courses as informative and interactive as possible, and we are excited to be able to continue providing professional training throughout these challenging times!

We still have a long way to go until the courses will be ready to go live but we will keep you updated on our progress via our website and social media, and we will have an update for you in the next edition of Feedback!

Kaye Thomas
Conservation Team Administration Assistant

Thanks and Things

We are so grateful to all those who have sent us items from our Wants List, prizes for our Annual Draw and bits for recycling. We really appreciate all your donations whether big or small. Thank you to...

Miss L Anquetil, Stella Austin, Leigh-Anne Boucher, Heather Buswell, Alison Fripp, Rob Hamar, Anne Harding, Mark Lyddy, Chris Moncrieff, Steve Newman (BAM clothing), Gilly Pickup, Ali Quinney, J. Robinson, Janet Rutter, Marion Sanders, Anne Stansell, Elizabeth Stone, Pete Webb, Michelle Wheal, Jo Winfield and Cynthia Yeoh (Map Marketing).

Thank you to our wonderful volunteers Kim Baker & Tony Hulatt for all your help including keeping the aviaries clean and general site maintenance. A big thank you also goes to Di Hawkings for being on hand to write notes during this years sanctuary owl health checks. Local wildlife enthusiast, Amy Walkden, not only found an owl in need but also assisted us in releasing the bird back to its home Thank you Amy!

A big thank you also to our inspiring fundraisers! The Axe Valley Runners gave us a donation from the proceeds of the annual Grizzly Run, Rainham Community Orchard in Kent raised funds through their apple pressing events and Shelley Wright & Tracey Morris sold homemade jam to raise funds. We would also like to thank the RSPCA at Westhatch who, over the last 6 months, have transported 5 different birds to our sanctuary here for us to care for and release.

Your support really is greatly appreciated by all the team here at the Barn Owl Trust. Thank You.

Can you help with:

- Postcards and pre1970 envelopes with stamps on
- Used stamps, including any foreign stamps & currency
- Wild bird food - mainly sacks of black sunflower seeds
- 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)
- Socket set (48 pc 1/2 inch drive)
- Extra long drill bits (3,4 & 5mm)
- Wire cutters
- Drill-driver bits (for screwing)
- Quick grip clamps
- Wheel Clamp suitable for use on our Display Trailer (13-17 inch wheel)
- Box Trailer (minimum 2.4m x 1.5m x 1.8m high)
- Small plate compactor
- Barn Owls: Evolution & Ecology (Alexandre Roulin) book.
- Wildlife Conservation on Farmland Vol 1. book.
- 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 ...



The clocks have just gone back and the evenings have drawn in. On damp and dreary days like today it is getting dark by 5pm and at the moment Spring seems a long way off. The news is full of the increasing number of Covid cases but the Climate and Ecological Emergency which is gathering speed, is hardly mentioned. In an effort to not get too depressed by the lack of significant action by most political leaders I've been planting seeds. I have this plan to plant enough 'Year long cabbage' otherwise known as 'Walking stick cabbage' to provide a plant for everyone in the community that wants one. As you might imagine they can grow very tall and they provide a continuous supply of yummy cabbage to the grower. Because they're tall and narrow they can be planted in a flowerbed or a large pot. I have lots of seeds. If you would like to grow some you can send a stamped addressed envelope to the Trust and we will send you a couple of seed pods.

Before starting to write this, I read the tailpiece I wrote in early Spring. The impending Climate and Ecological Crisis was my focus then, this was before Lockdown arrived and 'social distancing' became the norm. I can't help feeling that Covid is a wakeup call for the World, in fact in May the Director General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) said "The pandemic is a reminder of the intimate and delicate relationship between people and planet. Any efforts to make our world safer are doomed to fail unless they address the critical interface between people and pathogens, and the existential threat of climate change, that is making our Earth less habitable."

In May the WHO published 'Prescriptions for a healthy and green recovery from COVID-19' which are worth reading. They say, "Attempting to save money by neglecting environmental protection, emergency preparedness, health systems, and social safety nets, has proven to be a false economy – and the bill is now being paid many times over."

This is a perfect opportunity to create a Green future. Protecting our natural environment should have at least the same priority as economic recovery. In fact, if it is done correctly a 'Green recovery' could aid economic growth, create jobs and develop a healthier, safer and more sustainable society.

During the Lockdown we all saw how air quality improved. Currently worldwide, over seven million people a year die from exposure to air pollution – 1 in 8 of all deaths. Over 90% of people breathe outdoor air with pollution levels exceeding WHO air quality guideline values. Two-thirds of this exposure to outdoor pollution results from the burning of the same fossil fuels that are driving climate change. A 'Green recovery' could change this.

Around the world the crisis also brought out the best in our societies, from solidarity among neighbours, to the bravery of health and other key workers. Here in Ashburton people were delivering food and prescriptions, walking their neighbour's dogs and more. Those now working from home cut down on travel time and emissions, creating quieter roads which meant more walking, cycling and appreciation of the natural World. We live in an affluent society and many of us can make lifestyle choices and changes that will reduce our environmental impact.

'Business as usual' is not sustainable and as we head into an uncertain future it is vital that the community spirit highlighted by the pandemic is nurtured. That we continue to look out for each other, support each other and share acts of kindness. No-one knows what is coming next, but we do know that things need to change.

Together we can make a World of difference.

Frances Ramsden