



Issue Number 30 - Autumn 2003



# FEEDBACK

Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU - (01364) 653026 - [www.barnowltrust.org.uk](http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk) - Registered Charity No: 299 835



## Major Road Project Results

- 72% of Barn Owls known to have encountered a major road were killed!
- Barn Owls are three times more likely to be found dead than seen alive on major roads
- Half of all Barn Owl deaths occur on roads

# Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to Feedback.

Firstly to those of you who noticed, apologies – Feedback is a month later than usual. This is not because we didn't get it together on time; it is because we wanted you to be amongst the first to know that the Major Road Research Project has been published. First conceived in 1996 this huge project has absorbed an enormous amount of effort in bursts over the last seven years. It uses data and information we have gathered over a 15-year period and represents a massive investment for the Trust. We have received no external funding at all to do the project or publish and distribute the report - fortunately the final product is as good as we hoped.

Although we all know roads kill Barn Owls this is the first time the effects have been quantified, so turn to the centre pages for a look at the statistics. The last

six months at the BOT have also been dominated by fieldwork for the Devon Barn Owl Survey (page 5). In order to achieve the mammoth task of checking every roosting and breeding site recorded in the county in the last ten years we have had to take on a Survey Officer and buy another vehicle to 'get him out there'. But of course other things don't stop happening and we are dealing with an ever-increasing number of enquiries from all over the UK and abroad. We continue to develop links with other groups and individuals working in conservation throughout the country and frequently provide information and advice for these. We currently have six casualty owls in our Birdroom and 27 resident birds that have to be cared for. Staff comings and goings (page 10) have meant restructuring some workloads and additional training. The installation of a new computer system has made life less stressful for our staff and especially Alan,

our IT support man. Training days for survey volunteers and a Bracken Bashing Day in July were new experiences for everyone involved and proved very successful. Although it was a little disappointing that so few people were able to join us for the Bracken Bashing, those who did enjoyed their tour of the Trust's field and did an excellent job. There will be another opportunity to visit and help with the management of the Field on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December when we hold our first Hedge Management Day; phone the office or email us if you are interested in coming along.

There is also an opportunity to get together for a social evening and a buffet when we hold the Grand Draw in Exeter on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December, see page 4 for details, or to join us in Dorset for our next nestbox workshop in November.

We also report back on the results of our Friends Survey (page 11) sent out with the last issue of Feedback. In response to popular demand we have had a new range of colour Xmas cards printed and include a flyer with this issue so please consider buying your Xmas cards from the Trust - you can see them in full colour on our website.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Feedback and feel it keeps you informed about our work. Please consider what you personally can do to help conserve the Barn Owl and our environment. □

Thank you for your support.

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*Cover Photo: Stuart Dawber*

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

*Many thanks to everyone who provided words and pictures for this issue.  
Editorial team: Frances Ramsden and Sandra Reardon.*

*Copy date for issue No 31 is 1st February 2004*

*Send your contributions - news, letters, pictures and information to:  
Feedback, Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU  
or email [info@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:info@barnowltrust.org.uk) (subject Feedback)*

## Nestbox Workshops

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

**at Kingston Lacy in Dorset**

In liaison with  
The Dorset Owl & Hawk Group  
and The National Trust  
Saturday 22 November 2003

Call 01364 653026  
for details and  
a booking form.

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# Barn Owl Trust News

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## How on Earth?

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British Barn Owls are also known as *White Owls* because they are white! White breasted, white faced, and white undersides to their wings. We've seen around 1,500 young Barn Owls at close quarters and virtually all of them were normal; with predominantly white fronts and undersides. This summer we discovered a brood of two five-week-old owlets in north Devon, which we believe are unique. Both had completely brown chests. All the under-wing coverts, the flanks, the legs and chest were brown coloured and most of the facial disk was dark brown. This colouration is characteristic of the eastern-european sub-species *Tyto alba guttata* and individual *guttata* Barn Owls do occasionally turn up (mostly on the east coast) having flown across the North Sea. It was amazing to discover eastern-European-coloured owlets in Devon and then even more amazing to realise that we had already seen both the adults and both of them were white!

How could this possibly happen? Perhaps these owlets had one or more *guttata* birds in their ancestry and they were throw-backs. Regular readers may recall a story in last summer's FEEDBACK about another site (14 miles



Photo: Kevin Keatley

away) where a brood of two comprised one white Barn Owl and one *guttata*-coloured Barn Owl. Perhaps these unusually coloured birds will become less unusual in years to come.

Having got over the initial excitement we realised that here was a rare opportunity to capture a unique picture: a normal white adult feeding a dark-breasted owlet. Our photographer friend and long-term BOT volunteer Kevin Keatley took

up the challenge and in September we were delighted to receive his pictures. Well done Kevin!

If any other Barn Owl enthusiasts have come across anything similar we'd really like to hear from you. □

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## First Bash Results in Severe Bruising

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Regular readers will be familiar with the Lennon Legacy Project and our plan to create 26 acres of Barn Owl heaven here

at Waterleat. Many years ago, huge areas of the field were covered in dense bracken which was eventually removed

by repeated cutting. Over the past 50 years intensive grazing and occasional cutting have helped to keep the bracken in check but now we are drastically reducing the grazing we are concerned that it will once again take over. Although bracken has some wildlife value, we are determined to keep it in check because it would render the grassland less suitable for flowering plants and the extra cover would reduce the availability of small mammals to foraging Barn Owls.

On July 5<sup>th</sup> we held our first volunteer task in the field – a Bracken Bash! After a guided walk around the whole 26 acres and a little instruction in the use of the broom handle(!), we set about the task of bruising all the bracken stems. This has (in theory) the effect of sapping the strength of the rhizomes thereby preventing any spread.

You can get involved...

Why not join us next July for an annual bash or on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2003 to help with our first Hedge Management Day. Places are limited so please phone the office to book or to find out more details. We start at 10.30; bring a bow saw if you have one and a packed lunch. □



Photo: Frances Ramsden

# More BOT News

## Team Barn Owl



Photo: David Ramsden

Staff from the Barn Owl Pub in Exeter are taking part in a gruelling seven mile commando challenge to raise money for the Barn Owl Trust and other charities, the challenge involves two road runs of 2 miles each and an army assault course!

The Barn Owl Pub is a Business Supporter of the Trust and is helping us with events and promotional activities too. Landlord Mark Newbrook said "We are pleased to be offering our support to the Barn Owl Trust. Our customers read the information left by the charity and are genuinely interested in the work that they do. It's a real opportunity to get more involved in local issues."

This year the Trust's Grand Draw will be held at the Barn Owl Pub on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2003. Mark and his team are kindly offering the use of the venue and are putting on a buffet supper for all guests to include Pollyanna Pickering the well known wildlife artist. Tickets are available at £5 from the Trust. Please contact Sue Booth on 01364 653026. □

## A Day with the Trust

I think we could count on one hand the sightings either of us have had of this beautiful bird in the wild and those only fleeting glimpses in the car headlights. But that was before we won last year's prize draw to spend a day in the field with the Barn Owl Trust. And what a day it was! We would visit three confirmed nesting sites across the border in Cornwall with the objective to monitor them but also to give us a sporting chance of seeing an owl in its natural habitat.

David warned us not to get our hopes up, but nothing could have prepared us for what we found at the first nest in the loft of an original and sympathetically restored longhouse - five fledglings, their adult features fully recognisable through the soft down. The second nest in a disused barn yielded two young chicks, and at the third nest on a National Trust tenant's farm we were rewarded with three chicks. Each brood was individually weighed (somewhat ignominiously by popping them head first into what looked like a piping bag), their wingspans measured to approximate their age, the more developed first brood could even be sexed, and finally each bird was ringed.

On a high we returned to the Barn Owl Trust's base in Ashburton for a tour of their field, which was featured in the previous newsletter.

Thank you to everyone at the Barn Owl Trust, especially David and Amy for making it possible and to Abi and Vaughan, Betty Bailey and Mr and Mrs Redwood for welcoming us into their homes to share the experience.

John Seear



## Barn Owl Trust Grand Draw & Buffet Supper

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2003

**BARN OWL PUB, EXETER**

Tickets for supper £5 each from the Trust

## It's a Walk Over

This year's annual sponsored walk took place as usual on the very beautiful Flete Estate in the South Hams by kind permission of Anthony Mildmay-White.

Regular staff members Megan (the Golden Retriever) and Bungle (the Staffordshire Bull Terrier) showed their canine friends how to keep fit whilst raising money and between them they received nearly a thousand pounds in sponsorship. Obviously they did not need the money so were kind enough to donate it to the Trust. Their human counterparts managed a little more at £1,335.65 but there were nearly two hundred of them.

Phil Sheardown of Canoe Adventures again ferried us across the estuary in his 10 person North American canoe - one of the high spots of the day especially for the children. It was extremely impressive how he and three or four volunteers stuffed people into and pulled them out of life-jackets in the blink of an eye and no-body had to wait more than ten or fifteen minutes to be paddled across. Thank you Phil and helpers for your efficiency and hard work.

Paddy (my husband) and I walked as sweepers in order to make sure that nobody got lost on the way and we were this year joined by Lesley Ford (admin assistant and

intrepid Annapurna Trekker). This was quite a frightening prospect but we did keep up with her most of the time and only had to make her stop a couple of times when we were in danger of overtaking the walkers who were supposed to be in front of us.

As always it was a wonderful day out in beautiful countryside and at the end of it we had raised £2,324.15 and there may still be a little more to come. The walk is quite a complicated and time consuming event to organise and relies on the help and goodwill of quite a lot of people but it was well worth it as everyone had a really nice day and made money for the Trust as well.

Perhaps you would like to join us next year on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2004. We can help you find local accommodation if you'd like to take a little holiday around the event - its a brilliant day out and certainly worth considering wherever you live, whatever your age and walking ability.

Thank you once again to all those people and dogs who took part.

Sandra Reardon

# Devon Barn Owl Survey

Survey Volunteer Training Day Photo: David Ramsden



2003 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. This involves searching every Barn Owl roosting and nesting site in the county recorded since 1993 – over 1100! This doesn't mean there are 1100 sites currently occupied by Barn Owls of course. We estimate that around 25% of these sites may be occupied at any one time.

So, what's involved in a day's survey work? First we decide where we're going to go. Picking an area where there are lots of sites close together is a good start. Then we phone each landowner to ask permission to check their barn, nestbox, tree hollow, or wherever it is the Barn Owls were previously reported to be. Sometimes the owner will know enough to tell us over the phone if Barn Owls are around and what they're up to. If we don't have the owners' contact details, we go and knock on the door to ask permission. Once permission is granted, we visit the site armed with a ladder, torch, hardhat, rope and other paraphernalia to help deal with all possible eventualities (i.e. a ladder wedge to cope with uneven ground). When on site our aim is to establish whether Barn Owls are nesting, roosting or absent. This is determined by what we find which may include live Barn Owls, owlets, nest debris, eggshell, pellets, feathers, poo, or absolutely nothing at all.

John, Mark and I have all been running around the countryside checking the majority of sites (David, Keith and Frances do the annual ringing sites). Each of us has responsibility for two or three districts and collectively we have searched about 60% of the 1100 sites so far. Personally I have had the pleasure of covering Teignbridge and the South Hams. The scenery has been stunning, and one of the perks of the job is getting to see places you would never normally see. Nest sites are still thinly spread and if I were to make a premature guess, I would estimate there to be between 30 and 35 breeding sites in the South Hams this

year. It is interesting to note that every breeding pair I have observed has nested in a purpose-built nestbox. This really goes to show how instrumental nestboxes are in encouraging Barn Owl populations.

We've still a way to go before we can estimate the number of pairs nesting in the whole of Devon, and checking sites is about to get a little tricky. Up to now confirming a nest site has been relatively easy especially when we have come face to face with a brood of owlets! But all this is about to change as most youngsters begin to fledge around the end of August. We're now going to have to rely on finding nest debris, bits of eggshell, as well as sniffing around for ammonia type smells, a recently used Barn Owl nest can really stink!

Most landowners are enthusiastic and interested to know what we have found. I've met some very lovely people on my travels, and have often found myself having to politely refuse an invitation to stay for lunch or tea. It is nice to know that most people feel it's a real privilege to have Barn Owls on their land, and want to do what they can to provide the right environment. I think attitudes have changed a lot over the last 10-15 years regarding wildlife preservation. Hopefully the trend will continue in order to encourage a thriving Barn Owl population!

We have had a great deal of assistance from volunteers who have been invaluable in helping us to complete our survey. Some have taken on the task of physically searching sites and some have gone from door to door in likely looking areas interviewing landowners. This means each volunteer is referred to as a Searcher or an Interviewer. Earlier on in the year we held training days for both roles. We ended up with about nine volunteers in each group. They all spent a day with us here at the BOT headquarters for an intensive crash course in Barn Owl ecology and survey techniques. The Searchers were taken to an anonymous farmstead where they were shown what to look out for and how to check nestboxes

using various health and safety methods. Everybody had a lot of fun and learnt a lot (especially how far they were willing to go up a ladder!). Once the Searchers were covered by our own nest inspection licence, they were raring and ready to go.

The training day for the Interviewers was less about searching and more about interviewing techniques (funny that). A major part of their work is about making contact with landowners whom we have never corresponded with before. This work is really important in helping us to discover new roosting and breeding sites that have never been recorded. Training was given on what sort of questions to ask to get the information we need and how to instigate a friendly rapport. Arriving unannounced on the doorstep of a perfect stranger can be a bit nerve-racking sometimes. 99% of people we call on are really friendly and more than happy to help. However, advice was given on how to deal with gruff characters etc, which is not out of the question in the wilds of Devon! We had a lovely day and everyone did really well to take in such a lot of information.

Survey workers from the Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society have also been keeping us informed of any Barn Owl sites they come across. Thanks to everybody's hard work we predict that we'll have completed all fieldwork by November. So far we think we're on target to get the final report written up and printed around the beginning of next year.

We have also had a fantastic response from the general public. Loads of people have taken the time to fill out our survey record forms and send them in. Thanks to people being so forthcoming with information, we have learned of quite a few nest sites in Devon that were previously unrecorded.

Why go to all this trouble? The 2003 survey will update roosting and nesting records for all Devon's 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.

Finally, if you have seen a Barn Owl or know of a roosting or breeding site in Devon we are still very keen to hear from you.

**Amy Oliver**  
Assistant Conservation Officer



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# Project News

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## Barn Owl Scheme Progress

Survey Officer John Howells has been busy completing the final stage of monitoring visits at 26 East Devon Barn Owl Scheme sites. The Scheme, started in 2000 and supported by East Devon District Council, is the largest of its kind to date and has delivered a package of conservation measures to 42 sites in East Devon. Work at 16 sites was completed last year. The results of this season's monitoring have not yet been collated but we have recorded a number of new nest and roosts in the district, so the outlook seems brighter for Barn Owls in East Devon.

Following from the success of the Teignbridge Barn Owl Scheme, which was completed in 2000, Teignbridge District

provided us with half the funding to extend the Scheme to a further four sites, as well as continue monitoring at another 15 sites. Conservation work has almost been completed at one of the additional Scheme sites, while the other three have received the first of two monitoring visits and will be completed next year.

Work at two final North Devon Barn Owl Scheme sites is now nearly completed. 22 sites have participated in the Scheme in total and we have recorded a significant number of new breeding sites in North Devon since the Scheme began in 1999. □

## 2003 Breeding Season News

For the past thirteen years the Barn Owl Trust has visited selected sites each summer in order to monitor nesting success. Some of our annual monitoring sites have had Barn Owls nesting every year since 1990! However the number of young raised, and their survival, varies from one year to the next and because of this, long-term studies are important. As well as counting nests and numbers of young, we generally fit each young with a uniquely numbered (BTO) ring to monitor dispersal, survival, and mortality.

The 2003 season in the southwest has been pretty good overall – much better than in other parts of the country which reported an appalling year. After the fantastic summer weather back in April we were expecting many of the birds to be nesting early but were surprised to

find the opposite! Barn Owls have a way of doing the unexpected - rather than laying their eggs in April most waited until mid-late May when the weather was very unsettled.

In June we were finding hatching eggs where we expected to find well-grown young. Consequently many sites needed repeat visits towards the end of July and in most cases the news was good – broods of two or three were normal, we had one brood of four and three broods of five. Not bad, but we are still hoping for another bumper year like 1996. In total we visited 65 sites ringing owls at 40 of these, 97 young (giving an average brood size of 2.4) and 14 adults. □

## Imerys Update

Conservation Officer Mark Green was delighted to discover four young owlets in a newly erected polebox near St Dennis in Mid-Cornwall's china clay area. The box, positioned on a disused waste tip, is one of twenty-eight boxes erected as part of the Imerys Barn Owl Initiative.

The Initiative is a partnership between Imerys Plc, the minerals company that operates the majority of the china clay quarries, and the Trust who are working together to increase Barn Owl numbers in the china clay area.

"We are very pleased by this early success," said Mark. "Our initial survey of the area in 2001 found that Barn Owls were roosting in a few buildings but there were no signs of any nesting. Since then we have erected nearly thirty nestboxes in buildings, trees and on poles and are

advising Imerys on managing parts of their land for the benefit of Barn Owls and other wildlife. This is the first year of monitoring the nestboxes and we were delighted to discover that Barn Owls have already benefited from our efforts. What's even more exciting is that the particular box the owls have used was only erected in February."

Loren Bracher, Imerys' Landscape Manager, was equally heartened, "Barn Owls are such beautiful birds. I am thrilled that a pair has bred this year on one of our disused waste tips. We work hard to restore these areas back to nature and it is very rewarding to have Barn Owls breeding on one of these landscaped tips. We have our fingers crossed that more nestboxes will be occupied next year. □

## Field News



*Small copper butterfly Photo: David Ramsden*

### Lennon Legacy Project Update

The Trust's 26 acres, purchased in October 2001, is in a period of dramatic transformation from intensively grazed sheep pasture to Barn Owl heaven! For the first time in well over twenty years the site has not been grazed this summer and the effect has been dramatic.

Four acres have now been ungrazed for two years and this summer there were thousands and thousands of grasshoppers, so many that the grass seemed to be singing! We've seen an increase in butterflies too. Marbled whites appeared for the first time. On a typical walk we'd see about ten of them plus Ringlets, Gatekeepers, Painted Ladies, and loads of Meadow Browns. The numbers of Swallows and House Martins (50+ daily) suggested that insect numbers were enormous and we've had Swifts for the first time too!

During a picnic by the stream we came face to face with a young Roe Deer stag and Kestrels have been seen hunting for the first time. This summer really has been amazing. Where we had the overhead cables buried all sorts of wild flowers appeared including lots of Musk Thistles (the only scented thistle) crawling with Painted Lady caterpillars. We're really glad we left the telegraph poles in place as local Buzzards have made good use of them whilst hunting Field Voles. By this time next year another 12 acres will have been ungrazed for two years.

Artificial fertilisers were applied annually by the previous owner which has left high levels of phosphorus in the soil at the top of the field which is mainly rye grass. To reduce this we took a hay cut off ten acres and will do so again next summer. This should enable native grasses and flowers to re-establish. We've had a digger in to level parts of the circular path and create space for a small agricultural building, and we've begun work on recreating one of the original hedge banks that was grubbed out in 1971. More news in the next issue! □

# Owl News

Sadly we had to say goodbye to Spirit. Spirit, a male captive bred Barn Owl originally found flying around in a park in Harmsworth (London) in 1991. He had been with the Trust for 12 years. He was very characterful and for many years entertained the staff with his strange little ways. He would sit out in the pouring rain until he was so dripping wet that he was unable to fly up to his roosting box at which point somebody had to help him. He sat out in full sun all day long, as a result of which his feathers had been bleached by the sun and were really pale. He would also try to entice unsuspecting female Barn Owls by making a shallow scrape in the gravel and placing items of food around the edges (very tempting if you happen to be a Barn Owl I'm sure). He was also not averse to dive bombing members of staff if they were in the aviary for any reason. As you will appreciate, we will miss him a lot!

We recently took in a Tawny Owl that



Nelson in August

Photo: John Howells

was found in the road. It came in about a month ago with an extremely nasty eye infection and really did not look as though it was going to survive. After being in quarantine in the bird room for a few days whilst receiving treatment it was moved to the hospital aviary where there is more space for it to move around. The injured eye was still tightly shut, it was not moving around very much and was showing no fear of humans (not a good sign).

I was away for a couple of days and upon my return thought that it was a different bird in the aviary as it had both eyes open and was making quite a fuss when approached. I'm pleased to report that it (shall we call it Nelson?) is doing really well and although it probably won't make a full recovery I'm sure that its quality of life at Waterleat will be as good as we can make it. Nelson is now bonding with two other Tawny Owls in the Pond Aviary. If anyone would like to adopt Nelson and be kept up to date with his progress I'm sure he would be delighted.

We also recently had a Hobby brought to us by our local postman who found it on the road - presumably stunned by a car. I'm sorry to say that I missed this as well. We passed it on to a local contact and it seems likely that after a little loving care and attention it might be able to be released back into the wild.

As I write we have another Tawny Owl recovering in the Hospital Aviary, two Barn Owls, and two Tawny Owls in the Bird Room all casualties brought in during the last couple of weeks, as well as a Little Owl awaiting release.

Two of our captive bred rescued Barn Owls recently helped with a project designed to give a better understanding of wild Barn Owls. There is still a lot to be learned about how they use the landscape and where they find their food. One way of doing this is to fit them with



Nelson two months later

Photo: Mark Green

radio tracking devices, which make it so much easier to follow their movements. With greater knowledge of an individual bird's movements we would more easily be able to make a practical difference to their general well-being and survival rate.

Brian Creswell from Biotrack fitted Pilgrim and Valentine with tiny radio transmitters - these were worn rather like very small rucksacks on their backs. The transmitters are probably about a centimetre long and weigh very little.

Brian set up video cameras which were running around the clock for two weeks and will continue monitoring over the next few months in order to see whether the owls are bothered by, or even aware of their transmitters as it would not be acceptable to fit these devices to wild birds if there was any chance that they would be hampered in any way.

Both Pilgrim and Valentine seemed blissfully unaware of anything unusual and Valentine actually took advantage of their time together by laying an egg.

As I finish this article yet another call is coming in needing advice about a very thin juvenile Barn Owl found on the ground.

Sandra Reardon

## COMPUTERS FOR SALE

Two ex-Barn Owl Trust computers need new homes:

**Screech** - 233 mhz Pentium ii processor  
64MB RAM 3gb hard disk  
Sound Card, Modem  
Windows ME & Office 2000 - £100

**Elf** - 233 mhz AMD processor 64MB RAM  
3.5gb hard disk (sound not working)  
Modem  
Windows ME & Office 2000 - £100

Both come with screen, keyboard, 'very nervous' mouse and leads.

Phone the office on 01364 -653026



**FOR SALE** - framed watercolour painting of a pair of Barn Owls - 25" x 25" by Martin Brook (1978). £100 - Tel 01822 - 840598

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# End of the Road...

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Our new Report on Barn Owl Road Deaths – the Trust's biggest ever research project reveals the devastating effect of major roads.

Following a request from government back in 1991 the Trust carried out the first ever Barn Owl survey along the proposed route of a 22km dual carriageway. Soon after the road was opened dead Barn Owls began to be reported and in 1996 a second survey revealed that local Barn Owls were now absent. Our Conservation Officer (who was then doing the Barn Conversion Research Project) began thinking about the impact of roads – why are Barn Owls so often killed, are roads the cause of Barn Owl decline, do they hunt the road verges, are some roads safer than others? These and many other questions resulted in the birth of the Major Road Research Project in 1996.

The project has been so enormous (and we were so busy) that it has taken seven years to write up! Nothing like this has ever been done before and it could not have been completed without the help and support of virtually all our staff and volunteers. Almost all the Barn Owl data (sightings, rings, recoveries etc.) we've been collecting since 1985 was used in the research (5,709 bits of information) and lots of people helped out especially our principal scientific advisor Prof. Graham Martin of Birmingham University. Although the news is bad, we are very pleased to be able to present a brief summary of the findings and aim to describe different aspects of the subject in future issues.

**The presence of major roads in rural England has removed Barn Owls from**

**an area of between 8,100 and 16,200 sq km and depleted the population over an area of roughly 48,600 sq km - 40% of the total area of rural England.**

Major roads cause the complete absence of breeding Barn Owls within 0.5km either side of the road, severe depletion of their population in a corridor 0.5-2.5km of the road, and some depletion within 2.5-8km of the road. It is not until 25km from a road that no effect of its presence on Barn Owl populations can be detected. Since, almost the entire area of lowland Britain lies within 25km of a major road it is highly probable that **almost the entire British Barn Owl population is to some extent suppressed by the presence of major roads.**

In the nesting season (March-August) all adult Barn Owls whose nest site is within 0.5km are almost certain to be killed and those within 1km are highly likely to be killed. Outside the nesting season, **adult Barn Owls whose main roost site is within 0.5km are almost certain to be killed, birds within 2-3km are highly likely to be killed**, but birds beyond 5km are most unlikely to be affected. During the period when young Barn Owls are dispersing from nest sites (August-November), roughly 40% of birds dispersing from within 1km of a major road will be killed, about 20% of birds dispersing from 12km will be killed, but birds dispersing from 25km are most unlikely to be affected.

Most of the Barn Owls killed on major roads are juveniles, which encounter roads during post-natal dispersal. It was previously thought that these deaths were relatively unimportant because

many juveniles die anyway from more natural causes. However our research shows that Barn Owls killed on major roads are not those that would have died anyway. By the time that dispersing juveniles have reached a major road most of those that were going to die of other causes have already died. **Juveniles that die on major roads are not life's failures; they are the ones that should have survived.** This is especially important because juvenile survival rate has a powerful influence on the size of the adult (breeding) population.

On minor roads, Barn Owls are fifty-seven times more likely to be seen alive than found dead which suggests that minor roads do not generally have any effect on Barn Owl mortality. However, **on major roads Barn Owls are three times more likely to be found dead than seen alive** which suggests that when individual Barn Owls encounter a major road they are very soon struck by traffic.

Of all owl and raptor casualties, Barn Owls are by far the most frequent victims. Whereas Kestrels are frequently seen hunting major road verges but hardly ever found dead, Barn Owls are hardly ever seen hunting the verges but are frequently found dead. It has previously been suggested that juvenile Barn Owls disperse along major roads hunting the verges. However our research has shown that Barn Owls are not able to use major road verges as dispersal corridors because they become road casualties too quickly.

By examining the movements of 62 ringed Barn Owls we have determined that **72% of Barn Owls which encounter a major road are killed during the encounter.**

**In Devon, a county with relatively few major roads, the average probability of any juvenile Barn Owl encountering a major road is < 25% and major roads kill up to 18% of all the young Barn Owls produced in an average year.** In counties with a higher concentration of major roads, such as those surrounding London, Birmingham, and Manchester, it is probable that the proportion of all juveniles that become major road casualties is much higher.

On balance, road verges are an ⇨ ⇨ important wildlife resource and current developments in management practice are aimed at increasing their suitability for wildlife. Some authors have even suggested that road verges should be managed to encourage small mammals and their predators; this would cause even more Barn Owl road mortality.



Another Major Road casualty  
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Photo: David Ramsden  
-8-



# ..Research Results

Measures to reduce the adverse impacts of major roads on Barn Owls in Britain have not been generally adopted by road designers and managers probably because the main *guidance documents* and *good practice guides* on reducing the impact of roads on wildlife have failed to recommend mitigation measures for Barn Owls.

The Trust's new report "Barn Owls and Major Roads" contains ten recommendations and **within its Biodiversity Action Plan, the Highways Agency stated its intention to implement appropriate actions from the report.** The Barn Owl Trust recommends that:

- 1) The UK government should implement changes in agricultural policy that result in a dramatic improvement in the quality and quantity of Barn Owl habitat, principally rough low-intensity grassland, away from major roads.
- 2) The UK government should implement changes in transport policy that result in reduced dependence on road transport and avoid the need for additional major roads.
- 3) In order to obstruct low-level flight across carriageways, continuous hedges and/or lines of closely spaced trees (>3 metres high) should wherever possible be created adjacent to the metalled surface along both sides of major roads. This is especially important where roads are level with, or raised above, the adjacent terrain.
- 4) Owls and Birds of Prey should not be



*Few deaths occur on minor roads with hedges*

*Photo: David Ramsden*

- encouraged to hunt along major road verges except where foraging habitat is provided behind continuous screens (rec. 3).
- 5) Areas of rough grass, which are likely to support small mammals, should only be provided near roads if they can be sited behind continuous screens (rec. 3).
  - 6) In areas where continuous screens (rec. 3) are not provided and the loss of verge grassland is acceptable, permanent ground cover such as dense bramble or gorse should be maintained across the entire width of both verges, in order to reduce the attractiveness of the verge to Barn Owls. This is especially important where roads are level with, or raised above, the adjacent terrain.
  - 7) Barn Owls should not be encouraged to nest within 1km of any major road unless the roads in question are protected by continuous screens (rec. 3) or sunken >3 metres below the level of the adjacent terrain. Ideally Barn Owls should not be encouraged to nest within 3km of a major road.
  - 8) New unscreened major roads should not be built in rural areas where major roads are currently absent and Barn Owl still resident within 25km. This includes motorways, dual carriageways, modern two/three lane 'A' roads, and local bypasses.
  - 9) Further research should be carried out in order to determine the effectiveness of continuous screens (rec. 3) and the effectiveness of permanent dense ground cover (rec. 6) in reducing Barn Owl deaths along major roads.
  - 10) Highway maintenance staff should be trained to identify bird species and required to systematically record road side casualties.



*Hedge and tree screens should be created to reduce major road mortality* Photo: David Ramsden

Copies of the full report are available from the Trust; please see the enclosed appeal leaflet "End of the Road".

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# Team Talk

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In April the new Management Team (Office Manager - Sandra Reardon, Senior Conservation Officer - David Ramsden and Fund-raising Manager - Sue Booth) took on the responsibility for the day-to-day running of the Trust. Pete Webb, who introduces himself below, became our first full-time Admin Assistant. In June having completed a twelve month contract with the Trust Assistant Conservation Officer (ACO) Sue Searle left us to become self employed. Amy Oliver moved from two days on reception to full-time conservation work in July and became an ACO rather than a Conservation

Assistant. In July part-time Admin Assistant Judy Cummings left us; Judy features in our Focus on Friends on page 15 of this issue. We had a student called Inma from Zaragoza, Spain and Flo Brooks from Queen Elizabeth's Community College in Crediton on placement. We were joined in July by John Howells who was taken on as a Survey Officer to work on the Devon Barn Owl Survey for six months. John first heard of the Trust when he was ten years old and tells you about himself below. At the end of August our part-time Handyman 'Spike' John Rycroft got a full-time job as an electrician and left us after

four years. He and wife Maddie have also been brilliant volunteers for the Trust and will be helping us at the Dorset nestbox workshop in November. Ex-volunteer Deborah Lang visited us in August; she now works for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) in Norfolk and we were also visited again by Peter Bevan from the BTO. We have just heard that Conservation Officer Mark Green who has been with the Trust for four years has been offered a post with the National Trust starting in mid October. □

## Introducing Pete

I started work here on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003 as the first full-time admin assistant. Most of my working background is in service industries firstly as a self-employed shopkeeper and later a cleaning contractor. I have worked with computers for over 20 years and for much of the last 5 years I've worked in the tourism industry providing information. Having been made redundant from Ashburton Information Centre where I was the manager for over 4 years I was working at Totnes Tourist Information Centre for several weeks on a part time basis and looking for a full-time post. As I enjoy working with computers so much I was looking mainly for admin work. I've always been interested in the environment and wildlife so when this job came up I applied successfully for the position. I enjoy learning about and occasionally

working with Barn Owls; one highlight of my time here has been to spend a day in North Devon with David and a chap from the BTO ringing owlets. I also enjoy providing enquirers with help and information and I particularly like speaking to someone who is ecstatic that they have owls in their buildings, often after a long wait when they have put in a nestbox, sometimes many years previously.

On a personal note I moved to Devon over 30 years ago to attend Exeter Art College, have been married for 33 years with 4 children and 2 grandchildren. For most of that time I have lived and continue to live in Ashburton. In my spare time I walk, run and cycle and also enjoy writing, mainly about local history, which is another interest.

Finally, I find the working environment at



Photo: Amy Oliver

Waterleat a haven of peace and tranquillity in a frenetic world. Not only is it a lovely environment to work in but I have very friendly colleagues.

**Peter Webb**  
Administration Assistant

## ...and John

I have been passionate about wildlife conservation all my life, and wanted to work in the South West – so when I got the chance to volunteer with the Barn Owl Trust, and then make it a full time position it was just fantastic!

This is my first 'real' job after Exeter University, where I graduated from with a BSc in Biological Sciences and an MSc in Biological Research Methods. After leaving university I tried without success to get a job in conservation – always coming up against the catch 22 - you have the qualifications but need more experience! So I became self-employed as an artist/naturalist/photographer/gardener – picking up an RHS general certificate in horticulture on the way!

I have been involved with various conservation initiatives, one of which (to my new colleagues' horror!) is the AES (Amateur Entomological Society) Bug Club which aims to introduce insects to people of all ages, particularly kids before they develop any phobias!

I enjoy many hobbies, including wildlife/landscape photography, art, crafts, music, playing classical guitar, collecting and restoring oil lamps and interesting musical and scientific instruments, to name but a few!

I had known about the Trust since I was 11 when I won a competition run by SWEB – the Young Environmentalist of the Year, part of the prize was a day at the Trust! And when I met up with Sue Searle again (I had known her at university) – she persuaded me to come and volunteer, that was in November 2002, when Sue left in June 2003 I was offered the position of Survey Officer which I accepted with much pleasure. I have really enjoyed my time so far at BOT – it has given me the great opportunity to work in a team to help conserve wildlife, but also the chance to get out and meet people during the DBOS survey work – it's excellent to meet some of the people who are so enthusiastic about supporting Barn Owls, plus I have had the brilliant job of feeding



John and Dusty

Photo: Sue Searle

the owls, which are all great characters. Back at the age of 11 I never dreamt that I would be lucky enough to work for the Trust, and get so involved with all those cute feathery owls, both wild and captive (well, they are, even the one that does a splat at me every time I feed her!).

**John Howells**  
Survey Officer

# Misconceptions and Musings

## Popular Misconceptions

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

### No. 8

#### 'Barn Owls can see in the dark' – **WRONG!**

Because owls fly about at night we assume they can see in the dark but they can't. In order to understand how they cope we need to ask ourselves "what is darkness".

Vision in total darkness is a physical impossibility but fortunately total natural darkness is rarely found above ground. Owls are able to see at night because it's not really as dark as we may think. Humans tend to concentrate all their activity into daylight hours and most of us wouldn't attempt to do anything in the dark without the aid of artificial light. Go into the countryside at night and switch off your torch. Once your eyes have adjusted to near-darkness you may be surprised by just how much you can see. Even on a moonless overcast night you'll have at least some vision.

Owls' eyes certainly are adapted to coping with very low light levels but their night vision isn't much better than ours. Ability to see in the dark varies between owls just as it varies between people. In fact, there is so much individual variation that some people can see in the dark better than some owls!

Owls are particularly good at seeing small moving objects at very low light levels but when it comes to catching food their hearing is normally more important than eyesight; so much so that a silent mouse may go unnoticed. Owls are not particularly good at noticing things which don't move; hence the stories of owls landing on motionless people. So how do they manage to avoid flying into things at night if their night vision is not that great?

Owl habitats are spatially quite complex: the dark interior of an old barn with all its roof beams, trees with all their twigs. On a moonless night beneath a dense tree canopy, how on earth does an owl move about without flying into all those branches? Answer; memory! The evidence suggests that nocturnal owls have a mental 3D map of their entire area and that nocturnal activity is permitted more by familiarity than by night vision. We may compare this to the way in which blind people move about at home and find their local shops. This then is one of the main reasons why Tawny Owls are so faithful to their territory and Barn Owls so sedentary in their home range. It's also the reason why rehabilitated adult owls should always be released very close to where they were found. □

## Friends Survey Results

Firstly I would like to thank over two hundred of you for sending back your completed questionnaires; this was a response rate of 18.3%. We've been analysing the results and sending out the information requested.

The survey told us many things including how you found out about us. We plan to use this information to help raise the profile of the Trust and hopefully recruit more Friends and supporters.

Most of you read about us in magazine articles or met us at events. Just 11% heard about us from other organisations. Over 80% of respondents are over 51, and 51% are 60+. The 18-30 age group only accounts for 1% of the total as does the under 18's. 43% of respondents have been Friends for over 5 years; only 8% have been Friends for less than one year. 62% have either children or grandchildren.

Only half of respondents share their copy of Feedback, so if we can encourage more of you to do this we can immediately reach significantly more people. 84% of participants read all of Feedback and almost all are happy with the balance of contents.

Over 50% of respondents never use the internet although 25% use it daily, but 93% have never seen our website. We also discovered that a lot of you listen to BBC Radio 4 and 2 and the most popular papers read are local and then Sunday.

We've found the comments very interesting. Thank you for all your encouragement. We will consider all your ideas very carefully and be responding to all the questions individually. Several of you suggested we held an open day and now we own the field this might be possible but there are issues such as health and safety, public liability, access and parking to be solved first. Meanwhile those of you who want to visit the Trust might like to consider joining us for our next volunteer task in the Field on December 6th 2003. Contact the office for more details.

Finally the winner of the lunch at the Trust is Leonard Oates! We're looking forward to meeting you. Thanks again for your help.

**Susan Booth**  
*Fundraising Manager*

## Noticeboard

**Join us for a buffet supper** at the Barn Owl Pub Exeter on Friday 5th December 2003 when we hold the Grand Draw. There are lots of prizes to be won, an opportunity to meet Trust staff, volunteers and Pollyanna Pickering the well known wildlife artist and to buy your Xmas pud to save the postage. Tickets for the buffet are available from the Trust at £5.00 per person. Tel: 01364-653026.

### **Bored with all those out of date magazines** in doctors, dentist or hospital waiting rooms?

Well cheer someone up the next time you visit them by leaving behind a copy of Feedback magazine! By doing this not only will you relieve someone else's boredom and take their mind off their nerves(!) you will also help to raise awareness for the Trust. Let's spread the word about Barn Owls - together!

**Happy Birthday Nancy Budd**, thank you for the donations received from your friends in lieu of birthday gifts.

**Congratulations to Lot Sutcliffe** on winning the Royal Agricultural Society "Regional Woodlands and Plantations Competition 2003 (Devon, Cornwall, Somerset and Dorset)". This prestigious award was in part for creating wildlife habitat. In addition to creating a huge community woodland Lot manages one field for Barn Owls by mowing alternate strips every year. □

## In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies from the estates of the late  
Rupert Watson,  
Anne Kathleen Clegg,  
and Barbara Knight

and donations  
in memory of  
John Rhodes, Mr Lang,  
Herbert Dowsett  
and Paul Meen

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

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# Other News

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## Lost Gardens Barn Owls



Photo: Supplied by Lorna from Heligan Gardens

The Lost Gardens of Heligan have very generously given their support to The Barn Owl Trust by joining our Business Supporters Scheme. Below they describe the goings on of their own resident Barn Owls.

'For the second year running, this year we have been watching a pair of Barn Owls nest, breed, and rear three chicks on the outer edge of the estate of The Lost Gardens of Heligan. We have been able to

witness their activities from Horsemoor Hide. There a screen connected to a small camera installed in the owls' nest box transmits live images for us to see. We have had the privilege of observing the chicks develop into beautiful young birds that are due to fledge any day. The behaviour we have witnessed over the past four months has been fascinating to watch and even comical at times. We have had an insight into their lives as they grow into adult birds, catching a few minutes here and there of them roosting (often on one leg), preening, stretching and flapping their wings, and even whiling away the hours mesmerised by the antics of horseflies in their box! By the end of August this year all three chicks had flown the nest. We hope that their success continues.

The picture shows the three owlets and smiling staff from the Gardens on the day that David from the Trust went to ring them. □

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## Owl Be Back!!

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Like any good summer holiday you always have some tales to tell people when you get back. Well now the summer is drawing to a close I thought it would be good to tell you about some of the places the BOT visited this year.

We went to Exmoor Zoo. We set up right next to the Meercats' enclosure and watched them watching us all day! Sue Love our new volunteer brought her partner Derek with her and they were absolute gems. We discussed activities that we could do on days like this and she came up with a Lucky Dip idea!



Volunteer Sue Love at Exmoor Zoo

Photo: Derek

Steve from Exmoor Zoo held face painting sessions in the gazebo and very kindly donated the takings to us.

We did the round of county shows including Devon, Cornwall and Dorset. The introduction of the Lucky Dip at the Dorset show was very popular with both adults and children joining in and we were joined by the Dorset Owl and Hawk Group which was a great success. The conservation team had a very busy time taking notes of sightings of Barn Owls and giving out valuable one to one advice.

An invitation from Woodlands Leisure Park to have a day out was jumped at, and Lesley and myself spent a day there at the end of August. We ran a Lucky Dip (Geran the winner of the cuddly owl is pictured right) and we thoroughly enjoyed Geoff's falconry displays. The day was fantastic and we're hoping to spend more time there next year.

Last but by no means least John from the conservation team spent a day at the Lost Gardens of Heligan in the first week of September. He had a really good day, spoke to lots of people and enjoyed looking around

## Business Benefits!

Corporate social responsibility and cause related marketing are just two of the terms that describe what can be viewed as a minefield to business owners and marketing managers alike. However it has been proved that businesses benefit from linking and working with charities.

To quote some statistics: '89% of the British public have purchased a product or service associated with a cause or charity they care about in the past year'. *Business in the community / BMRB 2002* and '4 in 5 British employees say a company's demonstration of commitment to the communities in which it operates has an impact on pride in the company they work for'. *MORI 2000*

If your business is looking for ways in which to reach new markets and have fun in the process then we have the answer - become a Barn Owl Trust Business Supporter. This is a chance to come and join us, we can offer publicity opportunities, skills sharing, marketing advice, website links and much more.

Please phone Susan Booth on 01364 653026 for more details or via email [suebooth@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:suebooth@barnowltrust.org.uk)

For as little as £25 per month you will be helping to make a difference. □



Geran, the Lucky Dip winner Photo: Lesley Ford

the Horsemoor Hide.

I really enjoyed being out of the office and that's not just because the weather was lovely, it's because we met and spoke to sooooo many people! I'm looking forward to getting out more next year so keep your eyes open because we may be in an area near you! Thank you to everyone who made it possible.

**Sue Booth**  
Fundraising Manager

# 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 from George and Dot Bramall in Cheshire about the work of the Broxton Barn Owl Group.*

It all began on one evening as Dot walked across the old airfield on Guernsey, Channel Islands. A pair of owls, hunting along the hedgerow turned, one flew towards her, saw her and veered away. She stopped in her tracks. It was her first encounter with owls and she was 'hooked'.

It was not long after that, through Ornithological Group of La Societe Geurnesiase, a volunteer was required by Colin Shawyer to provide information on Barn Owls on the island for the 1984 Hawk & Owl Trust National Survey. Of course Dot got the job and from that moment on, everywhere she went the question, "Have you seen a Barn Owl?" was the conversation piece. The result of course was that an island wide network was established, resulting in 15 pairs being confirmed by the time we left the island in late 1991.

"I wonder how many pairs of Barn Owls there are in our district of West Cheshire compared to the same area on Guernsey," said George one evening looking across the Cheshire plain from the hills by Broxton. "Why don't we find out?" said Dot and so the challenge began. The Breeding Bird Atlas for Cheshire recorded only 18 pairs in the whole county and in an area the size of Guernsey, below us on the plain; all we could find was one established pair. One pair compared with fifteen. Colin had recorded 35 pairs in the whole county in 1985, a fall of 85% since the last recorded survey in 1932. The need to find out the reason and more important to reverse the trend was indeed a challenge.

During the breeding season at the crag of Beeston Castle, a group of enthusiastic conservationists kept a 24-hour watch on



a pair of peregrines until the chicks fledged and flew in May. What better recruiting ground for beginning a Barn Owl Group. Some of the watchers were RSPB members and so the news spread and it was not long before we had a team interested in taking up the challenge. Broxton Barn Owl Group was established in the summer of 1984 and our first task was to take part in the three year BTO-Hawk & Owl National Survey.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust took an interest in our activities and so did Cheshire County Council and the City Council. The County Council funded us for the purchase of a stuffed and mounted Barn Owl and George began a continuous programme of talks to schools, clubs and social institutions each one providing more and more information on the whereabouts of any of Barn Owls in West Cheshire. All sightings were recorded on O.S. maps and a pattern began to emerge to enable work to begin on establishing the placing of boxes.

Both local authorities funded us to buy plywood for the manufacture of boxes and with the help of BT providing old telegraph poles, work commenced on establishing Barn Owl corridors in selected areas where sightings were reported on a regular basis. Visits were made to all the farms in the areas of sightings and farmers provided with literature on suitable grassland habitats for short tail voles. This was no mean task in a county renowned for its countryside tidiness and its manicured silaged fields for maximum milk production – but the farmers did cooperate and began to be as enthusiastic as ourselves to see 'the farmers' friend' back again on their land. Corners of fields and riverside edges were left rough and provided sites for both tree and pole boxes.

Results began to show. By 1997 we had our first recorded chicks ringed and each year as box numbers increase from 8 to 120 and more natural tree sites were discovered, so our annual score began to grow until this year we have 28 breeding sites; 14 in pole boxes, 1 in a barn box, 5 tree box sites and 8 natural tree sites. Our breeding success this year is 110 Barn Owl chicks and average of 3.9 chick/sites compared with 3.5 last year. In addition, and as a bonus we have 4 breeding kestrels in our boxes and they have produced 15 chicks. Last year we even had a muscovy duck, which also took a liking to an owl box as a home.

So progress has been made and enthusiasm continues to grow. Thanks to the Lottery Fund, we now have a trailer for carrying poles and boxes, a power auger to ease the work of digging holes for poles and a digital camera to record the work we undertake and the resulting broods produced. We now have two ringers in the group and undertake ringing for the other groups which have followed our example and carry out similar work throughout the whole of Cheshire. The work of the Cheshire Group can be accessed on the internet on [www.cheshirebarnowls.com.uk](http://www.cheshirebarnowls.com.uk) with links from this site to all the individual groups and many of their members for anyone interested in finding out more on Barn Owls in Cheshire.

**George & Dot Bramall**  
*Broxton Barn Owl Group*



*Photos: provided by George Bramall*



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# Your News

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Dear BOT

We have a property in France, which has a resident Barn Owl. Someone has advised that we erect a box to encourage the owls to nest in the barn instead of in the bathroom. After being in the UK for five months we went back to France to find the newly laid floor tiles covered beneath the beam where 'la Dame Blanche' had excreted and regurgitated. The pellets were no trouble, the white of the excreta eventually washed off but the black parts were completely immovable. Fortunately we had some spares so we replaced 6 tiles. We also blocked up the access hole making the house inaccessible. I hasten to add the attached barn is huge and well endowed with perching places. There is also another barn and a pigsty on our ground. It has been such a joy to see her sailing majestically in and out. She is almost pure white and huge. I do hope we manage to maintain her home to her satisfaction. Please send some advice.

**Rosemary Danniell**  
*Poussinac France*

*Nestbox details and other BO information were dispatched to Rosemary by return, because "her owl" already had access to other buildings it is likely that it will stay around and they will continue to enjoy magical sightings. Wherever possible alternative sites should be provided and used by Barn Owls before excluding them from regularly used sites. ED.*

Dear BOT

On behalf of Tatworth WI I should like to reiterate our thanks for such an interesting and informative talk with magnificent slides. It gives food for thought, in many things we take for granted, the beauty of own countryside, the wildlife and wildflowers etc which surround us. We should be aware of things we can do and should do to conserve all these things. With today's pace of life it is all too easy to ignore things, leaving it to other people which is not a good idea. We should make our feelings and beliefs felt to save many of these things for future generations so they too will be able to enjoy and appreciate them. I believe all our countryside and wildlife is there for all to see, enjoy and be proud of. May all your team at the Barn Owl Trust continue your wonderful work; we wish you all success and we shall certainly do our best to encourage conservation work wherever possible.

**Miss C M Russell**  
*Somerset*

Dear BOT

I write to thank you for the kind and ready donation of Barn Owl pellets you sent at the beginning of term. There were a few

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strange looks when I popped them into the staff common room fridge for storage. I tried the activity with three groups of children and they all thought it was brilliant. One group saying, "It was the best science lesson ever". This was very pleasing indeed. A host of topics were discussed including food webs, conservation, animal digestion and anatomy. However it was the "hands on" practical aspect of the activity that most thrilled the children, they were discovering things for themselves, just like real scientists. I am sure I will repeat the activity with different groups next year. Thank you again for your help.

**Robert Cranston**  
*Melrose*

Dear BOT

I was unfortunately unable to do the Sponsored Walk this year due to being at the hospital for a family emergency. I have spoken to my sponsors and explained the situation and they have all paid their money as they knew I would not have missed the walk unless there were extreme circumstances. I enclose my cheque towards the conservation for Barn owls. I sincerely hope there will be another chance for me to do it next year.

**Mrs G Offen**  
*Devon*

*Thank you very much to you and all your sponsors. We hope the emergency was sorted satisfactorily. ED.*

Dear BOT

I have raised some money for your Trust from a competition. I couldn't do it without my friends Ella and Daisy. We raised £6, I hope it helps the Barn Owls.

**Abbey Wilson**  
*Devon*

*Abbey is seven and her mum said she held a "guess the name of the Teddy" competition at school break. Well done Abbey, Ella and Daisy. ED*

Dear BOT

Ann and I enjoyed the Walk yesterday. We both thought it was very well organised and the tea at the end was a really good idea (delighted to be able to have soya milk). Thanks again – we will spread the word to get more friends and colleagues next year.

**Lesley Mainwaring**  
*Devon*

Dear Megan and Bungle

Congratulations on completing your sponsored walk and well done to everyone for doing so well and raising so much money. Sorry it's a bit far to come and cheer you on. Thank Sandra for her nice letters and pictures of you both. Best wishes

**Louise Anquetil**  
*Fife*

**And to bring a smile to your face:**

Driving down a country lane I noticed a farmer standing in the middle of a meadow. When I stopped and asked him what he was doing he said he "was trying to win a Nobel prize". He had heard that it was awarded to anyone who was out-standing in their field.

**Rob Hamar**  
*Devon*

Individuals and companies are being urged to save office materials that normally end up in the bin in order to help raise money for the Trust. Toner and printer cartridges and old mobile phones can be recycled and earn funds to support our work.

Throwing away an old mobile phone or printer cartridge is not very environmentally

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## Cash for Trash

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friendly. Some mobile phone batteries contain cadmium and other dangerous and toxic substances. When dumped in landfill sites the phone casing can corrode and cadmium could leak into the soil.

Very few printer cartridges are recycled. Many are buried in landfill instead of being recycled, it can take more than 1.5 pints of oil to make a toner cartridge! In the last 10 years it has been estimated that millions of these cartridges have been dumped. Phones are refurbished and sold to developing countries by the company that operates this scheme. Any that are unsuitable are disposed of safely, their components reused or precious metals extracted.

Readers are asked to collect unwanted mobile phones, phone batteries, chargers, plus used printer, inkjet and toner cartridges from friends, relatives and neighbours as well as from their workplace. We can provide Freepost envelopes for you to post them directly to the company or you can send them to us at Waterleat.

If you are interested in setting up a collection point in your area we can supply posters and a press release to help you get started. This is a very "green way" for you to support the Trust.

For further information contact Pete Webb or Sue Booth at The Barn Owl Trust 01364 653026.

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# Focus on Friends

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Judy Cummings became a Friend of the Trust in May 1993. She was an only child and her father's job as a consultant meant that they moved frequently, living in Scotland, Lancashire, Sussex, Devon and Gloucestershire. She spent as much time as possible in the countryside, picnicking, birdwatching and blackberrying. As a teenager she became a voluntary warden on Rye harbour nature reserve. On leaving school her love of the natural world led her to study biology and zoology at Kings College London where she got a BSc Hons in Zoology. She then became a research assistant at St Andrews University in Scotland looking at protozoa (single celled creatures). Judy fell in love with Scotland and settled there for a while. She got married and divorced, trained as a secretary and ran a wholefood shop where she developed her interest in nutrition and organics and the links to conservation.

After 5 years at St Andrews she bought a 28' yacht and learnt how to sail and spent the next 3 years in the early 1980's sailing around the Scottish islands enjoying the wildlife. Next she moved to Dorset where she lived on a boat making plans to sail around the world. These had to be shelved when her father became ill. Between 1990-93 she trained as a physiotherapist in Bristol and then moved to Devon and spent 2 years working full-time at Torbay Hospital. She then moved to part-time work to enable her to care for her Mother. In

1996 she became involved in cardiac rehabilitation physiotherapy, an exercise and educational programme helping patients who had suffered heart attacks and surgery to develop confidence in daily life. In February that year she contacted the Trust requesting nestbox information and in November she attended a nestbox workshop. She became a volunteer in early 1997 helping out in the office and organising the Trust's unruly and ever-growing index card system. In December '97 she was employed two days a week as an admin assistant, Coozie, her black lab, always came along to work with her.

With a short spell as joint office manager Judy took on responsibility for all our purchasing, reproduction and stock control and could always be relied on to find the best quote or know where to put your hands on things. Over the years Judy's other commitments changed the hours she was able to work latterly reducing to just 8 hours a week.

Last year Judy was one of the Annapurna team, undertaking a gruelling trek in the Himalayas and at the same time raising significant funds for the Trust. Her dedication to her cardiac rehab work and a need to have some time for herself, meant that Judy left the Trust in July this year. In her time as an employee she frequently volunteered, helping at the Sponsored Walk and other events, collecting



Photo: Sonia Seldon

packages, the occasional live bird emergency and ringing trip. She's been a real asset to the Trust and we feel fortunate to have had her as part of the team.

We wish her well and hope that she will now find time for some of her hobbies: gardening, reading, music and sewing to name but a few. We also wish her and Lesley (from reception) all the very best for their forthcoming trek in Turkey which they say will be much easier than Annapurna. Thank you for all your support Judy. □

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## Inma from Spain

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Hello I'm Inma! I'm from Zaragoza (Spain). I came to England for 2 months thanks to a scholarship. I thought it would be a good idea to contact "The Barn Owl Trust" people and now I'm working as a volunteer.

In Spain I have finished my degree in Environmental Risk Management. In my last year I choose to study the situation of the Barn Owl in my city. I carried out a survey of species in the area during one year (2001-02). I compiled information about the places where Barn Owls live and roost, I analysed their pellets, their main problems, mortality causes statistics and their protection in law.

I'm a really lucky girl because I arrived just in time for the "Devon Barn Owl Survey"; I'm helping David to do site visits in the county. I'm learning a lot and I hadn't handled a Barn Owl before, it is an amazing feeling. The rest of the time I do different things: analyse pellets, feed captive owls, help in the office ... and other works which are necessary to do. The Barn Owl Trust people are really polite with me; they are always asking me if I'm ok, like mum, it's really pleasant! I couldn't imagine all the work that this charity is doing until now. I think that it is very interesting, very hard sometimes and

necessary for the wildlife conservation. I think that those who take care of the Barn Owls are conscious about the big life and environmental changes around us. In my short stay in England, I have had time to realise that the Barn Owl is an English symbol, which is worthwhile to conserve.

It's a pity to leave this but I miss the Spanish food and warm too. I'm really pleasant for the B.O.T. kindness; it has been a good experience. I will miss you. **Inma**

After four years as a conservation officer at the Trust, I am hanging up my torch and hardhat and moving on to pastures new.

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## Barn Voyage...

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I have friends in Milton Keynes who think my job over the last four years has involved stuffing Barn Owls into jars with vinegar. If only conservation was that simple. It takes dedication, intensive training, tact and diplomacy, patience and copious quantities of tea and biscuits.

My duties have been wide and varied. I have worked on all of our Barn Owl Schemes, carried out site assessment surveys, managed the Imerys Barn Owl Initiative, erected almost 200 nestboxes, helped with research, reviewed and commented on local plans and planning

applications, dealt with wild bird casualties, represented the Trust at shows and on radio and TV... the list goes on. I have developed many skills that I didn't know I had.

I have also taken on the role of Health and Safety Officer, responsible for implementing and reviewing the Trust's health and safety policy and guidelines. I am pleased to report there have been no fatalities during my time in the post.

The work of the Trust is a long term commitment. Such is the nature of conservation that instant results are a rarity. I'm fortunate that I have been at the Trust long enough to see some successes. It is very rewarding to inspect a nestbox you erected a few years ago and find a young brood of Barn Owls sitting in it.

I would like to thank all those involved with the Trust - the staff, volunteers, supporters, the farmers and landowners we work with, and, of course, the birds themselves - for the many happy memories I will be taking with me.

**Mark Green**

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# Thanks and Things

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Thank you to everybody who has supported the Trust since the last issue of Feedback. Good luck to those of you that have bought draw tickets. Last year's first prize winner was John Seear from Surrey. He won a day out with the Trust and came with his daughter Claire in June (see page 4 for his impressions of the day).

We always like to give a special thank you to people who have provided items on our Wants list. Regular readers will know that this is where we ask you to look for unused or unwanted items that we can put to good use. If you feel you can help or you have any queries please phone the office.

Thank you to Peter Shone who donated 3 desks and a carrier bag of used stamps, Julian and Rachel Edwards for their kind donations of two pairs of binoculars, mobile phone, towels and ring, binders. David Glover for books of postage stamps. Iris Galley, Nell Braithwaite and Mrs J Cargill for used stamps, Chris Moncrieff for a box of stationery including padded envelopes and stamps. Mr and Mrs North gave a digital

video camera, 3 chairs, 2 files and 3 bowls, Howard Jordan a limited edition Snowy Owl print. Thank you Pat and Jenny Ford for all your help and the cakes, Jasmin Ramsden for the fridge for the bird room and Graham James for the camera. Lyn Walker from Acorns Florist, Tavistock kindly put together a stunning Barn Owl display in her shop window during August and John Parkes of the Outpost Ashburton has a permanent BOT notice board in his window. Thanks to Mr Comer and his neighbour for a microwave oven, Dot and George Bramall for first day covers and Winslade Wildlife Sanctuary for passing on equipment when they closed down.

## Can You Help?

*We are looking for:*  
3 & 4 drawer filing cabinets  
An endoscope  
Office chairs (with five wheels)  
A power point projector  
An office/computer desk

*We can always use:*  
Good quality dark blue washing-up bowls  
(for owl baths)

Office sundries – ink cartridges etc. *Please talk to Pete to find out just what we need*  
A4 lever arch files  
New postage stamps  
and volunteer time

## For recycling/fundraising

Used stamps  
Used toner and ink cartridges and  
Old mobile phones and accessories (see  
*cash for trash page 15*)

## For the field

We still need some field management machinery, if anyone has a working :

Small 4WD tractor and a flail mower at a reasonable price we'd like to hear from you.

We are also looking for:  
Chainsaw - in working order  
Wood chipper...

We are also trying to get hold of a copy of the out-of-print Hamlyn Butterflies of the British Isles - SBN 0 600 57513 6 □

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## Tail Piece



What an amazing summer we've had. It's been a real pleasure to walk through the Trust's field regularly and watch the gradual transformation of the short green grass into a waving sea of golden brown heads. Although we haven't had Barn Owls hunting over the field yet we've had adult swallows parking their young on our fence and then diving in to feed them accompanied by loads of chattering. The butterflies have been amazing and the ravens have been back since July giving us incredible flying displays.

As the grass got longer it became harder to walk across the field but the mown path we plan to create should make it easier. In years to come we hope to be able to invite Friends to see what was made possible by Vivien Lennon's Legacy. It was really surprising when plants like white campion that hadn't been seen for years started appearing where the power cables had been buried. The seeds must have been sitting in the soil just waiting for the opportunity to burst into life!

Of course that's what the whole project is about, giving wildlife the opportunity to thrive, and we can all do it to some extent. A small pond in your garden will attract wildlife. Compost heaps not only help to recycle biodegradable rubbish they can also provide somewhere for hedgehogs and toads to hide away. Even in a town or city you can help wildlife, your flower bed or window box can provide pollen for butterflies and bees and

a bird table or peanut holder can help your local birds get through periods of bad weather.

What else can we easily do to help the environment? These days most of us shop, at least in part, at supermarkets. Did you know that in Ireland a levy of 9p was introduced on plastic bags in March 2002? This has apparently removed over one billion bags from circulation and raised money for environmental schemes. We can all help to reduce waste and conserve natural resources by just remembering to take our own bags when we shop.

Think about the best option for the natural world when you go shopping. We all consider the price of our purchases but what about the way that it's made? Does it deplete an endangered habitat or exploit the workers that produce it? If you are interested in finding out more about green shopping I recommend subscribing to "Ethical Consumer" magazine like the Trust does. It's a sort of green version of "Which" magazine that comes out every two months and will give you loads of information on buying everything from canned food to washing machines.

Of course recycling our waste will help; if your local authority doesn't operate a recycling scheme maybe you and your neighbours could lobby them to start one. Look at what you put in your bin or send to the dump and see if you can reduce it by 25% then tell us what you did to achieve it so we can tell other people. Don't forget to purchase recycled

products too otherwise there isn't a market to encourage more companies to continue and expand their range of products. Amongst other things you can buy from recycled materials are paper, pens, and wellies.

Plastic bags, recycling, shopping and garden ponds may not seem particularly relevant to Barn Owl conservation but the birds are just as dependant on the natural world as we are. In order to conserve the Earth and its incredible diversity for future generations we all need to develop a greater awareness of how we affect the environment and must do what we can to minimise our personal impact. Consumer power has great strength as demonstrated by the dolphin friendly tuna campaign back in the 1990's. We are incredibly lucky that we live at a time and in a place where we have the chance to make choices, let's make sure we make the right ones.

Thank you for choosing to support the Barn Owl Trust. It's because of this support we have been able to undertake projects like the county Barn Owl surveys, the Barn Conversion and the Major Road Research Projects which we know can help Barn Owls. Please continue to support us and think about what else you can do to help our planet.

*Together we can make a world of difference.*

**Frances Ramsden**