



Issue Number 28 - Autumn 2002



FEEDBACK

The Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU - (01364) 653026 - Registered Charity No: 299 835



In this issue...

- The story of Joss
- An unusual owlet
- Dusty awarded Blue Peter badge
- Devon Barn Owl survey imminent
- Annapurna adventure
- Owl news
- Lennon legacy project update
- An owly cake



Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to Feedback. This issue is packed with news and stories as diverse as the latest on the Lennon Legacy Project (pages 8 & 9) and a very unusual wedding cake (page 14).

In our regular feature Around and About (page 13) we visit Shropshire to hear about the fledgling Barn Owl conservation project there. We bring you up to date with "goings and comings" at the Trust. In May we interviewed for new conservation staff and the new members of the team introduce themselves on pages 10 & 11.

After last year's Foot and Mouth epidemic there was a tremendous amount of work to do through the summer. This combined with a hectic

ringing season and staff training made for an even busier summer than usual. At our annual monitoring sites brood sizes were generally smaller than in previous years but we are getting more reports of late broods. In East Devon, where we are into the second year of a Site Enhancement Scheme, we have recorded breeding at six new sites.

This autumn Mark Green (Conservation Officer) is off to New Zealand for ten weeks with Sonia Seldon (our former Receptionist) and in November three of the team head off to Nepal for the adventure of a lifetime (page 12). With David (our Senior Conservation Officer) locked away three days a week writing up his research we are preparing for a demanding autumn.

With the help of Alan Lewis (IT support) we are working on major changes to our database to make it more user-friendly. We have brought the management of our website in-house so we can update it more efficiently; thank you to Dave Thomas for all his help over the last two years. Next year we are planning some major changes to the site; if you have access to the internet it's worth a visit - www.barnowltrust.org.uk.

2003 is the year of the Devon Barn Owl Survey - is it really ten years since the last one? Where did those years go? On page 4 we give you the details and on page 5 we appeal for volunteers to get involved in a hands-on way with supporting Barn Owl conservation.

We are always pleased to receive contributions to Feedback, we hope you enjoy reading this issue and it encourages you to keep supporting the Trust. Thank you for your help. ☺

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Cover Photo: The son of Joss - Frances Ramsden

*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, Philip Knowling, Sandra Reardon.*

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*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*

Nestbox Workshops

Spend a day with Trust staff and volunteers, learn about Barn Owls and build your own nestbox.

Sunday 24th November
Bridgwater, Somerset
with the Hawk & Owl Trust & Somerset Wildlife Trust

Saturday 22nd February
Torquay, Devon
with the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust

Call 01364 653026
for details and a booking form.

Barn Owl Trust News

BOT Meets Blue Peter

In May this year David (our Senior Conservation Officer) and Dusty the Barn Owl travelled to London with the mobile aviary. They went to meet the Blue Peter team and film for an item screened on BBC TV at the end of June. The journey was fairly slow as the aviary and Ranger combined was about 40' (over twelve metres) long. It attracted some puzzled stares on its way up the M5, M4 and into Shepherds Bush. Dusty travelled quite happily in her box in the back of the Ranger.

When they arrived at Television Centre the aviary had to be reversed 500 metres down a narrow access road to get into the studio. With just inches to spare on either side David received a round of applause from the floor crew as he made it safely to the door. He then had to drive in and reverse out 3 times for rehearsals before the final filming.

On TV the mobile aviary arrived in the Blue Peter studio with presenter Matt sitting alongside David chatting. Dusty, whose box had been strategically placed earlier, was waiting and as Matt showed the viewers a selection of pellets, eggs and feathers David opened the box and lifted Dusty out into camera view. She sat obligingly on David's hand whilst they



David with Simon & Matt in the Blue Peter studio Photo: Frances Ramsden

discussed her, turning her head 180° to check out the studio. Then, just as they were finishing up, and to the delight of the camera crew, she shook herself and flew to land 30' up on a railing. She raised her tail, did a poo and then flew up into the lighting gantries and that was a "wrap". The floor manager said, "That was one of the magical moments of Blue

Peter".

David went up into the roof with a lighting engineer and Dusty was happy to return to her box to make the long journey back to Devon. ☺

Education Day

We held an environmental education day for local school-children as part of the Trust's Heritage Lottery Fund project. The event took place in May at Fowlescombe Farm in South Devon. Some 100 local children attended the event.

Fowlescombe was ideal because of its range of old and new farm buildings and different habitats; the farm is being managed for wildlife as well as agriculture.

The morning featured a talk charting the changes in farm landscapes over the past 60 years and the effects on wildlife followed by the appearance of a live Barn Owl, Dusty. The children were riveted by the talk and thrilled by Dusty as she flew soundlessly over their upturned faces.

A walk across fields and around farm buildings followed. With the children excitedly investigating different sorts of habitat and considering the implications for Barn Owls they were able to put the things they had heard in the talk into context. They saw nestboxes and found evidence of wild Barn Owl roosting. They also, as can be seen from the picture, had the chance to make Barn Owl masks! It was a day of big clouds and strong winds, but fortunately the rain



One hundred children in owl masks

Photo: Philip Knowling

held off.

Afterwards thank you cards from the children were wildly enthusiastic, with quotes such as "it was the best ever day of my life" and "everything I did was fantastic".

We are grateful to Barbara and Richard Barker at Fowlescombe and for the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund. With their help the Barn Owl Trust successfully devised, developed, planned and held a brand new

educational event looking at Barn Owl habitat and the countryside.

Footnote

Days after the event it was discovered that the nestbox in the barn used as a lunch-room contained a brood of four owlets! You can visit the Fowlescombe website and see pictures of the owlets at: www.fowlescombe.com ☺

More BOT News

Devon Barn Owl Survey 2003

Preparations are underway for next year's Devon Barn Owl Survey – a repeat of the 1993 survey carried out by the Barn Owl Trust and Devon Birdwatching & Preservation Society (DBW&PS). The survey aims to return to all sites occupied in 1993, re-check all Barn Owl roosting and nesting sites recorded since then, record new sightings and previously unknown occupied sites, estimate coverage by searching selected map squares, estimate the county population and check for changes in distribution.

DBW&PS is once again our partner organisation for the survey. We are currently seeking funding to support the work, which will start in earnest in the spring of 2003 and culminate in a report in 2004.

Survey workers will fall into two main categories. The first category will consist of people holding English Nature nest inspection licences, who can search sites for signs of occupation and status using a ladder, torch, hard hat, etc. The

other category will include people who cannot search sites but who can visit locations to interview people (farmers, site owners, landowners, farm workers etc). All survey workers will be required to follow both the Trust's Data Confidentiality Policy and Health & Safety Policy.

Training days for volunteers wishing to take part in the survey will be held during the first part of next year. We are keen to hear from anyone who would like to participate. Please phone one of our conservation team to let them know if you are interested.

If you live elsewhere you can approach your local Wildlife Trust or volunteer Barn Owl group to see if they need help. Those living in Cornwall may be interested to know that the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey is planned for 2004. ☺

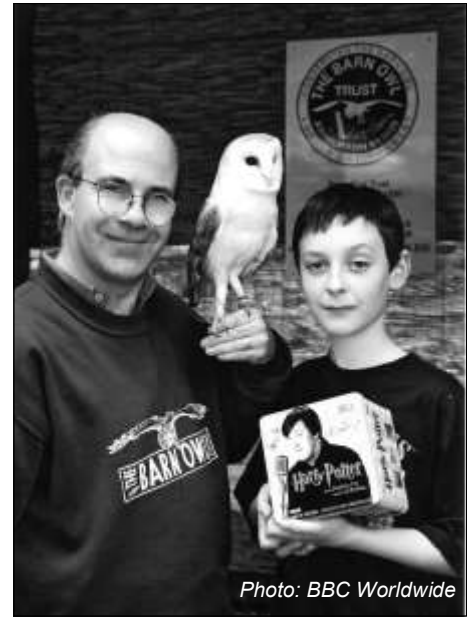


Photo: BBC Worldwide

Harry Potter Outing

A day out with the Barn Owl Trust was the first prize in a national competition organised by the BBC to promote its Harry Potter spoken-word recordings. The winner, 11 year old Adam Connell from South Wales, visited the Trust in June along with his sister Charlotte (8), his mother Janice and family friend Kit.

Adam had his picture taken with Dusty the Barn Owl, saw Barn Owls in the wild and even got to hold owlets as he helped Senior Conservation Officer David Ramsden to BTO ring birds at a nest site. He was also presented with a limited edition boxed set of Harry Potter tapes signed by both J K Rowling and Stephen Fry. ☺



Annual Walk

Photo: Frances Ramsden

We were really looking forward to the walk this year - last year's having been cancelled due to the Foot & Mouth crisis.

Leading up to the day the weather was absolutely appalling - wind and driving rain as I'm sure you will remember whilst waiting for the summer to arrive. However the day started off well; there were even a couple of little blue patches in the sky,

although the ground was a bit wet. We had a record number of participants. As usual my husband, Paddy, and I acted as sweepers, so we left well after the majority. The Annapurna girls (see article on page 12) left mid morning looking very businesslike with all the gear including walking sticks (sorry, poles); this was to be their first real training walk together. Paddy and I were in the slightly ☺

☹unfortunate position of being around the 200th people to walk the tracks and many had become pretty churned up and muddy by this stage. And then it rained... and rained... my boots were not quite as waterproof as I'd thought and neither was my husband by the look of him. One of the shoulder straps on my rucksack broke (NB always carry large safety pins). Most people were back at base by now. And it rained... and rained... it was like walking through very wet cement. An hour or so later and the sun came out and we continued on our way gently steaming.

By the time we got back it was a beautiful late afternoon and after a cuppa and some fish and chips we all agreed it had been a great day. Can't wait for next year.

Sandra Reardon

PS You might like to know that the walk raised £3,234.97 for the Trust - thank you all.

Even More BOT News

Not Every Barn Owl is a White Owl!

Each summer the Trust visits a selection of nest sites as part of its annual monitoring program and over the years we've seen around 1,400 nestlings each one with a lovely white chest. This summer Trust staff were amazed to discover a completely brown-chested young Barn Owl. How could this happen?

Around the world there are 35 different kinds of Barn Owl (known as sub-species) and each type has a different Latin name. British (white-breasted) Barn Owls are part of what's known as the 'nominate race' *Tyto alba alba* which is found throughout western Europe. If you want to see a brown-breasted Barn Owl you need to go to eastern Europe, the home of *Tyto alba guttata*.

Very occasionally, *guttata* Barn Owls do turn up in Britain, normally having crossed the North Sea from Holland or Germany and landed in East Anglia. It's extremely unusual to see an eastern European Barn Owl in northern or south west England. The bird pictured (right) was discovered in north Devon and had not yet taken its first flight – could one of its parents be a 'foreigner'? Amazingly, its nestling brother looked perfectly British! ☺



Photo: Frances Ramsden

Barn Owls on Site

The Trust's booklet *Barn Owls on Site - a guide for developers and planners* has been updated by the BOT and reprinted by English Nature this year.

As well as our new indoor nestbox design, the new booklet contains a quick reference guide and answers frequently asked questions. You can obtain the booklet from either the Trust or English Nature. It can be downloaded in full from their website: www.english-nature.org.uk ☺

Great Grant

BOT has been awarded a £50,000 grant from the Tubney Trust towards public information provision and our work with farmers and landowners, schools and colleges and conservation professionals.

Thank you from the trustees, staff and volunteers for this wonderful donation. ☺

Volunteers Needed

Do you have any spare time? You could put it to good use and do something to help Barn Owls.

At the Barn Owl Trust's Devon base
We are looking for volunteers to help with the following tasks:

- **Aviary cleaning:** a regular commitment of 3 – 4 hours, weekly, fortnightly or even monthly. We provide training, equipment, waterproofs, tea and coffee. If you don't mind messy jobs and being outside it is a wonderful opportunity to spend time in close proximity to owls.
- **Survey work:** participate in next year's county Barn Owl survey, see page 4 for more details.
- **Painting and decorating:** help prepare and repaint the outside and the inside of the Trust's offices.

Wherever you live

- **Recruiting Friends:** You can help support the Trust by distributing leaflets

and recruiting new Friends or holding a fundraising event

Other groups need help too

• In Shropshire

The newly-formed Shropshire Barn Owl Group is looking for people to help with a wide variety of tasks - see the article on page 13 for more information.

• In Dorset

The Dorset Owl & Hawk Group has been recently founded to enable local people to take an active part in the conservation of birds of prey. This group also needs people to get involved and help make it happen.

If you are interested in helping with anything listed above, or have any other ideas on how you could help please ring Lesley or Amy on 01364 653026. ☺

Scheme Updates

South Hams Barn Owl Scheme

The original Barn Owl scheme started in the South Hams district in 1997 and aimed to enhance 32 Barn Owl breeding and roosting sites, with an additional site included in 2000. This summer Stage 3 work has been almost completed at the final seven of the South Hams Barn Owl sites. This brings the total number of sites that will have been enhanced through the scheme to 33. Since the beginning of the scheme we have recorded a significant increase in the number of Barn Owl breeding sites in the district.

Teignbridge Barn Owl Scheme

Originally the Teignbridge Barn Owl Scheme enhanced nine Barn Owl breeding or roosting sites around the district. Work at these sites was completed in 2000. Since then, the Trust has recorded a number of new breeding and roosting sites. In 2001 Teignbridge District Council and the Trust provided funding to include another four sites in the scheme. We have now completed Stage 1 work at three sites and Stage 2

work at the other one. TDC are also supporting monitoring work at up to 15 sites until 2003.

North Devon Barn Owl Scheme

This 22 site scheme began in autumn 1999 in partnership with the district council and with the support of the Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society. The progress of the scheme was seriously delayed last year, when Foot and Mouth restrictions prevented access to farms until the autumn. We have now almost completed our final Stage 3 visits at 20 sites and the remaining two sites will be completed next summer.

East Devon Barn Owl Scheme

EDBOS is a 42-site scheme and was launched in November 2000 in partnership with East Devon District Council and with the support of other groups. Originally the scheme was aimed at securing existing breeding sites. However, it became apparent after the first season of fieldwork that there were far fewer breeding sites in East Devon than we had anticipated – we recorded

breeding at only 16 sites in 2000. The criteria for participation in the scheme were expanded to include sites where Barn Owls are roosting but not breeding and sites where there is little or no evidence of Barn Owls at present but where there are areas of good habitat in the vicinity. It is hoped that the work done at these sites will encourage Barn Owls to colonise and breed there in the future. We have made good progress on the East Devon scheme after the delays caused by the Foot and Mouth crisis last summer. We have almost completed the final Stage 3 work at 16 sites, Stage 2 work is completed or underway at 25 sites and the initial Stage 1 work has been completed at the final site. ☺

Imerys Initiative

The Barn Owl Trust and Imerys plc have joined forces to help Barn Owls in Cornwall. This project aims to improve habitat and provide nest sites for Barn Owls in the St Austell area. Behind schedule due to the Foot and Mouth crisis last year, we have now erected a number of nestboxes in buildings, trees and on specially erected poles. Due to the lack of suitable sites we have not been able to erect as many indoor nestboxes as originally anticipated so have proposed that more pole boxes are provided instead. We hope to erect a further five this winter. ☺

Heritage Lottery Fund Project Progress



Photo: Philip Knowling

The Heritage Lottery Fund project has entered its third and final year. The project has helped the Trust create one full-time post and part-funded several part-time roles. It helped purchase portable display panels, large exhibition photographs and a marquee. It has also paid for the Trust to attend extra shows and events, send out a national Friends recruitment mailing and produce more information leaflets.

Trust staff and volunteers attended a total of ten shows and events this summer. This year with the Devon Barn

Owl Survey looming in 2003, the focus was on the South West of England. The Trust does some shows such as the Royal Cornwall Show and the Devon County Show every year. This year for the first time we attended the Healthy Living Show, the Mid Devon Show and the Dorchester Show (where we were joined by volunteers from the fledgling Dorset Owl & Hawk Group).

There is still money in the budget to be spent on additional elements of education work and a mailing to be sent out to every library in the country.

Dobwalls Bypass Survey

In June the Trust was contracted to carry out a Barn Owl survey along the route of a proposed A38 bypass at Dobwalls in Cornwall. A search of potential nest and roost places within 500m of the proposed route revealed a couple of occasional roosts. The Trust's report recommended mitigation measures to minimise the threat posed by the new road to Barn Owls. ☺

The Trust took delivery of its new marquee in July. Made (appropriately enough) at Owls' Gate in Cornwall, it is 18 feet long by 14 feet wide, green and white with twin centre poles.

The marquee looks extremely stylish and really stands out from the crowd. It gives enough covered space to mount an excellent display. Having it means that we can take open ground at shows, rather than the more expensive covered space. The marquee will last for years to come, an enduring reminder of the value

Owl News

We are all very sad to report the news of Joss's death (see below). When you have rescued a bird from death, nursed it back to health, returned it to the wild and watched its progress, it is not possible to remain detached. We were all thrilled when he settled locally, found a mate and started a family. Let's hope that Joss's son (cover picture) will have a little more road sense.

Last Thursday was the health check day for our resident birds. For Sue and Amy this was an introduction to catching and handling the birds in our aviaries at Waterleat. At first things went along quite slowly as we started in the aviary with our disabled Raven. She only needs to look at you in that particular way and open her beak to turn your blood to water. Then came Hazel, our London Barn Owl. She has been with us for a couple of months and is very confident around people. She was definitely the crossiest Barn Owl I've ever seen. She screamed at the top of her voice, wriggled about and pecked and scratched the whole time she was being held; in fact everyone came out of the office to see what all the noise was about. Occasional health

checks are essential and most of our birds go through the process without a murmur.

By the second and third aviaries the girls were gaining in confidence and much more efficient so things speeded up a bit. By the end of the day everyone had a clean bill of health (the owls that is) and the staff were all exhausted.

Since the last issue of Feedback we have sadly had to say goodbye to Winterbourne and St David, two captive bred Barn Owls in their late middle years. New arrivals include Hazel, our London owl, Sandy a disabled wild Barn Owl and Pensilva a beautiful young female captive bred Barn Owl (less than a year old) found in Cornwall. She had escaped or been illegally released and was thin but otherwise in very good condition. Unfortunately no-one has claimed her.

This last week Rave has been receiving the attention of a couple of wild ravens who have been delighting the staff and volunteers with views of them swooping



Amy & Sue with Woodstock the Tawny Owl
Photo: Mark Green

down to croak at her.

Sandra Reardon

The Story of Joss



Joss in July
Photo: Frances Ramsden

In May 2001 a helpless fledgling Barn Owl, fluffy with down and helpless, was found by a lady called Joslyn. BOT Assistant Conservation Officer Mark Green negotiated Foot & Mouth restrictions and vehicle disinfecting points in a round trip of over 100 miles to save the bird. He took it to the Veterinary Hospital in Plymouth (which treats the Trust's casualties free of

charge) where the owl, a male of seven and a half weeks, was found to have a broken right leg (a fairly uncommon occurrence – most fractures are in the wing).

From the vets Joss (after Joslyn) came to the Trust's base at Ashburton. He arrived with his leg in a cast, and spent several weeks in the bird-room, where birds are given treatment and solitude.

By mid-June the fracture had healed and Joss returned to the vet to have his cast removed. The story was filmed for Channel 4's *Pet Rescue* series and shown on national TV over three nights in September.

In early July 2001 Joss, now recuperated and a fully-fledged adult, was ringed and released back into the wild. There was no advantage in returning him to his natal site as he was too young to have become familiar with the area. Instead, in September 2001, he was released into an area of good habitat with no resident Barn Owls.

The following Christmas staff found Joss at a roost close to the release site. Joss had been self-sufficient for over three months and was living in a valley

that hadn't had resident Barn Owls since the 1960s.

Excitingly, in the spring he was joined by a female and the pair moved into a nestbox erected by the Trust in 1991. In July Joss and his mate were found alive and well. Better still, there was a healthy male owlet in the nest – "Son of Joss"!

Then tragedy struck. In August 2002 a Barn Owl was found dead beside a dual-carriageway two miles from the nest site—it was Joss. The verges of major roads, attractive to small mammals, are good for hunting but bad for the hunter. Thousands of Barn Owls are killed by traffic every year.

At least, with the safe fledging of Joss' offspring, the story has some sort of happy ending. Let's hope the youngster will survive to breed next year and Joss' line will carry on.

Philip Knowling

Lennon Legacy Project...

Second progress report.

It's now twelve months since the Trust's first land acquisition following a substantial legacy received from Mrs Vivien Lennon. First, David (our Senior Conservation Officer) brings you up to date.

We've always had a real grass roots approach to nature conservation, preferring to get out into the countryside and make practical improvements rather than just work from the office. Having twenty-five acres right next to the office means we can now do real fieldwork without even loading up the car!

However, we've had to make sure that the field project hasn't reduced the time we spend on farms across Devon and Cornwall or time spent in the office advising people across Britain how to encourage Barn Owls. We have also had to ensure that managing the field is not a drain on our resources. For this reason we have applied to DEFRA for grant aid under the 'Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme' (ESA). Conservation grants like ESA and the Countryside Stewardship Scheme do not enable landowners to make money out of conservation. Rather, they are based on payments towards income forgone. In other words, they compensate the landowner for some of the fall in income which results from taking land out of agricultural production or reducing livestock grazing.



The power cables coming down
Photo: Mark Green

The grass-keep on our twenty-five acres is worth about £1,200 per year and the grazing is normally done by several hundred ewes and lambs from March to November. However, this amount of grazing results in a short grass sward that supports no small mammals (except a few moles) and is therefore no good for Barn Owls.

In order to transform the field into species-rich rough grassland (with thousands of voles) we need to drastically reduce the grazing and this means losing almost all of the annual income. If our application to enter the ESA Scheme is successful we hope to be compensated for about 75% of this loss, each year for ten years. In addition we will be able to apply for grants towards the costs of capital works such as fencing, hedge creation and stone wall restoration. We are currently devising a management plan that complies with the grant scheme requirements whilst also ensuring that it is entirely compatible with our objective of turning the field into optimum Barn Owl habitat and at the same time encouraging a broad range of other wildlife.

The overhead power cables that ran from one side of the field to the other were thought likely to be a hazard for any birds of prey once the habitat improved. Earlier in the year our Trustees decided to use some of the remaining legacy money to have them put underground. Thanks to the generous support of Western Power Distribution and Dartmoor National Park they came down this summer although the poles have been left to provide perches for hunting birds and sites for nestboxes.

Two pole boxes for Barn Owls were erected in the spring and a Little Owl box in the summer.

David Ramsden

In order to manage the field to the best advantage, and measure the benefits to wildlife, it is essential to know what wildlife we've got already. Sue Searle, our new Assistant Conservation Officer, has wide experience of various wildlife survey techniques and has taken on the task of setting up baseline surveys that can be repeated in the future. Sue now takes up the story...

The field has been intensively grazed and fertilised for many years and is not, at the moment, ideal habitat for small mammals and therefore not suitable for Barn Owls. It is important to find out what plants and animals live on the field at the outset and to set up repeatable surveys to monitor change over time. This year



The power cable in the trench
Photo: David Ramsden

we've left about 4 of the 25 acres ungrazed.

A photographic study was already in place when I took the ACO post. This consists of 12 photos taken monthly at fixed points around the site. These will show changes in vegetation and the impact of management over time (across seasons as well as long-term).

A detailed plant survey was carried out in July to determine the species composition and percentage cover. A habitat map has also been prepared



One of the pole boxes going up
Photo: Paula Carrier

time to practice what we preach



Sue sweep netting Photo: John Lightfoot

and Heather Buswell (one of the Trustees) created species lists for the various habitats on the site.

A weekly butterfly survey has also been carried out since April and in August a series of invertebrate traps were set to find out the species and numbers of insects living on the field. These included a moth trap, tiny pitfall traps, sweep netting and flight interception trap.

A group of teenagers and their leaders also spent two days in August setting up small mammal traps to find out what species (if any) are currently using the field. Signs of other mammals using the field, such as deer, rabbit, fox, mole and badger were recorded and evidence of dormouse and grey squirrel was found in the woodland edge. A bird survey is also being

All the small mammals were released after trapping, this wood mouse was kind enough to pose for us. ↴

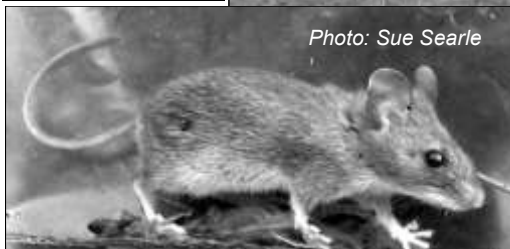


Photo: Sue Searle

carried out regularly.

The conclusions are that the field is pretty much the 'Silent Spring' that was expected. The insect populations are small, butterflies are limited, small mammals mainly absent and birds scarce, although we have seen large numbers of house martins flying over the field. The plant species numbers are low and all in all there is a lot to be done to make the site a suitable habitat for Barn Owls. Wood mice, bank voles and a common shrew were found in the scrub and hedgerow areas around the field but not in the grassland itself. We didn't find any field voles at all (the Barn Owl's favourite food). The part of the field which has been ungrazed this year shows significantly larger invertebrate populations and more plant diversity than the main part of the field.

A management plan is now being prepared for the next five years and this will include drastically reducing the grazing pressure, looking after the hedgerows, reinstating one of the original hedgerows, creating a large pond and managing the small patch of woodland. Regular monitoring of progress will be carried out.

This is the start of an exciting project for the Barn Owl Trust and hopefully the end result will be ideal habitat for Barn Owls. We can now practice what we preach!

Sue Searle
Sue Searle



The Flora Survey—on the grazed (above) and ungrazed (below) parts of the field Photos: David Ramsden



Small mammal trapping in August Photo: David Ramsden

Team Talk

Goings & Comings

In June Sonia Seldon (three days a week reception/conservation assistant) left to take up a full-time post as a seasonal ranger with Torridge District Council.



Photo: Frances Ramsden

In July Lucy Boxall (*above*) joined us for two weeks work experience from South Dartmoor Community College.



Photo: David Ramsden

Divena Brown (*left*) and Cathy Franks (*right*), pictured with young helper Jack Warne and his sister, retired in August after several years as our volunteer aviary cleaners. Divena continues in her role as a member of our education steering group.



Photo: Frances Ramsden

In September, after more than five years with the Trust, Barbara Webb (*above*) - volunteer Friends co-ordinator left to live in France.

Thank you all, for all of your help and support.

We are pleased to welcome Jamie Sutherland who joined us as a volunteer in May (see page 11).

We interviewed in May for a new ACO and Sue Searle started with us in June. Amy Oliver began work as Conservation Assistant/Receptionist in July and last but not least Bev Porter began working as a volunteer in the office in June. ☺

Introducing Sue: I started at the Barn Owl Trust as Assistant Conservation Officer in June. This is my first 'proper' job in conservation since graduating in 2001 with a BSc in Biological Sciences from Exeter.

I worked for Devon Conservation Forum for five years doing administrative work and have been keen to get my hands dirty and do some field-based conservation. As a mature student I thoroughly enjoyed my time at university and managed to get plenty of relevant experience in my spare time by studying abroad (monkeys in Sri Lanka, insects in the Cook Islands and ecology in Russia), running a WATCH group and teaching at Offwell Woodland Education Centre. Latterly I was the Teacher/Naturalist for the East Devon Heathland Heritage Project. I am also heavily involved in the Devon Mammal Group. Since graduating I have started an MSc in Ecology and Management of the Natural Environment at University of Bristol (part time).

I am married with two teenage children and enjoy sailing, bug hunting, walking, gardening, reading, decorating and drawing and painting. In a previous life I was a trained nurse and midwife as well as working for many years in administrative roles. Although I work full time I do also enjoy just being a suburban housewife and mother and just pottering around the house, which I never imagined I would!

Introducing Amy: I really can't believe my luck. To be offered a job in conservation just down the road from where I grew up!

A childhood spent mostly outdoors at Dartington inspired a great interest in the natural world. As well as steering my education toward an ecological bias, it meant that I undertook various voluntary placements in my teenage years. These included hunting for slugs with the monkeys at the Monkey Sanctuary in Cornwall and helping to recreate the past at the Lost Gardens of Heligan.

At 22 I graduated with a BA Hons degree from Sussex University in Geography and Environmental Studies with Cultural and Community Studies. One of the most influential and profound experiences of my life was a university field trip to the rainforests of Malaysia to carry out a research project. Hence, immediately after graduating, I headed back to Malaysia and spent the next year or so travelling about around Asia. I managed to pay off most of my debts and make a small living from importing textiles and clothing from Thailand and selling them in Brighton.

I began thinking it was about time to kick-start my career so moved back to Totnes



Photo: David Ramsden

So far I have found the job extremely interesting, challenging and varied – I love it! I am learning new things all the time and I have been able to utilise some of my new-found knowledge and skills from my degree and masters course and have had a lot of involvement in the Lennon Legacy Project at BOT (see pages 8 & 9). So far my jobs have included looking after the captive owls and casualties, visiting schools to give talks, visiting farms to give habitat advice, checking nestboxes, putting up new nestboxes, manning a stand at the Dorchester Show, survey work (see LLP), carpentry and supervising volunteers in various activities.

Sue Searle



Photo: Sue Searle

and began working as a Project Coordinator for the Education Department at Paignton Zoo. I designed and created displays for an interactive science activity centre. Although it was valuable work and raised public awareness, I craved getting my hands dirty and working in the frontline of nature conservation. I spent over six months applying for jobs in the South West to no avail and began to have serious doubts about being able to stay in the area. Then the Barn Owl Trust

continued on page 11...

....continued from page 10
advertised and as you see I was offered the job of Conservation Assistant.

Misconceptions and Musings

Popular Misconceptions

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

No. 6

"Twit-twooo! – that's the sound of a Barn Owl!" – wrong!

If I had a penny for every time I've heard this one I'd be a rich man – well not exactly rich but you know what I mean!

Everybody in Britain has surely heard this sound, a repeated "hoo hoooooo" often followed by a "key-wick key-wick". Watch any British-made movie and you can almost guarantee that in every night-time scene, you'll hear it. That sound is synonymous with the word OWL. Ask

any group of people what sound a Barn Owl makes and most of them will do a pretty good imitation of a Tawny Owl call. That's right, it's the Tawny Owl that goes Twit-twooo – NOT the Barn Owl!

Barn Owls do call but it's a sound that most people have never heard. When describing a Barn Owl's call, the word "screech" is often used but this adds to the confusion because many people use the word screech to describe the Tawny Owl's "key-wick" or the Little Owl's "E-yoww".

Barn Owls do in fact have a huge vocabulary and the loudest sound – the adult male's territorial yell – is best described as a fearsome shriek lasting 2-



3 seconds and descending in pitch. ☹

Me and My Girl

Jamie Sutherland is 22 and volunteers with the Trust three days a week, working mainly on pellet analysis. In 1996 a serious accident left him with mobility and short-term memory problems. Here Jamie introduces himself and recalls how he met Kandy, his canine companion provided by Dogs for the Disabled.

This is the path I have moved along to bring me and Kandy here. I started at South Dartmoor Community College in 1992. I joined the Army Cadets with the hope of one day going into the armed forces. I imagined a career in the military, leaving with a good pension and – as I am passionate about fishing – getting my own fishing lake.

However, things did not go to plan due to a pushbike accident in 1996 that left me in a wheelchair. My Mum's determination and dedication got me back into mainstream education. After secondary school I went to Exeter College for three years, where I took business studies and IT courses.

We got in touch with Dogs for the Disabled in Exeter, who came to talk to me about having a specially-trained dog. They brought in a dog, saying it was just to see how well I got on with dogs. Unbeknown to me they were actually seeing whether we were compatible.

My first choice of dog would have been a collie and my last a labrador. This dog was a labrador. She was sat down, let off

her lead and told to go free – at which she bounded across the room, jumped up on the side of my wheelchair, gave me a big kiss and sat back down as if to say "Yeah, he'll do". Her name was Kandy.

I had Kandy for one night to see how well I could cope. Two weeks later she came to live with us. Me and Kandy have been together ever since and she has been my best friend, "My Girl".

From Exeter I moved on to Bicton College of Agriculture to do a two-year course in Countryside Management. I was unable to achieve the full grade because there were things my accident meant I couldn't do, such as driving heavy machinery. As this course was coming to an end I applied to various organisations in the hope of getting a work experience placement.

I started with the Barn Owl Trust in May 2002. Although I enjoy being outside, at the Trust I am a bit limited as to the types of work I am able to do due to the rough ground and the steep gradients in the area. I have really enjoyed working alongside the staff and volunteers. I have also really enjoyed the trips I have made. One was to listen to a talk, another was a day at a farm to take part in the Trust's environmental education event. I have also been to a few wild Barn Owl sites with the conservation team.

Jamie Sutherland

I have been here since July now and so far it has more than exceeded my expectations. I work two days a week as receptionist and the other three with the conservation team. Learning everything involved in both roles at the same time could be described as overwhelming.

However, now that I have my head around the basics, I'm really enjoying the diversity of my responsibilities and challenges I encounter.

There's no better feeling than being out in the field, maybe to put up a nestbox, and knowing that I am actively contributing to



Photo: Mark Green

With Jamie's parents we are investigating four wheel drive machines that could help to extend Jamie's mobility and access to the outdoors.

the preservation of our natural heritage.

I feel extremely privileged. I have arrived!

Amy Oliver

Annapurna Adventure



In training at the Sponsored Walk L-R Lesley, Rosie and Judy

Photo: David Ramsden

In November three members of the Barn Owl Trust staff take off for an amazing three-week adventure in Nepal. Rosie Waine (Secretary to the Trustees) tells us how she, Judy Cummings (Admin) and Lesley Ford (Reception) are preparing for their trek.

We are high on Dartmoor, jubilantly signing the Visitors' Book at Cranmere Pool. It's a little eerie up here on the ranges, but there's no firing today and once this wild side of Dartmoor envelopes you, you soon forget the sombre reminder of political instabilities. Walking has been a dominant feature in our lives now since spring, and we have a pattern of meeting on Saturdays to

walk various routes of increasing distance and difficulty. It's amazing how much variation there is in walks graded 'strenuous'! A 5 mile walk is a stroll for us now (unless there's horizontal rain) but we were nearly beaten by the coast path from Dartmouth to Kingswear! Rematch scheduled for October, when we've had time to forget the fearsome upsy downsy bits without a cup of tea in sight. The South Hams coastline is stunningly beautiful and a welcome distraction from sore legs.

We have all noticed the considerable benefits of so much exercise and are without doubt leaner and fitter (including Judy's dog Coozie).

In August our 'Pre-Trek Meet' in Gloucestershire gave us a taste of things to come. Just like at a nestbox workshop you instantly have something in common with everyone there, only it was walking, rather than Barn Owls. The hills around Painswick have some surprisingly fierce upsy downsy bits of their own, not to mention glorious views across the distant Avon as you follow the Cotswold Way.

By now perhaps you have itchy feet, or are wondering what all this has to do with the Barn Owl Trust. Well, fundraising for the Trust is the answer. As a recipient of Feedback you have no doubt already given generously and we do appreciate that. Perhaps you could simply lend support by thinking of us from time to time, especially on about day 13 when we scale the 5,414m Thorong La pass. That will be our toughest day – 8 to 10 hours of walking in a thin atmosphere. Perhaps most spectres of doubt hover around this part of the trek, when we look ahead to the unimaginable feeling of what it might be like. There is no other way round the Annapurna Circuit without crossing this pass, and a helicopter is not an option unless in dire emergency.

All three of us are going into what is, for us, totally unknown and it is the most exciting challenge we have ever undertaken. If you could sponsor us, or if you know someone else who might, please do complete and return the enclosed leaflet. It would be the icing on the cake if we could raise £1 for every metre of altitude we climb, that's £5,414.

We all feel incredibly fortunate. We work in the worthy field of Barn Owl conservation supported by a lot of wonderful individuals like you. And we have discovered a shared lifetime ambition, which is now going to happen and is a perfect opportunity to raise funds for the Barn Owl Trust.

Rosie Waine

Being an Ethical Consumer

Years ago people who talked about global warming, the environmental impact of pollution and the need for conservation of our natural resources and environment were ridiculed. These days even children are aware of these issues. It is unfortunate that the governments taking part in the recent World Summit couldn't agree on a strategy to start to tackle them. Maybe if enough people show concern the 'powers' will listen.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world – indeed it's the only thing that ever does." Margaret Mead.

Conservation and concern for the environment go hand in hand, so here at the Barn Owl Trust we try to promote ethical consumerism and environmental awareness. Wherever possible we purchase goods with "green credentials", recycled paper, rechargeable torches and refillable ink cartridges etc. Our sales goods have minimal packaging and we consider the environmental impact of their production and eventual disposal. We recycle everything possible, we use organic tea and coffee in the office and wherever possible when we provide food at our nestbox workshops we use organic ingredients.

Back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, before newspaper banks were a common sight in virtually every supermarket car park, we ran a local recycling scheme and the papers we collected brought in a small but welcome income for the Trust. These days there is little or no money in recycling but it is easier for everyone to get involved and do their bit. Being an ethical consumer can cost more in monetary terms but looking after our environment and natural resources is an investment for the future - anything else is just a short-term saving. ☹

Around and About

Around and About is a regular Feedback feature taking a look at Barn Owl conservation carried out by groups and individuals around the UK. Here we go to Shropshire to take a look at the work of two Friends of the Trust, postman John Lightfoot and civil servant Glen Bishton. John has been a frequent visitor and volunteer at the Trust over the last two years. Unfortunately the only pictures we have of them were taken of John in Devon.

The Shropshire Barn Owl Group is a rather grandiose title for what presently amounts to a 'group' of two: John Lightfoot and myself, Glenn Bishton – plus John's young son Jonathon and a few 'press-ganged' helpers. Perhaps also a little presumptuous at the moment since our efforts are being targeted on two Shropshire towns, Ellesmere and Telford, and we haven't begun to venture into the other several hundred square kilometres of the county!

John has been constructing and installing Barn Owl nestboxes around Ellesmere for five years. Until recently securing materials, constructing the boxes, approaching landowners, installing boxes and monitoring them has all been funded from his own pocket. His determination to help the Barn Owl has culminated in 37 nestboxes. Living in Ironbridge, Telford, I had intended to do something for Barn Owls for several years and when John and I were put in touch with each other (by the County Bird Recorder) in February 2002 the idea of the Shropshire Barn Owl Group materialised.

We decided to work together and to pool our skills and resources. Both of us have been watching and researching birds for nearly 40 years which has given us a certain amount of understanding of their habitat requirements. We immediately

set about carrying out field surveys around Telford, identifying areas of suitable Barn Owl habitat and locations where both tree and indoor nestboxes might be erected. This involves plodding around fields, poking our heads over hedgerows, driving along country lanes, scanning maps and approaching farmers.

As a result, we have been able to pinpoint several clusters of apparently good rough grassland habitat and are now installing nestboxes on farmland and fields on the Weald Moors, an area of predominantly grazing land. Many old barns have been converted to dwellings and there is a shortage of large decaying trees with holes, which means we will probably have to resort to pole boxes.

The Environment Agency has generously offered to provide 20 'A' shaped nestboxes and to assist in installing the poles. Thanks to the enthusiasm of one farmer, we plan to install around 10 of these boxes in the immediate future on a farm which is in the Countryside Stewardship scheme and supports some excellent habitat. There are Barn Owls breeding on the farm, therefore this exciting project has the potential to encourage dispersing young birds to remain to breed and to create a core population on the Weald Moors.

An important task has been to find supplies of wood to put our future nestbox-making plans on a secure footing. By May 2002 this was achieved thanks to the generosity of several local companies. This has alleviated some of the pressure, allowing us to spend more time on finding the best locations for the boxes and installing them. Amid all of this John has found the time to design and develop a bracket which will allow us to fix the rectangular external boxes to tree



Photo: Frances Ramsden

trunks in record time - perhaps a patent should be forthcoming! However, we have not yet resolved another pressing problem: occupation of boxes by stock doves and jackdaws. We are working on this, but Shropshire is a predominantly agricultural county and perhaps this is an inconvenience that we will have to live with.

So it is early days. Offers from individuals to fund boxes are coming in and applications for funding, particularly to enable us to purchase ready-built nestboxes, are going out on the obligatory in-house designed letterhead complete with logo! We are generally raising the profile of Barn Owl conservation whenever we meet other birdwatchers and conservationists and have been invited to assist the Shropshire Ornithological Society in a survey of Barn Owls in Shropshire in 2003. We have also written the Barn Owl Biodiversity Action Plan for Telford and Wrekin Council. This emphasises the opportunities available under the agri-environment Countryside Stewardship scheme to create fields of rough grass and to retain grassy headlands. We are keen to hear from anyone in Shropshire who would like to get involved and can be contacted via the Barn Owl Trust

Glen Bishton and John Lightfoot
Shropshire



John Lightfoot using a digger bucket to inspect a nestbox

Photo: Frances Ramsden

Your News

Postman Simon Bishop and teacher Emma Bowley were married in East Devon on Saturday 1st June. Simon has been a Friend of the Trust since 1996, a volunteer since 1997 and is fairly crazy about Barn Owls as can be seen from the wedding cake pictured below.

Congratulations Simon & Emma, we wish you many happy years together!



Photos supplied by Simon & Emma

Dear BOT

I feel really privileged to not only have owls breeding in our loft but to actually see and hold the chicks when you came to ring them, it didn't really sink in until later that evening.

Thank you so much for the experience, good luck with your very valued work. Best wishes

Josie Cleaver
Devon

Dear Friends

We walked up to the barn a few days ago and had three sightings of a Barn Owl, or possibly two. It was hunting level with the top of the hedge on the inside of the field. The last time we saw it really pleased us as it was carrying food into the barn and although we couldn't hear any noises from within we thought they were probably breeding. The birds are wonderful; they are a joy to watch.

Margaret
Devon

Dear Megan

Just a wee note to say woof, woof! (well done!). You did really well on the sponsored walk and helped to raise all that money. I hope your paws weren't too sore after it.

Being a Cocker Spaniel my legs are a bit shorter, but I still enjoy my walkies. Having had trouble with my back and legs I can't run like I used to, but I was 14 last month, so don't do badly for an OAP!

Woofs, Bruce
Fife, Scotland

PS I had to get Louise to write this for me as I have difficulty holding a pen in my paw. By the way, well done to everyone else too.

Our Adoption scheme has been very well received and proved extremely popular. We thought we would share a couple of extracts from letters with you.

Dear BOT

Thank you for your very kind letter enclosed with the adoption pack. I felt overwhelmed with the beautiful photograph and certificate of adoption. I understand the need for privacy for these beautiful birds and feel privileged having this opportunity to adopt one.

Nora Lee
Devon

Dear BOT

Thank you so much for your letter telling us about "our owl" and her friends. We can appreciate how she feels, being a lady of leisure, as we are retired ourselves and enjoy an afternoon siesta. We are delighted to renew our adoption and look forward to receiving the up-to-date photograph in due course. Best wishes to all the owls and staff at the Trust.

Pam & Peggy Fullman
Kent

After our Environmental Education Day in May (see page 3) we received lots of cards and letters from children at Dartington Primary School. We have picked out one or two to give you a flavour of their perspective on the day.

Dear BOT

Thank you for the lovely day out. I really liked making the masks and seeing Dusty. I learnt a lot about where Barn Owls live and what they eat. I had a wonderful time.

Love Lily
Dartington Primary School

Dear BOT

We really enjoyed the day. We learnt lots about Barn Owls like what they eat and how much food they need. Where voles and mice and shrews live.

Everything was fantastic. We liked going on the walk and making masks and meeting Dusty. We hope we see you again.

Lots of love from **Tilly and Romek**

And from overseas

Dear BOT

I am a university student in India doing an MSc in Ecology and Environment. I am very interested in wildlife. Recently I read Feedback and was very pleased to get more information about Barn Owls. I enclose some newspaper cuttings about Barn Owls in India for your reference.

I would like to become a Friend of the Trust and regularly receive Feedback. Eagerly waiting for your reply.

Ashoka Chakkaravarthy
India

Dear BOT,

I am writing to thank you for all your help and advice. When I first e-mailed you about caring for refugee owls it must have been your most unusual Live Bird Emergency ever – lucky you didn't have to drive all the way to East Africa to help!

The Trust provided me with advice on treating an owl with an injured leg and referred me to some useful texts on the subject.

You also reassured me about the difficult behaviour of one of my owls – it turned out to be linked to the onset of the breeding season. Hormones, eh?

Thanks again,
Sophie Walker
Nairobi, Kenya

In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies from the estates of the late H W A Thomas and Myrtle I Thorn and donations in memory of Brian Newitt and Mrs Maud Potter

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

Focus on Friends

John & Margaret Rhodes live in Plymouth and have been Friends of the Trust since 1994. They have two grown up children, two dogs and four cats. Plymouthians born and bred, they met at a dance when they were teenagers. When he left school John worked on a farm and then trained as a motor mechanic and Margaret worked at Marks & Spencer until Sarah and Paul were born.

John has always had an interest in wildlife and is a keen birdwatcher; he is prepared to have a go at anything, is an avid collector of 'useful stuff' and can't

bear to throw anything away. He retired from Esso in 1995 and set up his own gardening business in 1996. He has bought a woodturning lathe and plans to start using it when he gets some time and would one day like to own a barge. Towards the end of last year John had three small heart attacks, which have slowed him down a bit; it's now possible for most of us to keep up with him.

As a child Margaret spent all her holidays on a farm in Devon, which she remembers as a wonder filled experience. She now helps John with his business, does fabric painting, line dancing, knits, cooks, enjoys walking miles with Holly and Millie (the dogs) and still finds time to help out here at the BOT. She would like to visit the Canadian Rockies in the fall and to travel to unspoiled parts of the world.

Their first contact with the Trust was in 1992 when they visited our stand at the Devon County Show and volunteered to help with practical tasks and moving casualty birds. Over the years they have turned their hands to a huge variety of tasks for the Trust. During 1995 both John and Margaret spent weeks here painting the inside and outside of the office. They have transported countless casualty and convalescing birds to and from the veterinary hospital in Plymouth for us. They have driven miles (and got lost several times) at all hours of the day and night to respond to live bird emergencies, including a 'Barn Owl' trapped in a porch that turned out to be a pigeon! Helping with our annual spring clean, our sponsored walk, collecting owl food, delivering draw prizes, fund-raising



Margaret - Annual Report Mailing 2002
Photo: Frances Ramsden

events and mailings of Feedback and the annual report are some of the other ways that John and Margaret support our work. They also help out at a local bird of prey hospital. When we have thanked them both Margaret and John have said how much they enjoy helping and that it has given the opportunity to make new friends.

Thank you Margaret and John for all your help over the years. ☺



John - Sponsored Walk 2002
Photo: Frances Ramsden

New Aviary

Work is underway on the Trust's new aviary and we are hoping to have owls resident by the end of the year. Long-time Friend of the Trust Derrick Crocker donated his time to build the aviary during the summer. We now have to complete the groundwork before the birds can move in.

Having experimented over the years with a range of floor surfaces (to facilitate easy maintenance) we plan to use wood bark under the covered perches, deep gravel where we need to walk and allow grass and wild plants to grow in the open areas. The aviary has been designed to facilitate photographing the birds without disturbing them.

Grateful thanks to Derrick and to the charitable trusts including the Panton Trust, the Barry Green Memorial Fund, the Animal Defence Trust and the Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust who



Under Construction Photo: Sue Searle

have supported this project, we are sure the owls will appreciate it. ☺

Thanks and Things

As always at this point in Feedback we'd like to take the opportunity to appeal for donations of useful items and to say thank you to the folk who have supplied things requested on our previous "wants lists".

Thanks go to Martin and Monica Overy and Rachel and Julian Edwards for towels; Roy Mills and Graham Lawes for nails; John Grey for a printer; Jenny and Pat Ford for a cutlery set and numerous office sundries and all their help in the office. Barbara and David Webb kindly donated cutlery and cups; Mrs Moncrieff envelopes and stamps, Mark Pountney gave us copier paper and Don Woodman very kindly donated a video camera. Thanks go also to our old friend David Crew who is finding it more difficult to get around these days and sent us £100, Tony and Jean Dennis who sent us £20 and stamps and our anonymous donor who sent us £40. Last but not least a big thank-you to all the people who kindly add an extra few pounds when renewing their Friends and adoptions donations. We would also like to thank Margaret Taylor of Holsworthy and Susan Barker of Dorchester for sending us the

proceeds from their garden open days. Thank you all for your support.

Regular readers will know 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. Some of the things on the list are consumables - we can always use stamps, office sundries and many other things you might just have lying around. If you feel you can help or if you have any queries please phone the office.

We are specifically looking for:
Plastic foldaway pet carriers
Folding garden furniture (for use at shows)
Heavy-duty cordless drills
An endoscope
Small over sink electric water heater
An electric toaster (for the office)
Office chairs (with five wheels)
A power point projector
We can always use:
Good quality dark blue washing-up bowls (*for owl baths*)
Office sundries – ink cartridges etc.

Please talk to Judy to find out just what we need

A4 lever arch files
New postage stamps

For the field

We need to acquire some management machinery and if anyone has an unwanted
Small 4WD tractor
Self powered flail mower
Chainsaw - in working order
we could put them to good use.
We are also trying to get hold of a copy of the out-of-print
Hamlyn Butterflies of the British Isles—
ISBN 0 600 57513 6
and a
good quality pair of binoculars
Once the management plan for the field has been finalised we will be looking for people to get involved in both practical and monitoring work so if you are interested please contact David or Sue.

Tail Piece



'Only when the last tree has died, the last river been poisoned and the last fish caught, will we realise that we cannot eat money.'

In the winter the ground was muddy underfoot and the Dartmoor stream running through our valley became a raging torrent carrying boulders that crashed their way along the streambed. Naked trees stood out against an oppressive sky. Cold rain fell in constant sheets and turned the surface of the pond into a murky maelstrom. The only wildlife that survived huddled out of sight, emerging only to feed or perish in the attempt.

Now a dragonfly incessantly patrols its territory, its lustrous wings flashing in the warm autumn sunshine. Occasionally it veers off to skim over the still clear water of the pond or to chase off an intruder that dares to challenge its supremacy. Leaves rustle in the gentle breeze and the calming sound of the stream as it meanders on its way are a pleasant background to the songs of small birds and raucous cries of the ravens providing incredible aerial displays overhead. The earth is dry and dusty, thirstily awaiting rain and the sun, much lower than a month ago, shines warmly on the dried grass heads nodding at the sky.

The same place just different times of year.
People visiting the Trust for the first time

have said, "aren't you lucky to be so tucked away and surrounded by countryside", whilst others have said, "how do you cope here?, do you have electricity?".

Ask any two people to describe the same place, even at the same time of year, and you'll get two very different pictures, neither of which is likely to match your own. Years ago I went on a course in the Lake District where three groups of two people were asked to describe a room none of us had ever been in. One person from each pair was blindfolded and led into the room, we then had to feel our way around it and then describe it to our partner who was waiting outside to draw our description. Afterwards we looked at the drawings and it was impossible to believe we'd all been in the same place. Seeing the room without the blindfolds was also a complete surprise. I guess what this shows, other than that we are all individuals with a unique perspective, is that clear communication is not that easy.

Our perspective depends on our character and our mood. Even the same person, describing the same place, in the same conditions, is likely to describe it differently depending on their mood. If the weather is good they could say, "it was lovely", or they

could say, "it was too hot" or "too bright". If there were a lot of people there they could say, "wasn't it great that so many people were enjoying the experience" or, "it was too crowded", it all depends on their mood.

Life is easier and certainly more pleasant if we are able to view things from a positive perspective. Even the gloom and doom of global pollution and destruction, if you consider how it is making individuals examine their relationship with the natural world and do their bit to protect the environment.

In this country we are so lucky, we have the freedom to do more than simply survive. We can make choices and those choices can make a difference not just to ourselves, and those people around us, but also to the natural world.

We hope you have enjoyed this issue of Feedback and that it encourages you to do your bit for the natural world. Thank you for your support.

Together we can make a world of difference.