

Issue Number 39 - Spring 2008



FEEDBACK

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International Issue Barn Owl MBE



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THE BARN OWL TRUST - CONSERVING THE BARN OWL AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to an International issue of Feedback where you have the opportunity to hear from groups and individuals around the world involved in conserving and studying these amazing birds. Following our attendance at the World Owl Conference in Holland last year (page 5) we invited some of the other participants to share news of their work and their perspectives with you - pages 6 -12. We hope you will enjoy reading their pieces as much as we did and appreciate how good their English is.

Whilst most European Barn Owl populations are experiencing similar problems to us, both Israel and the Malaysia Peninsular have booming populations and an amazing 'take-up' rate for their nestboxes. In a recent email Motti Charter (Israel) says, "We added 30 Barn Owl and 32 kestrel boxes on poles over the last two days. Tomorrow we will add another 10 Barn Owl boxes on trees.!"

On the UK front - Thank you to Bernard Wright of Broxton Barn Owl Group for letting us know that there were 156 successful

Barn Owl breeding sites in Cheshire in 2007 with a total of 651 confirmed young. This compares to 36 breeding pairs and 96 young recorded in 2006. They have 864 nestboxes installed - well done Cheshire.

On our front cover is a photograph from Amir Ezer (Israel) which we couldn't resist sharing with you. The inset features the MBE (Member of the British Empire) emblem awarded to David (page 3) in December. He accepted it on behalf of everyone involved with the Trust and its work, so we thought everyone should get a good look at it; most of us had never seen one before. Congratulations to everyone who has helped; it really is a shared award.

For those of you who use the Internet there are several web addresses included that we recommend a look at. If you want to find out what it's like to volunteer for a Barn Owl conservation group in Hungary check out the link on page 12 and if, like us, you found the Little Owl picture on page 11 fascinating, visit André's website for an amazing range

of photographs. Of course the BOT's own site will give you the latest news, information, tips for recycling, links, pictures and much, much more so add it to your favourites and call in regularly: www.barnowltrust.org.uk

In this issue of Feedback we bring you the latest BOT news and we have a very exciting update on the wildlife refuge (page 5) built in 2006. On page 4 Julie reports our Bird News and the latest on the 'Heligan Hooligan'. There is news on the comings and goings at the Trust on page 14 and events and supporters news on pages 13 and 15 respectively - we hope you might be able to join in with something to help us celebrate our 20th Anniversary this year.

We are holding our Annual Walk and Picnic in June and fervently hope for better weather than last year. We are also having a Supporters Day in July (page 3) to celebrate our 20th Birthday and it would be great to share these events with you but, if you are too far away, we'd still like to invite you to celebrate this incredible milestone - see page 15.

The next issue of Feedback will be our 40th and we are planning a bumper edition to record our anniversary so don't forget to send us your news and photos! In the meantime we hope you enjoy this issue and that it encourages you to do your bit for conservation. Maybe it helps to hear from people all over the world working to conserve Barn Owls and other wildlife. Together we can really make a world of difference. Thank you for your support.

Eds. Frances & Sandra

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Cover Photo: Amir Ezer

Inset: Pictures 1 & 3 BOT library, 2 British Ceremonial Arts Ltd

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

Many thanks to everyone who provided words and pictures for this issue.

Editorial team: Frances Ramsden and Sandra Reardon.

Copy date for issue No 40 is Monday 18 August

*Send your contributions - news, letters, pictures and information to:
Feedback, Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU*

Email: feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk

Website: www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Join us for a
Bracken Bashing Day
on
Saturday 5th July
10.00am - 4.00pm

This is an opportunity to see the Lennon Legacy Project field and help us to control the bracken.

We provide gloves and big sticks. You need to bring suitable clothing e.g. sunhats and a packed lunch

It's a fun day and really helps to control the bracken

Places are limited so please phone the office or email us if you are interested in coming along.

01364 653026

BOT News

An Invitation to our 20th Birthday

This year the Barn Owl Trust celebrates 20 years as a registered charity. Although the work of the Trust began back in 1985 and the Trust's Deed is dated 25th December 1987, the date recognised as our 'official birthday' is 28th July as this was when we received our charity number. What a 20 years. None of us involved back then had any idea how things would develop, how much we would achieve and how many wonderful people would get involved and support us. Who knows what the next 20 years will bring?

To mark the occasion we are inviting you to celebrate our birthday with your friends and neighbours. We hope that you might hold an event: a coffee morning, dinner party or something else to raise funds and awareness of the Trust and its work. If you are interested please ask for our Party Pack or talk to Caroline on 01364 653026.

We are celebrating with a Supporters' Day on Saturday 12 July and inviting you to come and visit the Lennon Legacy Project Field. We held our first Supporters' Day in July 2005, it was a great success. Since then we've built new hedge banks, created the ponds and begun work on the Forde Orchard site with the aim of eventually replanting it as an orchard.

On Supporters' Day there will be a short presentation to explain the objectives of the LLP and you will see the field as it was when we bought it and see the changes month by month. Then there will be an opportunity to visit our workplace and take a guided walk around the field to admire the wildlife at first hand. Please note: the walk will be approximately one hour and the site is an upland field with uneven terrain. We can't promise that you will see Barn Owls but you will get to see conservation in action and gain an insight into the work of the BOT as well as seeing the most wonderful views from the top of the hill. You can bring along a packed lunch and we will provide refreshments and hopefully cake!

****Booking is essential;** because of the logistics involved we are only able to cope with a small percentage of our supporters. All visitors will be brought in by mini-bus from Ashburton, so if you would like to join us on this memorable day we suggest that you get in touch as soon as possible to avoid disappointment.

We look forward to introducing you to the Lennon Legacy Project.

(Advance bookings only)**

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Photo: British Ceremonial Arts Ltd.

David meets the Queen

On December the 11th BOT Head of Conservation David Ramsden went to Buckingham Palace for his Investiture. David was one of 94 people receiving awards on the day. His MBE was presented by the Queen for 'services to the Barn Owl

Trust'. He was accompanied by his mum Ida, his mother-in-law Beryl and his wife Frances. David accepted his award on behalf of everyone involved with the Trust and its achievements. He said, "It was an amazing day and an incredible experience".

q

A Legacy for Conservation

With expenditure outstripping our income yet again, we had predicted a funding deficit for the third year in a row. Now, thanks to a significant legacy from Terence Noel Hughes, we should end the financial year with some funds towards future work.

Legacy income is increasingly important for the Trust because of the difficulty in obtaining grants for our general conservation work and information and advice service. In fact, since the Vivien Lennon legacy in 2001, which enabled us to buy the LLP field, the only years when we haven't had a deficit have been due to legacies. With legacy income we always like to do something really permanent so some of Terence's gift will help towards the capital works currently taking



The creation of the stone bank in Forde Orchard will provide a new habitat for reptiles, insects and plants
Photo: Matthew Twigg

place in the LLP field. The creation of 230 metres of new hedge bank and 120 metres of stone faced bank will provide a diverse habitat for wildlife for years to come. Hopefully Terence Hughes would have been pleased to know that his gift will help with this project.

q

Bird News

We have been quite busy treating wild owl casualties here at the Trust. Three Tawny Owls were brought in over the Christmas break. One had suffered an injury to its eye – Tawny Owls have very large eyes which are susceptible to injury. Unfortunately we think this owl is now blind in one eye and has little or no vision in the other so we need to be careful to ensure that he is able to find the food we put out for him. He will spend the rest of his days peacefully here at the Trust in our disabled owl aviary. The other two Tawnies will hopefully be released later in the year with a supported release method. All three owls were thought to be victims of road traffic accidents.

Unfortunately we had a fallen nestling Barn Owl that did not survive due to emaciation and a Tawny Owl with such a severe injury, probably sustained 10+ days previously, that the only humane thing to do was for it to be put to sleep by the vet.

Two Barn Owls, last year's nestlings that were unable to be returned to their nests, are currently undergoing a supported release, following the same process as the one used at Heligan. They are in the mobile aviary in an area that has ideal Barn Owl habitat surrounding it and we will release them when the weather improves. Yet

another juvenile Barn Owl is awaiting the return of the mobile aviary for release later in the year.

We received a Tawny Owl that had been found trapped in a boiler flue! It was only discovered when the boiler stopped working and someone checked the flue! This bird was not surprisingly underweight and after a short period at the Trust it reached a healthy weight and was taken back to the finding place to be released. Just as the bird was taking flight an almighty 'TWOOOO' was heard close by, it would be nice to think that this was her mate heralding her return!

Health checks

Harry and I gave all the birds here at the Trust their annual health check. This involved trimming their beaks and talons, weighing and worming them and giving anti-parasite treatment. They all passed with flying colours. One of the tawnies had a reputation for being a 'bit of a handful' but I'm pleased to report that he was the perfect gentleman, and took his 'medicine' in a very dignified manner.

One of the Barn Owls was believed to be causing quite a ruckus in one of the aviaries so the 'trouble maker' was placed in a different aviary, and not one to name names

I shall not reveal his/her identity, suffice to say that owls well at time of going to press!!!

Nest Boxing

We have been very busy with nest boxing trips during the autumn and winter months. There is only a relatively small window when this activity can take place at occupied sites; getting the nest boxes in place before the birds begin to think about breeding. We still have a very full schedule of visits but it is immensely satisfying to be providing wild Barn Owls with really safe nesting places.

What a fine bird!!!

After visiting a local school presenting 'The Wings of Change' story we were delighted that it featured in a local newspaper. At the end of the story, Baley our resident Barn Owl makes an appearance which is always the highlight of the visit. I just wanted to quote a few lines from the press release.....

'Ms Matthews introduced Baley and gave the youngsters the opportunity to look at her plumage and watch her in flight'. So all my preening and practice flights paid off then!

As a direct result of reading this article a member of the public became a Friend of the Trust.

Julie Matthews

Assistant Conservation Officer

'Hannibal' the Heligan Hooligan

We are now able to bring you further news of Hannibal the Heligan Hooligan, watched by millions of Springwatch viewers consuming his siblings in the nest. He then suffered a broken leg which healed crookedly so we had to catch him up and take him to the veterinary hospital where the bone was rebroken and pinned. He spent some time recuperating at the Trust. After a three month rehabilitation period it was decided that he was fit to be returned to Heligan.

In November last year, with Hannibal contained in a pet carrier and the mobile aviary hitched to the back of the Ranger, I headed off to Heligan. We were met by Lisa Phillips and Luke Sanger of Eco-watch Wildlife Surveillance who had selected a suitable site for the mobile aviary: a young orchard with rough grassland. The surrounding fields were sown with sunflowers for wild bird cover; at the bottom of the field was a small stream with marshy banks either side and in the distance a group of uninhabited buildings with a very attractive (to a Barn Owl's eye!) looking barn. Further afield the habitat was suitable Barn Owl hunting ground with rough, tussocky grass that could support a healthy population of the Barn Owl's preferred prey, the field vole.

Hannibal spent two weeks in the mobile aviary being fed and getting used to his surroundings whilst we waited for a period of good weather. Finally the conditions were right and the top of the aviary was raised one evening at dusk - he was free!

The following evening food was placed in the aviary and the next morning it was gone. The Barn Owl was coming back for food and the feeding regime over the past two weeks had enabled him to establish a pattern of 'return for food'. This gave him time to learn to hunt for his own food whilst still being supported.

Food was finally withheld and eventually the mobile aviary was brought back to Waterleat for the next release.

Hannibal has been sighted several times since and Lisa is still putting some food out in an alternative box. The latest news is that he was actually seen taking food to the nestbox where he hatched last year.

Another successful release!

q



The mobile aviary arrives at Heligan

Photo: Julie Matthews

More BOT News

World Owl Conference

'Owls, Ambassadors for the Protection of Nature In their Changing Landscapes'



The 4th World Owl Conference was held in Groningen in The Netherlands and with a little help from FlyBe and an impressive railway system Frances and I arrived on a cold, wet and foggy evening ready for the conference. I had been invited to present two papers, one on Barn Owls and Major Roads and a completely new one on the subject of Barn Owl nestbox designs, and I was full of trepidation.

The venue - Martini Plaza - was a huge modern facility in a totally urban setting and we felt a million miles from home. After a short walk from the hotel we stepped into a room FULL of owl people ALL talking about owls. After an introduction by David Johnson (USA) and James Duncan (Canada) we settled into a whole day of Owl Survey and Monitoring with presentations by Flemish, Serbian, British, Canadian, Brazilian and Syrian attendees. Altogether there were 139 registered participants from over thirty countries. As we are so involved in Barn Owl surveys we found it fascinating and learned loads about other survey techniques, particularly 'playback'. This involves surveyors armed with loudspeakers playing owl call recordings and counting the responses from wild owls. This method is particularly useful with territorial forest-dwelling owls which are very vocal and responsive (like Tawny Owls). Unfortunately it's not a method that works well with Barn Owls.

Day two started with Dr Iain Taylor's plenary talk, 'Do owls follow the rules?' - absolutely brilliant. Then it was the owls of Mongolia, Ural Owls in Finland, Spotted Owlets in India, Scops Owls in Slovenia, Short-eared Owls in Russia, and Mackinders Eagle Owls in Kenya. Then my talk, 'Barn Owls and Major Roads - Results of a 15-year study in Great Britain'. Fortunately it went well (what a relief), stimulated some good questions, and global awareness of the Barn Owl Trust took its first leap.

Every day of the conference was packed full of interesting stuff, not only the papers

presented but a huge range of poster presentations to be read and an endless supply of new faces to meet. We've never heard so many languages spoken and our rudimentary French and Spanish came in useful. Fortunately for us, English was the official conference language. This did however present a huge challenge to many of the attendees, some of whom had a really hard time presenting in English; we ended up feeling full of admiration for everyone's linguistic efforts. Coffee breaks and lunchtimes were impressive! Being an owl enthusiast anywhere in the world is something of a novelty so spending five days with well over a hundred people who talked of almost nothing but owls was a real buzz.

As well as learning loads about different species of owls it was a great opportunity to meet people we had previously corresponded with - putting faces to names, and to make new contacts from different parts of the world. We look forward to sharing information and working together in the future.

The final day of the World Owl Conference included news of declining Burrowing Owls in Canada and the USA, Barn and Little Owl work in the Czech Republic, satellite tracking of Eagle Owls in the Alps, high PCB levels found in Eagle Owls in The Netherlands, Eagle Owl decline in India, Barn Owls being used as biological pest control in Israel, Ural Owl re-introduction in Bavaria, the latest news on owl phylogeny (the re-classification of owls based on DNA analysis) from Michael Wink (Heidelberg University) and David's new presentation 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Barn Owl nest box designs'.

Those who build and erect boxes often don't realise that the nestbox designs they are using can cause unnecessary mortality and trying to get this message across without upsetting people is rather tricky. Fortunately the presentation went down well and stimulated lots of questions both in the lecture theatre and during the breaks.

When published, the proceedings of the World Owl Conference will include papers and summaries arising from all the presentations given. The criteria for evaluation of nestbox designs now feature in a new page on our website - just follow the link from the page 'Getting the best nestbox for your site'.

David Ramsden
Head of Conservation



Refuge Success

In December we visited the stone wildlife refuge (of Bill Bailey fame!) built in the Autumn of 2006 and were delighted to find a pair of Barn Owls roosting in the nest box.

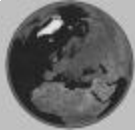
There were a total of **82** Barn Owl pellets in the box! A sign that the pair were using the purpose built nest box to roost in regularly - here's hoping that the next news to impart will be that they are using it as a nesting site - so fingers crossed and we'll keep you posted! There were also Little Owl pellets and feathers and Kestrel pellets in their respective boxes, clever birds! We also found bat droppings and over-wintering butterflies, a great success. **q**

Web News

The website continues to be a success, with over 1,000 visitors per day. It has become an essential tool for staff allowing the team to direct people to the extensive information, pictures, downloads and leaflets which speeds up enquiries and allows the conservation team to dedicate more hours to practical work. Following our trip to the World Owl Conference and David's presentation entitled, 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Barn Owl Nestbox Designs' we have added a new page entitled *How to choose the best nestbox design*.

We have also updated our *Pellet Analysis* slideshow to include Black Rat pictures. Our *Owl Aid Gifts* now have their own page making it even easier to purchase either online or by post. These make excellent environmentally friendly gifts, ideal for birthdays and other special occasions. Keep an eye on our 'LLP news' for the latest news from the 'field', our 'Wants List', 'Events' and 'Volunteering' pages as these are continually updated and there will be new information leaflets in 2008 too.

Harriet Davies
Support Officer



Czech Republic - Sova pálená



*Novosedly, catholic church, first brood of owlets
Photo: Libor Oplustil*

Legislative Protection

In accordance with the Czech legislation on nature protection and conservation, the Barn Owl (*Sova pálená*) is listed in the second highest protection category (Severely Endangered Species) and the handling of adult and young owls or eggs is subject to authorisation from the state nature protection authorities. The Red List of the Czech Republic lists Barn Owls as endangered. Despite the fact that a major part of the country has favourable climatic conditions for the occurrence of Barn Owls, the birds have disappeared from a number of sites.

Population Status

Barn Owl population status has been precisely monitored in the course of general bird censuses since 1973. The present population is estimated at 400-500 pairs and regular monitoring reveals a continuous population decrease. The results further prove that the Barn Owl population density in the Czech Republic is on average 3.0 pairs per 100 km², with considerable regional differences (density ranging from 0.5-10 pairs/100 km²). A larger part of the population (300-400 pairs) nest in nestboxes.

Reasons for the Population Decrease

The key reason can be on account of landscape changes. The present appearance of the agricultural landscape is affected by farming methods which were introduced in the 1950s. Smaller plots were integrated into large stretches of fields and individual farmers with small fields were replaced with agricultural mass production. Virtually every settlement had an agricultural cooperative with large cow stalls, piggeries, fodder depots and other farm buildings. Smaller private farms disappeared and with them did the diversity of the agricultural landscape. Barn Owls and Little Owls began to settle in the vast complexes of the agricultural cooperatives. Despite the changes following the end of the socialist regime in the 1990s which brought about a reorganization of Czech agriculture and the closing of a number of cooperatives, their grounds still remain the Barn Owl's key sites. Apart from nesting in the still operating or

dilapidated outbuildings of the cooperatives, Barn Owls traditionally nest in church spires. During the time of socialism, many churches and sacred buildings were intentionally neglected for ideological reasons and thus Barn Owls found ideal nesting conditions in their church spires. However, the change of regime in 1989 initiated a gradual restoration of churches. These renovations included security measures preventing wild pigeons entrance into these areas, which consequently also prevents Barn Owls from nesting there. Another significant cause of the Barn Owl population decrease has been the lack of safe nesting places. Starting in the 1990s, nature conservationist volunteers made and installed nestboxes. At present over 3,200 nestboxes for Barn Owls have been distributed in the territory of the Czech Republic.

Barn Owls in the Breclav District

The Breclav District is situated in the south-eastern part of the Czech Republic, bordering Austria and Slovakia. It is characterized by a warm and sunny climate (its mean annual temperature is 9°C) and its landscape is subject to intensive farming. It covers 1,150 km² and houses approximately 70 settlements with 125,000 inhabitants. The area boasts the longest tradition of continuous and systematic Barn Owl protection in the Czech Republic (since 1991). These activities have been pursued by volunteers in coordination with the Breclav chapter of the Czech Union for Nature Conservation. This area, unlike most other areas in the country, has seen an increase in Barn Owl population; its nesting density is one of the highest in the Czech Republic. At present, a minimum of 20 pairs nest here regularly, which represents an average density of 1.6 pairs/100 km². The highest number of nesting pairs, a total of 37, was monitored in 2002. This represents a population density of 3.1 pairs/100 km². The number of nesting pairs fluctuates in relation to the abundance of available food and climatic conditions in the winter months. Barn Owls can make use of any of the 120 wooden nestboxes whose size is approximately 100 cm x 50 cm. These are mounted outside the windows of church spires (28%) or in the attics of barns and farm warehouses (72%). The nestboxes in barns and warehouses have protective metal plates around the entrance hole to prevent stone martens from entering. The entrance is approximately 12 x 18 cm in size and is situated in the upper part of the nestbox. Inside is a partition dividing the nesting space from the entrance. Between 1991 and 2007 we monitored 254 nestings in the accessible church spires and installed nestboxes: 78% of them first broods and 22% second ones. The overall nesting success rate is 89%, the owls bred 1,211 chicks, 80% of which were ringed. Owing to

the fact that Barn Owls start nesting primarily in the second part of April, first nestbox checks are carried out in mid-June. The nestlings' age is determined according to the length of their wings and their weight is also taken. Every year, some of the nestboxes (mainly in churches) are occupied by Common Kestrel (13 nestboxes in 2007) and by feral pigeons (6 in 2007). Apart from installing nestboxes we also engage in the covering up of dangerous water and molasses reservoirs, as well as in installing grates on ventilation shafts and chimneys. We organize public lectures, publish literature material for public awareness and give practical demonstrations of our fieldwork. Education focused on farm workers has proved to be very important and effective.

We cooperate extensively with ornithologists in Europe. At the onset of our conservation programme we received substantial help from our French colleagues (H. Baudvin - La Choue), later we established highly productive cooperation with our Dutch (J.de Jong - Kerkuilenwerkgroep Nederland) and German colleagues (AG Eulen). At present we are collaborating with Birdlife Austria (K. Donnerbaum) in a coordinated approach within the programme of Barn Owl protection in border areas. We believe that with the assistance of international collaboration, Barn Owls will be rewarded with suitable living conditions in the European cultural landscape and that future generations will also be able to enjoy their presence.

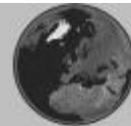
Libor Oplustil

*Breclav chapter of the Czech Union for
Nature Conservation
libor.oplustil@email.cz*



*Libor measuring wing length to determine
age of owlet
Photo: Frantisek Krause*

Belgium - Kerkuil



Small-scaled landscape in Northern East-Flanders (Belgium)

Photo: Ludo Goossens

Since the early '90s, Natuurpunt Herzele (working group of the largest Flemish nature conservation organization) started a unique project in the South of the Province of East-Flanders (to the south of Ghent). The loamy and hilly region is characterized by small-scaled landscapes and at that time had very few Barn Owls (Kerkuil).

Conservation

A nest-box project was started which was funded by the community of Herzele (35 km²) and resulted in a steady growth of the number of available nest-boxes. It took six years of waiting before we noted our first breeding pair. Year by year we observed an increase in the local population. The settlement of new pairs was mostly in concentric circles from the first occupied box, stimulating us to place nest-boxes at regular distances of 500 metres apart. This resulted in an increasing population with a maximum number of 8 occupied nest-boxes (with 3 breeding pairs) out of 30 available ones.

This project was later on adopted by the Regional Landscape of the Flemish Ardennes (526 km²), which is active in 13 communities, Herzele included. Hence, more than 150 nest-boxes were installed in the region, giving a boost to the local population. At the moment, the region accounts for 26 Barn Owl pairs, compared to only a few known pairs in the early nineties. Furthermore, the Regional Landscape is functioning under the umbrella of the Flemish Barn Owl Working Group accounting for 56 volunteers in the entire province of East-Flanders (2982 km²) and 86 pairs. The Flemish Barn Owl Working Group has been active for 30 years in Flanders.

Citizen Science

Nest-boxes is one thing, using them as valuable information gathering tools is another thing. Given the enormous amount of work that goes into installing, maintaining, cleaning them and ringing nestlings, it would be a shame not to exploit the data collected. Therefore a tight co-operation exists between the conservationist and a few scientists in the Province of East-Flanders. This resulted in a fruitful study project that tried to identify which landscape parameters play an important role in the attraction by Barn Owls. This study worked at three different spatial scales i.e. near the nest or breeding site (25 ha), in the territory (100 ha) and the active range (1,256 ha).

Finding out what Barn Owls really like can be done by looking at which parameters occur in frequently occupied nest-boxes compared to non-frequently or never used boxes since 1986. For boxes that were monitored at least 5 times (71 locations in total) in that period, we calculated a yearly occupation ratio. A site was considered good if this ratio was equal or above 50%, as bad if it was below 50%. This information can now help us identify which landscape parameters are typical for good habitats and which for bad habitats. This allowed us to draw a habitat suitability map of the entire Province which allows the volunteers to select their conservation priorities. Comparisons with Little Owls were made too and the similarities and differences of habitat selection between both species were published in scientific journals. Research was all carried out by volunteer scientists. Data was collected in a standardized way by

the conservationists advised by the scientists, for scientific robustness.

Communication Strategy

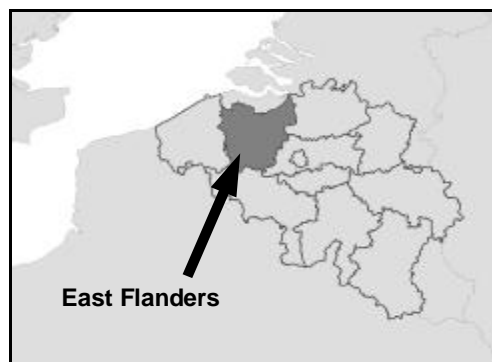
Since we realize that fundamental conservation goes beyond Barn Owl lovers, we tried to start with ordinary people. So we adopted a communication strategy in life-style magazines, motivating virtually everyone to take Barn and other Owls into account in their day-to-day decisions and actions taken. By broadening our target group, we brought Barn Owls into the lives of plenty of Harry Potter watching people, showing them another way of enjoying owls rather than keeping them as a pet. We believe that this communication strategy will finally have its influence at the decision-taking level, making owl conservation an issue to be dealt with, even by government.

Conclusion

In East-Flanders, we adopted a combined Barn Owl conservation and research strategy. This Citizen Science yielded interesting data collected by volunteer conservationists, that could be used directly by volunteer scientists, yielding a habitat suitability map for the entire Province that can assist the prioritization of conservation initiatives. Furthermore, we adopted a very broad communication strategy that allows bringing Barn Owls closer to non-Barn Owl people, lowering the barrier towards a more sustainable human behaviour when it comes to taking wild owls into account. This way we hope to establish a better understanding of the complexity of Barn Owl conservation and a more owl-friendly alteration in human behaviour.

Dries Van Nieuwenhuyse,
Natuurpunt Herzele
Global Owl Project

Reference: Van Nieuwenhuyse D., J. Lefebvre & M. Leysen, 2004. Kwaliteitsbepaling en –voorspelling van Kerkuil Tyto alba-habitat in Oost-Vlaanderen op verschillende ruimtelijke niveaus. Natuurpunt.Oriolus 70: 11-20.





Malaysia - Jampuk Putih

Chong Leong Puan is currently a PhD student at University of Queensland. His field study involving Barn Owls is being conducted in Malaysia where he works at Universiti Putra Malaysia and is involved in wildlife studies and teaching of wildlife related courses:



Photos: Chong Leong Puan

With the increase in human populations and increasing exploitation of natural resources, natural forests are increasingly being fragmented and converted to other land uses, in particular agricultural plantations. In developing countries, forest fragments are continuing to shrink and be replaced by cash crop plantations. Originating in West Africa, the oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) has spread throughout the tropics and is now grown in 16 or more countries. In Malaysia, oil palm was first introduced as a crop in 1917 and planted on a large scale in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Currently, it is the largest agricultural contributor to the country's economy.

The expansion of large-scale crop monocultures has created an unnatural environment in which many animals rapidly adapt and develop as pests. The most noticeable case would be the outbreaks of rodents that cause severe loss to agriculture including oil palms. In addition to production loss, rats also infest new oil palm plantings, damage young palm bases and sometimes destroy the plants.

Barn Owls as Biological Control Agents

Biological control of rats in oil palm plantations using Barn Owls has been widely practiced in Malaysia as well as other developing countries. Due to the abundance of prey, owls are expected to increase in number with an increase in the number of

nest boxes. In oil palm plantations, an early estimate of the predation efficiency of the Barn Owl shows that a breeding pair and their young would consume 1,200-1,500 rats per year.

The Barn Owls are suspected to have originated from Java or Sumatra and moved into Peninsular Malaysia in the late 1800s. The birds were first considered as a vagrant with only few records made in Peninsular Malaysia. From the discovery of a roosting pair in the southern part of the peninsula in 1968, increasing sightings and nesting were reported. From 1976 to 1978, the birds were found in oil palm plantations widely throughout the peninsula. Birds began to proliferate following the increase in rats with the advent of oil palm plantations, reaching some 15% of the area of Peninsular Malaysia by the early 1990s. It is now considered a common resident in other agricultural areas including paddy fields.

Unlike those of temperate regions where seasonal variation in food supply occurs, the Barn Owls in Malaysia breed year round and a pair may produce two to three clutches a year with a high surviving brood size and hatching success. The recently increased population has been shown to have great dispersal ability and is suspected to be still undergoing a population explosion in the peninsula. In addition, aggregation behaviour of newly developed populations has also been observed in many plantations.

However, due to the complexity of the predator-prey systems, and logistical difficulties, the study of the relationships between owl numbers, rat densities and crop damage is not easy. Despite its proliferation in oil palm plantations, the role of the Barn Owl as a biological control agent remains unclear. At present, many agricultural plantations still rely heavily on chemical control to minimize the loss caused by rodents. Anticoagulant poisons were introduced in the 1950s in oil palm plantations in Malaysia. The target animal generally ingests a lethal dose before the symptoms of toxicosis develop, which overcomes the problem of poison avoidance. However, chemical control may not be the best long-term option as the target tends to develop resistance over time. As a result, the second-generation anticoagulants, which are more potent were introduced about thirty years later to control resistant rats. Unfortunately, the process also causes secondary poisoning to non-target animals including Barn Owls. In general, owls only serve as supplementary biological control in conjunction with the already existing system of poison baiting.

Studies involving radio-telemetry indicate

that Barn Owls are less territorial with overlapping hunting ranges. This implies that they may provide a reliable and practical option for rodent pest management in oil palm plantations. Predation by a sufficient density of owls should slow the intrinsic rate of recovery of the rats. Although some promising results have been obtained, total rat control over large areas using Barn Owls at highly cost-effective levels has yet to be demonstrated before the use of chemical control can be reduced or eliminated. The elimination of poison baiting might also enhance the populations of other complementary predators, which would further contribute to rodent control. Thus, the role of the Barn Owl in controlling rodent populations is of great interest both to plantation management and nature conservation organisations.

Unlike their temperate counterparts, Barn Owls in the tropics have increased in number and feed exclusively on rodent pests in plantation settings. My study aims to examine the functional and numerical responses of Barn Owls to changes in rodent densities. The abundance of prey species allows intensive study of predator and prey relationships. The functional response of owls to prey will be determined by assessing the relationship between prey abundance and owls' feeding rates. The numerical response of owls to prey species will be determined by examining the correlation between relative abundances or densities of owls and prey species. The study will help in understanding the interactions of these species in order to improve the use of Barn Owls for biological control of rats in the plantations.

Chong Leong Puan
Universiti Putra Malaysia



Portugal - Coruja-das-torres



The TytoTagus Project started in 2006. The Tagus Estuary (central Portugal) is where many Barn Owls gather (up to a few hundred) during post-fledging dispersal, probably representing a unique scenario in Europe. These owls are expected to arrive from all the Tagus Basin, a lowland farmland with open hunting grounds and suitable structures for perch and nesting. The Project involves several studies such as marking nestlings with coloured rings, transects for monitoring road kills and spotlight transects for identifying marked birds. Although an uncommon methodology among owl studies, spotlight transects have been conducted in the Tagus Estuary for about 15 years, along fenced roads in farmland landscape, where large numbers of owls can easily be seen perching and hunting.

Before TytoTagus: First Steps

During 1991-1994, the Barn Owl was studied in the Nature Reserve of the Tagus Estuary, where a prior study showed a very high Barn Owl mortality in roads nearby. This study revealed that during the breeding season owls were scarce whereas in autumn their abundance was very high. Most of the owls occurring in the area were dispersing first-year individuals that probably only stayed for short periods. In 2001-2003 another study investigated the Barn Owl population upstream, in areas where juvenile Barn Owls could be coming from. Coruche Municipality is crossed by the Sorraia River which flows to the Tagus precisely in the area of Ponta da Erva. Agricultural lands on the margins of Tagus and Sorraia form a continuous hunting habitat and their fragmented riparian woods can possibly provide shelter during Barn Owl dispersal. Moreover, there was a high density of pairs in this area and the fledging period was synchronized with the abundance peak of Barn Owls in Ponta da

Erva. In 2006, the University of Évora embraced these hypotheses... and so TytoTagus arose.

Inside RipiDurable

RipiDurable (www.ripidurable.com) was a three-year project co-financed by the Interreg III C – South programme (a European Union interregional cooperation programme) joining partners from Portugal, Spain, France and Greece. The goal of this project was to contribute to improving know-how and overcoming limitations in the development of management strategies for riparian zones taking into account the natural characteristics, the economic potential, and the importance of these habitats as ecological corridors. In this respect, this project aimed to contribute to the rehabilitation and/or restoration of these ecosystems. The TytoTagus Project arose as a specific action proposed by the Portuguese partner, University of Évora, aiming at the use of the Barn Owl as a flag species in raising awareness about the importance of riparian vegetation to birds.

In 2006 and 2007, 123 Barn Owls from 24 nests were ringed. Nest sites were mainly farmhouses and ruins. About 30% of known nest sites became inaccessible to owls between 2001 and 2006, either because they were destroyed or converted. As a result, a nest-box programme was considered, starting with a testing phase using nest-box models adapted from the Barn Owl Trust. The first nest-box was erected in 2006, to provide shelter to a brood of Barn Owls in peril; the nest was over a hay storage which had to be removed. All parent owls and the six owlets adapted very well to the new home. After the breeding season, six more nest-boxes were erected in buildings inside the property of Companhia das Lezírias. An intensive nest-box scheme will be implemented in 2008-2012.

Several entities were profoundly involved in the project, from particular persons to NGOs, from schools to local companies; since TytoTagus was only partly financed, these voluntary contributors were fundamental! Contributions were also given by military institutions. For instance, SEPNA-GNR (Nature and Environmental Protection Services – National Republican Guard) provided help in access to nest sites with speleologist militaries (soldiers with caving expertise) and

also helping in Barn Owl rescues; and CTA-EMFA (soldiers from the Firing Range at Alcochete – Portuguese Air Force) contributed with help (people and logistic) in nest search and monitoring within their properties.

During 2006-2007 live recaptures were only possible by spotlight car transects in the Tagus Estuary: 10 ringed juveniles were identified during transects in the Estuary (ca. 385 km total, mean: 20 km per night). All marked owls came from the Alcochete Military Exercise Camp, most likely a result of more intensive searches conducted in this area (with the help of militaries) compared to other locations.

Business & Biodiversity: Prospects

In 2008 TytoTagus was finally launched as an independent project, owing to a Business & Biodiversity Commitment in protocol with Companhia das Lezírias SA, an important national company with agro-forestry and cattle production activities. This funding will allow for tracking owls with radio-transmitters and explore what happens during the post-fledging dispersal. A large area of the Tagus Estuary is owned by Companhia das Lezírias and this company has very good relation to local farmers: this is a very important partnership and a great step towards the conservation of Barn Owl in the area.

Since 2006 the TytoTagus Project has been collaborating with the team headed by Professor Alexandre Roulin (University of Lausanne), providing samples for genetic analysis. Stronger collaboration is expected for 2008-2012, both in scientific and conservation grounds.

Inês Roque
TytoTagus Project
Portugal



Soldiers from SEPNA-GNR go down a 6 meter hole in order to get 4 owlets for ringing.

Photo: Inês Roque



Israel - Tenshemet



Nestboxes are placed in high density
Photo: Kobi Meyrom

Barn Owls have been used as pest control agents of rodents in Israel since 1982. During the late 1960s, hundreds of birds of prey (some threatened and endangered species) were killed throughout Israel from secondary poisoning after eating rodents that had been poisoned with rodenticides. Israel is an important migration route for these birds, with 500 million birds migrating twice yearly.

In the 1980s a conservation plan that reduced the use of rodenticides and used birds of prey as part of biological pest control was devised. Barn Owls nesting boxes were set up in 1982 at Kibbutz Neot Mordechai in the Hula Valley in the hope of creating a Barn Owl population that could control the rodent populations. After a short time rodenticides were reintroduced to the fields, killing the Barn Owls and causing the project to be abandoned.

A year later, Kibbutz Sde-Eliyahu, located in the Great Rift Valley, 7 km from the city of Beit Shean and 30 km South of the Lake of Galilee was chosen as the replacement for Neot Mordechai. 14 Barn Owl nesting boxes and hunting perches were erected in strategic locations in and around the fields and plantations in order to establish a stable Barn Owl population. During the first couple of years there were many ups and downs. The first nest box design came from Europe and did not provide enough ventilation for the 40°C (and hotter) summers of the Beit Shean Valley. However, within a couple of years and after a few improvements to the nesting box designs, a population of Barn Owls was formed which has thrived.

The project is based on the addition of large numbers of nest boxes in farmland (typically 200-400 meters between boxes), a decrease in pesticide use, and creating a friendly environment for raptors. After integrating this project into first organic then non-organic farming practices, other farmers started placing nest boxes in the Valley and later in other parts of Israel.

Israel National Project:

Currently there are an estimated 1,000 nest boxes divided between 7 main regions in Israel, with plans to increase the size of the project to other locations in the future. In the

past the project was carried out by the farmers themselves, with little scientific influence, little analyzing of the breeding data and little scientific publication. 90% of nestboxes were added by the farmers for the purpose of biological pest control of rodents and only around 10% by conservationists and researchers. By monitoring the nest boxes using standardized methods, information will be gathered in order to increase the efficiency (nest boxes placement, etc.) of the applied pest control project.

In order to expand this project throughout Israel and increase the success of and coordination of existing nest boxes, a pilot of a national biological pest control project was started during the 2007 breeding season and hopefully a larger scale project will be established and implemented during the 2008 breeding season.

The project is led by the International Center for the Study of Bird Migration at Latrun, Tel Aviv University, the Israel Ornithological Center, and the Society for the Protection of Nature Israel and has national coordinators for the farming activities, scientific research, rodent monitoring and educational activities. The country was split into multiple regions, each of which will be under the supervision of regional coordinators. Monitoring methods include standardized nest box monitoring, ringing of nestlings and adults, rodent monitoring and pellet dissection. The project, which has limited funds, is funded by the Baracha Foundation, and hopefully will receive matching funds from the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Environmental Protection who want to join the project as full partners.

Most conservation projects for Barn Owls place nest boxes over great distances; here nest boxes are placed in high density, sometimes as close as 30 meters. There are even fields that have 20 boxes spread 150 meters apart, of which around 50% are occupied by Barn Owls yearly. For example, the region with the most nest boxes, Beit Shean Valley, has 300 nest boxes in 90 km². During 2002- to 2007, 48% to 74% of those nest boxes were occupied (144 to 222 pairs yearly). In addition to nest boxes, another 30-40 pairs of Barn Owls breed in empty structures and date palms within villages so that there can be as many as 260 pairs breeding in 90 km² yearly. *(In the UK an area this size would normally hold between three and eleven pairs – Eds.)*

Cooperation:

Raptors such as Barn Owls move regularly between Jordan and the Palestinian Authority and are at risk of secondary poison from hunting there. Though Israel has extensive laws concerning the use of pesticides, enforcement and regulation is sorely lacking. The situation in the Palestinian Authority and in Jordan is much worse with inadequate laws and enforcement. Hunting and poisoning are significant causes of raptor population

decline throughout the world but especially apparent in the Middle East. Illegal hunting of birds of prey is widespread in this region. Owls are also considered a bad omen by many Muslims. Thus, an important goal of this project is to raise public awareness about the usefulness of raptors and the benefits of environmentally friendly agricultural practices.

Since 2002, the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland has funded a project between Jordan and Israel. As part of this nest boxes were erected for the first time in Jordan in 2005. Out of the 22 nest boxes erected a total of 5 breeding attempts were recorded during the 2006 and 2007 breeding seasons. Preliminary studies of the diet of Barn Owls in Irbid, Jordan show that 91% of Barn Owl prey is made up of rodents. Jordanian farmers were initially worried about having Barn Owls on their farms, but after the success of the first two years those farmers who already have the boxes want more and new farmers are requesting boxes. The projects in both Jordan and the Palestinian Authority will expand during the 2008 breeding season as part of US-AID MERC research project in collaboration with Israel to determine how the farmers benefit from the raptors economically.

Education:

Posters and leaflets (written in Arabic and Hebrew) have been produced in Israel and distributed to local farmers, decision makers and the broader public. Educational campaigns targeting local communities of the benefits of owls accompany the project. As part of the Cleveland project, a poster produced in Israel was translated to Arabic for distribution in Jordan. The text had no mention of Israel in order to decrease possible friction with the local residents. As Barn Owls and Kestrels truly know no boundaries, they not only solve economic problems but are also bringing peoples together; something that is very needed in the Middle East.

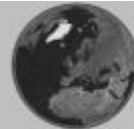
Motti Charter* and Yossi Leshem

*Scientific Coordinator
(The Barn Owl nest box scheme in Israel)
charterm@post.tau.ac.il



Project partners with Motti (holding one of the first Barn Owl nestlings to be raised in a nest box in Jordan)
Photo: Shaul Aviel

Holland - Kerkuil



Groningen is a county in the north of Holland. It is an average county regarding the Barn Owl (kerkuil). It is a wide-open country in the clay areas. The farmyards are almost the only places where trees and bushes are present. These parts are inhabited by Barn Owls in years when the field-vole population is at its peak. In other years the owls do not breed there. In the more soil/sandy parts of the county the presence of Barn Owls is very consistent. There are enough other species of rodents to hunt for; here meadows are surrounded by bushes and trees.



When the field-vole is at its peak the breeding pairs are about 90, when they are less abundant about 60. 80% breed in nestboxes. The year 2007 however showed an enormous increase of breeding owls. We have counted 148 pairs and likely more will be reported. There were 60 pairs breeding for the second time and four pairs even had a third. The average clutch-size was 4.2 for the first, 3.5 for the second and 3.2 for the third brood. This is spectacular especially if you regard the fact that 2006 was a year of poor field vole abundance. Normally 2008 will become a peak year. It's hard to imagine that this year will be even better than 2007!

I started to visit the owls in May. On two occasions I found young owls in the boxes that already had reached about 8 weeks. When I went up the ladder an owl flew out of the box, soon followed by a second. 'Ah', I thought, 'there must be eggs when the male is still in the box with the female'. To my surprise I discovered the female on 6 eggs and another two fully-grown owls. I have never seen that before, four fully grown young of the first brood and the female on eggs in the same box. There must have been so many voles that the male could easily raise four young and feed the female and himself! This was a sign for a remarkable year. In another box I found 11 eggs.

For the volunteers it was an intensive year. All those visits to the breeding pairs, cleaning the nestboxes and dealing with dead or wounded young take a lot of time. I myself have done this for many years on my own, dealing with 50 nestboxes in which owls breed and now I am chairman of the protection-group. This takes a lot of time too and luckily I have found some volunteers to help me. It is hard to find volunteers nowadays. Youngsters are more interested in computer games and those who have reached the age that they don't have to work anymore are afraid of heights or lack the physical strength.

Besides protection I like to photograph mammals, birds and owls in particular. I give lectures about 13 times a year and I like to use my own pictures to illustrate the stories. It's more lively and that appeals to people.

I have built hides within barns with the permission of farmers. I have restrained myself to take no more than 2 pictures a night. The adults are afraid of the flash and I don't want to disturb their feeding-programme. The rest of the time I just sit and watch. On one occasion the male had just delivered the prey and flew out, at exactly the same time the female arrived with a vole. They collided and the vole was lost.

The most wonderful thing I witnessed was when a cat climbed on top of a nestbox. One of the young had fallen out and I placed a new box - the original box was so high that I could not reach it. That night I wanted to be sure that this youngster was fed by his parents. So I hid in the tractor and waited. One of the cats found the begging sounds of the young very interesting, this was a height



Photos: André Eijkenaar

he could master! On top of the nesting box the cat looked into it. At that moment one of the adults picked up the cat and immediately dropped it. The cat fell on the ground. Unfortunately that was impossible to photograph.

But one photo I want to share with you (see below). Not of a Barn Owl but a Little Owl (Steenuil). I do a little bit of protection for this owl as well; there are not many left in Holland. In my hide I saw one of the adults return with a very heavy prey, it could hardly stay in the air. To my surprise it was a weasel. The Little Owl has been lucky, it could easily have been the prey of the weasel.

This year I have finally finished a web-site of my own. You are welcome to visit it www.natuurkijker.nl. It is in Dutch but most of you will recognise the species. Greetings.

André Eijkenaar

*Barn Owl protection in the Netherlands
(Groningen)*

(André's website is well worth a visit, there are some wonderful pictures and there is a link from our site - Eds)





Germany - Schleirule

Until 1950 Barn Owls might have bred in nearly every village in Germany, both in the flat and in the hill country (up to 600 metres above sea level). Frequently even several pairs might have bred in a village. The birds could cope with far snow-richer winters than today, since all barns and other agricultural buildings were freely accessible to them at that time. Each farm had a storehouse where grain was stored and one could hear the mice rustle. In many areas there were so-called owl holes in the gables of the agricultural buildings. Only extremely hard and long winters led to population collapses, but after 7-8 years the numbers could achieve again the old level.

As in many countries of Western Europe the intensification of the agriculture led to a population decline. Enormous grassland surfaces were transformed into larger areas of arable land, ever more corn was cultivated. New asphalted ways (*roads*) appeared. The old dirt tracks or farm tracks were now asphalted and this destroyed a good habitat for mice. Also churches were barred, grilled or trellised against feral pigeons and rooks. Agricultural buildings were removed or birds were excluded. Today Barn Owls can hardly survive the winters in upland regions despite less snow in the winters.

In the '80's conservationists all over Germany tried to address the lack of breeding places; according to rough estimations a minimum 20,000 nest boxes were built and erected. Also churches removed some of their grating. In Germany we don't have a trust for Barn Owls like the Barn Owl Trust in UK. In Germany many different groups and individuals erect

protection work and scientific study. Many of the groups and individuals are working together in the 'German Working Group for the Protection of Endangered Owls' or briefly 'AG Eulen'. The AG Eulen is an umbrella organization for all 'owl workers' and all owl species.

Today 9,300-12,000 breeding pairs are estimated to be present in Germany. In the last years like everywhere in Europe the number of traffic victims has increased. This is because of ever more roads, traffic, vehicle speed and as the mouse population in roadside areas represent traps for the Barn Owl.

Because in the last 20 years Barn Owls have increased they have been removed recently from the Red Lists of most of the Lands of the Federal Republic, which are set up according to the rules of the IUCN. The question is whether they have increased everywhere or only in the sample areas of the owl conservationist with their nest boxes. Up until 2007 the farmers in Germany must allow 5% of the arable fields to be fallow. In 2007 the government terminated this which is likely to worsen the food availability for the Barn Owls because fallow fields are good hunting areas with many mice. In the Hochsauerland, my area, there are 90 nestboxes. This is a mountain region 846



Martin Lindner (left) and Dietmar Waeltermann erect a nestbox
Photo: Carina Waeltermann

metres above sea level where only 1-20 breeding pairs can be proven in one year. There are more kestrels in the nestboxes than Barn Owls.

Possibly global warming will improve something in the future, because, unlike the flat country today, the mountain areas in Germany have more grassland than in former times.

Martin Lindner
German Working Group for the Protection of Endangered Owls, AG Eulen

**Barn Owl Trust
Walk & Picnic
Sunday 22 June 2008 - 11am start**
u See page 15 for more info



Ákos Klein (BOF), Simon Roper & Adam Martin (Ambios) & David Ramsden (BOT) at the Fogadó a Bagolyho (Owl Hotel) in Gyömrő, Hungary
Photo: Frances Ramsden

Hungarian Trip

As part of a European Project coordinated by Ambios Ltd / Igomango, David and Frances made a flying visit to Hungary in January to advise on a trainee programme with the Hungarian Barn Owl Foundation.

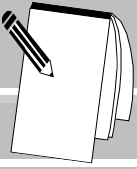
Barn Owl populations have been decreasing in Hungary for decades due to loss of traditional nesting sites, intensification of agriculture and loss of suitable habitats. The Barn Owl Foundation (BOF) monitors the Barn Owl population across Hungary and runs a sanctuary for injured Barn Owls.

Ákos Klein from BOF has visited the Trust twice and David and Frances spent 10 days in Hungary

in 2006 when they attended the European Congress of Conservation Biology. David said, "It was great to be able to help the BOF and Ambios get this project going and we hope it will lead to many more opportunities for cooperation in years to come".

After our visit two trainees from the UK spent six weeks working with the Federation. John Sutcliffe and Mike Cooke kept an on-line diary (with pictures) of their Hungarian experience which can be accessed through our 'Links to selected international bird websites'. It's well worth a look, just click Gyöngybagolyvédelmi Alapítvány (Barn Owl Foundation) UK Trainees' Diary.

q



BOT Info

... Dates for your Diary 2008

J Wednesday 23 April

Restoring the Balance – Barn Owl Trust talk and slideshow for the University of the Third Age at Rydon Hall in Kingsteignton. 2.45pm start.

J Thursday 15 - Sunday 17 May

Devon County Show. We will have a stand, sales goods and be providing information and conservation advice over the three days of the show. Please come along and introduce yourselves; we would love to see you!

J Sunday 25 May

'Wild Things' at Killerton House, Broadclyst, Exeter. We will have a stand with activities for children, sales goods and information leaflets. Come and enjoy a fun day out and also learn a little more about what goes on behind the scenes at this historic National Trust property. 11am-5pm.

J Thursday 5 - Saturday 7 June

Royal Cornwall Show. Look out for our stand at Wadebridge where we will have information, sales goods and conservation advice on offer.

J Sunday 22 June

Annual Sponsored Walk and Picnic on the Flete Estate. Bring a picnic and enjoy a rare opportunity to walk on this beautiful private estate beside the river Erme in the South Hams, whilst raising funds to help support the work of the Barn Owl Trust. 11am start.

Includes an optional river crossing by canoe. Please see our website or phone for details.

J Saturday 5 July (tbc)

Bracken Bashing Day. An opportunity to come and see the Lennon Legacy Project and help us to control the bracken. We provide gloves and big sticks. You need to bring suitable clothing (sunhats and/or waterproofs) and also a packed lunch. Please phone to book a place (10am start).

J Thursday 10 July

Restoring the Balance – Barn Owl Trust talk and slideshow for the East Coker Gardening Club at East Coker Hall, East Coker. 7.30pm start.

J Saturday 12 July

Happy birthday - Barn Owl Trust - 20th Birthday Supporters' Day. Please phone the Trust for further information and to book your place as numbers will be limited.

J July (date to be confirmed)

Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys & Signs. Held in South Devon, BOESS is a one-day training course for professionals involved in (or wishing to become involved in) Barn Owl survey work. Numbers are limited so booking is essential (course fee £150). To apply for a place please email Kelly Wakeham at kelly@barnowltrust.org.uk, confirming your name, job title, organisation and nature of work.

J Saturday 9 August

Awareness day at Churchtown Farm Nature Reserve. There will be guided walks, talks and loads of information and an opportunity to meet representatives of other like-minded organisations. Our stand will have a particular focus on children's activities, including mask making and face painting, together with sales goods and information leaflets.

J Saturday 6 - Sunday 7 September

Dorset County Show. Come along and meet members of our conservation team.

J Friday 10 October

Restoring the Balance – Barn Owl Trust talk and slideshow for the Bishopsteignton Garden Club at The Community Centre (the Old School), Bishopsteignton. 7.30pm start.

J Tuesday 14 October

The Barn Owl Trust's presentation: 'Lennon Legacy Project - transforming 26 acres of intensively grazed sheep pasture into 26 acres of Barn Owl Heaven' for Sticklepath Phoenix Group at Sticklepath Village Hall. 7.45pm start.

J Friday 24 October Barn Owl Trust Annual General Celebration—7 for 7.30pm. Venue to be confirmed.

J Wednesday 17 December

Grand Draw and Quiz Night. Venue in South Devon to be confirmed - please let us know if you are interested in coming along. r

Will Help

South Devon law firm, Kitson Hutchings Solicitors, have teamed up with the Barn Owl Trust to offer supporters the opportunity of helping the Trust fund their vital conservation work.

Whenever Kitson Hutchings make a Will for a Trust supporter, irrespective of whether a legacy is included for the benefit of the Trust, they will donate 25% of their fee to the Barn Owl Trust. In addition the supporter will be given an opportunity to maximise the donation by completing a Gift Aid form at no extra cost.

Kitson Hutchings have offices in Torquay, Newton Abbot and Exeter and home visits can be arranged at no extra cost.

For further information on making a Will or to make an appointment call Stephen Cole on 01803 202020 or Stephen Craig on 01626 203366 and identify yourself as a Trust supporter.



LLP Latest

Volunteer groups have played a major part in helping progress work in the Lennon Legacy Project field. The scrub in Forde Orchard was cleared with help from student work parties from Plymouth University. Some of the material was chipped and used on the path through Forde Orchard, the rest being used to create a dry hedge along the southern boundary fence line. The fence wire and straining posts were also removed, ready for groundworks to commence.

EDF Energy volunteers tackled gorse and bramble on the slope towards Corner Wood. This was through the Helping Hands Scheme, which enables staff to volunteer for at least two days a year to help support local communities.

For current developments with the Forde Orchard project and the LLP in general, please take a look at the LLP News pages on our website <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk> and if you relish some hard work in the

In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies from the estates of the late Terence Noel Hughes, Marie Jesty Wright and Guy Stanley Weaver

and donations in memory of Pam Bishop Janet Coward Elizabeth Ellett Gerald Ford and John Gaymer

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

great outdoors keep an eye on our forthcoming events page or call the office for more information.

Matthew Twigg
Assistant Conservation Officer

Team News

Some Goodbyes After two and a half years at the Trust Harry (Harriet Davies) is moving on:

"I couldn't have asked for a better start to my career in conservation and I am still very grateful to the Trust for taking a chance on me as an inexperienced graduate. I have learnt an incredible amount in the past two and a half years as Support Officer and been given the opportunity to develop many new skills and get involved with a huge diversity of tasks within the Trust, too many to list.

It has been lovely to get to know everyone who adopts the numerous owls and all the delightful letters I receive thanking the Trust. I have very much enjoyed working closely with the owls, helping with the health checks and keeping adoptees up-to-date with the mischief their owls have been getting in to. Helping with the new website was very exciting and although there were a few teething problems with the webcam I am glad it is now looking fantastic and a great asset to the site. As well as all the admin work, I have been fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to get out and about too; attending BOESS, a day out ringing owlets, carrying out butterfly transects in the LLP, helping with conservation team days in the LLP, foster home owl health check visits and attending a variety of shows and events – the highlight, of course, Newton Abbot Christmas Market dressed as a Barn Owl!



Harry
Photo: Paddy Reardon

I shall certainly miss all the fantastic people I have worked with and met through the Trust, walks around the LLP, the joy of receiving grants that help the Trust to continue its work and even the chaos of Christmas adoptions! I have an exciting trip to the Philippines lined up where I will be helping to survey Humpback Whales as part of a research programme but after that I hope to continue volunteering to get more practical conservation experience".

After nearly eighteen months at the Trust working as a volunteer handyman, **Graham Banfield** has left to take on paid work. During his time here Graham constructed an aviary, helped with mailings, made nestboxes, collected and delivered various items (including



Graham
Photo: Chris Richards

owls), renovated the elderly well loved tractor; the list goes on.... and on. Thank you Graham for all your hard work on behalf of the Trust and we wish you all the very best in your new employment.

And Hello's:.....

Liza Gunning

began working for the Trust one day a week in December 2007. She is bringing the Trust's legacy database up to speed, talking to solicitors' offices, sending out our legacy leaflet packs and hopefully raising the potential for increased funding from that area. From February 2008 she increased her hours to two days a week in order to help out in other admin areas.



Liza
Photo: Caroline Lewis

She says, "I live in Ashburton and have been a stay-at-home mum for most of the past twenty-two years, apart from a couple of years when I worked as a classroom assistant at a local primary school, and time spent helping out in the family business. I have no background at all in conservation or related fields, but I do love animals and the countryside, and give thanks on a daily basis for living in such a beautiful part of the world. I was born in Plymouth, but I've lived in this area for twenty-six years and consider myself very lucky. I enjoy walking, riding, reading, cooking and spending time with friends and family. I'm very happy to be here with the friendly BOT team and hope I can make a useful contribution to the fantastic work they do".

Carole Nicolls

has also joined the team; "I came to help out in the office in December 2007 and I am still 'helping', part-time. I have lived in Devon for the last 13 years and most of that time I have been working at home. My hobbies are gardening, particularly growing fruit and vegetables, and hand-building sculptural pieces with clay. The last 2 years I have been involved with BTCV, as a volunteer CO, worked for the Devon Furniture Forum and worked with all ages creating 'art' from recycled materials and scrap. My dream would be to plant a forest garden before I am too old to reap some of the benefits! The Barn Owl Trust feels like a special place to work and I find it very well



Carole
Photo: Caroline Lewis

organised and very ethical in its approach to everything. So far, as well as admin work, I have been on a 'trip out' with Julie to site the mobile aviary, helped to feed the owls and had my hands in a bag of owl pellets to pack them up to send to schools/colleges for analysis. Thanks to everyone here for being so helpful and friendly and a special thanks to Kelly".

CONGRATULATIONS

to Mark and Sonia (nee Seldon) Green (you may remember they were both previously BOT staff) – a baby boy called Rowan, weighing 7lb 3oz was born in December.



Rowan
Photo provided

Volunteer Heather Dutton is currently in her 3rd and final year of university, studying BSc Wildlife Conservation at Plymouth. "I have not been volunteering with the BOT very long, but already my time here has been very enjoyable and varied. I have gone on school talks, helped out with admin tasks, cleaned aviaries, helped with brush clearing, assisted with feeding birds that have come into the BOT and I am currently in the process of helping to re-design a new aviary leaflet.

Volunteering with the Trust will give me some added experience on top of working for the National Trust warden and previously working in South Africa and as a marine research assistant in Fiji. When I graduate I hope to be working abroad, either for a wildlife charity or on a wildlife reserve, and, eventually, I would like to set up my own reserve. I really enjoy volunteering here".

Heather and Thursday, one of our resident Tawny Owls

Photo: Julie Matthews



Supporters News



Celebrate With Us

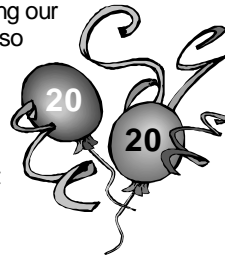
This year will be the 20th Anniversary of the Barn Owl Trust and we would love you to celebrate with us! As our supporters are spread far and wide we felt that one single event wouldn't really work ... but everybody holding their own event would!

Whether it be a family barbeque, Sunday lunch, walk with friends, girls' night out, boys' night in, coffee morning, club meeting make it in recognition of the Barn Owl Trust. It doesn't have to be complicated. For example, at a barbeque you could ask that everyone donate a few pounds for their

food or on a boys' night in for everyone to donate the cost of a pint of beer. If we all do something simple, together we could raise a substantial amount for the Trust in its 20th Anniversary year.

Of course if you want to do something on a bigger and grander scale than that is fantastic too! How about a 20/20 Coffee Morning (serve 20 cups of coffee in 20 minutes) or a 20/20 Cake stall (sell 20 cakes in 20 minutes)? You could have lots of fun with the 20 theme!! If you would like to hold an event for the Barn Owl Trust's 20th anniversary year or simply recognise the Trust at one of your social gatherings get in touch and we can send you our party pack (posters and information).

We will be setting up a page on our website dedicated to celebrating our 20th Anniversary year so send us your pictures and emails. We can all inspire each other to do something good for the Barn Owl Trust in its 20th year!



Walk With Us

This year's sponsored walk will take place on Sunday 22nd June. We have decided to move the date from May to June hoping the sun will shine on us this year! (You may recall the 'What a washout!' article in the last issue of Feedback!). This is a unique walk taking in coastal, river, woodland and meadow scenery on the beautiful private Flete Estate in the South Hams. There is also an optional river crossing in a native American Canoe coordinated by Canoe Adventures.

Walkees!

The sponsored walk is one of our two main fundraising events for the year, the other being our Grand Draw. To extend the number of participants taking part, this year we would like our sponsored walkers to include more of the four legged variety that's right – this year you can register yourself **and** your dog for sponsorship! We realise that some people are uncomfortable asking to be sponsored but it seems so much easier to ask somebody to sponsor your dog (especially if they have a really cute face!). So, this year if you register your dog as well as yourself you will both receive sponsor forms. You can then choose to raise sponsorship for you and your dog or just your dog while you pay the entry fee of £5 for non-sponsored

walkers. Dogs raising over £100 in sponsorship will receive one of our new 'Gwdihw Dog Balms' as a thank you gift - essential for sore paws after a long walk!

Obviously it is better for the Barn Owl Trust to have as many sponsored walkers (and dogs!) as possible because this raises more money for the Trust but all support via sponsorship or entrance fees is gratefully received.

Get a team together!

We are also encouraging team entries this year. Walking is a great 'time out' activity and can be a chance to share some time with friends or colleagues in a relaxed environment away from work. You'll be amazed at how the time passes when you are chatting and sharing experiences together. If you work in a large (or small) organisation or would like to get a group of friends together please contact us for a team entry kit.



Scarf Success

Our 2007 'Knit a scarf for the Barn Owl Trust' project was a great success. We sold 49 of the 50 scarves knitted (yes, there is still one white and gold scarf left that would make a wonderful birthday present!). The project raised just over £400 – a great effort by all our knitters and our supporters who bought a scarf for Christmas – Thank you! A big thank you must also go to Sandra, our Office Manager who spent many evenings using her fantastic creative skills to individually hand finish each scarf with beads, tassels or crochet. She really did give each scarf that special finishing touch! Here are a few of the lovely comments we received

"Hello, I recently bought 2 of the volunteer knitted scarves from you which were fantastic and I am hoping you haven't sold out as I would like two more!" Kind regards,

Jeannie

"I am delighted with the scarves! They are lovely. Well done those volunteers and thank you."

Rachel

We need YOU to thread a bead (or two!)

Thread a necklace or bracelet for us to sell and help raise money for the Barn Owl Trust

Contact us for your kit
Tel: 01364 653026

Advertise

If you are looking for a novel way to promote your business then the sponsored walk provides a range of opportunities. From entering a team wearing branded t-shirts to placing an advert on our 'Thanks for taking part' leaflet or providing literature to display at our rest and refreshment area. Contact us with your advertising ideas; we will try to be as accommodating as possible!

For those living further afield

If you can't make it to the walk yourself – or if you don't want to collect sponsorship – why not support our dogs by filling in the leaflet enclosed and return it to us with your sponsorship money.

**Last year we raised around £2,500.
Wouldn't it be great to beat that this year!**

Contact: Caroline Lewis
caroline@barnowltrust.org.uk
or phone 01364 653026

Thanks and Things

Thank you everyone who has given us help and support since the last issue. A special thanks to all of you who knitted scarves for us. Well done, you helped us raise over £400 for the Trust. Don't forget to check out the next project on page 15.

Thank you too to Colin Meadows for assistance with the webcam and equipment, Jenny and Andy Muir who raised £151.18 with their coffee morning and to all our wonderful volunteers who give us so much assistance including those who collect injured birds for us.

We are very grateful to all of you who have read and responded to our Wants List; this is a great way of recycling and over the years has saved the Trust a small fortune. This time we need to thank everyone that has responded to our appeal for beads and ribbons, Rob Hamar for 2 slasher tools, Mr & Mrs Budgell and Sarah Tadd for towels, Mike and Margaret Clark and Melanie White for used stamps, Len Oates for owl pellets, ink cartridges and stamps, Sarah Colquhoun for 4 unused printer cartridges, John and Shelagh Prickett for a sack of wild bird food and Rosemarie for 2 bags of birdseed, Nicola Pearce for a parcel of towels, beads, ribbons, used stamps,

foreign coins, Pat and Jenny Ford for a sandwich toaster, filing drawers, chocolates, and last but not least Valerie Lurcock and Heather Buswell who both bought biscuits for the office staff at Xmas – yummy!

Please read through our list and see if you can support us with any of the following items that are surplus to your requirements, we'll be very grateful for your help:

- ◆ Portable CD player/radio for office use and for use in presentations if powerful enough
- ◆ Cement mixer
- ◆ Foreign change (please enclose a note of the type of currency)
- ◆ Roll of new hardwearing office carpet, suitable for gluing to the floor
- ◆ Staple gun, both office-type and DIY type needed
- ◆ Wild bird food - mainly sacks of black sunflower seeds, also peanuts and plain canary seed
- ◆ Wood for making outdoor nestboxes - sheets of 9 or 12mm tanalised softwood ply and lengths of 25x 50mm tanalised batten
- ◆ A4 and A3 recycled paper and card both coloured and white
- ◆ Photographic-quality colour inkjet printer

- ◆ Box trailer in good working order
- ◆ Hands-free telephone headset/microphone for use on reception
- ◆ Inkjet cartridges for HP Deskjet 3820 and HP Deskjet 930
- ◆ Lawn rakes/garden rakes
- ◆ Pitchforks
- ◆ 12 stackable chairs
- ◆ Postage stamps (both new and used commemorative and foreign)
- ◆ Office chairs (must meet H&S specs)
- ◆ Ophthalmoscope (instrument for looking into owls' eyes)
- ◆ Car interior cleaning products
- ◆ Jerry can in good condition for storing petrol
- ◆ Good quality 6ft projector screen
- ◆ Wildlife rehab group looking for somewhere to release house sparrows (*we have the perfect release site*)
- ◆ Good quality Barn Owl winter scenes either photographic or illustrative for Christmas card images
- ◆ Empty inkjet cartridges and old mobile phones for recycling
- ◆ Wild Barn Owl pellets (we can never have too many)
- ◆ Cement mixer

Tail piece...



Here on the edge of Dartmoor there really is no doubt that global warming is having an effect on our native wildlife. The daffodils were two months early and the frogs a month late. There was ice on the ponds some mornings when primroses were blooming in corner wood. My hedge-laying became frantic when buds started appearing on the trees in February but it was great being out-of-doors, sharing time with the countryside and doing something practical in the first really dry spell we'd had for ages.

Everyone here at the Trust is looking forward to being able to share the Lennon Legacy Project experience with those of you who are able to join us for the Supporters' Day in July. Hopefully by then, if we do have a summer, the butterflies, crickets and flowers will have returned to show off their splendour. At the moment we are seeing loads of evidence of vole activity, it's the easiest time of year to spot the signs in the grassland, so this bodes well for the Barn Owls and everything else that benefits from a healthy vole population.

Last year we were lucky enough to go to the World Owl Conference and meet lots of other owl enthusiasts from around the World.

It was wonderful to see so many people from different countries and cultures who all share the same passion for a species and, in most cases, the natural world. It was a perfect opportunity for sharing information, and for reinforcing the belief that what we, as individuals, can do, really makes a difference when there are so many other people out there doing their bit too. We were really lucky that the conference language was English and full of admiration for all of the speakers who gave their papers and answered questions in what was for them a foreign language. I was reminded of when our Friend Iñigo (from Spain) first visited the Trust in 1990, I found it a humbling experience that he could converse fluently in my language and I knew almost nothing of his. It has been a real pleasure editing the International articles for this issue and corresponding with the contributors. Once again I feel humbled by their grasp of my language. Hopefully sharing their work with you, with us and with each other will enthuse, encourage, lead to some new insights and possibly even some tangible benefits for Barn Owl conservation internationally.

As you will have seen from this issue of

Feedback, this is our 20th anniversary. It has been an amazing journey and we have met some remarkable people who have shared our experiences and helped us on our way. The Barn Owl Trust is more than just its achievements or the people who are here now, it is everyone who has taken part in or supported our work; it is a belief that conserving the Barn Owl can make a difference to our natural environment and that we can all do our bit to help make the world a better place for humans and for wildlife. It is about empowering individuals to feel that their actions matter, whether they are shopping, smiling or saving a Barn Owl site. There is as always so much more to do and as individuals we may feel overwhelmed when we think about trying to save the planet, but remember there are people all over the world sharing your concerns and doing their bit too. To all of you who have supported the Trust and shared the first twenty years – thank you, we couldn't have done it without you.

Together we can make a world of difference.

Frances Ramsden