

# feedback

Issue 65 / Spring 2021



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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](mailto:info@barnowltrust.org.uk)

Welcome to the 65th edition of our bi-annual magazine 'Feedback'. Apologies that it is reaching you slightly later than usual.

What a truly strange year it has been for us all! Our hope for you is that you have weathered the storm of the pandemic and come through safely and in good health. Here at the Barn Owl Trust we have, like many other charities, had the most peculiar year indeed. Sometimes on furlough, sometimes working from home, occasionally in the office and the Zoom calls..... oh boy!! The effects of Covid -19 on our work have been profound, as well as having serious effects on us all as individuals. Thankfully we have all stayed fit and well, and able now to return to work on site although not all at the same time and in a strictly Covid-secure way

Once our online shop re-opened we had an absolute boom in sales of nest boxes. Our team of two builders have been working flat out to keep up with the enormous number of orders. Due to the Covid restrictions, fulfilling the orders in a timely way has proved challenging but the team has worked doggedly to make sure the production line kept rolling. Many thanks to Jaz and Natasha for their superhuman efforts!

In the not-too-distant future the Conservation Team will reveal the result of their own huge efforts in designing and constructing our new online Barn Owl training courses for ecologists and surveyors. The task has proved time consuming and complicated and has been a real learning curve for everyone involved. That said, it has also been satisfying and very worthwhile, and we are very excited to be launching the new offering later this year.

Some of the admin team have been finding exciting ways to fill their days when furloughed. Judith has been ringing birds in her garden (**see Judith's Journal on page 6**), Lisa has been breaking bones in her garden, and Gill has been building veg beds in hers! Jackie has mostly been sunning herself in her plot and Maz has mostly been home schooling! Covid has certainly brought home to us the importance of having outside space to chill in (literally at some points when the temperature fell to silly figures). We do work in the most beautiful environment here at the BOT offices but when we were all shut in, like so many people, we truly appreciated our garden spaces as somewhere to relax.

Now we are all about to be back at work full time we are looking forward to putting the Trust into fully active mode and picking up lots of things where we left off. However, life at BOT is unlikely to be the same again as we have been thinking about new, smarter ways of working that will drive our mission, and keep us greener and more sustainable as a charitable organisation. You can read about how you can help us with this in **Going Digital, on page 5**.

It is always a joy to hear from our supporters and their experiences with owls, and we were particularly thrilled to hear from Phil Perry in Portugal about the Barn Owls on his wildlife reserve. Phil is an excellent photographer and keeps us supplied with wonderful pictures of the birds. Find out about **Phil's Portuguese Paradise on page 7**.

We hope that you enjoy reading this Spring edition, and also that you get a chance to get out into nature to enjoy it for yourselves. Thank you again for your unwavering support of our work. We truly appreciate the help you provide, whether as a Friend of the Trust, as a Barn Owl Adoptee or as someone who donates to our cause. We rely so much on your help, and during these very difficult times we are even more grateful for every penny that comes to us from people like you. Thank you, most sincerely. Because of you, we can continue our vital conservation work.

**Gill Gant**  
Admin Assistant

# BOT News

## Climate and Ecological Crisis? What's all the fuss about? A talk by David Ramsden MBE



*This is the title of a popular new talk by Barn Owl Trust co-founder David Ramsden and it's something you might like to book for any social groups you attend. We asked David to give us a bit of background and explain what it's all about.*

Like many other 'slightly older' conservationists (!) I've spent the last 30+ years not only working in the environmental sector but volunteering for wildlife charities, supporting campaigns, lobbying and signing petitions etc.. I knew all along it was an uphill struggle but it wasn't until 2018 that I really began to grasp the magnitude of our failure. Particularly our global situation. And I was not alone. According to a brand new article\* from 17 of the World's top environmental scientists "The scale of the threats to the biosphere and all its lifeforms, including humanity, is in fact so great that it is difficult to grasp for even well-informed experts".

*\* For an up-to-date assessment I highly recommend reading 'Underestimating the Challenges of Avoiding a Ghastly Future' (Bradshaw et al. 2021) published in 'Frontiers in Conservation Science' - <https://bit.ly/2QPznlj>*

My reaction back in 2018 was to spend winter 18/19 reading papers and reports and listening to online presentations. The realisation that we had failed, that habitat destruction, wildlife decline, and pollution had got far, far worse was both depressing and motivating – a call to greater action. I had to do more.

The following Spring I was invited to present 'An Introduction to the Climate Crisis' to the members of Dartmoor National Park Authority as part of efforts to get the Authority to declare a climate emergency. I'd been mentioning climate change on the end of my Barn Owl Trust presentations since way back in 1989 but never before given a presentation on the subject.

After another 100 or so hours of research and 'powerpointing' I delivered it in June 2019, seemingly with the desired effect. The following month, Dartmoor National Park did indeed declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency - the first UK National Park to do so.

By chance, whilst giving a Barn Owl Trust talk on 'Safer Rodent Control' to a group of north Devon farmers, I happened to mention that I had with me a short presentation on climate change. To my surprise, nearly all of them wanted to see it (!) and afterwards their questions were all about climate change rather than rodent control. It was at that point that I decided to create my first full length presentation on the Climate and Ecological Crisis. Several hundred hours later, it was ready.

Thankfully the comments I've received every time I've presented it have been extremely encouraging, so much so that I've now made the full length talk available as a Powerpoint slide show for other speakers to present. So if you're a public speaker with a potential audience you can request a copy. If not then I'm more than happy to present it to you via 'Zoom'.

Because these global issues involve politics, and I needed the freedom to talk about it, we decided that this talk would be from 'David Ramsden MBE' rather than the Barn Owl Trust. The full talk lasts 70 minutes. A 40-min version is also available.

These talks are being offered free of charge and enquiries can be made by email to [whatalotoffuss@gmail.com](mailto:whatalotoffuss@gmail.com) or by calling **01364 255256**. Further details are available on the Public Speakers Corner and SpeakerNet websites.

**David Ramsden MBE**  
Head of Conservation

# News Bites

## BOT Talks

Our educational talks are all now available as online presentations using Zoom.

We offer a specially-designed session for primary school, KS3 level and community youth groups called the Wings of Change. The session uses storytelling to engage the children and covers Barn Owl habitat, adaptations, decline and conservation.

We also offer 3 different presentations about Barn Owls and their conservation, for adult groups. Each one lasts around 60 minutes with time for questions, but can be flexible to meet your group's requirements.

Please email [info@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:info@barnowltrust.org.uk) for more information and to book.

## Feed the Birds

Thank you to the Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society who have paid for this year's winter bird food crop and the preparation of the ploughed area. The crop was sown by hand on the 15th April and we are now waiting for some rain and for the weather to warm up so the seed starts to grow before the birds eat it all! Winter Bird Walks are being planned for Society members to see the results of the funding.

The Society and the Trust are also liaising on another project, more about this in future issues.

## Learn More About Owls

Some of the BOT team recently tuned into a series of fascinating talks facilitated by the International Owl Centre.

Prof. Roulin's 'Owls for Peace' talk gives amazing insight into Barn Owl biology. It also describes how owls in the Middle East bring different people together and how a fascination for nature helps conservation.

Alexandre Roulin is a professor of biology at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. For two decades he has studied Barn Owls to answer evolutionary and ecological scientific questions. His ambition is to reconcile humans with nature and to use interdisciplinary approaches to promote peace and respect for our environment.

If you'd like to watch his talk please go to: <http://ow.ly/ZsCT50ExNlp>

# LLP Update

Semi-ripe Hazelnut shells were littering the paths in early August as the Squirrels began feasting on them. The hedgerow Blackberries were green and swelling and the Sloes were also ripening, much earlier than usual. On the 6th a huge flock of swifts (100+) were seen and heard hunting over the field, the largest display for some time. The Creeping Buttercup in the crop was still flowering and seems to have been the plant that has benefited most from our 'no-tillage' trial, unfortunately it did seem to suppress a lot of the plants we did want to grow!

On the 13th the first Linnets of the season arrived over the crop and at dusk on the 15th we were delighted to see one of the two young male Barn Owls which were released on the 9th. There were regular sightings of these two throughout the coming months. We recorded the hottest August day here in 15 years at 29.3°C and a mean temperature for the month of 17.4°C – significantly warmer than the average of 15.77°C for the past 15 years.

September saw a flush of Parasol Mushrooms in the long grass and more Field Mushrooms appearing on the mown paths. We were having wonderful sightings of Roe Deer and Southern Hawker dragonflies were regularly seen around the ponds. The Hazelnuts had completely disappeared from the trees by October but the Holly, Sloes and Hawthorn berries were an amazing sight along with the huge number of Great Mullein or Common Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) plants coming up in North Park.

On the 13th October another two young Barn Owls were released from the mobile aviary in North Park and volunteers Tony and Kim carried out a Hazel Dormouse survey on the 20th. They found 4 boxes with nests and 3 other boxes with fresh green leaves that the mice use as bedding. They found 5 dormice in total and a family of 6 Wood Mice. On the 25th a Sparrowhawk was seen hunting over the crop, it was chased by a Goshawk over the larch plantation. The resident group of Meadow Pippits were joined by others and we were seeing upwards of 20 flying up from the long grass.

November was rather wet but it didn't deter a dozen socially distanced volunteers planting over 70 young trees in our recently fenced re-wilding area. The cattle (a small group of Belted Galloways) arrived on the 17th and left on the 31st December having done a good job of grazing the rough grassland and poaching the ground along the Pennsland lane hedge.

December was a very wet month too, 29 days with 229.1mm of rain. The mean for the month here over 14 years is 152mm! David saw a Starling murmuration on the 11th of about 500-1000, a very unusual and spectacular sight! On the 26th December Storm Bella arrived knocking over one of our empty mobile aviaries parked in Kiln Close. The goat house was also blown over with one of the goats trapped inside! Fortunately she was shaken but unhurt and their house was only slightly damaged.

On the 31st, Matt and Mateo checked all the small bird boxes, clearing them out ready for the next breeding season. They found evidence of Dormouse nests in four, perhaps indicating that the local population is increasing.

January saw another first for the LLP when on the 8th two Herons were spotted flying from the Orchard. With the Herons visiting regularly we knew the arrival of the frogs must be imminent and the first frog spawn was seen in the Flo Pond on the 14th and in the Oakley Pond on the 15th.

On the 17th the first Primrose in flower was recorded in the Pennsland Lane hedge of North Park. We began February with completely sodden ground and the river level high. The pipes in the river that feed the ponds needed clearing almost daily as they were blocking with leaf debris. On the 25th, the first signs were seen of hatched tadpoles in the Flo Pond and the first Peacock butterfly was spotted.

In March, Matt and Mateo cleared the abstraction pipes in the river and began pruning the fruit trees in the orchard. Very unusually, a rabbit was seen in the scrub at the top of Corner Wood. We rarely see them here and usually the only evidence that they visit are droppings on the path by the Holly hedge on the other side of the land. The first Skylark of the year was seen and heard flying over the airstrip and then landing in the rough grass on the 5th and again on the 6th, when a flock of over 80 Linnets were counted flying up from the crop.

By the end of March the Blackthorn in the hedges and the Plum trees in the orchard were in full bloom and the top of the field was a carpet of Celandines shining out in the rough grassland. The birdsong this month was delightful, a chorus of Linnets with Great Tit, Robin and Blue Tit, and then there is the Skylark who was still being seen and heard most days – glorious!



*Harrowing the wildflower crop  
Photo: Frances Ramsden*

The 1st of April brought the first Chiff Chaffs of the year and during that first week the Crop area was mowed to prepare for ploughing on the 9th. The 6th saw the arrival of the first Swallows of the year and on the 10th and 11th the harrowing of the Crop area brought in 100+ gulls including at least 3 Lesser Black Backed who soared noisily over the field behind the tractor.

This was the first opportunity to use our two vintage harrows bought during lockdown. The disc harrow prepared the ground after ploughing, then the seed was sown by hand and the chain harrow covered the seed.

The seed mix was Spring Barley/Wheat/Triticale, White/Red/Japanese Reed Millet, Fodder Radish, Dwarf Sorghum, Linseed, Gold of Pleasure, Dwarf Sunflower and Quinoa. Also, Common Poppy, Corn Marigold, Cornflower & Corn Chamomile as nectar strip along the South and East edges.

Up to 6 Pied Wagtails have been in evidence every day since. Now what we really need is some gentle rain and warmer nights to facilitate germination.

**Francis Ramsden**  
BOT Trustee

# Judith's Journal

I am going to backtrack a little bit to the start of the first lockdown. In line with government guidelines the BTO restricted all ringing to areas within a ringer's home boundaries i.e. gardens. This was eased to a certain extent when tiers were introduced but at present it has returned to mainly garden ringing. Whilst survey work and ringing is classed as voluntary and can therefore be undertaken, the BTO advises ringers to be aware of social distancing, the amount of travelling and number of people involved. It is a slightly 'grey' area.

One of the schemes that the BTO runs within the Ringing Scheme is the Constant Effort Site (CES). The purpose of CES is to gather information about the numbers of adult and juvenile birds together with productivity and adult survival rates. This indicates whether species are doing well, or not. As suggested by the title each ringing session runs for the same length of time and uses the same amount of netting each time in the same places. It is undertaken during regular set periods and has been running since 1983. Up to now it has operated mainly in reed-bed and scrub habitats.



Male Firecrest  
Photo: Judith Read

With the change in circumstances the BTO decided to extend the scheme to find out the importance of gardens to birds and how much they are used. So I enrolled the garden. The main difference is that feeders can be used to attract birds to the garden. I operated two nets – a 40' and a 23', one down each side of the garden. There were 12 sessions between the 3rd May and 31st August producing a total of 186 new birds and 27 retraps. The sessions became busier as the young fledged but only one session was busy. Surprisingly the most numerous species caught were House Sparrow followed (unsurprisingly!) by Blue Tit and Great Tit.

The garden CES was extended to cover 6 sessions over winter. This has proved far more challenging due to the weather. One morning it took about 30 minutes to get the furled net open because it was so frozen! Numbers of birds have also been very low although the garden seems to get busy again once the net has been taken down!

You never know what is going to turn up in your nets during a ringing session. Early in December a Firecrest made an appearance. In this case showing quite clearly that it is a male by the broad orange stripe in the crown.

The really fun bit of ringing is either catching a bird that has been ringed elsewhere or receiving information about a bird that you have ringed and has later been recovered. Sadly, in many of the latter cases the bird will have been found dead.



Male Firecrest with distinctive orange stripe  
Photo: Judith Read

If you do find a bird with a ring on it the information is important and everyone would be very grateful if you would advise the BTO about the ring. You can do this at <https://www.bto.org/>.

Generally within a couple of days you will receive an e-mail giving you information about the bird. This confirms the species of bird, the age when it was ringed, where it was ringed and where it was found as well as the distance covered and how many days since it was ringed.

A permit is not for life. At this time every year each ringer is required to renew their permit. We have to confirm that we have no convictions under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and submit the total number of adult birds and nestlings that we have ringed in the past year. We also pay a fee to cover the cost of administering the ringing scheme. Hopefully my permit for next year is on the way!

**Judith Read**  
BOT Team Member & BTO Ringer

## Caught On Camera

This amazing photo of a Cattle Egret was captured in Kent by one of our supporters, Les Foster.

The Cattle Egret's scientific name is *Bubulcus ibis*. They are slightly smaller but much rarer than the Little Egret. Cattle egrets are visiting the UK in increasing numbers. They spend time close to livestock and eat insects and worms which their hooves disturb.

Info from [rspb.org.uk](http://rspb.org.uk)



# Bird News

## Bird Hospital

It has been relatively quiet over winter and through the second lockdown period with just two Barn Owls arriving. A lady brought in a male bird in mid-December that she found sat in a field whilst out walking her dogs. He showed no obvious signs of injury although his left eye was sometimes partially closed. Despite care he sadly died two days later.

I decided to send him to the Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme for a post-mortem analysis. The scheme is a national surveillance group that quantifies the exposure of sentinel predatory bird species to pollutants, pesticides and biocides of current and emerging concern. It is run by the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and is currently funded by the rodenticide industry.

The results came back saying that he had sustained damage to the left clavicle and keel and had died from a haemorrhage in the thoracic cavity. These injuries indicate he had been in a collision with something.

For more information about The PBMS - [www.pbms.ceh.ac.uk/](http://www.pbms.ceh.ac.uk/)

A second bird, a female, was found by a local farmer in one of his barns at one of our annual monitoring sites near Paignton, Devon. She had an obvious injury and infection to one of her ankles that had probably prevented her from hunting as she was very weak when picked up. Unfortunately she died soon after we collected her.

Interestingly she was a bird that I had ringed two and a half years previously as a youngster in the nest at another annual monitoring site only 4.7 miles to the west. She had lived for a good two and a half years in the wild and had not dispersed very far from where she had fledged. The average dispersal distance from a parents nest is 12 km and the average life expectancy of a wild bird is only 18 months.

Birds that are ringed and then recovered do provide a truly fascinating insight into the life of the owl in question and also add to a better understanding of the ecology of the species as a whole. And then there is my personal perspective of having ringed her in the nest at only a few weeks old and then to hold her again moments before her life ended. What a privilege to have known this beautiful bird.

## Sanctuary

During the past year there have been no new additions to the Sanctuary. Two Tawny Owls sadly passed away, one in November 2020, and another at the end of March this year.

On a happier note it's nice to see Silver, the one-eyed female Barn Owl and the two males Tormund and Tyrion in the adjacent aviary taking an active interest in each other now that spring has arrived. Most of the resident birds have also had their annual health check and are all doing really well.

**Rick Lockwood**  
Conservation Officer

# Going Digital

As with many small organisations, Covid-19 has forced us to work very differently. In many ways, it's no bad thing as it has led us to examine the way we work and communicate with each other and with you, our supporters.

Less paper, less printing, less travel – so much better for the planet!

As the first lockdown began, like everyone else, we had to stop our traditional communication channels and face-to-face interaction. Our office temporarily closed, and our planned events were unfortunately cancelled. It triggered such a dramatic departure from what we were all used to and left us no choice but to adapt to a new way of life. Which we did, of course! It was tricky at first but we are nothing if not adaptable here at BOT!

Sadly, Covid restrictions meant we were not able to hold our usual Conservation training courses on site. The Conservation Team are instead hard at work creating interactive online versions of our training courses. It's a huge undertaking for our small team and we hope to launch the courses this Summer. Look out for details on our web-page (more technology!).

Working from home also meant we couldn't send out letters, certificates, and magazines by post as we normally would. This meant we needed to 'go digital' where possible.

As you know The Barn Owl Trust tries to be as sustainable as possible.

We recycle and reuse where we can and going digital helped to reduce our environmental impact even more. It is also less expensive for us to send out communications via the internet, saving vital funds on postage and packaging.

Can you help us with this drive to become more digital?

Many of our supporters already prefer to receive their communications, certificates and magazines by email. It helps us to streamline our working practices and saves the Trust's funds. Our digital version of Feedback is also in COLOUR!

We know not everyone will be set up to receive digital communications but if you are happy to receive items like your bi-annual magazine or Adoptions and Friends certificates and updates digitally, please get in touch via email – [info@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:info@barnowltrust.org.uk).

We hope that many of you will take up this opportunity to help us become a more sustainable charity.

We'd like to say a really big thank you to all of our wonderful supporters for continuing to support us during these very difficult times. We truly appreciate your help, and we really couldn't do it without you.

**Gill Gant**  
Admin Assistant

# Barn Owls in Portugal

Earlier this year we were contacted by Phil Perry, a long time supporter of the Barn Owl Trust, who lives on a wildlife reserve in Portugal. He observes and documents all sorts of wildlife, taking beautiful photos of the species he encounters. Phil kindly agreed to write an article about his resident Barn Owls for us...

This year we are monitoring two Barn Owl nestboxes on our property in Alentejo, Southern Portugal. One nest is on the side of a ruined windmill with a wonderful view over the countryside and some rough meadows all around that are full of Wood Mice (*Apodemus sylvaticus*). This nest has been used for three years now with mixed success. In the first year, first the male and then the female deserted the nestlings and we had to intervene. We took the remaining three youngsters to a rehabilitation centre in the Algarve and in due course they kindly brought back the three young adult owls, duly ringed, for release onto our land. A most exciting event. Last year the male again deserted but the female remained and reared one chick that successfully fledged.



We have no idea why the desertions occurred but the main problems facing Barn Owls in Portugal are: loss of habitat, lack of places to nest, food shortages, rodenticides, and 'predation' by vehicles. Our current thinking is that the birds are not very experienced and that mice numbers may have been low for the last two years which were very dry.

This year a pair of Barn Owls has again nested in the windmill box. They recorded one unusual prey item, a Great Tit (*Parus major*): small birds are rarely preyed on by Barn Owls, particularly diurnal species. This winter we have had plentiful rains which seems to have boosted the rodent population judging by the numbers of prey seen uneaten in the nestbox. The male owl has been bringing in lots of mice for the female.



Unfortunately, the female is not incubating the eggs properly, often leaving them exposed in the box while she sleeps next to them. Maybe it is a new pair that are again inexperienced.

Our other nestbox is mounted on a tall pole in a meadow next to a small olive plantation. This is the first year it has been occupied. They have laid nine eggs – quite a high number. Again, the male has brought in lots of Wood Mice – more than the female can eat at one time. Everything looked to be going fine. But in the last week or two the eggs have been left un-incubated and are scattered around the nestbox. Not encouraging signs. It seems this may also be an inexperienced pair.



I think I have to add an additional factor to the plight of Barn Owls in Portugal: That inexperienced birds are highly unlikely to breed successfully. So sadly, our hopes this year are muted as it is possible that neither pair will hatch any eggs this season. The Olive plot owls' eggs are due to hatch any day now (after  $\pm 34$  days 'incubation'). The windmill owls' eggs are not due to hatch for another ten days or so as they were laid somewhat later. We will see what happens.

Still, we do at least have a pair of Common Kestrels showing signs they might nest in our Kestrel nestbox. This species also suffers from a lack of suitable nest sites as they do not make their own nest. Hopefully, vole numbers are good this year for this diurnal hunter.

**Philip Perry**

# A New Barn Owl Book

'Barn Owls Evolution and Ecology' by Prof. Alexandre Roulin

Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-1-107-16575-5

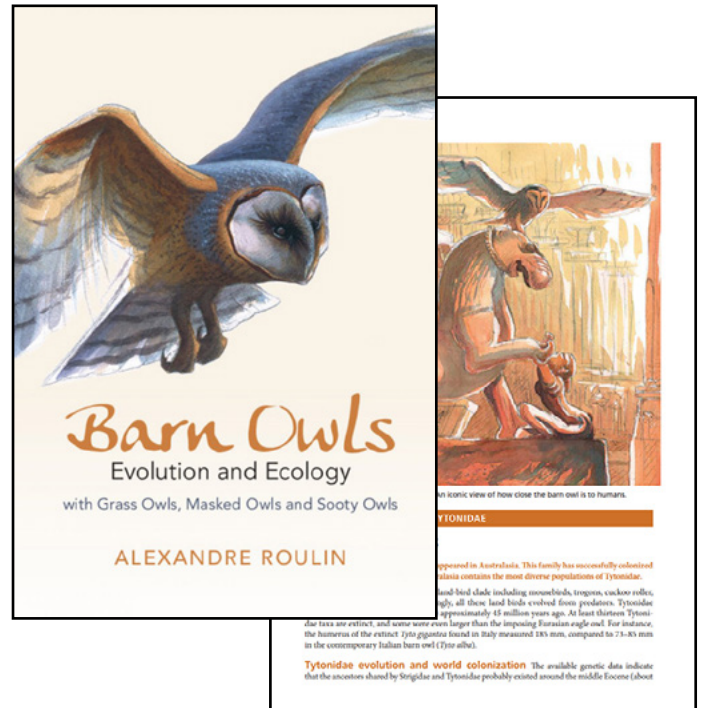
Although we've known about Alex Roulin's Barn Owl research at the University of Lausanne for many years, it was not until the World Owl Conference 2017 that we first met face-to face.

The team he leads have not only researched important aspects of Barn Owl ecology, like foraging behaviour and home ranges using GPS technology, but also some fascinating aspects of their evolution based on DNA sampling. Fairly high-end scientific stuff (!) yet Alex has managed to produce a book that's highly accessible to all owl enthusiasts. It's packed full of new information and is beautifully illustrated.

We were asked to look at an early draft of the 'conservation' chapter and pleased to see that our comments have all been taken on board. Other chapters provide fascinating insights into the private lives of Barn Owls. Did you know, for example, that nestlings feed each other and even 'negotiate' or that Barn Owls promote cross-border cooperation between Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians?

Amazing stuff!

Well done Alex & team!



# A Barn Owl in Winter

We were thrilled when Jane Eardley got in touch with us to share some lovely photos of her local Barn Owls...

I have lived in remote areas of the countryside all my life, and I've always had a love of Owls. I can remember as a child seeing the occasional sighting of a Barn Owl on our farm.

These past few years there has been lots more Barn Owls where I now live, out in the Staffordshire moorlands. In February 2021 we had a really cold spell with lots of snow, ice and sub zero temperatures. I had not seen the local Barn Owls for a few days and was starting to worry if they'd managed to find sufficient food.

Then late one afternoon I saw the familiar flash of white fly past the cottage and I saw a Barn Owl land in my field. I managed to get my camera out just in time to photograph it eating the vole.



I thought I would share the photos with you all. I use a Nikon D500 with 200-500 lens for my bird photography.

I am lucky to also have resident Tawny Owls in the wood, and Short Eared Owls just a bit further up on the moors. Watching the SEOs hunting is such a joy. I've got a few nice photos of them too, which I thought you all might like to see.

As I have had many sightings in my fields of the Barn Owls, I've now put an indoor box in one of the old buildings in the hope that they might choose to make their home here one day.

It is great to see the good work that the Barn Owl Trust is doing to educate people about these beautiful birds.

Jane Eardley



# The Owly Inbox

## DIY Nestbox

Hi Barn Owl Trust,

I wanted to say thank you to all at the Trust for the great nestbox building plan and the on-line videos – they were really helpful and very clear.

The Barn Owl box we have made is now hanging. It replaces one that we'd inherited which was in bad shape.

Neighbours have told us that it was used by Barn Owls, so we're hoping that they'll visit once again. I hope to put my new learned skills to use and make more boxes for local groups.

Kind regards,

Peter Raftery



## Fitness Fundraiser

Dear Barn Owl Trust,

My name is Henry and I am 16 years old and live in Holland. I used to live in Gloucestershire and that is why I chose to support a UK charity.

As part of the requirements for my school each year I have to complete a number of challenges and services which help other people.

This year I decided to set myself a challenge of raising money for the Barn Owl Trust as I love all birds.

Between October 1st and April 1st I have run 650km (running around 3 x a week, 8km each time). I then asked family and friends to sponsor me. In total the donations made on my behalf to you have totalled approximately £225.

I hope this money can be used to support some of the Barn Owls you rescue.

Best wishes,

Henry Bellamy

## Owl Mug Cosies

Our lovely (and talented!) supporters Tracey and Shelley have been raising funds for BOT by making and selling these adorable owl mug cosies, with thanks to the Coffee Station Café for providing a place for them to be purchased.

They still have some if anyone would like to purchase them. An owl cosy costs £5.50 including postage and Tracey would be delighted to pop you one in the post (colours picked at random), just drop her a line on [rafikihandcrafted@outlook.com](mailto:rafikihandcrafted@outlook.com).

A big thank you to Tracey and Shelley!



## Nestbox in LA

Hi Barn Owl Trust,

I'm Dana. Thank you for the information on your website. We live in Los Angeles, California and about three months ago followed your instructions and built our own Barn Owl box and hung it in our tree. This evening we realised we now have two residents! You can see one of them in the photo below...



# Bough Beech Wildlife Tower

In 2013 Kent Wildlife Trust's (KWT) Living Landscapes work introduced a Barn Owl Project in the Bough Beech area in West Kent. The purpose was to improve habitat management for wildlife by working with farmers and landowners. The idea was to use Barn Owls as an iconic species to attract interest, knowing that habitat good for Barn Owls is also beneficial for many other species.

Myself, and husband Peter (who have been KWT Nature Reserve Wardens for 40 years) drew on our volunteer team and began building some Barn Owl boxes. We chose the Barn Owl Trust recommended design. The first box was erected on land adjacent to the Bough Beech Reservoir with encouragement from SES Water who own the site.

Bough Beech Reservoir is well known by many bird watchers as a good place to see many bird species.



Construction begins  
Photo provided

Sadly, their extensive and meticulous lists over the years seldom mentioned the sighting of a Barn Owl.

However, we were rewarded with a pair of nesting Barn Owls the very next year. As we erected further boxes we continued to attract nesting Barn Owls. As with Barn Owls, some years very good, others poor, but sightings of Barn Owls around the area soon increased.

One day, thumbing through a 2010 copy of the Barn Owl Trust 'Feedback' I noticed the News page announced the building of a Wildlife Tower.

Without hesitation I decided that was just what we needed. A solid building to replace all the barns and out-buildings, traditional Barn Owl nesting places, would be just the thing! As Bough Beech sits in the Low Weald on clay, a stonework edifice was not in keeping. Something in brick would fit the vernacular. Colin Shawyer supplied an alternative plan which looked just perfect.

Where to build? Once again SES Water welcomed the idea and agreed the use of a field of rough grassland, north of the reservoir, already a hunting ground for Barn Owls. More lucky than we could hope, a local landscape architect offered to draw up the planning application.

Our team of volunteers were keen, but although sport many talents – not a brickie among them!



Lynne and Peter with the completed tower  
Photo provided

However, we questioned Dave Rabbett, who taught Carpentry in the Construction Department at the West Kent College in Tonbridge, and following a chat with his Department Head, we were told their Brickwork Course Instructor was willing to lead his students to build the tower. Elation!!

January 2019 the planning application was approved. More elation!

Our volunteer team dug and prepared the foundation, then, on a sunny day in June 2019 the brickwork began. John Callaghan the instructor led his willing and hard-working young students to lay the first brick. Progress was slow but sure.

While we worked a pair of Barn Owls watched the progress sitting in the 'window' of a nearby Tawny Owl box. Flying out over the grassland occasionally to hunt. What a summer! Luck was still with us when Gary Milnes, another instructor with roofing skills, completed the roof in February 2020 – Yes, just before the Covid Crisis.

So, the planned party celebrations were cancelled, and the tower news not published. Although bird watchers noticed a kestrel regularly sitting on the roof.

In November 2020 a Barn Owl was spotted leaving the tower. They have since been seen regularly using the tower. This is a dream come true!

**Lynne and Peter Flower**

# Beryl Welsh

Beryl Welsh (nee Boucher) 1926-2020

It is with the greatest sadness we announce the passing of Beryl Welsh (mother of Frances Ramsden, BOT co-founder and Trustee). Beryl was passionate about the Barn Owl Trust, even before it became a registered charity. She would help out at our annual fund-raising jumble sales in the 1980's and went on to become a regular helper at our street collections once we had received our registered charity number in 1988. From litter-picks to sponsored walks, repainting the office, child minding, dog walking and packing newsletters or sales goods she was always willing to lend a hand where it was needed and was a regular visitor to the office for many years.

Originally from Gloucester she worked as a telegraphist and in 1947 she joined the Land Army and was sent to work on farms in Cornwall. It was here in 1947 that she first met Reginald Welsh, an RAF engine fitter who was home on leave. They were married in May 1948, and in January 1952 moved to the house in Modbury where Beryl would spend the next 69+ years and raise their two girls June and Frances.

Beryl joined the Women's Institute in Modbury and was President and Secretary at different times until it closed down in the 1990's and she then joined Aveton Gifford WI. For many years she ran a gift shop in Modbury and then a second-hand shop. She also became a care worker in her 60's.

One of her other passions were the Brownie Guides. In the mid 1960's Beryl started the 1st Modbury Brownie pack. She became 'Brown Owl' and provided inspiration to hundreds of young girls for many years.



*Beryl with Ida Ramsden fundraising in 1989  
Photo: BOT Staff*

In 2007 she accompanied us to Buckingham Palace to see David collect his MBE from Queen Elizabeth II. Reg died in November 2012 and Beryl continued to live at Modbury, frequently spending time in Ashburton and always keen to visit the office and help where she could.

For her last few years Beryl was virtually housebound but was still always keen to support the Trust by buying draw tickets and her Christmas cards. She died at home on 12th December after a short illness.

Thank you so much, Beryl.

We miss you.

## In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies  
from the estates of

Barbara Lucas, Susan Beardsley,  
Eilizabeth Miller and Elizabeth Mary Knibbs

and donations in memory of

Mary Yonge, John Colebrook, Beryl Welsh,  
Marjorie Tame, Paul Yells, Martin Lacey,  
Christopher Mark Spiller, Connie Whybrow,  
Maureen Basford, Keith Thomas Lynn,  
Derek Pretious, Shaun Armstrong, Ray Gunner,  
Alec Hutchison and Ronald Staines

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

*They all now have a leaf on our Memory Tree.*

*Each wooden leaf bears the name of someone who  
either chose to support our work by leaving a legacy to  
the Trust or, of someone whose family and friends have  
made donations in their memory.*

## Owl Release

We recently received an email from Natalie, a concerned member of the public who had unfortunately hit a Tawny Owl with her car. Thankfully, the bird survived so Natalie carefully picked it up, placed it in a box and took it home to seek further advice. The bird had no obvious injuries but was clearly stunned. After seeking advice from our Conservation Team Natalie, with help from her parents, was able to successfully feed and rehydrate the Tawny Owl. After a few days, the bird was in good health and was successfully released back into the wild, where it was found.

Well done Natalie!



*The Tawny Owl recuperating  
Photo provided*

# 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...

Marion Lyddy, Beryl Searby, Liz Woollard, N. Reid, Myfanwy Ford, Jude Gourd, Honey Ingram, Melanie White, J Dilnot Smith & Son, Peter and Ann Stansell, Anne Strong, Gwyneth Parish, Mrs J Muir, Anne Harding, Louise Anquetil, Ian Pickvance, Helen Farrow, Andrew Whybrow (from the late Connie Whybrow) and Esther van Delft.

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 to our inspiring fundraisers! Tracey Morris & Shelley Wright gave a donation from the sale of their lovely owl cosies. Henry Bellamy raised funds through sponsored runs and the Rainham Community Orchard in Kent raised funds through sales of apples from the orchard.

A big thank you to Westmoor Vets (Tavistock) and to City Vets (Exeter) for their ongoing support.

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

## Can you help with:

- 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
- Three-furrow plough
- 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 ...



It's hardly surprising that those of us who live in the UK talk about the weather so much. Variable doesn't begin to cover it! It's not unusual these days to hear that we've regularly had record breaking weather events and the Met Office reports that during the winter, 20/21 most of the South had less sunshine than usual and more rain. Compared to the heatwave last year April was really different. We had the lowest average minimum temperatures for April in the UK since 1922 with a record high number of ground frosts - 22 days in the month compared to an average of 12. Despite this during April the UK saw 48% more sunshine hours than average. April this year was also one of the driest on record, with just 11% of our average rainfall here. Not good for farmers and gardeners!

We know that because of Climate Change the weather is going to be more extreme and record-breaking events will become 'the norm'. This has serious implications for food supplies. Here in Ashburton the 'Ashburton Climate Emergency' (ACE) group is working on projects to raise awareness and try to create a more resilient and sustainable community. One of these projects is the 'Community Fridge'. Millions of tons of perfectly good food goes to waste every year in the UK. This contributes to Climate Change as it produces methane - a greenhouse gas even more potent than carbon dioxide. Figures from 'waste2' suggest that "If food waste were a country, it would be the third-largest producer of CO2 after the USA and China." The 'Community Fridge' has a team of volunteers who collect unsold food from retailers in the area and anyone in the community can come and take anything they want. The only proviso is that you don't take more than you can use. Anyone with a surplus of home-grown fruit or vegetables can contribute and another team of volunteers check the fridge to keep it clean. A great example of how a small group can make a difference to a whole community.

If you feel inspired and want to find out more ACE has a website... [www.ashburtonclimateemergency.com](http://www.ashburtonclimateemergency.com)

As we emerge from Covid restrictions I'm really concerned about all the talk of 'returning to normal'. 'Normal' is not sustainable. 'Normal' has us facing a Climate and Ecological Emergency. Humans have evolved to deal with immediate threats, and many don't see that species loss or Climate Change affects them. Last year Sir Robert Watson, chair of The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), said "The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide."

Covid has been a warning to us and shown that in an 'emergency' governments can act dramatically. Here in the UK, as our statistics show, we acted too late compared to countries like New Zealand and Australia but thanks to our NHS and communities pulling together to support the vulnerable, we fared much better than countries like Mexico and India. We now have an opportunity to 'Build back Better' with the emphasis on sustainability rather than economic growth and consumerism. It would be great to think that our leaders and the 'people' got it..... But despite the warnings from the United Nations, resuming 'business as usual' seems to be the goal. It is encouraging to see that the media is now mentioning Climate Change more often and we have to hope that 'action' rather than words will change our societies for the better. As individuals we may feel that we can't change things but even small changes made by many people do have an effect.

*Together we can make a World of difference.*

Frances Ramsden