

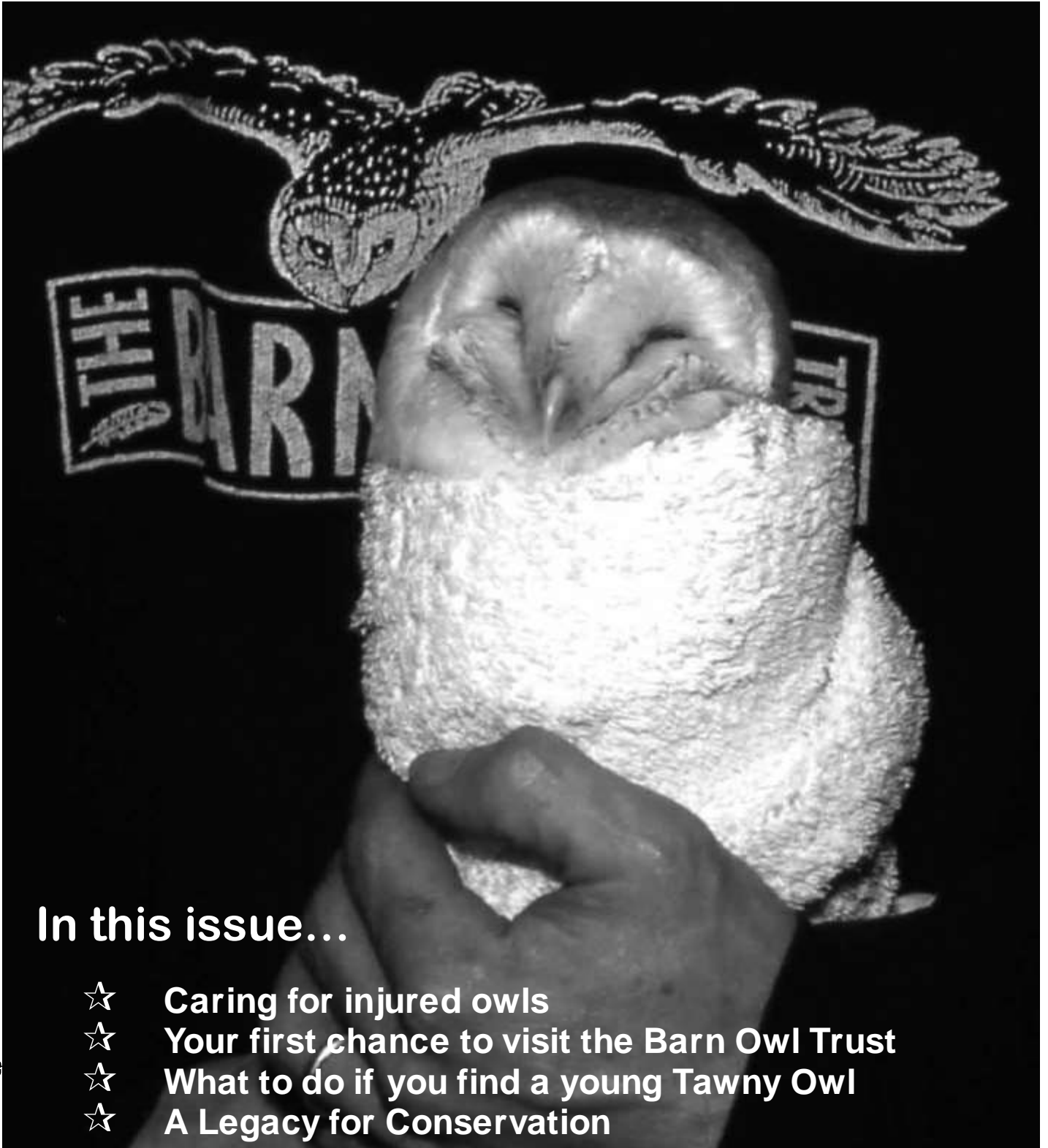


Issue Number 33 - Spring 2005



FEEDBACK

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



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- ★ Your first chance to visit the Barn Owl Trust
- ★ What to do if you find a young Tawny Owl
- ★ A Legacy for Conservation

Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to Feedback - the months have flown by since our last issue when we were gearing up for the Christmas period. November and December proved to be extremely hectic - we are very grateful to all our volunteers who helped us through this fairly stressful time.

The conservation team increased by two Officers in November with the arrival of Paul French - Survey Officer and Simon Balmford - Assistant Conservation Officer. They introduce themselves on page 5. Stacey Sewell now has the new title of Projects Officer and is working with us full time. She is helping with some of the fundraising tasks that are necessary for a registered charity and working on a project to turn our thousands of slides into a digital picture library.

We are currently advertising for a new Assistant Conservation Officer to keep the team up to strength as John Howells has moved on after almost two years with us -

he says goodbye on page 11. Paul French completes his six-month contract in April and returns to the Shetland Islands.

The conservation staff have been very busy with the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey over the past few months and have completed the data entry and are now working on the report. This will be the first comprehensive survey since the 1994 Barn Owl Survey of Cornwall - a joint project with the Cornwall Bird Watching and Preservation Society.

The report will be published to coincide with the Royal Cornwall Show in June and we will bring you the results in the next issue of Feedback. If you can't wait until then keep an eye on our website for more information. We have some survey stories for you on page 4.

With completion of the survey fieldwork ACO Simon Balmford has been focused on reducing our nestbox waiting list and going out erecting boxes and meeting

landowners. ACO Amy Oliver has been planning wildlife provision in the Trust's barn and meeting representatives from what appears to be a vast number of agencies to discuss the practicality of creating a wildlife pond in the Trust's field.

At this time of year we start to receive calls about young Tawny Owls found on the ground and we now have a new leaflet for just this eventuality (see page 10).

An exciting first for the Trust this year is our Supporters' Day where we invite YOU to come and see the Lennon Legacy Project in Action - more of this on page 3.

We have had some unusual avian visitors to the Trust over the winter and these can be seen in the pictures on pages 6 & 7.

Around and About goes to Guernsey to find out about the conservation work of La Société Guernesiaise Ornithological Section on page 13.

We've tried to pack this issue of Feedback with lots of varied and interesting news and hope that you will enjoy reading it. Thank you all for your continued interest and support.

Eds

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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.

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*Send your contributions - news, letters, pictures and information to:
Feedback, Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU
email feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk
website www.barnowltrust.org.uk*

Join us for a **Bracken Bashing Day**

Saturday 2nd July
10.00am - 4.00pm

This is an opportunity see the field before our Supporters' Day and help us to control the bracken.

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

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

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



Barn Owl Trust News



The Lennon Legacy Project field in 2001

Photo: David Ramsden

we hope this will continue to increase.

On Supporters' Day we are planning a short presentation where we will explain the objectives of the LLP and you will see the field as it was when we bought it and then see the changes month by month. We will also explain our future plans.

There will be an opportunity to see where we all work and to take a guided walk around the field so you can admire the wildlife at first hand. Please note: the walk will be approximately one hour and the site is an upland field and the terrain is uneven. We can't promise that you will see Barn Owls but you will get to see conservation in action and an insight into the work of the BOT as well as wonderful views from the top of the hill. You can bring along a packed lunch and we will provide refreshments and possibly a cream tea!

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

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

(*Advance bookings only*)

Your First Chance to Visit the Barn Owl Trust

On Saturday 16th July the Barn Owl Trust will make history by holding a 'Supporters' Day'. This is an opportunity to visit the Lennon Legacy Project (LLP) and see for yourselves the changes that our conservation work have made to the local landscape. The Trust purchased the 25 acre field with a legacy from Vivien Lennon in 2001, hence the name of the project - maps show that the field was originally 8 small fields each with its own name. Since 2001 we have entered the land

into the DEFRA Dartmoor Environmentally Sensitive Area grant scheme. An original hedge bank has been recreated; we've spent over £8,000 on fencing; nestboxes have been erected; we have had a wooden barn built, a hedge bank and a stone wall repaired and we have completely changed the management of the grassland. Last year we saw a huge rise in the number and variety of species of insects, plants and birds in the field and

Nestboxes for Sale

As a direct result of demand the BOT have now started selling Barn Owl nestboxes. These are suitable for use in buildings only. If you want an external box, eg for a tree, we can put you in touch with suppliers.

The indoor boxes are £35.00 plus £11.00 carriage. They are made of plywood and are the size of a tea-chest so please take this into account before you order one. Also read leaflets Nos 1 and 45 available free of charge from our website: www.barnowltrust.org.uk or from the office - phone 01364 653026.



Photo: Frances Ramsden

BOT Owlets

Designed and made exclusively for the Barn Owl Trust

Each owlet comes with its own personal nestbox.

Soft and cuddly

They make great gifts!

£5.00 plus £1.00 p&p

Tales from Cornwall

Cornwall Barn Owl Survey 2004 – the story so far....

These last few months have been really busy. I have spent most of my time since mid-November out and about collecting data for the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey (CBOS), but now with a bit of last minute help from the whole Conservation team, the fieldwork has come to an end. As you read this, we hope to have the report finished and well on the way to being published, but as I write in early February, we have only just started the data entry, let alone any analysis and report writing. So the next few weeks promise to be a busy time...

It's a bit too early to start speculating on the outcome of the survey, but at least one thing has changed significantly since the last survey in 1994, and that is observer coverage. Since the 1994 survey, we have collected ten years worth of site data all of which has been re-checked for CBOS 2004. Only ninety-two sites were held on the Trust's records up to 1994, whereas for the 2004 survey, we had nearly six hundred sites to visit. As such, we expect CBOS 2004 to be a more accurate representation of the Barn Owl in Cornwall, even though it will not be directly comparable to the 1994 survey.

On a lighter note, undertaking CBOS 2004 was an extremely enjoyable project. Even though you're out looking for evidence of Barn Owls, it's often the people and places that make the difference between a good day and a bad day. Early on during my fieldwork I found myself in a small village following up a report of nesting Barn Owls in a church tower. Upon investigations in the local post office, it turned out that the postmistress was also the churchwarden. She showed me in to the church and then presented me with several sets of keys, before heading back to the post office. After the novelty of being in charge of a church wore off, I climbed through a tiny doorway and went up the spiral staircase inside the tower. On reaching the top, it was apparent there were no owls nesting on this level, so I climbed a ladder, followed by another ladder, and found myself in the belfry - face to face with a set of rather large bells. After a look around, and no signs of Barn Owls, I looked at my watch and saw that it was fifteen seconds to four o'clock. Wondering whether these bells rang on the hour, I hastily retreated back down the ladders, and had just reached the bottom when the air exploded with the sound of several chiming bells! Lesson

one learned: always check the time before ascending a bell tower!

A second time that stands out in my mind was meeting Arthur and Sue in North Cornwall. John Howells and I were guests of theirs while we completed some survey work in that area. Arthur is locally famous for the unusual dishes he sometimes prepares out of the finest local ingredients. Much of the meat in Arthur's freezer was wandering around the Cornish countryside, before falling victim to traffic on the roads. It was then, with some trepidation that John and I sat down for a meal of Badger stew!

was a Barn Owl in the nestbox, nine times out of ten as soon as the ladder was erected it would fly out. One site I visited was very unusual in that two adult Barn Owls were roosting in the same nestbox, and they didn't fly out. After carefully extracting them both, I ringed them before 'posting' them back into the box where they stayed quite happily. Another experience I might never get to have again!

I shall miss the character and characters of Cornwall now that fieldwork has finished, but I feel I've got to know this part of the country just that little bit better, and my life is all the richer for it.



Photo: Nick Sampford - nick@sampford.freereserve.co.uk

Thank you to everyone who made CBOS 2004 possible - from all of our volunteers who put in lots of effort visiting selected map squares on our behalf, to members of an interested public for supplying us with much of our data. Thanks must also go to the farmers and landowners who were in the main so friendly and helpful to us, and for allowing us access to their land and buildings.

Paul French
Survey Officer

Cornish owl sites have in turn been pretty, unusual and often very dodgy, but mine shafts do seem to be a particular Cornish speciality. One report we received was of Barn Owls nesting 20ft down a shaft, with a pair of Kestrels nesting in the associated engine house, which they shared with a pair of Ravens that apparently chased off any avian or 4-footed intruders from the combined nest sites - obviously the Trust's message of help save the Barn Owl has reached a whole new audience!

As to the people - I think with very few exceptions everyone was really helpful and encouraging, if with slightly odd perceptions of Barn Owls - such as "There was a middle owl looking after an old owl and a young owl"! But it was really nice to find people enjoying 'their' owls.

John Howells
Assistant Conservation Officer

Perhaps not surprisingly, it was lovely. Arthur then showed us a video of when he was interviewed for 'Inside Out', a local TV programme. Arthur showed the interviewer the skin of a Horseshoe Bat he had found on the road. "Did you eat it?", "Of course," replied Arthur. "It was too good an opportunity to miss!" "What did it taste like?" A slight pause was followed by, "A bit like mouse really."

These unusual events were the icing on a very varied cake. Some days would be quiet and I wouldn't see anything interesting at all, whereas others would be extremely eventful. Being a qualified bird ringer also added another dimension to the fieldwork. At most sites, if there

New Staff News

In the last issue of Feedback we explained that thanks to a legacy from the Estate of Florence Parsons we were planning to expand the conservation team. Here the two new team members introduce themselves:



Paul French

Photo: John Howells

Where to begin really? I'm the new Survey Officer at the Barn Owl Trust, and I'm now halfway through a six month contract. I was taken on to complete the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey. I started at the beginning of November, and after an intensive three weeks training, was thrown into the depths of darkest Cornwall. So far so good, and I'm really enjoying this, my first winter in the south west.

I was born and raised in the industrial setting of Wolverhampton, but was always into birds and conservation. I graduated from East London University with a BSc (Hons) in Wildlife Conservation in 2000, and soon got a short-term fieldwork contract with an agricultural consultancy. My next job saw me moving to the remotest inhabited island in Britain, as I became the assistant warden at Fair Isle Bird Observatory. This was a fantastic experience, involving monitoring both breeding seabirds and birds on migration through the island. I stayed here for two seasons, before leaving Shetland in the winter of 2002/03 and becoming a volunteer for the Game Conservancy Trust. I was lucky enough to be taken on as staff member for a short while, radio tracking mountain hares and red grouse, before heading back up to Shetland in Spring 2003 to take up the assistant warden contract on the RSPB reserve on Fetlar. This involved more seabird monitoring and intensive monitoring of most of Britain's Red-necked Phalaropes. Again, I had two very enjoyable seasons here, separated by a winter in the Forest of Dean and a bird ringing trip to Israel for two months.

Winters always prove the hardest time of year to fill when you are doing short-term contracts, so I was delighted to see this position offered by the Barn Owl Trust. The opportunity to work with a species I had always loved was too great to pass by. Luckily, my long journey from

Shetland to Ashburton for the interview paid off, and I was thrilled to be offered the job. I've managed to do a few extra things besides the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey since I got here, such as attending a nestbox workshop and a wildlife recorders' forum, feeding the captive owls and starting a weekly bird survey of the Lennon Legacy field. Luckily, being a ringer has also paid off as I managed to ring three Barn Owls during the course of my survey work. One of which not only made my day, but also delighted the farmer I was with at the time. Through the Kingfisher Project, run by Ambios Ltd. and funded by the European Social Fund, I have received funding for conservation training and I completed courses on 4x4 off-road driving, first aid and woodland management.

I am due to start a contract with the RSPB on Shetland again in the Spring, but at the moment I'm looking forward to my remaining few weeks and the writing of the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey report with some excitement. In summary then, this winter is one that I think I will look back on with happy memories, and who knows what will happen between this time of writing and my leaving. Of course, due to publishing deadlines, by the time you read this, I will only have a few short days left on my contract, but hopefully the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey Report will be almost completed. As I look forward from writing this at the beginning of February, there seems like an awful lot of data to be entered and analysed before that point is reached. All I can say is "watch this space!"

Paul French
Survey Officer

I have been working for the Trust since November when I was lucky enough to be offered the position of Assistant Conservation Officer.

I am originally from the Midlands and have always been interested in natural history, conservation, ecology and animal welfare. I moved down to Devon in 1995 to study ecology at Plymouth University. I graduated in 1999 and have lived in Devon ever since. My last job was in Plymouth working in retail and I was eager to become involved in conservation-based work.

Before I started work in Plymouth I was living a very rustic and low impact life near Saltash where my partner Kerry and I lived in a small dwelling, collecting our water from a spring, our electricity from a wind turbine and our wood from a local coppice, whilst running a gardening business.

Paul and I started on the same day and as soon as his training was finished he began to collect data for the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey. My role is quite diverse

so my training has been on-going but I've been working on my own some of the time since the end of November.

I have been kept busy erecting indoor nestboxes, travelling throughout Devon and Cornwall to visit a variety of people and locations. I have visited everything from large Dutch barns on busy farms, to small traditional agricultural buildings in the middle of nowhere. One that springs to mind was a small stone building about 500 yards from an old railway. After pulling up in the field before it got too boggy, I had to cross a small stream, scale a fence and then struggle through about 6 feet of bramble and finally found the shed in question, only to have to repeat the journey with 30ft ladder, nestbox and tool box.

Because the Trust wanted all the data for the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey in by the end of January we all spent the last two weeks of the month driving all over Cornwall to check recorded sites. Participating in the survey work was quite a change from all the nest-boxing that I'd been doing.

I have also made occasional visits to schools and youth groups to present the Wings of Change talk - a very daunting prospect initially. The highlight of this is Dusty the Barn Owl who comes with me on the trips.

When not at work I spend my time surfing, wakeboarding and SCUBA diving, and other things that involve being outside.

Having spent the last year working in retail it has been quite a change coming to the Trust. I have been made to feel really welcome by all the staff, and enjoy the time in the office as much as my time out and about doing practical conservation work.

Simon Balmford
Assistant Conservation Officer



Photo: John Howells

A Legacy for Conservation

Those of you who have been regular supporters of the Trust will know all about the Lennon Legacy Project and how we are transforming the field that we were able to buy because of a legacy from Vivien Lennon. Some of you will have been at our volunteer events and helped us to restore the hedgerows and control the bracken. On page 3 we offer you, our Friends and supporters, the first opportunity of visiting the field to see for yourselves the changes we've made and to share in this incredible project.

In the last issue of Feedback we told you about the two new posts (one six month and one twelve month) that we were able to create thanks to a legacy from Florence Parsons. A huge amount of survey work and practical conservation have already happened thanks to this gift and there is more to come.

Other legacies and "Gifts in Memoriam" have helped to support our conservation work and our free Information and Advice service and will also help to pay for the rebuilding of the Pond Aviary. This week we have received a significant legacy which may well be used to help us create a wildlife pond in the field.

Legacies have made such a difference to the Trust in the last few years and we thought we would enclose a copy of our legacy leaflet with this mailing in the hope that you would like to help us to continue our work in years to come. Although we originally produced this leaflet many years ago I'm sure that many of you will never have seen it as we have concentrated mainly on placing legacy leaflet dispensers in solicitors' waiting rooms.

On New Years Eve we were able to release two wild Barn Owls from the mobile aviary in the field. They had been found injured and had convalesced with us. At the moment they are still happily roosting in our pole boxes and barn and hunting across our field. We hardly dare to hope that maybe these two birds will pair up and breed in our beautiful valley. This was only possible because of Vivien Lennon's legacy to the Trust.

Future legacies will help ensure that the Trust is here to restore the balance for these and other Barn Owls for many years to come

With your help we will surely be able to make this happen. □

In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies from the estates of the late
Major Charles Oakley
Eric Richardson
John Ashby Lowne
Elizabeth Mary Wardle
and
Frederick Philip Deckets
and donations in memory of
Les Dyer
Mrs L G Bevan
and
Bert Lock
Our thanks and sincere sympathies go to their families and friends

*Together we can
make a world of
difference...*



A Long-eared Owl's Tale

In November 2004 the Trust received a call from Carolyn Hillier who had found an injured owl. Amazingly it turned out to be a Long-eared Owl - there was only one recorded sighting of the species in Devon in 2003. She brought it to the

Trust for treatment. Carolyn takes up the tale:

Guests on our farm found the owl sitting in an exposed spot above a hedgerow during the middle of the day. We returned to have a look at it and soon could see that its wing was broken. My daughter and I eventually managed to catch the owl and headed down to the owl sanctuary.

We did not at this point realise what type of owl we were carrying in our box - due to our haste and the twilight gloom we simply assumed it was a member of the local tawny owl population. However there was delight at the Trust when it turned out to be a Long-eared Owl, rare in these parts.

David invited us to help examine the owl - weighing it up side down in a plastic cone particularly fascinated my daughter! The wing was broken close to the elbow, a difficult break to mend and at this stage it was not certain whether the owl would heal

sufficiently to be released. But the treatment went well and after two months David contacted us to talk about returning the owl to the wild. We felt honoured and excited to be asked to help with this. We found a good site for the mobile aviary within a few yards of where we had first seen the owl, and a neighbour's freezer with room for a supply of owl food.

Over the next few weeks we visited the owl at dusk every day to check on its progress and to leave fresh food. Very unsettled to start with, it gradually grew calmer with each visit and eventually would quietly sit and watch us through the wire. Fifteen days after the owl's return David asked us to open the aviary, which we did at the end of a vibrant sunset. About twenty minutes later, as we watched from the field edge, the Long-eared Owl came out flying really strongly, silhouetted against a purple sky. It did not return to feed again at the aviary although we left food for another seven days.

It has been a great privilege to be involved in the rehabilitation of this beautiful bird.

Carolyn and Cedar
Dartmoor, Devon



Photo: Frances Ramsden

Bird News

We are currently planning a new aviary to replace the Pond Aviary which was built by volunteers using mostly recycled materials in the late 1980's and is just outside the office. At the moment it houses Barn Owls, Tawny Owls and our disabled Raven. Because of its situation I'm afraid that we do tend to spend odd moments when we should be working watching some of the strange carryings on amongst the feathered residents.

Just a couple of weeks ago Hazel decided that it was bath time. She really could have done with a wetsuit and snorkel as you can see from the picture. When Hazel has a bath she *really* makes a very good job of it. Having spent about ten minutes submerging herself with much flapping of wings and ruffling of feathers she finally gripped the side of the bowl with her talons and flapped her wings so hard that she was in danger of lifting it clean off the ground.

The Pond Aviary also houses the three Valentine owls (they came to us in February last year). They were captive bred and not much more than owlets when left on someone's doorstep and we agreed to re-home them at Waterleat. These three Barn Owls (a male and two females) never seem to be more than two or three inches apart and always sit in the same spot looking rather like one owl with three heads. With Spring in the air two of our Tawny Owls spend most of their time cuddled up together occasionally preening and nibbling at each other in an affectionate kind of way. The birds will be temporarily housed in our release aviaries



Bath time for Hazel - the bowl was full when she started

Photo: John Howells

whilst the demolition and building work is carried out.

Not many office workers have a view like this right outside their window.

We are hoping to be able to incorporate a web-cam in the new aviary so anyone logging on to our website will be able to see for themselves what some of our owls get up to.

Sadly just a few weeks ago Mrs Cornish - our oldest Barn Owl - died. She was a wild disabled owl and had been actively involved in breeding owlets during the early years of the Trust when breeding and release was still an option. There was a Mr Cornish as well at one time but he died many years ago and Mrs Cornish had been living with other owls since then. We think Mrs Cornish was probably coming up to twenty, she had been a road casualty and was with us for 18 years.

Over the last few months we have taken in an Eagle Owl that has now been rehomed as he would have needed an aviary all to himself, and an injured Long Eared Owl that we have been able to release after treatment for a broken wing and a few weeks convalescence. More news and pictures of this beautiful owl can be found on page 6. Added to this of course are the two Barn Owls that we released on New Year's Eve which are still very much in evidence and can sometimes be seen from the office window at dusk flying across our field.

With the huge number and variety of small birds visiting our bird tables and snowdrops, crocus and daffodils all vying for centre stage everything is looking pretty good at the moment - who could wish for a better place to spend their working hours.

Sandra Reardon
Office Manager



This Bengalese Eagle Owl was found in the wild !

Photo: John Howells

Life and Death Decisions

Caring for injured owls – a small part of our work, but how important?

In this feature article we explore the issues and explain the process, of rehabilitation:

One cold November evening in the middle of a Trustees' meeting a road casualty Tawny Owl arrived. The agenda had to wait. Desperately thin with a severe head injury, bleeding from the beak, unable to stand, we all agreed it would probably be dead by morning. Even its heavy burden of lice and mites were abandoning ship – crawling off in their hundreds to find a new host. Well, against all odds (and with lots of TLC) she survived. That was *fifteen* years ago and "Woodstock" is still with us – one of the disabled wild owls in our sanctuary. She's virtually blind, spends most of her time on the ground, is in superb condition, and seems very content. Having read that, you're probably thinking



'Woodstock' photo: John Howells

one of the following: "Oh dear, poor bird, thank goodness for the Barn Owl Trust; how wonderful they were able to save her," or, "living on the ground for 15 years, that doesn't sound very good", or "complete waste of time – should have been put down".

Complete waste of time? Are injured/sick/starving wild birds simply life's failures - destined to die? Are we interfering with natural selection if we try to rescue them, wasting resources that would be better spent on habitat conservation? Does the life of one individual really matter when so much birth and death is going on all the time? Maybe we should only maintain birds that stand a good chance of complete recovery and release into the wild (this is in fact the policy of the UK's biggest wild life rehab group, the RSPCA). Or is all life sacred? Should life be preserved wherever humanly possible? Last week a one-winged Barn Owl died in our sanctuary, *eighteen* years after we

received her from the RSPCA. Was her extra-long life a wonderful achievement or a waste of funds? Tomorrow you may come across an injured wild bird. What will you do?

Although it's not our main activity, owl rehabilitation is something we've always done. We may only receive around twenty birds a year but when you've been doing it for over twenty years that adds up to quite a lot of experience! Every bird we've released has been BTO-ringed and over the years we've accumulated quite a few ring recoveries showing that at least some rehab-released birds do survive. We've also given a lot of thought to the various ways in which birds are released and believe that this has a tremendous effect on our success rate. I felt very honoured in 2000 to be asked to give a presentation on release methods to the Annual Symposium of the British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council at London Zoo.

We now receive calls from all over the country and have developed our own database of wildlife rehabilitators whose phone numbers we give out. Each bird arriving here at the Barn Owl Trust is assessed on arrival and detailed records are kept; things like the finding circumstances are noted along with the bird's weight and initial assessment. We don't refuse to help a bird because it's the wrong species so owls of all species tend to stay and other birds are usually passed to other rehabilitators.

After the initial assessment a decision has to be made. In fact the process of rehabilitating any wild creature is often a series of life-and-death decisions. The first one is: do we send this bird to the local vet to be put down, do we pass it to someone else, do we send it 25 miles to Plymouth for initial treatment, or do we do the initial treatment ourselves? All four options are commonly used. We are very lucky that the Veterinary Hospital in Plymouth will treat birds for us free of charge – a fantastic contribution given the high cost of the operations that are frequently undertaken.

The simplest birds to treat are often fallen nestlings and after an initial check they can usually be returned to the nest, fostered into another nest, or placed in a nestbox at a suitable site and fed nightly – a method which works particularly well with young Barn Owls but not so well with other

owls. Unfortunately fallen nestlings sometimes have internal bleeding (especially if they've fallen twenty feet onto the concrete floor of a farm building) and quite often they are underweight and need feeding-up. Overall, nestling birds are generally easy to treat and a good proportion of them stand a reasonable chance of survival in the wild. However, if nestlings are kept in captivity too long and months later (when fully fledged) they are taken out and simply let go their chances of survival will be much reduced so we don't do this!

Most of the owls we get are adults received in autumn or winter. Some of these have no obvious injuries but are simply starving (emaciated). It's these birds that most readily fit into the 'life's failures' category. Starvation is by far the biggest natural cause of mortality and birds that are less well-adapted fail to find enough food and die. Those that are better adapted survive and hopefully breed the following spring and pass their superior genes to their offspring. This is natural selection – the process of evolution. By taking in starving birds, feeding them up and releasing them perhaps we're wasting time or even working *against* nature? But think of this, Barn Owls have declined largely as a result of intensive farming methods, which have reduced their food supply. Barn Owls starve (partly) because of the way humans manage the countryside: because of consumer demand for the products of intensive farming (how much of *your* diet is from wildlife-friendly farms?). If an opportunity arises to give a poor starving Barn Owl a second chance surely we should?

The practical side of dealing with starved owls is quite straightforward: warmth, fluid by tube, TLC and food are usually enough but about a third of starved birds are so emaciated that dehydration has already caused major organ failure.



A wing fracture is mended at the veterinary hospital. I. Fajardo

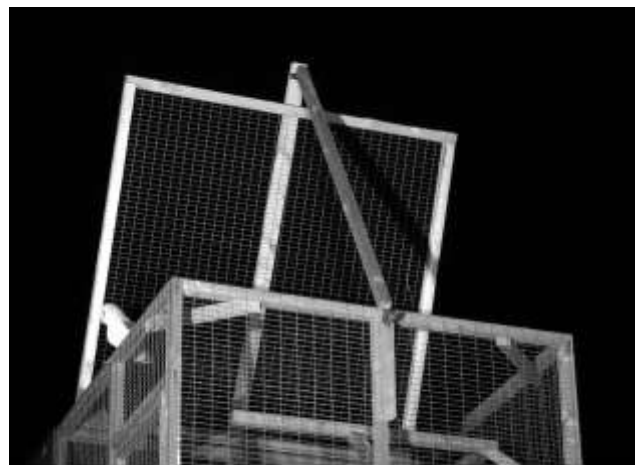
- Rehabilitation at the BOT

Most adult owls we receive have been injured in some kind of collision; mainly road casualties but flying into overhead wires is surprisingly common. Different species are prone to different injuries for example Tawny Owls' eyes are very large and prominent so a high proportion of injured tawnies have eye damage. Head injuries, spinal injuries and internal bleeding are frequent but by far the commonest are wing fractures. Owls have relatively large wings and breaks commonly occur anywhere from the shoulder to the wrist. Fractures of the humerus (upper arm) can usually be pinned at the Veterinary Hospital and radius/ulna (forearm) fractures usually need to be immobilised by strapping the wing to the body. Severely injured birds almost always have to be kept boxed for a period of 10-20 days and handled daily for tubing, feeding, wound-checking, pill-giving etc. and they don't like it at all. Shock, stress and fear seem to have more effect on them than physical pain.

Deciding whether or not to treat a seriously injured bird is often a difficult judgement and parts of the assessment are bound to be subjective; a matter of opinion. Is putting the bird through at least two weeks of stress justifiable? Is there sufficient chance that it will be releasable or at least have a decent quality of life in permanent sanctuary? What is a *decent quality of life*? The most natural thing for a bird to do is fly so is it fair to keep a bird that'll never fly again? Can a one-winged wild Barn Owl ever be content with a grounded aviary existence? Well, consider this: humans value freedom and freewill. To us, flight is an amazing thing, which we're not designed to do, and freedom of the sky something we admire or even envy. Whereas to birds, flight is just how they get about – they probably don't think of it as being special at all. If birds yearn for freedom it's probably *freedom from starvation* which occupies their minds above all else. Perhaps a captive slightly-overweight disabled bird is content, free

from the constant threat of starvation it used to face?

About half of all the seriously injured owls we receive die or are put down because their prospects are hopeless. Out of those we decide to treat, a very small proportion die during early treatment but most do well – some very well indeed (readers may remember 'Jos' a young Barn Owl with a badly broken leg (FEEDBACK 27 page 7) who was released, paired up with a wild female and bred successfully (FEEDBACK 28 page 7). However between treatment and release are two critical stages: *assessment* of the individual, and *release method selection* leading up to the release itself. Pre-release assessment involves keeping the owl in a large flight aviary and watching it carefully over a period of weeks. Some wing fracture cases make such a good recovery that their flight is perfect. Standing at the end of the aviary so the bird flies directly towards and then away from you and seeing that both wings extend fully there is no lop-sidedness and that landings are perfectly coordinated is great! Sadly this is often not the case, the owl may fly back and forth OK but closer inspection reveals a slight imbalance: the healed wing not quite extending fully or drooped after landing. This is another crossroads, another life and death decision to be faced. With a bird flying 98% OK, is it better staying captive for the rest of its life or better to give it a chance in the wild? It's easy to say everything for release must be absolutely 100% fit but not easy to apply in real situations where there are usually other factors to be taken into account and people's opinions vary.



A rehabilitated Barn Owl on the edge of the mobile aviary shortly before taking its first flight following rehabilitation.

chance of post-release survival. Also, if an owl picked up as an adult can be released in its home-range (where it's familiar with the landscape) this will also increase its chances of survival. To combine both advantages we use a mobile release aviary: when the owl is ready to go we tow the aviary close to where it was originally found and set it up. The owl is installed and fed by a local person and released two weeks later. Once the owl has stopped coming back for food we put the top down and tow it off to the next site – simple! All of the most successful releases we've had were from the mobile aviary.

Most of the Trust's time and money is spent on conserving wild Barn Owls; principally habitat creation to improve survival and nesting success. That's as it should be. The amount of owl rehabilitation work we do is relatively small but we firmly believe it's important.

Tomorrow you may come across an injured wild bird. What will you do?

No matter where you are in the UK, you can call the Barn Owl Trust for advice or perhaps the phone number of a local rehabilitator. If we can help we will.

David Ramsden
Senior Conservation Officer



The Trust's mobile aviary arrives at a release site. Photo: D. Ramsden

Using the best release method is vital. There are great advantages in releasing a bird from a top-opening aviary rather than taking it out and simply letting it go. If it's shut in a release aviary for a couple of weeks, the top is opened, and food still provided in the aviary, it will generally stand a much better

If You Find a Tawny Owlet

Long overdue, a new addition to the BOT range of information leaflets has been produced just in time for this year's breeding season. Every year we are contacted by people who have found young Tawny Owls on the ground. Leaflet No 48 - "What to do if you find a young Tawny Owl" will enable you to check the owlet over and assess whether or not it needs specialist care. If it's OK and most of them are, it needs to stay in the wild and this leaflet gives you advice about where to place it, including a temporary box you can provide, and tells you how to recheck it later. It also tells you how to get help.

Tawny Owls are woodland birds that have adapted to live outside woodland and may be found anywhere there are trees, from city parks and wooded gardens to tree plantations and farm copses. They are medium sized, predominantly brown or grey-brown birds with a familiar hooting song "hooo hu huhuhoooo" and "kewick" contact call. Tawny Owls are highly territorial, repeatedly using the same flight paths and perches from which they hunt. The diet consists mainly of mice, shrews, voles, young rabbits, beetles, insects, worms, and small birds. They are an early-nesting species laying 2-4 almost round white eggs normally in March, hatching in April and leaving the nest in May.

Young Tawnies usually leave the nest long before they are ready to fly and there is actually no point in placing such birds back in the nest. From approx. ½ to ¾ grown (around 120-220 mm tall) Tawny owlets go through a phase (sometimes called "branching") when they walk/climb/

jump/flutter around in the trees at night. The adults locate them by their contact calls; "ti-sweep" and "ti-swerp", and will feed them anywhere. It is not at all uncommon for owlets to spend time on the ground during this phase and they are surprisingly good at climbing back up again.

The advice contained in Leaflet 48 must only be followed when dealing with nestling or fledgling Tawny Owls so first check this is what you have. Small tawny nestlings (up to the size of a man's fist) are almost entirely covered in fairly short thick white down. Larger nestlings (standing up to about 150mm or 6" tall) are rather round and woolly looking with slightly wavy greyish-white and brownish-buff barring on very loose body feathering. The centre of the facial disk is unbarred and the eyelids have livid pink wax-like edges.

- It is very important to remember (or find out) **exactly** where the owlet was found
- If the owlet was picked up in woodland or near trees in March April or May it is almost certainly a young Tawny Owl
- It is perfectly natural for Tawny owlets to be out of the nest before they can fly
- Adult Tawnies will feed their young wherever they are - even on the ground
- By far the best thing is to take the owl back to where it was found (but **after** you've read the leaflet)
- Adult Tawny Owls have been known to attack people who go too near their



This cartoon was inspired by a metric error (cm instead of mm!) in the rough draft of the leaflet.

- nests or young – read the leaflet or take advice before doing this
- Its parents will not reject the owlet because humans have handled it – owls have very little sense of smell
- Hand rearing the owlet and releasing it later is NOT the best thing for it

Visit the Trust's website www.barnowltrust.org.uk to read or download the full three-sided leaflet or ask the office to send you a free copy by fax or post.

Busy Behind the Scenes

Whilst the practical conservation work is going on and the conservation team is dealing with enquiries from all over the UK, behind the scenes here at the Trust things are just as busy.

We are busily sending off applications to people we hope will fund the work. One project we are seeking support for at the moment is the nestbox project – we hope to erect a further one hundred nestboxes at locations around Devon and Cornwall this year to provide suitable sites for wild Barn Owls before next year's breeding season.

We have received quite a lot of publicity since the last issue of Feedback went out. *The Guardian's* weekend magazine mentioned that our owl adoptions made great ethical Christmas presents, which led to us receiving hundreds of calls over the festive period – the run up to Christmas was a frenzy of activity for the admin staff and volunteers at the Trust due mainly to orders for Christmas cards, puddings, our new fluffy owlets, other

Christmas presents both many and varied and of course Barn Owl adoptions.

Most people plan ahead but there are always those who wait until the last minute and then there is a mad rush to beat the Christmas post deadline. Everywhere we looked were piles of strange shaped parcels waiting to be posted off to arrive at just the right time for Christmas.

Our website (www.barnowltrust.org.uk) is updated as and when we have news to report. It features lots of colour photos and our full range of information leaflets and research project reports are also available to download. You can view colour pictures of, and print out order forms for, all our sales goods – hopefully you will be able to order and pay for sales goods on-line within a couple of months. We are always trying to improve our website, so any suggestions you may have about things you'd like to see included, or suggestions about how we could make the site easier to navigate would be appreciated. Please

email stacey@barnowltrust.org.uk or phone the office.

This year we are hoping to hold a special event on the evening of the Grand Draw, – more details of that in the next Feedback. We have some great prizes – thank you to everyone who has kindly donated them. Please buy the tickets enclosed with this issue to support our work. We would be delighted to supply more if you can sell them.

Like last year we are planning to be out and about, meeting people at shows and events. If you live in the South West, or are visiting, check out our events list – we'd love to meet you. Wherever possible we'll be painting faces, taking the lucky dip, and our sales goods, including our new cuddly owlets... See the picture on page 3.

Stacey Sewell Projects Officer
Lesley Ford Receptionist

Misconceptions and Musings

Popular Misconceptions

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

No. 11

'Barn Owl sites are legally protected' – **WRONG!**

There's a wonderful rumour going round that you can't do anything to a building or tree containing wild Barn Owls because all the sites they use have legal protection – in the same way that all sites used by bats are protected. Unfortunately it is just a rumour. Whilst sites used by bats are protected at all times (even when the bats aren't there), Barn Owl sites have no legal protection whatsoever. This is a real weakness in wildlife legislation.

However, Barn Owls are one of the few species that are protected against disturbance whilst nesting. Exactly what constitutes disturbance is not defined

but the protection area is "whilst at or near the nest". Nesting is legally defined as: from the beginning of nest building until the last dependant young stops returning to the nest. Barn Owls don't actually build a nest so protection for them doesn't really start until the first egg is laid.

The protection of occupied nest sites during the nesting period relies on people's awareness of the birds' presence, the law, and the measures which should be taken. The level of Barn Owl awareness amongst planners and developers varies tremendously – from one extreme to the other!

The publication (by English Nature) of our booklet '*Barn Owls on Site – a guide for developers and planners*' has made a difference, but dealing with planning-related enquiries is a never-ending job. ☐

Goodbye John...

The last (almost!) two years have been absolutely excellent and it is with some regrets that I am moving on. The people I've met and worked with have been excellent (if occasionally somewhat odd, but as the saying goes, takes one to know one!). After knowing the Trust many years ago I started volunteering and then became a member of staff - Survey Officer - for the 2003 Devon Barn Owl Survey. In addition to survey work, I helped to write up the DBOS report and deal with all the data. I finished the various district Barn Owl schemes that were still ongoing at the same time as finishing DBOS!

After my stretch as Survey Officer I was invited to stay on as Conservation Assistant and that allowed me to be involved with the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey - a real hardship having to drive around Cornwall looking in old barns!! Now that we've finished the actual surveying, I've been able to help our new Survey Officer - Paul - to prepare all the data for the report. It's a bit like being the relative of a new baby - all the fun and none of the sleepless nights!

Answering enquiries by phone and email has made me stretch my brain to answer questions that are so varied it's almost unbelievable!! The various computer-related enquiries from around the office have given me the opportunity to learn more than I thought possible about the idiosyncrasies of the digital world, and to learn about the database in greater detail than should be allowed to mere mortals without the aid of tranquillisers!

I've also had the ace good fortune to get my hands on so many different owls – from doing the health checks at the Trust and in the various foster homes, to live bird emergencies over the summer such as rescuing 'starving' Barn Owl chicks and catching an Eagle Owl (but I couldn't sneak her home...!).

I am going to move on to working in other areas of conservation and to developing my artwork and photography – so if anyone needs their pet or relative painting then please do get in touch!

I will miss (and at the same time, enjoy the freedom from!) the total commitment to the Trust and still intend to keep in touch if my help is needed! I'm also really going to miss everyone at the Trust, not forgetting Duncle, Krista, Misty and Co – the 'office' cats - and of course all the owls – especially my favourites – Dusty, Hazel and all the Tawnies!!

John Howells
Conservation Assistant

The World in Our Hands



Climate change is now an accepted fact. But did you know that you can easily do things to reduce your personal impact on the environment. Here are just a few suggestions that may not seem like much but can make an enormous difference if we all do our bit.

- ☐ Only boil as much water as you need. Jug kettles need less water as they have smaller elements
- ☐ Don't leave the TV and video on standby mode.
- ☐ Buy FSC (Forestry Standards Council) timber. This timber comes from sustainable sources.
- ☐ Always put plug in the sink or basin when running hot water otherwise you are washing energy down the drain

- ☐ Replace your light bulbs with energy saving equivalents; they use around a quarter of the electricity and last up to twelve times longer
- ☐ Keep furniture away from radiators; the foam in an upholstered chair is a very effective heat insulator!
- ☐ Buy pump-action sprays rather than aerosols
- ☐ Avoid food and drink from distant countries - think of the energy used to transport it here
- ☐ Sort your rubbish and recycle wherever possible
- ☐ Spend wisely – wherever possible buy planet friendly products
- ☐ Is there an alternative to using your car? Can you share a lift?
- ☐ Insulate your home, you will save money as well as energy
- ☐ Check if the energy companies you use invest in renewable energy sources
- ☐ Volunteer to help with conservation and environmental projects - enjoy helping your planet!

Other BOT Bits

Malodorous Mail

Sometimes people find bird pellets and like to send them into us for identification. It's really nice to be able to tell people that they have definitely had a Barn Owl around. Other pellets often turn out to be from different bird species such as Kestrel or Tawny Owl.

Last June a lady phoned in to report a Barn Owl that was frequenting her garden nightly. She hadn't seen it but every morning she would find a pellet on her patio. I took down the details, and suggested she might like to send one of the pellets to us here at HQ, so we could confirm the location as a roost site.

About a week later I received the small package in the post, which I eagerly unwrapped. It became quickly apparent that it wasn't a Barn Owl pellet or any other kind of pellet. I had my suspicions as to what it was, and asked David for a second opinion. He agreed. It was a hairball produced by a rather fluffy feline!

I phoned the lady back, fearing she may be embarrassed by my news. During our conversation she said she'd been wondering why the Barn Owl only ever seemed to visit in May!

A couple of months later I received a package with a letter from a man suspecting he'd found a Barn Owl pellet whilst walking in fields. I opened it with usual gusto, then quickly realised I was holding some sort of mammal poo. The smell was the first giveaway. These days I'm a bit more cautious when I receive a parcel in the post. Unwrapping poo and hairballs can be a bit of a shock, but it certainly raises a few guffaws and chuckles in the office.

If you ever find a bird pellet and would like us to identify it for you, then feel free to send it in....but please smell it first!

Amy Oliver
Assistant Conservation Officer



Recycling

Our cartridge recycling scheme has continued to bring in money since last August's insert in Bird Watching magazine. We are still getting in a trickle of requests for information from that source. Please remember we cannot recycle Epson cartridges at the moment but are still trying to find someone who will take them. We are still collecting the larger laser jet cartridges and old mobile phones.

Since the end of April 2004 we have received an amazing total of £510.94 from recycling.

We are still recycling used stamps but are finding the larger quantities of ordinary British are worth so little we would prefer only British Commemorative [not including Christmas] and foreign at the moment. If you still are collecting large quantities of ordinary and Christmas stamps can you please send them directly to the Robert Murray Stamp Shop, 5 & 6 Inverleith Gardens, Edinburgh EH3 5PU, Scotland clearly marked for "The Barn Owl Trust" please. If they are being sent direct, please can you cut them out with a small border of paper backing. Please contact me if you need more information.

Pete Webb
Admin Officer



When out doing general fieldwork we are quite often

Fieldwork News

approached by people who want to know about making provision for Barn Owls and are quite satisfied with one of our free information sheets about indoor nestboxes. The fun starts when you get two neighbours who both want the owls to live in their nestbox rather than their neighbour's. There's nothing quite like a bit of local rivalry to motivate people! Things got even more serious when we discovered two neighbours who had both erected entire buildings specifically to attract the owls! One was also used to house a tractor and the other had poultry in but neither would have been built if it wasn't for the possibility of attracting Barn Owls!

In 2004 we had two reports of Buzzards attacking Barn Owls – avian predators hardly ever take owls so this was really unusual. In both cases it was reported that the owls had only just taken off when they were caught in mid-air. Unfortunately we don't know what happened to the owls in question. A few years ago we did get a reliable eye-witness account of a Barn Owl which came out in daylight being caught and killed by a Buzzard and another first-hand account of a Buzzard catching a Barn Owl in mid-air and then letting it go. Apparently the Barn Owl flew off unharmed. Have you heard any similar reports?

Standing Orders

Last year, when we had a full-time fundraiser in post, we considered the possibility of signing up for what is known as 'face-to-face' fundraising. Quite a few charities acquire new supporters in this way by using salesmen and women who sign people up in public places (busy streets, fetes, shows, etc) to become members of a particular charity; they usually ask you to set up a standing order for £3, £4 or £5 a month.

I really dislike being stopped in the street by someone trying to sell me something and in the end we decided that we might make as many enemies as we did friends and added to this the agency running the scheme would receive all the money donated for the first year or so. Although it works for some charities we decided that it was not for us.

However... it did set me thinking that our supporters, although not great in number, are extremely supportive and very loyal so.... Maybe we could persuade some of you to sign up in the same way – a

monthly standing order payment for £3 or £4 instead of an annual payment of £15, £20 or £30. The theory is that you won't notice a few pounds going out every month and although it will be slightly more labour intensive at our end (I'm sure Lesley won't mind – she's a wizz with our Friends' scheme), overall the benefits to the Trust will be enormous.

Some of you already make your donations by monthly standing order and some of our adopters also make their donations in this way - so thank you. As for the rest of you, all you need to do now is ask us to send you a standing order form and return it to us with the freepost label we'll send you and we will do the rest (well Lesley will). Thank you everybody and I'll let you know what everyone thought of my idea in the next issue.

Sandra Reardon
Office Manager

Around and About

Vic Froome first contacted the Trust in the summer of 2001. He lives in Guernsey with his wife Jill and has erected numerous Barn Owl nestboxes in the last five years. Vic produces the "Guernsey Barn Owl Newsletter".

"Do you know, I think we are winning. I am sure that Owls and Kestrels are increasing. Guernsey's Barn Owls have suffered the same fate as on the mainland UK. There used to be 400 plus small mixed farms, now we have only 15 dairy farms, most only growing grass for silage. We have too many people and houses and too much money here - we are too clean and tidy. But in the Owl's favour on Guernsey, our numerous hedgerows are protected; this is where the voles and mice can survive.

Natural disasters have affected the Owls' housing; the hurricane, the big frost. Do you remember the two drought years? They all took their toll on our tree population; even worse was Dutch Elm disease - 80% of Guernsey's tree cover. Watching one 'owl tree' succumb to the disease and seeing the owls move two trees down to a tree that also went within two or three years was the trigger for me to do something. Things all came together at the right time, and we started making and

erecting nestboxes five years ago. We now have three hundred Owl nestboxes and thirty Kestrel boxes in position; by the way the Kestrels prefer the owl boxes. Our first boxes were taken up within six months and the fastest to move in was within four days. We have also sent boxes to all Channel Islands in our Bailiwick and also Normandy and Brittany with great success.

At least twenty-five pairs of Barn Owls bred successfully last year and eight pairs of Kestrels. We also had reports of Owls regularly occupying twenty more boxes last year. They have used at least eighty-five of the boxes over the five years and thirty-five have been used by Kestrels - eighty-five young Barn Owls and thirty-five Kestrels have fledged that we know of. In addition, we also still have our "Natural" sites.

We do not have time to survey 200+ sites so I rely on newsletter return slips and phone calls, however 30% of box owners do not reply. Those that do say how enjoyable it is to have new tenants, and very few if any lost theirs last year. Half a dozen people reported being lucky enough to spend time



*Photo: Vic Froome
He writes... This photograph was taken at the bottom of my garden in 2004. Jamie Hooper is our BTO representative and bird ringer*

watching and photographing their birds and - the good bit - telling others what can be achieved.

I am still making boxes for people who say they have seen someone else's Owls and asking if we think they might be lucky enough to have the privilege of the birds coming to them.

I believe one major difference with our scheme in Guernsey is that we have encouraged anybody and everybody: farmers, schools, businesses, government and private house owners, to have boxes. We have achieved a minor miracle of getting really entrenched people to talk to each other and realise that not only is it possible to change the world, but it is enjoyable.

We have over two-hundred box owners, television, radio, newspapers all communicating - can't be all bad can it?"

Vic Froome
*La Société Guernesiaise
Ornithological Section
Guernsey*



Photo courtesy of David le Conte, President, La Société Guernesiaise (www.société.org.gg)

He writes... 'We have had kestrels breeding in the owl boxes for three years (barn owls breeding the other years - last year owls in one box and kestrels in another). The step design of this new owl box meant that the Kestrels were virtually full size before being able to get out - we could see their heads bobbing up inside the box for a couple of weeks before they actually emerged.'

Your News

Dear BOT

Your fluffy owlet toys were a huge success in our family Christmas. I bought one each for our three grandchildren, age range almost 3-4½ years and staged a treasure hunt in the garden in the afternoon. A spare full sized Barn Owl box was put in the Magnolia tree in the garden with the owlets inside. The children had to realise what the box in the tree was for and then find and fetch a ladder and climb it to get their present - the hatch of the box was only 5-6' up, and I went up and down behind each in turn. One of them still has to have his 'owl bird' in his cot every night to sleep with.

Barrie Watson
Sussex

Dear BOT

Thank you very much for taking the trouble to write to me about Dusty. I am well chuffed that she is doing so well, I have her picture on my desk and tell everyone it's my Blue Peter badge. You may not know the story but I lost my wife five years ago and she had brought Dusty up from 5 days old. The two of them went everywhere together and the only people capable of looking after her were the Trust. You kindly agreed to look after her and by golly haven't you done a great job for which I thank you. When I'm rich and famous I will send you bundles of money, till then I hope all goes well with the Trust. Thanks again,

Steve Pope
Oxfordshire

Dusty goes out on educational visits to schools and young people's organisations with Simon, one of our assistant conservation officers, and has often appeared for press and television, once appearing on Blue Peter - hence her Blue Peter badge. (Ed)

Dear BOT

Please accept cheque enclosed for £92. As promised I had a BBQ with family and friends and held a raffle and games, which raised this amount. It was a great success, which I hope to repeat again next year. I hope that this helps the Barn Owl Trust and all the good work you do; it is much appreciated.

Carol Hedger
Surrey

Dear BOT

Thank you very much for the owl pellets; it was wonderful to have a box of pellets in my pigeon-hole at work! The Spring Open Day was a great success and we were rushed off our feet with eager children and parents totally absorbed and fascinated in the

dissection! They all went home with an arrangement of skulls and bones fixed to pieces of card. We had made an eye-catching display about the Barn Owl; its diet, its roosting sites, nestbox design etc. The students made woven willow bird feeders to sell and sold bird seed and spindle tree saplings too. They raised £40.75 and all wanted it to go towards one of your Barn Owl conservation projects so the cheque is enclosed. Thank you for all your help and advice.

Gill Oldaker
Shropshire

Hi BOT

I received the Owl Box last week. It has been fixed to the barn as your instruction stated. Let's hope it's taken on by the owls.

The previous owners of the farm have told us the owls usually nest in the hole of an old tree in the grounds. At the very least they have an alternative site, or it may be used by others needing a nesting site. We see an owl every day hunting on the fields surrounding us; it's a fantastic sight. We never see a pair, and we don't know if we are watching the male or female.

We consider ourselves fortunate to have these wonderful birds on our land and their wellbeing is very important to us and their field will be left untouched for them to hunt. We would be grateful for any further information you think we should have. Thank you.

Gillian Dulieu
Essex

We sent Gillian information leaflets on habitat for Barn Owls. (Ed)

Dear BOT

Please find enclosed a cheque for £30 to cover the cost of my owl adoption for my mum for another year. I don't think I've ever bought anyone a present that they've kept enjoying like this year after year....

Fiona Jackson
Southampton

Dear all at the BOT

We hope you are all well. It was my birthday on Monday and as a surprise Mark had arranged to take me away for a few days. To my surprise we went to Paris, which was wonderful. It is a beautiful city with lots of interesting sights. In the evening we climbed the Eiffel Tower where we had wonderful views of the city lights.

At the top of the tower Mark went down on one knee and asked me to marry him. Of course I said yes. We are planning on getting married next year but have not



set a date yet, I am still getting over the shock. Just wanted to share our happy news with you all.

Lots of love, **Sonia & Mark** - xxxxx

Sonia and Mark both worked and met at the BOT and we were delighted to receive their news. We wish them a wonderful future together. (Ed)

Dear BOT

Glad to hear that you can use one of the photographs. (See *Around and About page 13*). The Kestrels seem to like the owl boxes more than their own specially-designed kestrel box, which they have only used for shelter and feeding (often using the top as a table). We have had kestrels breeding in the owl boxes for three years (barn owls breeding the other years - last year owls in one box and kestrels in another). The step design of this new owl box meant that they were virtually full size before being able to get out. The day I took the photo was the only day when all five were together. With the other box they were able to emerge much earlier, huddling together on the ledge. I have thought of enlarging the ledge to give them and the owls more room, and safety.

David Le Conte
Guernsey

Focus on Friends

Valerie Lurcock first contacted the Trust in 1994 when she unsuccessfully applied for an admin post. In January 1995 she became a Friend of the Trust and offered to help out with typing. In July '96 we advertised again and this time Valerie was successful and during her time here she turned her hand to just about anything, including dealing with telephone enquiries, banking, friends scheme... until she retired just before Christmas 2000. Since her retirement from the Trust Valerie has returned from time to time to help with various tasks including stuffing things in envelopes and painting and decorating and in 2004 we persuaded her to come back on a regular basis to act as minutes secretary to the trustees.

Valerie's best moment whilst working at the Trust was a day out visiting nest sites to ring wild Barn Owls. Her worst moment was leaving work one evening to drive home across the moors when she got her car stuck in the ditch up the hill. She suddenly reappeared back in the office and after a quick look at the situation the local garage had to be called to haul her car out. 'I'm always having to pull people out of that ditch,' said the garage owner stoically.

Valerie has been married to husband Rick for forty-four years and they have lived in Devon for the past twenty years. She has always enjoyed the countryside and has belonged to one or two local conservation groups, helping with chopping down the dreaded rhododendrons and writing "Disgusted of Bovey Tracey"-type letters to the Council, trying to protect some of this lovely county from developers.

Valerie and Rick have three grown-up children and four grandchildren. Their eldest son is the marine officer for the South Georgia and South Shetland Islands Government, living with his wife, penguins, seals and albatrosses at King Edward Point. When Valerie and Rick visited them

they were able to walk among the sleeping elephant seals then sit on the beach and wait for inquisitive gentoo penguins to waddle up. The king penguins looked most forlorn as they stood hunched in the cold wind for days on end, hardly moving as they waited for their old feathers to moult.

Like many people, Valerie loves dogs and for many years has helped raise funds for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. When she retired Valerie was able to devote more time to her passion of puppy walking. Bessie is her eighth pup and is four months old. "They are all so different and all great fun". One of her pups, Cannon was rejected for not concentrating, "Like me" says Valerie, "So we kept him and he's a wonderful uncle to all subsequent puppies". The next five are all qualified and working, Emily spends her weekdays learning to be a Guide Dog at Leamington and weekends hurtling up and down mountains with her foster parents who belong to the Welsh mountain rescue team.

From the age of seven Valerie lived on a houseboat on the Medway with her parents and spent all her spare time sailing. Probably one of the most scary times of her life happened when she was seventeen. She helped crew an ex-fishing boat heading for Calais, but unfortunately the boat was so rotten that it began to sink three-quarters of the way across in a howling gale. Eventually the Calais pilot boat came out to rescue them - and the crew were returned home on another boat. The ex-fishing boat eventually ended up in the Mediterranean as a scuba diving school.




Bedtime stories take on a whole new meaning!

Valerie's life is nothing if not eventful! Last year she visited New Zealand with her 90 year old Mum and went on a coach tour of South Island. She said, "It is a wonderful country with miles of productive farmland, mountains, fiords and glaciers. We had to go to a wildlife park to see kiwis, but were able to watch wild dolphins swimming around in the sea when we went on a boat trip. If you want a hassle-free journey, persuade your 90 year old mother to get into a wheelchair and you will find you are whisked to the front of all the airport queues".

Next year Rick wants to travel the length of Route 66, which runs from Chicago to Santa Monica and is nearly 2,500 miles long so that should be interesting. □

Amateur Entomologists' Society



Founded in 1935 the Society promotes the study of entomology, especially amongst amateurs and the younger generation. It produces six bi-monthly highly acclaimed **Bulletins** and for the younger enthusiast, the **Bug Club Magazine**.

The Society is also a post-war leader in the field of insect conservation and publishes *Invertebrate Conservation News* three times a year.

Along with these publications the Society also publishes a wide range of books, leaflets and pamphlets.

**For more information please contact the Registrar at
P.O. Box 8774 - London SW7 5ZG
www.amentsoc.org - email: aes@amentsoc.org**



Photos supplied by Valerie

Valerie and Owen

Thanks and Things

A very big thank-you to all of you who have supported the Trust since the last issue of Feedback. This is the place where we say a special thank-you to those of you that responded to our last "wants list" and tell you the things that would be useful – just in case you happen to have them lying around or know someone who does.

Paul Rendall and Eileen Hooper-Bargery donated digital cameras. An anonymous donor sent us 5 calculators. We had office chairs from Jill Willcocks. Roy Mills of Mercia Drain gave us timber, nails and bird seed. Ashburton Post Office provided goodies for our Christmas party. Mr W R Milligan gave us a scanner and John and Shelagh Prickett donated bird seed. We received a mini-camera from Dorothy Manuell and a filing cabinet from Sue Couch. Thanks also to Gail Cobbold for organising a donation of birdseed from Haith's Wild Bird Food and thank you to Haith's too. Pat and Jenny Ford not only help out in the office all year but also last Christmas bought a guillotine, calculator, and drills for the Trust as well as goodies for the staff. Thank you Pat and Jenny!

Can you help?

We could use:

Comfortable good quality office swivel chairs *to save our backs and bottoms!*
New unused stamps
Used and unused padded envelopes
A garden fork
4" galvanised nails
Mixed drill bits
Electric over-sink water heater
Modern petrol chainsaw
Modern petrol brush cutter *in good working order*
Clean and dry storage nearby to the office for stationery and packaging
New hard-wearing carpeting for the post-room and small office
2x1 tanalised timber
9mm and 18mm softwood ply
Wild bird food (or donations towards buying it) - this is increasingly expensive and the birds just keep coming back for more!
Modern 4WD Tractor (at least 60hp)
Waste grain to encourage small mammals and wild birds in the field and a moth trap.
and last but not least - we are in need of a few volunteers ...

- A handy-person on call to do all those little jobs to keep the office, aviaries and grounds in good order (well you don't know if you don't ask!).
- a qualified electrician who can carry out annual appliance safety testing in the office
- a helper for just a few days a year manning stalls at various local events (any necessary training can be arranged!)
- somebody willing to spend about an hour a week carrying out a bird survey in the LLP field starting in April
- a couple of people to clean out our aviaries on a regular basis (every couple of weeks or once a month if we can find enough people. They would need to have some spare time in the daytime (Monday to Friday).
- Someone to carry out a small mammal trapping study in the field during August
We also want your used ink cartridges, old mobile phones and stamps for recycling – see page 12. □

Tail Piece



Ragged Robin: FJR

In the winter of 2001 we created a small pond and it has been a constant source of delight watching the wildlife move in over the last three years. Last summer I spent hours watching dragonflies, photographing them as they

hatched on the long grass around the pond margins. This Spring it's been even more exciting - every time I went out to look there seemed to be more and more frogs and they were singing! Using a torch to look into the water at night I got a better look at the frogs plus newts, waterboatmen and loads of spawn lurking under the surface. A few days ago the valley's lone heron discovered the pond for the first time and has been breakfasting on my frogs! I feel really sorry for the frogs but it's wonderful to see the heron at such close quarters.

At the moment the wild daffodil bulbs and primroses are flowering on the hedge bank we've created. Amazingly there have been green leaves on some of the hazel all winter despite it being cold

enough for the pond to freeze over. This year's buds are just waiting for the sunshine to warm them up so they can burst into action and turn the whole hedgerow green again.

The bird tables have been hectic with flocks of greenfinches and chaffinches. There don't seem to have been as many blue tits and great tits as in previous years, but we have had long tailed tits coming to the bird cake for the first time as well as the usual blackbirds and robins that love the porridge oats. Black sunflower seeds are a big hit with our birds; they almost ignore the peanuts we put out these days.

Encouraging all this wildlife has taken relatively little effort and given us such great pleasure. On days when there's far too much to do and we feel overwhelmed, just stopping for a while and staring at the bird table or doing a spot of pond watching can shift our perspective and help us to get everything back into proportion.

We twenty-first century humans have lives that are overfilled with stimulation. Most of us are conditioned by advertising to be constantly wanting and striving and comparing ourselves with others, which makes us dissatisfied. But if we step away from our material concerns and look at the magic of the natural world for a while, it

makes it much easier to count our blessings. No matter how poor we feel, we are infinitely richer than our ancestors were or most of the world's population is now.

Conservation of the natural world is important not only because our very lives depend on the health of our planet but also because, excuse the cliché, nature is a soothing balm for our souls.

Feel sorry for the people who hear a dawn chorus and think it's a racket, smell flowers and say they stink or feel the wind in their hair and worry about the effect on their hairstyle. Take time to hear waves on the beach, scrunch through crunchy autumn leaves, find the beauty in the experience and you'll be feeding your soul.

Thank you for your support for the Trust - you help us to conserve the Barn Owl and its environment.

Together we can make a world of difference

Frances Ramsden