



Issue Number 29 - Spring 2003



FEEDBACK

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



Introducing the BOT Team with the LLP field behind us - Back L-R Sandra, New Sue, Middle L-R IT Alan, Frances, Lesley, Sue, Barbara Front L-R David, Spike, Mark, Jamie & Kandy. Unfortunately Amy & Judy were away and not all our volunteers were in on this day .

See inside for...

- Devon Barn Owl Survey Takes Off
- Field Voles Have Arrived
- John's Spectacular Release
- Moving Mountains - The Imerys Initiative



Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to Feedback. This year is the 15th anniversary of the Trust becoming a registered charity and looking back over the last 28 issues of Feedback has been really interesting. These days we produce Feedback on a computer and send it to the printer, but the first two issues were hand written and we photocopied about 50 copies at the local accountants. By the early '90's when the Trust employed its first staff we were using a computer to write the copy but cutting and pasting text and pictures.

It's fascinating to see the way the Trust has grown reflected in the newsletters and the projects and the people who helped to make it what it is today. Hopefully in another 15 years we will be able to look back fondly through another 30 issues of Feedback and see the continuation of successful projects and a sustainable Barn Owl population.

This issue is, as always, packed with news about our work. Seeing a wild Barn Owl in

our field for the first time has to be the most exciting happening of the year to date. This is the year of the Devon Barn Owl Survey. Incredibly it's 10 years since the last one. Anyone wanting to get involved can find details on pages 5 & 11. For those in Cornwall, it's your turn next year.

We bring you up to date on progress with the Lennon Legacy Project on page 6 and staff changes on page 10. Here we introduce you to our latest member of staff, Sue our Fundraising Manager. Employing a full-time fundraiser was a big decision for the Trustees, but with hardly any funding secured for the two county Barn Owl surveys, this year and next, it seemed the best way forward.

On page 12 we invite you to visit our fantastic updated website. You can now download our leaflets and see our sales goods in glorious colour. There are some great family pages with brilliant pictures,

designed to make finding out about Barn Owls lots of fun - great for children and grown ups too.

A big thank you to the Heritage Lottery Fund for supporting the project and to everyone who contributed time, effort and pictures, especially Melanie Lindenthal who came all the way from Germany and gave up her holiday to help with the website.

We also invite you to join us on our annual walk on June 1st. Some people schedule their holidays just to have the chance to walk on this incredibly beautiful estate and of course support the Trust. We can help you find a local B&B if you want to come!

After 3 years our Heritage Lottery Fund project has come to an end. There is a roundup of the achievements on page 5 and we have an article on pages 8 and 9 about our Cornish initiative to encourage Barn Owls - Moving Mountains. Three of our staff attended their first nestbox workshop in February and Conservation Assistant Amy Oliver gives her impressions on page 15. Anyone keen to share the experience is invited to join us in Dorset in November for the next one - details below.

The Barn Owl Trust has achieved a tremendous amount in the last 15 years and we are very grateful for the support of all our staff, volunteers and Friends who encourage and assist our work. We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Feedback and that it will encourage your interest and your support both for the Trust and for the natural world. Thank you for all your help. (Ed)

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

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Cover Photo: Melanie Lindenthal

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, 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: info@barnowltrust.org.uk

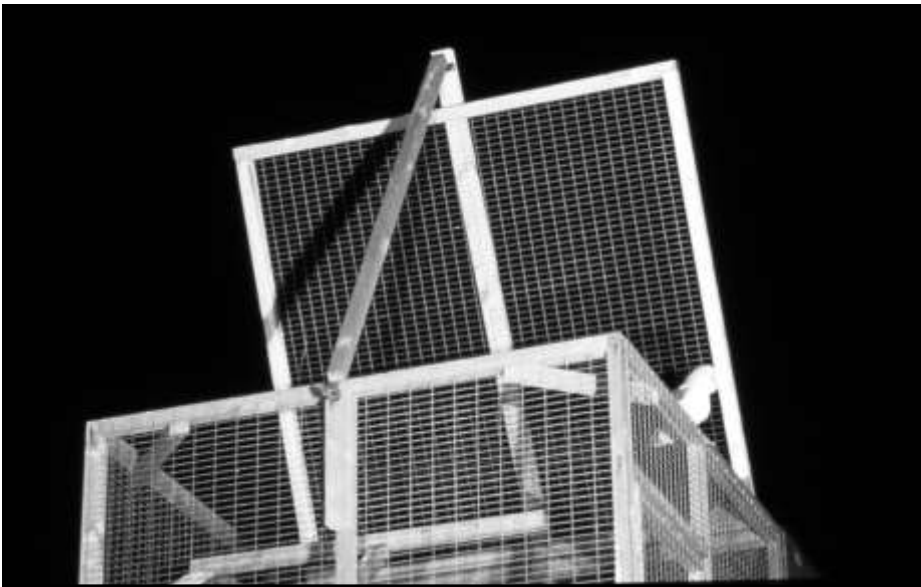
Nestbox Workshop

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

**Saturday
22nd November
Kingston Lacy, Dorset**

In liaison with the
National Trust
and the
Dorset Owl and Hawk Group
Call 01364 653026 for details
and a booking form.

Barn Owl Trust News



John takes in the view from the mobile aviary

Photo: David Ramsden:

John's Spectacular Release

'John' the Barn Owl (named after our friend John Rhodes - see page 4) had suffered a badly dislocated wing (probably from flying into overhead wires). We expected that he would become another permanent resident in the Trust's sanctuary but to our amazement, John made a full recovery. In February we set up the mobile release aviary next to one of the pole boxes in the field overlooking the Trust's office. John was given a final health check, weighed, BTO-ringed, and installed.

A few evenings later we started seeing a wild Barn Owl visiting John (see Lennon Legacy Project Update on page 6) - we even saw it fly into the pole box. This was the first evidence of a resident wild Barn Owl in the Trust's field since its purchase in 2001! Could John's release be the start of a beautiful relationship?

Spring arrived, flowers bloomed, birds sang, and the sun shone between calm moonlit nights - perfect weather for releasing a Barn Owl. On the 19th March a group of us turned out to watch John's release and we were joined by Margaret Rhodes. At dusk, David walked up the field to open the top of the mobile aviary. It certainly was an emotional moment - the excitement of the release mixed with thoughts of John Rhodes - how he would have loved to be here.

We expected to catch a glimpse of the back of John as he headed back to the wild, but we didn't. What we did see amazed us all. After five minutes he flew to the open end of the aviary, looked at the opening, then flew back into the sheltered end. We were all watching from

100 yards away. A couple of minutes later he flew again and suddenly he was up, up onto the very top of the opening! He waited, surveyed the view, and flew 50 feet to the pole box, looked around, and flew back to the aviary! He flew perfectly! To and fro, round and round, back and forth, in a display which lasted over half an hour. Occasionally he stopped and waited. Was he waiting for her...?

Eventually he flew off.

Eventually we went home.

But we will never forget that night.

Just like we will never forget John. □

Database Develops

In 1998 we were delighted when Mike Toms (now the national co-ordinator for the BTO Garden Bird Watch project) built our database. Replacing hundreds of record cards with computer records made it much easier and more efficient to record, look up and keep track of our Barn Owl data. It also meant we could produce labels for mailings and keep in touch with our human contacts more easily. However we still kept record cards for all the people we were in touch with. Over the years we have accumulated over 28,000. It was increasingly difficult to store them and more importantly find the right card when you needed it. Someone only had to have an absent moment when filing and a card could disappear for months or even years!

Last summer we asked Alan Lewis, our computer support person, to investigate developing the database to replace our filing drawers. Alan said he'd look into it, but when he saw the lists of what we'd like to be able to do he recoiled in horror. However, always ready to respond to a challenge, he bought a very thick book and started to consider the possibilities. In February after months of effort and extremely long days and nights - way beyond the call of duty, the new database was duly installed. To Alan's great relief ten people all using it at the same time hasn't caused any problems and it has revolutionised office practice. On behalf of everyone in the office and the Trustees we would like to thank Alan for his brilliant work and the vast number of volunteer hours he put into the project; we are all delighted and very grateful. He then started work on the website. □



Photo: Mike Drew

Assistant Conservation Officer Sue Searle and Dusty the Barn Owl help to launch a new range of stamps in January.

More BOT News

LLP Work Days

If you would like to get involved with the Lennon Legacy Project and help us manage our field there are two practical events you could come along to:

Saturday 5th July 2003
Bracken Bash, picnic and tour
of the field
10.30 a.m. – 3.30 p.m.

We will be keeping the bracken under control as part of the management of the Barn Owl Trust's 25 acre field. Join us for bracken bashing in the morning with a tour of the field in the afternoon. Bring a picnic and hopefully the sun will shine!

Saturday 6th December 2003
Hedge Coppicing Day
10.30 a.m. onwards

Come along and help coppice the driveway hedge. This hedge has the potential to be the home of nesting birds, dormice and many species of flowers and insects but it needs restoring. Radical management of the hedge will help revitalise it. Bring a bow saw if you have one and a packed lunch.

Please book a place, as numbers at each event are limited to 20. If you can't make either of these dates, don't worry we will be organising more opportunities for you to get involved in the future.

Annual Walk

Our annual walk and picnic on the beautiful Flete Estate in the South Hams will be taking place this year on Sunday 1 June. This is a departure from previous years as it is the weekend immediately after the May Bank Holiday. Sandra will be sending out letters to our regular walkers in a week or two, but anyone else who would like to come along, please give us a ring and we will send you all the details.

Last year everyone really enjoyed the opportunity to have a canoe river crossing so we've asked Canoe Adventures to help us again. They will be delighted to ferry you across the water in their giant 10 seater canoe if you don't want to take a paddle at the beginning of the walk.

Megan the golden retriever is really looking forward to the walk and this year her friend Bungle will also be walking. Bungle is Sue Booth's dog, he's a Staffordshire Bull Terrier. If you would like Bungle and Megan to do your walking for you please complete and return the enclosed sponsorship form. Otherwise, we look forward to seeing you!



John Rhodes Photo: Frances Ramsden

Absent Friends

Those of you who read Feedback regularly may recall the "Focus on Friends" in the last issue that featured John and Margaret Rhodes from Plymouth. We are very sad to report that John died very suddenly and unexpectedly just before Christmas.

We first met John and Margaret in 1992. Over the years they had both become not just valued volunteers for the Trust but also very good friends. Always happy to lend a hand, they were here in November painting the office for us and running up and down to the vets with casualty birds.

The crowds at John's funeral reflected his popularity and he will be greatly missed by many people. Our thoughts and sympathy go to Margaret and their children Sarah and Paul.

All of us who knew John are finding it difficult to believe he isn't here any more. Rest in peace John.



David with Megan and Lupe at last year's sponsored walk

Photo: Frances Ramsden

2003 Grand Draw

How about going to see Chicago? Not the place but the show! By buying the draw tickets enclosed with this issue of Feedback you could win two tickets to a West End show of your choice AND hotel accommodation for the night, courtesy of moneysupermarket.com

We have also managed to secure some other excellent prizes including a year's subscription to Devon Today, Warner Village cinema tickets and a handbook and tickets to a National Trust property or garden; beautiful limited edition Owl prints by wildlife artist Dick Twinney and a pair of binoculars from Jessop's.

There are two books of tickets inside this copy of Feedback. If you think you can sell more for us - please give us a ring on 01364 653026 and we will be happy to send them. The draw will be held on Friday 5th December 2003. And remember you have to be in it to win it!!

The winners of the first prize of last year's Grand Draw: 'a day with the Barn Owl Trust' are Friends of the Trust Mr and Mrs Seear from Surrey. They will be joining us this summer to meet the team and to visit a wild Barn Owl site with conservation staff.

The eighteen prizes, which included signed limited edition prints, Microsoft computer packages and Harry Potter Tapes and CD's have gone as far afield as Aberdeen. Thank you all for your support. For a full lists of winners please send us an SAE marked Draw winners.

Devon Barn Owl Survey 2003

This is the year of the Devon Barn Owl Survey. We have joined forces with the Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society to run a countywide census of Barn Owls in Devon. It is a monumental task as it involves checking every Barn Owl roosting or breeding site in the county recorded since 1993 - over 1000! It is inevitable that the conservation team will be run off their feet, even with the help of volunteers.

Ten years ago we ran the 1993 Devon Barn Owl Survey with DBW&PS. It was extremely useful because it successfully updated all existing Barn Owl site records, established base-line data on the bird's status in the county and enabled subsequent conservation work to be effectively targeted.

Since 1993, the majority of our practical and conservation work has been carried out in parts of Devon where the birds were found to be most rare. This included the erection of hundreds of nestboxes, habitat advisory work with landowners and scheme work in liaison with local authorities. As a result, most Barn Owl sites in Devon have not been systematically monitored since 1993. The 2003 survey will update records for all districts, help assess the impact of conservation efforts in targeted areas, allow population trends to be identified, and facilitate the effective targeting of future conservation efforts.

For the survey to be as effective as possible we hope to attract a range of skilled and enthusiastic volunteers. They will help to re-check all sites occupied

since 1993, and record new sightings and previously unknown occupied sites. Where a site visit is essential a search to confirm the species' exact status will be carried out by suitably trained, licensed, and equipped people.

The bulk of the fieldwork will be carried out between June and September and as a member of the conservation team, I'm really looking forward to spending the summer months exploring new parts of Devon, meeting new people, and observing nesting Barn Owls. With the number of times I envisage having to lift my ladder off and on the Trust vehicle, I

expect to look something like Popeye by the end of the year! The invaluable amount of fresh data that we hope to amass will definitely be worth any amount of sweat and tears.

If you are interested in volunteering for this project we would love to hear from you (see page 11 for more details). All contributors will be acknowledged in the report irrespective of the extent of their involvement.

Amy Oliver
Conservation Assistant



Visiting one of the 1,000+ sites to be checked

Photo: David Ramsden

HLF Project Ends

'Barn Owl Country' was a three-year BOT project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project aimed to increase the quality and quantity of information about Barn Owls and their habitat available to the general public, to produce new educational materials, to reach out to new audiences and to attract new Friends for the Trust.

Spanning April 2000 to March 2003 the project has enabled us to purchase new display materials and a small marquee and it resulted in our attending many extra shows to spread the word, including BBC Gardener's World Live at the NEC in Birmingham, an event in Bedfordshire and Dorset Agricultural Show.

It supported the revision of our entire range of information leaflets and the creation of some new ones. We were able to build a database to enable us to undertake an

e-mailing to UK libraries and we also circulated conservation groups with our revised Barn Owls on Site booklet.

We ran an education event on a farm for 100 children and have completely revised our Schools' Pack with the help of volunteers Chris Robinson and Divena Brown, both teachers. Our website, launched during the project, has recently undergone another major development and now has resources specifically for children; all of our leaflets are also now available on-line.

We have increased our use of e-mail; all of our office staff now have access to the outside world through this medium and we receive a huge number of enquiries this way. The number of contacts that the Trust has made has grown during the period from 17,000 in 2000, to well over 28,000 to date. Over £5,000 worth of volunteer time has gone into the project and it has employed one full-time officer and 12 hours per week admin assistance for most of its life. With our Project Officer, Philip Knowing, moving on in October 2002 we had a mad

dash to reach the outstanding targets by 31st March 2003, but with some outside help we are delighted to report we did it and "Barn Owl Country" has been a great success.

Thank you to the Heritage Lottery Fund for making it possible - there are a lot of Barn Owls and a lot more people out there who have benefited from your support.

Money for Stamps

If you have any used postage stamps please let us have them. We can convert them into cash to help support our conservation work. Foreign stamps are OK too. Collect them up and send them in and we'll do the rest. Please make sure to leave a ¼ inch margin around the stamp so as not to damage it.

You can also send amounts up to 500g direct to the ITMS 2000 (SRS), PO Box 2568, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3WP. Please remember to mention us in a covering note otherwise we will not benefit.

Project News

Lennon Legacy update



The view from Monitoring Point 1 in the field

Photo: Sue Searle

Things have been quiet over the autumn and winter on our new field, as everything lies dormant. The grazing animals have now been removed and the field will not be grazed this year (except for the odd stray sheep). From next year we will resume a low intensity grazing regime to maintain suitable habitat for Barn Owls and other wildlife - we are aiming for a more old fashioned, traditional type of field.

By October 2002 I had prepared a draft Management Plan for the site and in November 2002 the Trustees approved it. The Management Plan was a major step for the project as it set out the vision for the site as well as getting down to the nitty gritty of when things will be done, by whom and the approximate costs.

The site is to be entered into the Dartmoor ESA Scheme (Environmentally Sensitive Area) which is an agri-environment scheme for land within Dartmoor National Park. The Scheme aims to encourage sympathetic land management for the benefit of wildlife and landscape conservation. Various meetings with people from DEFRA (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) have led to an agreement on the management of the site and a funding package. Funding will help cover such things as fencing, planting a new hedge, stone wall restoration, hedgerow management and even NOT grazing in the winter! The scheme runs for 10 years with an opt-out option after 5 years. The application process is now nearing completion.

Some on-going monitoring and survey work has been carried out over the autumn and winter including a winter bird survey, dormouse survey, water shrew survey, a

bracken survey with associated management plan and the ongoing monthly photographic survey.

The field was host to a large flock of fieldfares in December and January and the dormouse survey found that these delightful creatures are using several parts of the site and appropriate management for them has been included in the Plan including the re-instatement of a coppicing regime for the hazel.

The two big pieces of news are that on 1st November 2002 we found our FIRST VOLE HOLES in the long grass area, which was left ungrazed in 2002. When we checked last week there were dozens of holes and burrows spreading throughout the long grass area.

Our second piece of news is that we have seen a wild Barn Owl on several evenings standing on the mobile aviary in the field. We know that there were Barn Owls in the area last year (see Story of Joss in Feedback 28) but they did not hunt over our field due to the lack of suitable foraging habitat. With the new food supply (voles) on site it is great news that we are being visited by a wild Barn Owl already. The mobile aviary in the field has a wild male Barn Owl (John) ready for release in it. He was rescued following an injury to his wing in a road traffic accident and is now fully recovered and ready to go back into the wild (see page 3). Could the wild visitor be Joss's amorous 'widow' looking for a new mate? Keep your fingers crossed!

Sue Searle

Assistant Conservation Officer

● STOP PRESS UPDATE

A local Barn Owl survey within a 2km radius of the field, carried out by the conservation team in March revealed that 'Joss's widow' is indeed roosting nearby and is very likely to be the visitor to the field. With "John" due to be released in the next few days we are hoping to be able to report that they have paired-up in the next issue of Feedback.

The survey included checking the 3 poleboxes erect in the field, and evidence in one of them showed that the brood of 3 juvenile Barn Owls released after being brought in as casualties last year were catching wild food before dispersing from the area. Another box showed evidence of being used by the juvenile Little Owls released from here in August last year – one of them was returning for food until October. □

Scheme Update

Regular readers will be familiar with the Barn Owl Scheme concept – identify Barn Owl breeding sites, deliver a package of practical and advisory conservation measures designed to increase the vitality and breeding productivity of the birds at those sites and monitor the results.

Over the last five years the Barn Owl Trust, supported by local authorities, Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society and others, has implemented Schemes in four Devon Districts. The Schemes in South Hams and Teignbridge have been so successful that they have now been expanded to include additional sites.

The North Devon and East Devon Schemes are nearing completion, with only a few sites requiring their final monitoring visits this summer. The Trust has not planned to start any new schemes this winter or next as we are concentrating our efforts on the Devon Barn Owl Survey 2003 and the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey 2004. □

Aviary Cleaners

Can you spare 3-4 hours a week, a fortnight or even monthly?

We are looking for volunteer aviary cleaners; we provide training, equipment, waterproofs, tea and coffee and sometimes even biscuits.

If you don't mind messy jobs and being outside it is a wonderful opportunity to spend time in close proximity to owls. □

Owl News

I am really excited to be able to report that the pole box in our field is being visited regularly by a Barn Owl. We suspect it could be the partner of Joss (sadly found dead after colliding with a car last autumn – see issue 28). A Little Owl was also visiting another of our pole boxes quite often judging by the pellets and feathers that we have found. Thanks to Vivien Lennon's generous legacy we have at last been able to create our own owl friendly environment. The extra bonus as far as I'm concerned is that I can see it from my office window.

Some of you may remember talk of Rave our disabled Raven. For many years we thought she was a 'he' because of her macho behaviour until DNA tests on her moulted feathers confirmed that she was a girl. We had hopes at one time that she would be able to join the Ravens at the Tower of London but sadly the keepers didn't want a disabled bird. Anyway, she has been living at Waterleat since 1993 with a selection of Tawny Owls and Barn Owls. Last autumn, for the first time in ten years, two wild Ravens began visiting her aviary and actually landed on the roof in their attempt to make contact with her and they have been visiting ever since. David and Frances tell me that they appear amidst much cawing at the crack of dawn and don't care who they wake up!

Earlier this year we had a really bad week, receiving calls about three Barn Owls and a Tawny Owl - all found dead or injured and unfortunately we were unable to save any of them. They had all succumbed to vehicles of one sort or another (one being hit by a train).

Our most recent arrival has quite an interesting story behind her rescue. This particular Barn Owl was visiting a garden in Ivybridge and when the owner opened her window the owl flew in and landed on her husband's shoulder. Needless to say

she was captive-bred, very tame and extremely hungry. She was very dirty on arrival and needed quite a bit of cleaning up. She is now well settled in at our sanctuary and we can tell from her ring that she's about ten years old. Sadly no one has claimed her (I have written this last sentence too many times before). David wants to call her Ivy but I am sure that we can think of a more inspiring name for her - any ideas?

All of our feathered Waterleat residents seem to be quite happy and healthy and apart from our two rather eccentric Londoners have been leading fairly peaceful and uneventful lives.

These two captive bred Barn Owls that came from London seem to have a burning desire to stay out in the rain until we decide that enough is enough and return them to a warmer and drier environment. This is a positive action on their part as there is always plenty of cover available in all the aviaries. The strange thing is that, given the chance, they stay out in the rain until they are no longer able to fly properly, because they have become too soggy and heavy. I'm sure that they could take a lesson or two from their country cousins in basic survival techniques. Spirit is one of the owls in question and he is actually quite an old man, having been at our sanctuary for over ten years and we don't know how old he was when he first arrived. Sue and Amy have now actually built him a sort of umbrella over his



Is it wet enough for me to come out yet? Photo: Sue Searle

favourite perch so that he keeps warm and dry. Hazel, pictured above, is the other 'water baby'. She has only been with us for a year or so and is very sociable, taking a keen interest in everything that is going on around her.

Sandra Reardon

Friends Survey

As with any new job I've had to get to know lots of people here quite quickly.

Your support as a Friend of the Trust is invaluable – your contribution directly helps the Trust with its vital work. Now I've settled in and got to know the team here I want to know a bit more about you. I can't afford to buy you all a drink down the pub so I've enclosed a survey with this issue of Feedback.

Finding out more about our current Friends and supporters, what you like and dislike etc will help me in my search to find more Friends for the Barn Owl Trust. Recruiting more Friends will

enable the Trust to plan ahead and develop more conservation projects.

You can fill in the survey anonymously if you want to but if you fill in the personal details section of the form we will enter you into a prize draw – the prize is the opportunity to come and have lunch with us one day and find out more about the Trust and its work and meet the people who make it happen.

So if you have a couple of minutes, go get a cup of tea and please answer a few questions; it really will make a difference.

Sue Booth
Fundraising Manager

In Memoriam

The Trust has received
A legacy from the estate
of the late
Pamela Hutton
and donations
in memory of
Marjorie Gertrude Rice
John Rhodes
and
Margaret Prichard

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

Moving Mountains...

BOT Conservation Officer Mark Green reports on the Trust's four year project - the Imerys Barn Owl Initiative:

As part of their commitment to enhancing biodiversity on their land Imerys, an international minerals company extracting china clay in mid-Cornwall, have joined up with the Barn Owl Trust for an innovative, four year project. The aim of the Imerys Barn Owl Initiative is to increase the Barn Owl population in the china clay works area over the next few years. Imerys and the Barn Owl Trust are working together to maximise the suitability of the company's land holding for Barn Owls through habitat improvement and the provision of nestboxes. An initial survey of reported Barn Owl nest and roost sites provided a baseline estimate of the existing population against which the success of the project can be measured. All the nestboxes will be inspected annually over three years to monitor occupation by Barn Owls. Following the Conservation Team's most recent visit to the china clay area we take a look at efforts to regenerate the scarred landscape and review the progress of the Imerys Barn Owl Initiative...

Anyone who has been to mid-Cornwall could not help but notice the 'Cornish Alps'; huge mounds of sand and stone which litter the landscape. These are the inescapable by-products of the china clay industry that dominate the local landscape and economy. For every one tonne of china clay produced there are nine tonnes of waste generated made up of mica, sand and rocks. For 200 years these materials have been dumped on the surrounding land, creating a unique lunar landscape of deep pits and white tips, blue lagoons and wasteland. Earlier pyramidal structures known as sky-tips were superseded by massive terraced structures called finger-tips. Their design arises from the need to safely deposit more spoil in as small an area as possible, but the result is visually imposing, with limited after-use potential.

A solution is to restore these barren waste areas to natural habitat or agricultural land. Over the past few years significant improvements have been made with many areas landscaped and planted with trees, shrubs and grasslands. Imerys and other clay producers are working with English Nature on a project which will transform the redundant clay works to a new landscape of undulating heathlands, woodlands and farmland.

Heathland is the natural choice for much of the vegetation cover on the re-shaped tips. It needs little encouragement to thrive, having covered much of the area



*Pyramid - An old pyramid tip. Some of these will be left unlandscaped as a reminder of our industrial heritage.
Photo: Mark Green*

before the advent of the china clay industry. It is a mosaic of patches of heather, bare ground, heathland grasses, patches of scrub, woodland and boundaries of various types including hedges and banks. Traditionally heathlands were managed sustainably, being grazed by cattle and sheep, whilst herbs and flowers were gathered for use as bedding or fuel, some were even used for their medicinal properties.

Heathlands are also very rich in wildlife and many plants and animals are dependent on this habitat. There are five thousand species of invertebrates such as bees, wasps, dragonflies, spiders and a whole host of others that find a home on heathland. There are also distinctive birds like Stonechats, Nightjars and Dartford Warblers that are rarely found elsewhere.

Cornwall is important nationally as it has the second largest area of heathland after Hampshire, but of the heathlands that existed in 1949 nearly 60% have been lost. Today there are only 7,000 hectares of heathland remaining in Cornwall compared to 80,000 in the 18th Century.

On our latest visit to the area we took the opportunity to view the heathland restoration work that has taken place on some of the disused waste tips. Once a tip has been re-graded to a more natural shape than the steep sided, terraces of 'white finger' the spread of native heathland vegetation is encouraged by the transportation of seed. The two methods commonly used are the removal to a new site of large clumps of soil

containing seeds and plant matter, or by flailing. Flailing involves the collection of seed-bearing branches and shots from heathers and similar plants which are cut and mixed with a mulch for spreading directly onto the new surface. Once established the restored heathland will be managed to maintain a mixed age structure of plants and to prevent invasion by scrub species, such as willow and rhododendron. Eventually grazing will be introduced as a sustainable and low-cost method of managing the heathlands in perpetuity and this will reforge the once-strong link between the agricultural community and the heathlands.

Not all the china clay area will be restored to heathland. Much of it is destined to become woodland, some of it will become mixed habitat and some of it agricultural land. Imerys have already introduced Soay sheep to graze some of the partially landscaped tips and reclaimed pastures. Soay are an ancient and now rare breed that originates from the Scottish Island of St Kilda. Being light, agile and independent they are well suited to the situation and help to improve the condition of newly restored pasture and at the same time put the land to commercial use at an early stage. "They look nice but they're impossible to manage and their meat is very gamey," was the assessment of David, our Imerys guide.

It is the pasture and areas of edge habitat that we are concentrating on. The Barn Owl is a specialist, adapted to catch small mammals in open habitat at night.

the Imerys Initiative

They are not woodland birds and heathland does not usually support significant small mammal populations. It is the pasture and edge habitats that will provide the rough grassland foraging habitat for Barn Owls, and it is these areas that are the focus of the Imerys Barn Owl Initiative.

We had already identified existing and potential areas of suitable Barn Owl habitat and presented a report containing management recommendations to Imerys in the first step of the scheme, which was completed last year. The aim is to maintain or establish areas of foraging habitat and provide roosting and nesting sites in the form of nestboxes nearby.

The dynamic nature of the shifting landscape in the china clay area has complicated the management of the project. Some areas initially identified by us as potential foraging areas have been found to conflict with English Nature's heathland or woodland restoration projects, or they will be drafted into commercial use as tipping sites or tip expansion in the near future. Many of the original buildings identified as suitable for nestboxes are due to be demolished or sold-off in the next five years. Out of thirty possible indoor nestbox sites we found enough suitable buildings to erect only thirteen. There are few mature trees in the area suitable for outdoor nestboxes and so we reduced the shortfall in nesting provision by the use of pole boxes. On the one hand pole boxes have the advantage that they can be placed more or less exactly where you

want them, often in the heart of rough grassland; on the other hand, they are more expensive, weighty and more complicated to erect than other types of box.

Three pole boxes were erected in the relative warmth of spring last year, but our intrepid conservation team bared a bitter easterly wind to position a further five this February. Four went up without any problems onto poles already sited by Imerys according to our directions. However, on arrival at the fifth pole we discovered that it had been half-buried by the recent realignment of a track round the edge of the quarry and we were forced to abandon the nestbox installation. Such is the nature of working in such a volatile landscape.

This summer will see the first year of monitoring when we will inspect all the nestboxes for evidence of Barn Owl use. We anticipate finding signs of roosting in one or two nestboxes, but it may be a few years before there is any breeding in the project boundary. Watch this space for developments.

And finally, a thought from Cornish poet, Pol Hodge.

"Place sustains people, people sustain culture and ultimately culture sustains place."

Mark Green
Conservation Officer



*Pole box erection - Conservation workers Mark Green, Sue Searle and Amy Oliver take the strain.
Photo: David Ramsden*



*Finger tip - The steep angle sand sharp edges of these massive terraced tips dominate the landscape. Eventually they will be regraded to a more natural form and restored to natural habitat.
Photo: Mark Green*

Networking

The Trust has continued to develop links with other bodies. Last year our booklet *Barn Owls on Site* was reprinted by English Nature in their "in house" style. We then mailed it to all the UK Barn Owl conservation workers we are in touch with.

Last October we joined the Hawk and Owl Trust at their members conference where we gave a presentation on the work of the BOT. In November we ran a very well attended nestbox workshop with the Somerset Wildlife Trust at their headquarters near Taunton.

In February we worked with the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust to run a workshop in their district and in March we attended the AGM of the International Owl Society at the National Bird of Prey Centre in Gloucestershire and gave a presentation to their members.

Communication and liaison is one of the keys to successful conservation. We look forward to working with other conservationists both professional and volunteer during the year. Let us know if we can help. □

Team Talk



Photo Mark Green

Spike has been busy throughout the winter making nestboxes for the conservation team to erect. Since last year they have reduced the nestbox waiting list by half. Spike is pictured here with the 5 pole boxes he made for the Imerys project.

"Well the times they are a changing". With the end of the Heritage Lottery Fund Project looming and after almost six years with the Trust, first part-time and then later full-time, Phil Knowing left

in October. He moved on to work as press officer at Paignton Zoo.

Rosie Waine who had been Secretary to the Trustees since September '99 and a part-time admin assistant since January '01 also left at the end of 2002. Her role as secretary has been filled by an old friend, Sharon Clayborough and we are currently recruiting for the admin role.

Sharon worked for the Trust between 1995 and 1997 prior to going off to university as a mature student. Having got her degree she then came back and helped us out for three months before moving to America for a year. Now back in the UK and working for Victim Support, she has kindly agreed to attend Trustees' meetings to take the minutes.

In the autumn the Trustees decided to recruit a full-time fundraiser and unanimously selected the energetic and enthusiastic Sue Booth. Sue introduces herself below.

In April last year we recruited Lesley Ford to enable us to answer the phone and deal with enquiries five days a week instead of two - yes, it really is a year Lesley! This has inevitably changed the way we work, but instead of two days worth of calls spreading over the week (did we really

believe that would happen?) the number and range of enquiries continues to grow. Hence the Trustees' decision to recruit for a full-time admin post to support the information and advice service and the new Management Team!

As of April 2003 the new Management Team have taken on responsibility for the day-to-day running of the Trust. Senior Conservation Officer David, Office Manager Sandra and Fundraising Manager Sue are the Management Team. They have taken over from Trustee Frances Ramsden who needed a break after 15 years working as a Managing Trustee. Frances will remain a Trustee and continue to produce Feedback and other BOT publications. She will also carry on BTO ringing for the Trust and with the other Trustees will support the new team.

We look forward to introducing our new staff member in the next issue of Feedback. □

(As a member of the editorial team I feel that I can sneak this paragraph in to say that we will all miss Frances enormously and her shoes will be extremely difficult to fill.

Sandra Reardon)

A New Sue

Yes another Sue at the Trust. One of the first questions I was asked on my first day was, "Would you mind being called Big Sue as we already have a Sue here!" I am after all 6ft 2"! I'm hoping that this will be a good omen for me, as I want to make a BIG impact on the Trust's income!!

I'm the new Fundraising Manager for the Trust. With the end of the Heritage Lottery Fund project looming, income from the Barn Owl Schemes at an end and no funding secured for the two forthcoming county surveys, the Trustees took the bull by the horns in the autumn and advertised for a full-time fundraiser. I got the job and started at the end of January; I'm here to increase the funds so that the Trust can continue and develop its valuable work.

I plan to start by developing a funding strategy and implementing it, increasing the numbers of Friends, Adopters and business supporters and the donations from Grants and Trust funds are important goals. I also want to organise some excellent fundraising events. My four-legged friend Bungle will be taking an active part in this as Megan's walking partner for the Sponsored Walk. He's a Staffordshire Bull Terrier (a small muscular dog with a BIG personality!) He's already been helping me in the office by greeting the postman with a loud bark and doing other useful things like emptying the

bins for us (although I'm sure he's not meant to eat the contents!).

In my spare time I love to go scuba diving. I'm currently studying for my PADI advanced open water certificate and diving in places like Heybrook Bay, Fort Bovisand and wrecks all around the Devon, Cornwall and Welsh coasts. I've also dived the Red Sea in Egypt and some of the quarries around the Snowdonia National Park. In the summer I'm hoping to help out with some of the marine surveys for the Marine Conservation Society if I get time in between helping the conservation team here with ringing and raising funds!

My career background is predominantly in advertising and marketing. I graduated in 1996 from the University of Plymouth with a degree in business and computing and moved to London to work in TV advertising. In 1998 I moved back to the Westcountry and worked for a small animal welfare charity for a couple of years. I then went on to a sales and marketing management role in the hotel industry then back to advertising for the local and regional press - phew! As you can see my experience is varied and I hope will stand me in good stead to achieve success in the coming year.

If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap.

If you want happiness for a day, go fishing.

If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune.



Sue wields a hammer at a Nestbox Workshop
Photo: Frances Ramsden

If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody.

- Chinese proverb

Sue Booth
Fundraising Manager

Misconceptions and Musings

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

No. 7

“Wild Barn Owl sites must be kept secret – otherwise the owls will disappear” - **WRONG!**

The Barn Owl Trust has been collecting information on wild Barn Owls since the mid 80's and we now have hundreds of nest and roost sites on our database and this information is really important for conservation. Over the years, thousands of people have reported Barn Owl sightings to the BOT but we've also come across people who are reluctant to tell anyone about the wild Barn Owl site they know of – even us!

When questioned, the concerns of secretive people usually include one (or more) of the following:

- we will be invaded by hordes of birdwatchers
- we will be prevented from converting the barn
- the nest will be raided by egg collectors

In reality, these things virtually never happen. Birdwatchers only get really excited about extreme rarities, barn conversions are never refused because of Barn Owls, and eggs laid by captive Barn Owls can be easily and legally obtained so why risk heavy fines by stealing from a wild nest site?

We once came across a case where the “guardian” of one wild Barn Owl nest site was so secretive about the bird's presence

that even the owner didn't know the birds were there – and demolished the barn!

We don't suggest you broadcast it to the world if you have Barn Owls, but the right people should be informed - knowing where nest and roost sites are enables them to be protected. The Barn Owl Trust aims to record all Barn Owl sites in Devon and Cornwall and treats all data as confidential. In most other counties there are other recording groups. If you are unsure about any organisation which asks for information, you can always ask to see their Data Confidentiality Policy. □

Survey Volunteers

If you are interested in becoming a Devon Barn Owl Survey Volunteer (see page 5 for more details of the survey), please let us know as soon as possible.

Training days are scheduled for the end of April and May and places need to be booked in advance. There are two ways in which you could help. You can become a 'searcher' or an 'interviewer'.

Searchers: Trained, licensed and well-equipped people who can search sites for signs of occupation and status such as pellets, feathers, nest debris, eggs, young and adults using equipment such as a ladder, torch, hard hat etc.

Searchers will be required to attend a one-day training session on Saturday 10th May at Ashburton and it is hoped that they will carry out at least five days of fieldwork between May and December. You would be required to provide your own transport and 30ft ladder but we can supply a torch and hard hat.

Interviewers: Unlicensed people who will not search sites but will visit locations within

previously agreed map squares simply to interview people (farmers, landowners etc).

Most volunteers will be Interviewers and we are running two training sessions one in the north of the county and one in the south. We hope that interviewers would carry out at least one day of survey work between April and November.

You can volunteer to visit any number of sites in any part of the county but we will allocate in advance which map squares you will be working in to avoid duplication of visits or visits to known sensitive landowners.

Under Health and Safety legislation, the survey organisers have a duty of care to all Searchers and Interviewers. The Barn Owl Trust will provide training covering health and safety, record keeping, data collection etc.

Please call the office and talk to the conservation team if you want more info. □

It's a Fair Cop

Last autumn our receptionist Lesley passed a phone call onto the conservation team from a caller who wanted “to speak to someone who knew about keeping owls and other raptors.”

Far from being the keeper of an owl fretting about some quirky behaviour of their beloved pet, the caller was from a company who make transcripts of police interviews. They were dealing with a case involving captive birds of prey and wanted specialist terminology and spellings confirmed, such as 'BTO' and 'closed ring'.

Not our run of the mill enquiry. □

Getting Stuffed

The RSPCA were called to a church tower in Bath to rescue an owl that had been “trapped” for two days. However all was not as it appeared. When the two officers arrived at the church the vicar told them that the bird “had passed away some time ago” - it was in fact a taxidermy specimen.

Ollie the Eagle Owl had been “residing” in the belfry for two years without attracting attention. He had been placed there by the owner of the nearby Ace Optics, to allow customers of binoculars and telescopes to test products before purchase. The vicar was quite happy to have Ollie there as he deterred pigeons! →

Emergency Service

Last May a worried farmer near Truro in Cornwall contacted the Trust for advice. He had a full grain silo in one of his barns and in the process of removing some of the contents had disturbed a female Barn Owl sitting on eggs.

After consulting with the local English Nature Species Protection Officer as to the best course of action, Conservation Officer Mark Green visited the farm to assess the situation. Sure enough, he found six cold Barn Owl eggs lying on top of the grain underneath a tarpaulin cover. Fortunately, there was a fresh pellet on the floor of the barn indicating that at least one Barn Owl was still around.

A nestbox was erected near the grain silo and another in a nearby hay store and the farmer was advised to remove the tarpaulin cover to make the grain silo less attractive as a nesting site.

Later in the summer the farmer reported that he had heard activity in the nestbox near the grain silo. He also described seeing young owls outside the barn, but by his description sounded more like Tawnies than Barn Owls.

Keen to discover if the Barn Owls had bred again Conservation Officer Mark returned to the farm in December and was delighted to find nest debris in one nestbox and twenty pellets in the other. It seems that the Barn Owls had not abandoned the site when they were disturbed, as is often the case, but used the nestboxes provided by the Trust to raise a brood of two or three young. □

→ Thank you to John Gray for supplying this unusual tale, which originally appeared in the Telegraph. □

Other News



Lesley & Judy on the Menang Pass in Nepal

Photo: Fellow Trekker

Annapurna Update

Thank you very, very much to everyone who generously supported us by buying altitude for our Trek around the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal in November.

We made it! It was a tough trek, especially crossing the Thorong Pass, where it snowed. For a while we feared the pass would be closed, in which case we would have had no choice but to retrace our steps.

We set off at 4am in pitch darkness with head torches on. It was the most amazing experience. People staying in a lodge further up the pass looked out of the window and all they could see were little lights coming up the mountain. The sun came up and the views were spectacular. It was the hardest thing we

have ever done but worth every painful step. The Trek lasted for three weeks and in that time we saw no traffic of any kind except mules and ponies as there are no roads on the trail. Nepal is such a varied and beautiful country, with welcoming and friendly people. We saw so much, from the rice paddyfields and heat of low altitudes to the snow and frosts of 17,764 feet!

We are very pleased to report that we have succeeded in raising £1,196.57. It has been the most amazing experience for all of us, and we are delighted to have been able to raise funds for the Trust at the same time.

Lesley, Judy & Rosie

Xmas Greetings

Those of you who plan ahead will be pleased to know the Trust is planning to print a new selection of Christmas Cards this year.

Designs are now being chosen for the new range. Some will have a simple Christmas message and others will be left blank for your own greetings.

We hope to have them available in the summer and will advertise the cards and the pack price in the Autumn issue of Feedback. If you can't wait until then please give us a call after July.

Volunteer Wanted

We need a vivacious volunteer; someone with a good telephone manner to help with an on-going fundraising project.

We need someone initially to help with our legacy campaign and expect the role to encompass other fundraising activities.

If you have a few hours to spare a week, don't mind working in a busy office, want to be part of the BOT team and can travel to Ashburton please give Sue Booth a ring.

Call 01364 653026 for more details.

Snail Mail or email?

As the Trust develops and grows, our workloads become heavier. We are now using computers more as an environmentally friendly way of sending information - email. This helps to save us time, money and more importantly has less environmental impact than sending paper.

If you have access to the internet and an email address please let us know as we could then send you things like your renewal letters, appeals and news stories we think you might be interested in electronically.

We will still be posting your copies of Feedback, it just wouldn't be the same on a computer screen! Those who don't have email, don't panic we will still be using the post!

On the enclosed survey form we have included a question about this. If you are happy for us to email you please let us know your email address. If you have any comments please give Sue Booth a ring on 01364 653026 or email me (!) on suebooth@barnowltrust.org.uk

barnowltrust.org.uk

With support from the Heritage Lottery Fund we have revised our website and created a range of new resources for everyone interested in Barn Owls.

All of our leaflets are now available on-line. Family pages - for children and grown-ups too - feature lots of new images. There is a links page, we have revised our sales goods page to include lots of amazing photographs and of course there is the latest BOT news.

Tea-Time

At the end of last year there were emails flying about in cyber space about tea chests.

OPAL a company based in London had 60 traditional tea chests that they no longer wanted. Rather than send them to landfill they set about locating a carrier to deliver said boxes to Devon for conversion into Barn Owl boxes.

Thanks to Kate Owen at OPAL and Paul Ashwell at Impatient Parcels for getting the boxes to us in December. They arrived in time for our February nestbox workshop and are now waiting their first residents.

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. In this issue we hear about the newly formed Dorset Owl and Hawk Group from Danny Alder and Brian Cresswell, two of the founder members:

Born (or should that be hatched!) out of the success of last year's Barn Owl Trust nestbox workshop held at Dorset Wildlife Trust HQ, Dorset Owl & Hawk Group is a new, local group helping to conserve barn owls in the county and already has 15 active supporters. The aim is to assist with the conservation of this magnificent group of birds, mainly through the construction and installation of nest boxes and subsequent monitoring of their use.

We are both founder members of the group and licensed ringers. We also hold the required schedule 1 license for ringing Barn Owls at their nest. We are keen to promote general nest-based ringing which can help contribute to national monitoring of birds of prey (Barn Owls in particular), and more focused, project-based studies of raptor biology. Both approaches to the study of these birds serve a useful conservation purpose, and with several DOHG supporters from around the county willing to coordinate nestbox provision on their local patch, it shouldn't be long before some useful results appear.

We simply don't know enough about the current distribution and abundance of Barn Owls here in Dorset. By establishing a network of volunteers across the county we are confident we can fill gaps in our knowledge and, most



Dorset nestbox workshop

Photo: Frances Ramsden

importantly, be able to undertake some targeted conservation work. A survey in 1985 estimated there were 110 pairs in Dorset, but during the 1932 barn owl census the figure stood at 235 pairs; a sobering fact that this beautiful bird has fallen in numbers by 60% in a little over 50 years.

Dorset Owl and Hawk Group is already monitoring boxes on one estate near Dorchester, another couple of farms in the shadow of the infamous Cerne Giant and is currently in discussion with both the County Council Farms Estate and National Trust to establish nestbox and habitat management schemes which will benefit Barn Owls and Kestrels. In east Dorset there are several keen supporters including one who has already established nestbox monitoring along the Stour Valley. The group made a dozen tea chest boxes during its own nestbox

workshop late last year, and these will go up in barns this spring. It's early days yet and we need to carefully match our targets with our resources (in other words, people), but it's very exciting to begin something that can involve different people from all walks of life.

The group is very fortunate to have made many useful contacts in such a short space of time, including Dorset Environmental Records Centre, Dorset Wildlife Trust, English Nature, Environment Agency, FWAG and DEFRA's Countryside Stewardship Officers and not forgetting Dorset County Council's Countryside Service (though it helps slightly that Danny works for them!).

One of our most important contacts has been the Barn Owl Trust and, no, we haven't been bribed by Frances to say this, but their encouragement and advice about setting up a group has proved invaluable! Through BOT we secured 70 tea chests, which were sat in a barn near Sherborne and would otherwise have been scrapped by the farmer who had no further use for them. We have also been lucky to recruit a couple of BOT friends into Dorset Owl and Hawk Group. We look forward to maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with the Barn Owl Trust over the coming years.

If you live in Dorset and would like to know more or support DOHG, please contact Danny or Brian by email (danny@dohg.org.uk or brian@dohg.org.uk) or phone Danny on 01300 321159 or Brian on 01258 817925. week-day evenings are best.



Bob Gifford carefully weighs a young Barn Owl. Photos supplied by Danny Alder



The bird has mostly adult type feathering with traces of juvenile down on its head & back.

Your News

What a Draw

Dear BOT

What a lovely surprise to receive the Dick Twinney Owl print as a prize from the Trust Draw. I am delighted to display it amongst the various other "Owls" in my home. With best wishes to all at the Trust

Joyce Baker
Kent

Dear BOT

Your letter and Grand Draw prize came as an unexpected but very pleasant surprise. David Whittle's fine print will be framed and given a prominent position in our home – it will give us much pleasure!

Keith & Jean Symons
Barnstaple

Dear BOT

I was very thrilled to open up my Barn Owl Trust Friends pack and impressed with the contents. The selection of items you send out is a real treat for any Barn Owl fan.

Ian McGuire
Bristol

Dear BOT

Thank you very much for giving such an interesting illustrated talk to our group. The members thoroughly enjoyed your visit and I think went away wiser than when they arrived! The slide /musical sequence that finished your programme was a very beautiful finale. Thank you.

Valerie Stephens
Paignton Parish Wives Group
Devon

Dear BOT

I am writing a letter to say a very big thank you for the information you sent me. This will help me to complete my project. I am particularly looking forward to analysing the Barn Owl pellet. I am enclosing a donation of one weeks pocket money, I hope this can be used to help the Barn Owl.

My Mummy has also given me a cheque to become an Owlet. When I have completed my project I will send you a copy. Once again a very big thank you. Keep up the good work.

Dion Bell
Somerset

Dear BOT

I was so impressed by your letter NOT begging for money with the Gift Aid form you sent me that I decided to send you a cheque. I have also returned your stamped address label so that you can use it again.

E Jewell

Dear BOT

I have just adopted a Barn Owl for my son Jake's ninth birthday. He was absolutely thrilled with the gift and the

pack that was sent to him and has written you a letter to ask how "his owl" is. The fact that he wrote on his own, without being asked to, makes the present even more special – thank you very much indeed. Jake would really appreciate a reply from you. Kind regards

Nikki Dawson
Berkshire

Just so you know, Sandra did write back to Jake.

Dear BOT

Just a note to let you know of my Barn Owl nestbox results for 2002. I had a total of 71 youngsters with no nest mortality – this is a record to date. I also

Nestbox News

had 3 second broods laid around mid July. Another Barn Owl enthusiast and BTO ringer has ringed 60 young Barn Owls from his own boxes.

I thought you might be interested in a piece I read in our local paper. An old age pensioner found a Barn Owl entangled in strawberry netting early one morning. It was cut free by the RSPCA and had no injuries. It was a BTO ringed male and when the ring number was checked it was 9 years old.

Gil Gaylor
Isle of Wight

Feedback 23 featured an article on Gill's work on the Isle of Wight

Dear BOT

Thank you so much for sending our group all those lovely owl pellets, the children thoroughly enjoyed pulling them apart and the gory job of piecing all the bones back together. Thanks again for all your kind help.

Dawn Collins & Julia Percy
Watch Co-ordinators Somerset

Dear BOT

You say on your website that the Tawny Owl is the most common Owl in Britain. You are wrong, in fact the most common Owl in Britain is the Teal Owl. please update your site, thanks. Hahahaha...

Johnny

If you don't get this, try saying it out loud!
(ed)

Unfortunately not every letter we receive is positive; last year we received a letter from someone who wanted to let us know that she was not renewing her Friends subscription, because we didn't let her come and visit the Owls. She also felt we were too impersonal and "Would have liked to be invited to help on a project and to feel more involved with the work". It is always interesting, if not pleasant, to hear people's views and we would encourage anyone with similar concerns to let us know. We did respond thanking her for her letter, and her support. We thought it might be helpful to print our response to her criticisms in case

there are other people who feel the same way.

The Barn Owl Trust is a registered charity set up primarily to conserve wild Barn Owls. We operate from offices on a private smallholding on the edge of Dartmoor, where we also have aviaries to house our resident birds - the land does not belong to the Trust, we pay (literally) a peppercorn rent. The site is a perfect haven for the birds, but is not at all suitable as a visitor center. The access is a narrow track and there are no facilities here for visitors, for instance parking is difficult and the ground surface is uneven. If any visitors should arrive then a member of staff has to stop work in order to be with them; there are significant Health and Safety implications involved in having a visitor center. Given that there are many tourist attractions where one can go and see captive Barn Owls displayed, the Trust's policy is that this is not a role for the BOT. It would divert resources away from important conservation work. Our Friends leaflet does state that we do not operate a visitor center.

In Feedback 27 we invited readers to attend a nestbox workshop, our annual walk and we asked for volunteers on page 11. In issue 28 we again invited people to attend nestbox workshops, asked for volunteers for the county Barn Owl Surveys on page 4 and described more volunteer tasks on page 5. Friends in the South West also receive our events list to let them know of other events that they can attend. Apologies to Friends that live many miles away, we realise that if you live in Scotland attending a BOT event is not likely, but some people do travel very long distances to attend a workshop or our annual walk. One of our very keen regular volunteers lives in Shropshire, he spends his holidays in Devon and comes to work with us. Incidentally the lady concerned lives within 20 miles of Ashburton.

Hopefully most Friends of the Trust are happy to support our work because they feel it's worthwhile. We hope that you feel involved through your contact with the office, our information service and the news in Feedback and the Annual Report. Thank you for your support.

You can't please all of the people all of the time, but we do try. (ed)

Focus on Friends



Photo: Frances Ramsden

Chris Robinson has been a Friend of the Trust since 1993 and has been attending Trustees' meetings as our education advisor since 1995. A primary school teacher for many years, Chris retired at Christmas 02.

Her interest in the natural world was fostered as a child when she would ride through the Devon countryside accompanied by her two dogs. The area between Torquay and Teignmouth where she used to spend most of the time with her four-legged companions sparked her interest in wild flowers and wildlife. Unfortunately the area has changed considerably in the intervening years with significant housing developments replacing many of the green fields.

Riding not only gave Chris the opportunity to appreciate the natural world, it also introduced her to local farmers and attending gymkhanas as a child provided an insight into the agricultural community.

Born and brought up in Devon, Chris moved to Bath to do her teacher training, focusing on science. Her specialist study was on spiders and she is still really interested in these amazing creatures and always identifies the species before putting them carefully out of the window! After qualifying Chris taught in Liverpool. Despite being in very urban surroundings she managed to interest her "children" in the natural world by making use of local parks as venues for environmental education. She also taught in rural Warwickshire before taking a break to have her two (now grown-up) sons, Alex and Conrad.

Moving back to Devon, Chris began teaching again when her boys started school. With the exception of two exchange teaching breaks she spent the next 25 years at a local primary school. Her international exchanges meant that she spent 12 months in Canada and a term in Connecticut, USA. Both exchanges gave her the chance to explore the local countryside and get an insight into conservation projects. The school in Connecticut had a very under-used nature trail and Chris organised a day to give the children access to this incredible resource.

At her school in Devon Chris started an environment group for the children. They created a nature area by reclaiming a piece of scrub beside the school where there had previously been willow coppice. They then began clearing paths to create access. Over the years they have seen the regeneration of the willow, hazel coppice and a range of woodland flowers including wood anemones, snowdrops and wild daffodils. The children have also been involved in tree planting and clearing the stream that runs

through the site - otters have since been recorded as visiting and the winter bird count has recorded over 30 species.

The nature area, which boasts a bird hide, has provided an enriching experience for the children. It is relevant to the natural history area of the curriculum and has also had benefits for other subjects like art, drama and English. The children are really enthusiastic about the nature area but unfortunately it could be threatened by plans for a new school.

Still recovering from an operation she had last autumn, Chris hasn't been able to launch into her retirement with quite the energy she hoped. However her plans include volunteering and travelling; she is particularly attracted to a project in Greece involving the conservation of turtles. She is also very interested in sustainability and has a dream to live in an environmentally friendly house, which she is currently researching.

Chris was very involved in the production of the Trust's School Pack back in the mid '90's and helped extensively with the recent revision of the pack, one of our HLF project targets. We hope she will now have time to become more involved with other areas of the Trust's work.

Thank you for all your help and happy retirement Chris. □

Nestbox Workshop Fun

Each February and November the Trust runs a one-day nestbox workshop with a partner organisation. After joining the Trust in July '01 I had the chance to experience my first nestbox workshop on 22nd February. The partner organisation was The Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust, based at Cockington Court, Torquay.

The benefits of this particular partnership became immediately apparent on my arrival. The grounds surrounding Cockington Court are stunning and were particularly impressive with the show of spring flowers on a beautiful day. The venue itself was the old Gamekeeper's Cottage, a lovingly restored thatched building.

Everyone arrived to a welcoming drink and biscuits and the day got under way with an illustrated talk from David. He gives a fascinating insight into the world of Barn Owls, some of the issues surrounding their

survival, the use and positioning of nestboxes and the work of the Trust.

Lunch gave everyone the chance to refuel with a delicious organic ploughman's and of course to make friends and chat.

The afternoon began with the practical task of turning everybody's tea chest into a habitable Barn Owl des-res. With DIY experience ranging from nothing to professional, the task ensued with an air of organised chaos. With step-by-step instruction and help at hand, we had a huge amount of very noisy fun. A group photo with the finished products portrayed everyone's sense of comradeship and achievement.

Obviously many people attend with the intention of putting up their nestbox either on their own land or on a friend's. So we all left in convoy to be shown how to do this in a traditional and a modern barn. The demonstrations were lead by David who

showed us how to site and erect the boxes correctly and safely.

By the end of the day everyone had made a new friend and tried something new. Each person left with the expertise to have a direct and positive influence on local Barn Owl populations. We have received feedback from previous participants whose boxes have been taken up by Barn Owls. You can imagine the sheer sense of joy felt by them and us, especially where the birds have nested. It really goes to show that we are all capable of making a real difference.

Thanks to everyone who came along, and to the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust for their hospitality. Humour was the flavour of the day and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. I can't wait for the next one!

Amy Oliver
Conservation Assistant

Thanks and Things

Thank you to everyone who has supported the Trust since the last issue of Feedback. As regular readers will know we are delighted when we can reuse or recycle something that has been left unused in a cupboard, loft or garage somewhere. We are always pleased to receive any of the items listed below, 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.

Special thanks go to John Kelly, a boat builder near Helston in Cornwall. John has made six nestboxes for the Trust, three of which were erected the day they were collected. Volunteers Jenny and Pat Ford not only bring copious quantities of cake and biscuits when they come into the office but at Xmas they also presented us with two huge boxes of beautifully wrapped goodies. They included an office chair, stationary and tools; all our staff and volunteers got to unwrap at least one parcel – thank you both for all your support. Our “IT Man” Alan has collected donations of a printer and ink cartridges for the Trust from his

other customers. Chris Moncrieff sent us two boxes of Jiffy bags, pens and stamps, Rachel and Julian Edwards sent us towels and files. Friend of the Trust Christine Mercer suggested her friend Andrew Zwick donated a laptop computer; it was put immediately to work and is proving extremely useful. How did we ever manage without it? Mr Tucker sent us some binoculars, which have already proved useful. Maureen Sheppard sent us a toaster and a juicer. Ian McGuire came along to the Somerset nestbox workshop in the autumn and donated 10 saws. He has also helped us with purchasing power tools. Sylvia and Peter Shone gave us a large quantity of office sundries and we also had an anonymous donation of office stationary. Thanks also to our old friend David Crew who sent us a donation of £70 with his Friends sub and to everyone else who kindly add an extra few pounds when renewing their Friends and adoptions donations.

Thank you all for your support. ☐

Can You Help

We are looking for:
Folding garden furniture (for use at

shows)
Heavy-duty cordless drills
An endoscope
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 (call her on a Wednesday)
A4 lever arch files
New postage stamps

For the field

We need to acquire some field management machinery and if anyone has an unwanted
Small 4WD tractor
Self powered flail mower
Chainsaw - in working order
Wood chipper...
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 ☐

Tail Piece



I am gazing out of my office window at the daffodils bobbing their golden heads in the breeze. The woodland floor is still carpeted in crispy brown autumn leaves; the trees, still waiting for their new green cloaks, overhang the gently flowing Dartmoor stream.

It's strange to think that the next time I sit in this room it will no longer be my office. I moved into this 9-foot space about 4 years ago when we had a major reorganisation of the office and it has become something of a second home to me, maybe because I've spent so much time here. It will be very odd not to be in the thick of things anymore, but after 15 years of being in the office every week, living and breathing the Trust for most of that time, it is time for a change.

Our new management team, David, Sandra and Sue are really capable and should be able to cope with the day-to-day running of the Trust. However if they need us, the Trustees, including me, are all on hand to lend support. Because I can't keep entirely away, I will

come in once a month to help with forward planning. I have also volunteered to continue working on Feedback, which I really enjoy and will of course continue my BTO ringing. I am delighted that my permit has now been upgraded to include Kestrels and Little Owls in addition to Barn Owls - thank you Keith.

People keep asking, “What will you do with all the free time?”. Well, after a break to catch my breath and take stock, I am going to do the Trust's bookkeeping for a while. I also plan to continue working with “IT Alan” to develop the Trust's database and website, help with BOT publications, do a bit of free-lance consultancy work to earn some money, and maybe even find time to read a few books and make some baskets, so I won't be short of things to do.

I will of course miss being in the office - change is quite scary, but it's also healthy and necessary for things to evolve and grow.

The Barn Owl Trust has played a very important part in my life, (and indeed in

many other people's and Owls' lives) but it's now time to move over and let other folk take up the reins.

I believe that the Trust has its own life force, which is bigger than the sum of all of us. The way that it has evolved over the years is testament to that. It has been an honour to have been involved and I have really enjoyed helping the Trust to develop to this stage of its life. Meeting and working with so many lovely people over the years has been a real pleasure. Thank you all.

I hope that your involvement with the Barn Owl Trust has helped you to believe that all of us can have a positive impact on the natural world, after all that's what it's all about - have faith and keep on believing.

Together we can make a world of difference.

Frances Ramsden