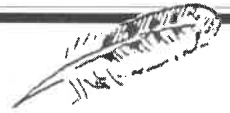




Issue Number 27 - Spring 2002



FEEDBACK

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**Changing times: DEFRA Barn Owl release ban...
BOT expands information service... arrivals and departures
Plus news, features and a giant brood of cuddly Barn Owls**

Printed on recycled paper

THE BARN OWL TRUST - CONSERVING THE BARN OWL AND ITS ENVIRONMENT
Registered Charity: No: 299 835

Barn Owl Trust News

Ringling the Changes

We are now taking phone calls five days a week. From April 2nd the telephone here at the Trust has been answered 9.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday. Dealing with telephone enquiries on just Tuesdays and Thursday is a thing of the past.

Answering the phone two days a week stemmed from the days when volunteers ran the office. Over the years the system continued so that the conservation team had full days free for fieldwork. However, with the increase in workload staff and callers have found it increasingly frustrating.

The trustees decided to put resources into employing a receptionist for three extra days a week, with effect from the start of the new financial year. Trustee Keith Grant said: "This is a big step for the Trust. We want to provide a more efficient service for Friends, partners and anyone who wants to support Barn Owl conservation in the UK".

Lesley Ford now shares the role of receptionist with Sonia Seldon so there is a human being rather than an answer phone to take your calls.

The answer phone will continue to give out a number for Live Bird Emergencies outside office hours. ☺

A Walk on the Wild Side

No it's not déjà vu, you have seen this photograph before but it's so nice we thought we'd use it again.

This year our annual sponsored walk and picnic breaks with tradition and takes place on a Sunday. We've moved the event from its usual Spring Bank Holiday Monday because of the Queen's Golden Jubilee holiday. The walk is now on Sunday May 26th.

The canoe crossing proved so popular in 2000 that we have decided to run it again this year, but



Dorset Workshop - Photo: Frances Ramsden

BOT staff have been out and about in several counties since the last issue of Feedback.

In November we were in Gloucester for a nestbox workshop, in liaison with the Gloucester Wildlife Trust and Hawk and Owl Trust. This was followed by meetings with people involved in Barn Owl conservation in Oxfordshire and Worcestershire. Also in November SCO David Ramsden gave a presentation in Hereford to the Rural Design and Building Association (RDBA) conference.

In January there was a chance to meet British Trust for Ornithology members when we attended the BTO South West regional conference and old friend Mike Toms (from the BTO

in Thetford, Norfolk) visited Waterleat. In February we were in Dorset for another very successful nestbox workshop in partnership with Dorset County Council and Dorset Wildlife Trust. The workshop brought together a number of interested parties who are now starting a Dorset Barn Owl liaison group. In March we visited Berkshire for the Hawk and Owl Trust's Barn Owl Conservation Network symposium where we met old friends from all over the UK.

If you live in Dorset and want to get involved with practical Barn Owl conservation you can contact the new group by writing to their secretary Richard Smith care of Feedback or emailing him at: orchidgrower@bushinternet.com ☺

it will be during the early part of the walk to tie in with the tides. We are also planning a treasure hunt to take place during the final leg of the walk for the young and the young at heart.

Megan the Golden Retriever has again agreed to participate providing she receives enough sponsorship - so please consider sponsoring her on the enclosed form. Last year she could only walk around Plymouth due to the Foot and Mouth epidemic so she's really looking forward to her country walk this year.



Photo: Philip Knowing

Please join us on the walk - it's a beautiful location, really good fun and one of our most important fundraisers of the year. Just give us a call and we will be happy to send full details and a sponsorship form.

Sandra Reardon

Other News

Barn Owl Release Scheme Ends

The Barn Owl Trust has expressed reservations over a government decision to end the licensing scheme for the release of captive-bred Barn Owls.

Following a review, the scheme (run by DEFRA) has been scrapped because of the low numbers of birds being released and the high cost of administration. But Barn Owl Trust research has shown that – carried out properly – the release of captive-bred birds can be a positive conservation tool.

Releasing captive-bred Barn Owls into the wild is a complex process that needs to be regulated. The licensing scheme came into being because of concern about the huge numbers of captive-bred birds being released during the 1980s. Now there are only a few groups and individuals doing it on a regular basis. However, the work can help repopulate areas with good habitat but where wild Barn Owl numbers are low. Many landowners feel it is not worth thinking about creating good habitat when there are no Barn Owls in the area. The prospect of birds being released encourages them to create good habitat.

DEFRA have stated that licences to release Barn Owls may still be applied for under section 16 of the

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. However, the policy remit will be against issuing licences. The penalty for releasing a captive Bred Barn Owl is a maximum fine of £5,000 per bird and/or a six-month custodial sentence. A general exemption for the release of rehabilitated wild Barn Owls will continue.

The Barn Owl Trust published the first ever study of release results in 1989 and drafted the original *Code of Practice for Barn Owl Release* on behalf of the then DoE in 1992. In 2001 a second report on the re-introduction of captive-bred Barn Owls was produced for the DEFRA review. The Trust took the view that the release-licensing scheme should be continued to allow for further study of long-term results.

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), also consulted during the review, felt it was important that further studies on the fate of released Barn Owls should be conducted and that a system such as the licensing scheme was required in order to enable such studies to take place.

Copies of the second Reintroduction Report (2001) are available from the Barn Owl Trust, price £5.00. ☺

Cliff Hanger

When we advise about the height of nestboxes, we recommend that they are put up high in barns or trees, because Barn Owls like to roost high in these sort of places. However there are always exceptions to the rules.

Whilst travelling round East Devon on the trail of current Barn Owl sites, Paula Carrier was pointed towards a farm which has a pair of Barn Owls. The farm is close to the south coast near Sidmouth with land edged by cliffs. The farmer explained that several years ago a pair were released from his farm, and he showed her the nestbox that he had

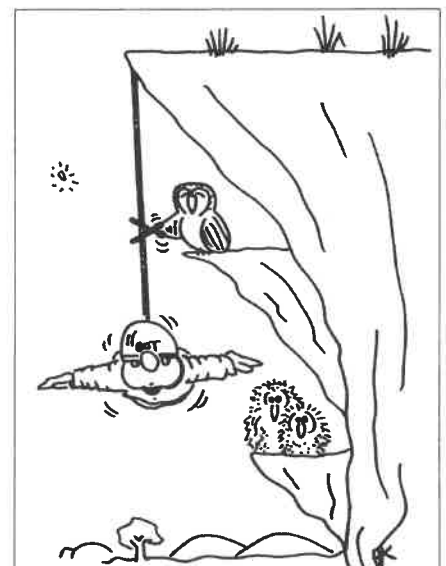
built for them in an ideally located, cosy barn. However, there was no sign of current or even recent roosting in this barn. The farmer then informed Paula that the Barn Owls were actually nesting in the cliff face! Apparently, not long after they were released, the owls stopped returning to the barn, instead preferring to roost in a crevice in the cliff.

It just goes to show, you can provide the most luxurious accommodation for them in a supposedly perfect location, and they still choose to nest in the most precarious, inaccessible, wind-swept and exposed site imaginable! ☺

Article 10 Update

You may remember we mentioned a couple of issues ago that DEFRA were thinking about charging for Article 10 Certificates. Well, due in part to many concerns expressed at the disproportionate effect the new fees structure would have on certain areas of trade, the proposals have been abandoned and a new set are being formulated. DEFRA will conduct another public consultation exercise with new proposals this year which will again include fees for Article 10 Certificates. However, it is unlikely that any new charges will be introduced before the autumn of next year and, in the meantime, applications will remain free of charge.

As a result of the regulations changing, there are still two types of Article 10 Certificates, but they are now called **Transaction Article 10 Certificates** and **Specimen Specific Article 10 Certificate (SSC's)**. Transaction Article 10 Certificates are issued to a specific keeper and allow the specimen to be used only for the specific transactions on the certificate or covering letter. SSC's are now replacing 'breeders' Article 10 Certificates, these will be clearly marked with a special condition to the effect that they are issued for the bird noted in the description box which may be used for any commercial purpose, regardless of who owns the bird and in any country in the EU. ☺



Illus: Phil Knowling

Owl News

Many of you will have seen us on Channel 4's production Pet Rescue last year and I am pleased to be able to report that Jos, the wild Barn Owl with the broken leg that featured during the course of the programme, has been recently discovered living locally in the valley. It is great news that he has managed to re-adjust to life in the wild after what must have been quite a traumatic experience for him. We are hoping that there may be a female nearby to continue the line.

Towards the end of last year we received a wild Tawny Owl that we think had been hit by a train. It was found on the railway line (in a dazed state but with no apparent physical injury) and taken to a local vet. They passed the owl to us for recuperation but it became obvious that it was not rallying and we unfortunately had to make the decision to have it put down after its condition deteriorated and it was unable to eat.

In December we took in another wild Barn Owl with a fractured wing, probably resulting from a road traffic accident. We had hopes of its recovering completely and being able to be released but despite the vet's best efforts and tender loving care from our conservation staff its wing is still rather weak and it will not be able to survive in the wild. It will spend the rest of its days here at Waterleat.

Sadly Gulliver died unexpectedly last month. Gulliver was a disabled wild Barn Owl of unknown age from Suffolk. He had been living in the sanctuary here for the past four years and we had expected to be looking after him for many more years. Those of you who have seen



They went thata way!

Photo: Sonia Seldon

our video 'Behind the Scenes' will remember the footage of Gulliver and Troon bringing up their owlets. We also said goodbye to Red Ring - she was our oldest resident Barn Owl; we think probably in her twenty-first year.

On a happier note we were able to re-unite a captive bred Barn Owl with her owner. She had been found flying around Torbay and after a couple of phone calls and a little confusion over ring numbers her owner was able to come and collect her from the Trust. Strangely enough one of her siblings had been picked up last autumn and also spent a short time here before being reunited with its owner.

Due to the decision by DEFRA (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) licences to release Barn Owls will only be available under exceptional circumstances, therefore we are very unlikely to breed any further owlets

at the Trust. You can read more about this on page 5. On a personal note I think it's a great shame. Although we only bred and released a very few Barn Owls in recent years, it was a brilliant experience to be able to see their progress 24 hours a day with the video camera set up in the hide aviary. It was a great learning experience for us all at the Trust.

Some of you will probably have seen our spot on Countryfile. The team spent several hours here at the Trust (see page 4). From what I could see Michaela Strachan managed to charm most male members of staff. Let's hope that the resulting programme will further the cause.

Now that we have become landowners we are planning to spread our wings, and those of our Barn Owls, by building a spacious new aviary. Old friend of the Trust Derrick Crocker is giving us a couple of weeks of his time to get the project underway.

Sandra Reardon

Astra Wheels

In 1996 we ran a piece in Feedback reporting that the Trust's previous estate car needed replacing. We were delighted when the Belsize Trust gave us a grant to enable us to replace it with a Vauxhall Astra estate.

The Astra has been an incredibly good and economical workhorse,

being used for school visits, talks, live bird emergencies, long journeys and general BOT running around - in fact everything except off-road work. Unfortunately with just over 100,000 miles on the clock the Astra is reaching the end of its road. After a prolonged stay at the garage recently we were told it had very limited life expectancy and needed a new

engine. However, its book value means that this is not a viable option.

We have some grant funding towards a new vehicle but unfortunately nothing like the amount necessary to purchase a new one and are currently seeking funds to make up the shortfall - suggestions would be welcome. ☺

Lennon Legacy Project

First progress report:

In the last issue of Feedback you may recall news of our first really big legacy (from Mrs Vivien Lennon) and with it the Trust's first land acquisition. Six months on David, our Senior Conservation Officer, brings you up-to-date with news from the field...

Once the purchase was complete (and we got over the shock!) we set about the task of recording all the ideas we had; things we might do, things we had to do, and some we'd rather not do! Obviously we all knew our main goal was to provide perfect conditions for Barn Owls and get them nesting, but we are interested in other species too. We needed to decide on the extent to which we would manage for maximum variety of wildlife rather than simply voles and Barn Owls. After listening to all our staff and volunteers, we've agreed a set of aims for the project and we're all really looking forward to seeing the field change over time.

Since 1985 we've been asking



Photo: David Ramsden

landowners to provide good habitat. Now it's time to practice what we preach! Luckily, we don't have to make an income from our 25 acres so we're in a very different position to most farmers. We did consider the merits of trying to make a profit at the same time as providing wildlife habitat; this would have made the project more relevant to farming (a "real world" experiment). However, we took the view that 25 acres wasn't really enough land for a proper trial. Virtually all the fields round here are very intensively grazed so we decided the priority

was to create as much perfect habitat as possible. Our aim is 25 acres of lovely long grass with lots of flowers and butterflies, loads of other insects too, thousands of field voles, harvest mice, pond life, skylarks, yellowhammers, kestrels, Barn Owls, and maybe little owls and tawny owls too.

Recently we've seen foxes in the field and were delighted when we spotted a stoat popping in and out of holes in the old wall between our office and the field. Where the River Ashburn passes through the field edge we've seen an occasional dipper and amongst the trees we've seen the usual array of woodland creatures. However there's very little wildlife in the field itself, just lots of intensively grazed rye grass.

Because we know the land is going to change, we now have a wonderful opportunity to record the effects on a range of flora and fauna. Therefore one of our first jobs, starting in April 2002, is to set up some survey and monitoring work. Currently we aim to monitor birds, small mammals, grasses, flowers, and butterflies. There are lots of other possibilities but unless we find extra help there simply won't be time with all our general Barn Owl work and a constant stream of enquiries from across the UK to keep us busy. We are currently advertising for a university student to come and study the field. Do you know anyone who could help?

In the mean time we've been busy erecting telegraph poles and pole boxes for both Barn Owls and kestrels. Where we hope to create the wildlife pond we've had some test holes dug so we can monitor the ground water level – so far so good. We've also set up a photographic monitoring system using fixed camera positions so we can get a set of photos every month for comparison. More news and pictures in the next issue...

Thanks indeed to Vivien Lennon – we won't forget you.

David Ramsden



Photo: Frances Ramsden

Misconceptions and Musings

Popular Misconceptions

A regular Feedback feature where we explode the myths that surround this beautiful bird.

No. 5

"If I tell people where the Barn Owls are their nest will be robbed by egg collectors" – wrong!

From Victorian times right up to the 1960's, egg collecting was a very popular hobby. The challenge of finding a newly-laid wild bird's egg and adding a different one to your collection attracted numerous young lads. The great beauty and fragility of many examples was admired by adults too.

How times have changed!

Taking wild birds' eggs is now highly illegal and, in the case of Barn Owls, even disturbing the birds is an offence. Rather than a common hobby, egg collecting has become the domain of highly skilled moneymaking offenders. The rarer the species the greater the profit.

The eggs of some endangered species are highly prized and theft is a real issue. However, this is **NOT** the case with Barn Owls. Wild Barn Owl eggs are virtually never stolen. For a start, they aren't beautifully marked – just plain white - and getting your hands on them is not a



Illus: Phil Knowing

huge challenge. In addition, the fines are very heavy – up to £5,000 per egg. However, the main reason that wild Barn Owl eggs are hardly ever stolen is because so many identical eggs are laid by captive birds. Why risk a fine when captive-laid eggs are so easily obtained?

No. The chances of your local Barn Owl nest being robbed are virtually nil. ☺

Volunteering

Volunteering is defined as: "The commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community, the environment or individuals outside one's immediate family. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain."

Wherever you live you could consider doing voluntary work and if you'd like to do it for the BOT we'd be delighted to hear from you. You could help us to recruit new Friends, distribute information, hold a fund-raising event like a coffee morning or participate in one on behalf of the Trust. If you are creative and paint, knit or sew you might like to hold a

sale of your wares and share the proceeds, you could lose weight or save pennies to raise funds. By doing any of these things you would be helping with Barn Owl conservation.

If you work in a factory or an office maybe you can heighten your colleagues' awareness of this beautiful bird, or possibly persuade the management to support our work. If you have your own business consider becoming a business supporter of the Trust.

Those of you who live in Devon and Cornwall may be prepared to be put on our list of people to collect

casualty birds or you may have half a day a month when you could become an aviary cleaner. If you have carpentry skills making nestboxes or donation boxes might interest you. Does working in our office half a day a week appeal to you? How about painting and decorating or bracken bashing?

If you are interested in volunteering for the Trust think about your skills, what you want to do, how much time you have available and then get in touch with us. Become part of the BOT team and whatever you do we guarantee you will get a nice warm feeling from helping Barn Owls - there's no greater job satisfaction. ☺

⇒ (Continued from page 10)

had recently had a fall and needed looking after, she wondered if we had a vacancy for the two-week



Photo: Frances Ramsden

period. After a very confusing conversation we worked out that she had meant to phone a residential home. We both found this amusing but I don't think her mother would have been too happy staying in an aviary. The following week a gentleman phoned to make a reservation for a table for four for Saturday evening at 8 o'clock.

When shoeboxes arrive in the post I am always a bit cautious as to what will be inside them. More often than not they are dead Barn Owls that

people have found and sent to us.

On one occasion I peeped into a shoebox that had arrived and found to my surprise... a bright orange owl. It was made of card and had been sent to us by a local school. They had had a talk by Paula and Dusty the previous week and their project was to make something owly. There was a range of items from models to cards to hand sewn pictures, all of them very good: much better than receiving a dead owl in the post!

Sonia Seldon

Around and About

Around and About is a regular Feedback feature taking a look at Barn Owl conservation carried out by individuals around the UK. Barrie Watson is from Sussex and practised as a doctor until his retirement. He has been active in the Ornithological Society and various other wildlife organisations including the BTO. He is a Friend of the Trust.



I was born and brought up in rural West Sussex and was always interested in natural history. I went to London as a student, missed the countryside and joined the Ornithological Section of the London Natural History Society. A girlfriend in the same section helped to steer me towards bird watching rather than botany.

I came to Barn Owl conservation through bird ringing. I have always been keen on ringing projects, which concentrate on particular species or groups to produce useful information. When I helped with the national Project Barn Owl survey in Sussex in 1995-97 I realised how much we needed to learn in the county and how much we could do to help Barn Owls

The West Sussex County Ecologist asked me to help him write a Biodiversity Local Species Action Plan for Barn Owls. The Hawk & Owl Trust have some successful nestbox schemes in the county and I am involved with their boxes in my local area and make my data available to them.

The county FWAG advisor regularly asks me to provide and erect boxes for farmers, and occasionally bodies such as the county council, the Environment Agency and English Nature will together fund a nestbox scheme and ask me to help with erection and monitoring. I was also helping someone who had a big ringing scheme in West Sussex - he had to give up for health reasons and has handed his 100+ Barn Owl boxes over to me to monitor. I get to see some wonderful old Sussex barns, and meet a lot of farmers who are keen to have Barn Owls about the farm.

We have a lot of barn conversions in Sussex; I scan applications in the local papers and try to help with problems arising. The ideal would be to talk to owners and developers *before* they make plans, and then to work *with* them. In fact the district councils will often stipulate that provision is made for owls within or near the finished building.

I knew of one group of derelict farm buildings with owls nesting in a barn roof where planning permission had already been granted. The owner was concerned for the owls and I put up tree boxes across the field from the barn. The owls moved straight in and produced six chicks so now, when the builders arrive, the birds will be safely out of the way. I favour the "A" pattern tree boxes developed by the HOT, as they are light and easy to fix in position, although the best ones are expensive.

Last summer I was sitting below one such box ringing three chicks when there was an almighty bang, followed by two others at minute intervals. We had noticed the gas banger for scaring birds, but assumed that it was not armed, as we had heard nothing while walking up the field. We jumped, but the owls did not - evidently they were used to it!

One morning in November 2000 I had a letter from the BTO containing three ringing reports of owls drowned in cattle troughs, all from that year's ringing. One of the three casualties was a breeding female with half grown chicks at the time. Ringing showed that the male fed two of the young to fledging (one was a road casualty in December). Another of the drowned owls was a bird of the year, found two miles from where it had been ringed.

As a result of these deaths I am campaigning to get the Barn Owl Trust's design of floats in as many troughs as possible, even if - like my nearest farm - there are 38 troughs on the property. A float in all troughs within 200 metres of the nest (as recommended by BOT) would have saved the breeding female.

Last summer we were concerned for our owl population after the widespread flooding of the previous winter, as many of our sites are in river valleys. We found that some which have always had successful broods either had no owls or just adults present with no sign of nesting. However, there were others which had nests for the first time ever (even with a gas banger under the tree!). The county population is probably lower than it could or should be, but it is at least stable.

Barrie Watson
Sussex



Photographs provided by Barrie Watson

Focus on Friends

Garfield Harris lives in Abbotskerswell in Devon, is a Friend of the Trust and has almost completed his first year as a volunteer in our office. Born in Bovey Tracey Garfield has lived in Devon almost all his life. As a child he was fascinated by a stuffed Barn Owl his family kept in a glass case. The colour and the beauty captivated his imagination, he could look at the bird but because of the glass he couldn't touch it. He can remember dreaming that the owl came alive and escaped and was flying around his bedroom.

On leaving school he apprenticed as a motor mechanic and was then called up for national service and became a heavy plant instructor in the regular army based at Chatham in Kent. In 1955 he married Mary, a Devon lass he had met aged 16 and in 1957 they returned to Devon. Garfield managed a service station for two years and then became an overhead lines-man for SWEB for six years whilst studying at home for his GCEs. At 31 he became a mature student at St Luke's college and trained to be a teacher specialising in geography. He then worked at Teignmouth primary for a year before becoming a teacher at Bovey Tracey

primary where he had gone to school himself.

In 1971 at dusk whilst on a school camp under canvas in north Devon, Garfield and his pupils saw a wild Barn Owl floating silently overhead.

After three years at the school he was seconded to Exeter University to take an advanced diploma in education. He then became deputy head of Wolborough C of E primary school in Newton Abbot and stayed for 21 years until he took voluntary retirement in 1994.

Garfield and Mary have two sons and four grandchildren. They have lived in the village for 26 years and Garfield has been involved with the church for twenty years. Since retiring he has become one of the two churchwardens at St Mary's and is responsible for the fabric and the contents of the building. He is also a sidesman, gives readings and assists with the Eucharist. He has tried his hand at watercolour

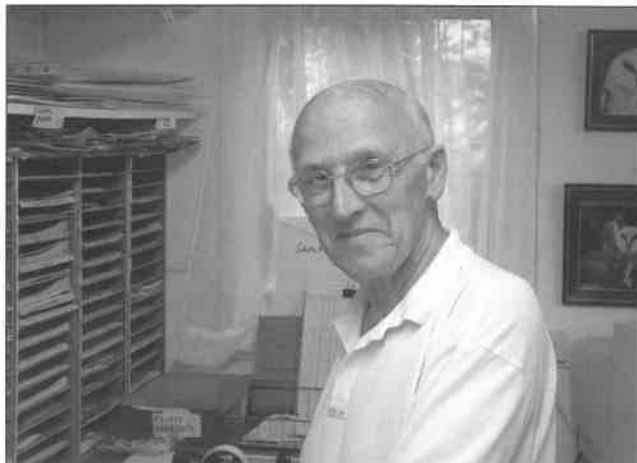


Photo: Sonia Seldon

painting, enjoys gardening, wildlife and cycles 20 miles a week.

As the result of a Devon County Council mailing promoting volunteering to retired residents Garfield contacted his local volunteer bureau and was put in touch with the trust. He now spends Thursday afternoons in the office dealing with the post – a vital role in an organisation with a national information service. Thank you for all your help Garfield and thank you too to Mary who makes delicious cakes. ☺

Coffee Time



Joyce Blake (centre) and her friends have raised £230.20 for the Trust with their 13th annual coffee morning in Galmpton. The event has become something of an institution in the little South Hams village since Joyce's

Photo: Frances Ramsden

husband Harry first contacted the Trust in 1990. Harry unfortunately passed away in 1998 but Joyce and her team have carried on with this annual event to support the Trust. ☺

An Original Gift
Order a one-off personalised cartoon card for someone you care about or a special occasion. Designed and drawn by our very own Phil Knowing to raise funds for the Trust
From £7.50

Thanks and Things

As regular readers will know Feedback has a "Wants" column where we appeal for donations of useful items. Some of the things on the list are consumables - we can always use stamps, nails, office sundries and many other things you might just have lying around. We are delighted when we can reuse or recycle something that has been left unused in a drawer, loft or garage somewhere. We are always pleased to receive any of the items listed, either new or recycled. If you feel you can help or if you have any queries please phone the office.

We'd also like to appeal to you for help with unusual draw prizes. Every year we trawl around to find prizes for our grand draw, a major fund raiser for the Trust, and we could do with your help. Tickets for events, short breaks, gift tokens, a trip in your hot air balloon - contact Lesley with your ideas.

A great big thank you to all of you wonderful people who have sent us the goodies on our list since the last Feedback.

A R Church for 3 measuring tapes, Mr & Mrs Anderson for a chest freezer and Peter Fleming for a super-duper wheelbarrow, a torch, a rake head and a donation. Several of you sent us your used mobile phones which was brilliant: thank you Mr & Mrs North, Harriet Rutter, G & J Thorne and Paul Bray. Our anonymous donor sent us £90, Anne Zealley gave a generous donation towards the field project after attending one of David's talks, Marie-Anne Martin gave us towels and 1st and 2nd class stamps and Liz & Chas Chatfield donated nails. Alison Gagg and Phil Knowling donated a printer and Pat & Jenny Ford bought us a brand new shredder and a pile of goodies for the office and workshop. Mrs Taylor gave us a post driver (which has already been very useful

in the field), a shovel and sundry tools, Stephen Jackson donated a rechargeable torch and A & P Strong gave us towels for the birdroom and a donation to buy office sundries. Thank you all very much.

We can always use:
Office sundries – ink cartridges etc.
Please talk to Judy to find out just what we need
Nails: 2", 3", 4" round wire also 1.5", 2", 3" and 4" galvanised
A4 lever arch files
New postage stamps
Cardboard pet carriers
Good quality dark blue washing-up bowls (*for owl baths*)

We are specifically looking for:
An endoscope
Small over-sink electric water heater
Cutlery for nestbox workshop lunches (*the plastic stuff keeps breaking*)
Ink jet or laser printer, we need a simple black ink workhorse
A powerpoint projector ☺

Tail Piece



Have you ever noticed how elastic time can be? As a child waiting for Christmas or a birthday can seem to take forever. Even as an adult when you're waiting for something to happen every minute can feel like hours. The flip side is, when there simply aren't enough hours in the day to do everything you plan and the years just whiz by faster and faster. Surely the seasons didn't used to pass as quickly.

I think part of the problem is our perception; our consumer society encourages us to start thinking about Christmas in September when the shops fill up with tinsel and gifts. In January when the tinsel disappears, we are prompted to look ahead when Easter eggs appear and in the summer shops and catalogues display their autumn and winter collections. It's not surprising that living in the moment is an alien concept.

Our ancestors had to struggle simply to survive. The freedom from starvation that we have in the 21st century gives us incredible opportunities. It seems crazy that with

the choices we have so many people find so little satisfaction in their day-to-day lives. I guess part of the problem is that we are conditioned in our society to constantly want more, newer and bigger possessions and more space in which to put them. We are encouraged to compare ourselves with others with the implication that if we spend money on a particular product our problems will be sorted, and we all buy into this at least to some extent. But how can a particular brand of soft drink or deodorant make you happier? Comparing yourself with someone else can only lead to discontent. Surely the answer is to look at your own life and work out what's important and try to make every moment count, "Live each day as if it were your last and treat the Earth as if you'll live forever". Simple words with a simple message - very hard to achieve, but what an incredible philosophy for aspiring to happiness.

Making changes can be daunting. Nature provides us with constant change, not just through the rotation of the seasons. Several times a week I walk up a green lane near my home

and every single time it's different. A few years ago a huge oak tree blew down blocking the lane and taking out part of the hedgerow - the devastation was tremendous. Now the scars have healed and where the canopy was opened up to let the light in wild flowers cover the ground and it's absolutely beautiful. I guess the lesson is that change no matter how devastating or uncomfortable can have a positive side.

We all have choices and we can change the way we live and the way we think to embrace the positive. If we want to leave a healthy world for future generations then we need to value the natural world and make the space in our hectic lives to appreciate what we have now, to enjoy the present and to try not to be afraid of making changes. We need to count our blessings.

Thank you all for your support and for everything you do for conservation.

Together we can make a world of difference.

Frances Ramsden