



Issue Number 34 - Autumn 2005



# FEEDBACK

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



- Early Birds
- Supporters' Day
- Cornwall Survey Results
- Live Bird Emergency Service

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**THE BARN OWL TRUST - CONSERVING THE BARN OWL AND ITS ENVIRONMENT**

# Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to a jam-packed issue of Feedback. After a fairly mild winter, as you'll see from the item on page 3, the breeding season began early this year and our BTO ringing site visits started in early May. This was also the start of the 'show' season, completing the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey report, aviary demolition, our annual walk (all of which you can read about) and of course our normal work. It feels like our feet haven't touched the ground since then. In May we were also joined by a new member of the conservation team; Lisa Ashford introduces herself on page 10.

In July we held our first ever Supporters' Day and on pages 8 and 9 we share that experience with those of you who didn't come along. It was a wonderful day and we all really enjoyed meeting you.

September saw another first for the Trust. We held our first training day for professional ecologists and planners, and there were participants from as far afield as Norfolk. As far as we know it was the first such event ever held and was specifically designed to train participants to search for and identify signs of Barn Owl occupation. We had loads of applicants for a limited number of places and now have a waiting list for the next one - we plan to run an article on it in the next issue. We will also be looking at wind farms then and would like to hear from anyone with Barn Owl or other wildlife related tales and relevant information please.

Amazingly it's now more than 17 years since the Trust became a registered charity and over 10 years since we published 'Barn Owls on Site - a guide for developers and planners'. Awareness of Barn Owls has certainly

increased over this period and our workload has grown and developed. We have some major achievements under our belts, but we are a small charity, albeit a national one and are frequently overstretched. Over the last few months the Trustees and Management Team have been looking at how best to serve the needs of Barn Owls in the future and how to proceed sustainably. Staff turnover, particularly on the conservation side is an issue for us. Amy Oliver who joined the Trust in 2002 as a Conservation Assistant and became an Assistant Conservation Officer in 2003 is reducing her working week to 2 days to enable her to attend a training course. We're not quite losing her yet, thank goodness, but we are looking to recruit someone in the future with a passion for Barn Owls (see item on page 10). If you or someone you know is interested in a job in the charitable sector please send us your CV and a covering letter so that we can let you know when we advertise.

We hope you enjoy reading this copy of Feedback and that you feel it keeps you informed about the work of the Trust; do let us know if you have any comments or suggestions. Passing this issue on to someone else when you have read it is the best way to recycle it.

Thank you for your support, it really is appreciated and does make a difference.

**Eds: Frances & Sandra**

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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@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk) by email or post to:*

*Feedback, Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU*

## Nestbox Workshop

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

Our next workshop will be held in partnership with the Devon Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group on

**Saturday 12th November 2005  
10.30am - 4.30pm**

**near Chulmleigh in Devon.**

**Call 01364 653026**

For more information or to book a place.

Cost: £10 per person  
or £20 per family

**A ploughman's lunch is available at  
£4.50 per person**

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# Barn Owl Trust News

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## Early Birds! (and the new government grant scheme)...

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Barn Owl observers across the UK have reported Barn Owls nesting much earlier than usual and with larger broods of young than normal. A mild winter combined with favourable spring weather and an increase in small mammal populations are thought to be the underlying reasons. A study in 1990 showed that the average 'first egg' date was May 9th. This year most clutches were started at the beginning of April and in the milder south-west many eggs were laid in March.

David Ramsden (Barn Owl Trust Senior Conservation Officer) said; "At one site we visited, all the young were already fledged by the beginning of June. The adults must have been laying eggs at the beginning of February! Providing

that the spring is not too wet, early young tend to fair better than most because they are more experienced by the time winter comes. Also, adults which nest early are more likely to breed twice in one year than those that start later."

Results from the British Trust for Ornithology have revealed that the average number of young produced has declined steadily in recent years from 3.43 owlets in 1987 down to 3.16 in 2003. In order to maintain the UK population of 4,000 pairs, Barn Owls need all the help they can get and favourable years can give numbers a real boost, if only temporarily. David said, "In the long term we're hoping that the new grant scheme for farmers will

increase the amount of good habitat. It's habitat quality which controls food supply and this has more effect on breeding success and survival than any other factor."

The Barn Owl Trust has been helping DEFRA to write Barn Owl habitat prescriptions for the government's *Environmental Stewardship* grant scheme. "Landowners entering the new scheme will be paid for creating Barn Owl habitat so it's really important to get the prescription just right and maximise the benefit for Barn Owls across England." □

## New Home

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This summer staff and volunteers replaced the Trust's Pond Aviary. Originally built from reclaimed materials in 1989, the aviary which housed resident Barn and Tawny Owls, along with our resident Raven was demolished and rebuilt.

The framework for the new aviary was built by long-term volunteer Derrick Crocker who spent two weeks here. The conservation team then put in two weeks hard labour finishing off and doing the groundwork - well done guys. A big thank you to Derrick, also thank you to the charitable trusts who gave us grants towards the project and to all the volunteers who lent a hand.

With the new aviary finished (just) in time for supporters' day (phew) the owls have now settled in - picture on page 7. □



*The demolition team take a picture break*

*Photo: Admin team*

## BOT Grant Aid

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The Barn Owl Trust has just awarded its first ever grant to a PhD student at the University of York. Using this grant Nick Askew will be extending his doctoral research studies to carry out work, which will directly benefit Barn Owl conservation in the UK. He aims to refine estimates of the quantity of habitat needed for Barn Owls to forage and breed effectively and to identify priority conservation areas for the species throughout the UK. He will also produce a leaflet detailing this information.

Whilst the BOT will fund the research, the RSPB has agreed to fund the cost of production and distribution of the leaflet. Nick has been working with Barn Owls for the last six years; he is a BTO ringer

and has used radio-tracking techniques to study the species. To date his research has focused mainly on birds in the Lower Derwent Valley in North Yorkshire - see *Around & About* page 13.

Having applied for support from the Trust Nick visited us in July to give a presentation about his work, meet staff and trustees and find out more about the BOT. His visit included the opportunity to visit a Devon Barn Owl breeding site.

The Trustees made a unanimous decision to support his work, which should be completed in September 2006. □



*Nick Askew (left) and SCO David.*

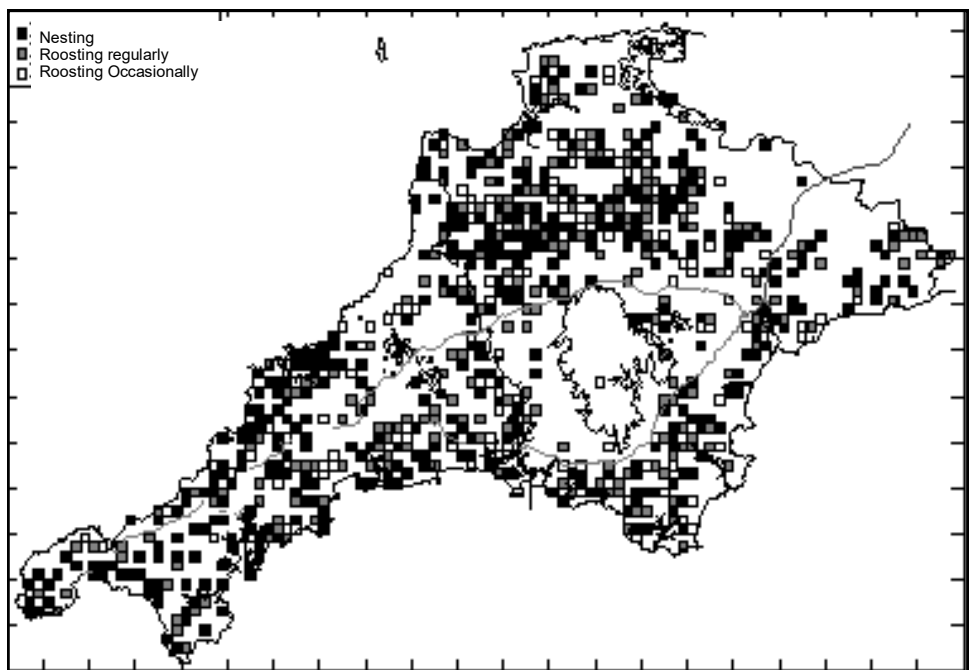
# Cornwall Survey Results

The 2004 Cornwall Barn Owl Survey was a huge undertaking which included the re-checking of all the nest and roost sites recorded by the Barn Owl Trust since 1st January 1994 – all 596 of them! During the survey year 239 additional sites were recorded bringing the total number of sites to 835 - five and a half times as many as were checked during the first survey back in 1994. In 2004 Barn Owls were found to be nesting at 217 sites, roosting only at 244 sites, and absent from 221. At the remaining 153 sites Barn Owls had been seen but no pellets or nests were found.

We were really impressed with the number of occupied sites recorded but we couldn't assume that this was the result of a huge increase in the owl population. We went to great lengths to investigate the extent to which the number of occupied sites was related to the number of sites we'd checked.

The difference between the actual number of occupied sites and the number recorded (survey coverage) was investigated in various ways including the semi-random selection of 33 two-kilometre map squares (totalling 132km<sup>2</sup>) where interviews were conducted at all farmsteads and other potential Barn Owl sites. Coverage was estimated to be in the range of 60-80% leading to a population estimate of 271-361 pairs and a breeding density of 8.6-11.5 pairs per 10km square, one of the highest breeding densities in Britain. This doesn't mean that Barn Owls in Cornwall are now common but it's certainly very encouraging!

Detailed distribution maps revealed that the species is widely but not evenly distributed across Cornwall. There was a lack of Barn Owl records along the



The distribution of Barn Owls as recorded during the 2004 Cornwall Barn Owl Survey (2km squares), including regular sightings during the main breeding season (March – August inc.).

A30 dual carriageway (as a result of road mortality) the upland area of Bodmin Moor (less suitable landscape) and in several other areas for reasons which are not fully understood. The areas with the greatest number of Barn Owls were mainly areas of very mixed farming.

In most cases the type of site used by the birds was recorded. Nest site types were fairly evenly divided between traditional barns and modern barns, with 74% of recorded nests being located in a nestbox. Between 1994 and 2004 the proportion of nests in hollow trees declined significantly and the proportion

of nests in nestboxes increased significantly.

We are extremely grateful to the eighteen volunteers who helped with the fieldwork and to all the farmers and landowners who gave permission and provided information as well as those people who reported sites to us at the Royal Cornwall Show. The survey was almost entirely funded by the Barn Owl Trust but we were very pleased to receive contributions from: His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales Duke of Cornwall, Imerys Plc., Restormel Borough Council, and the Elmgrant Trust. □

## Our Live Bird Emergency Service

The Trust operates a live bird emergency service which provides help and advice for anyone finding a casualty Owl. Over the years we've received calls about a lot of other creatures too! Outside of office hours our answering machine provides the number for a mobile phone, which, network coverage willing, connects to a member of the conservation team who will advise on the problem.

In the South West owls that are injured or starving will, with the help of volunteers, usually arrive here. In other parts of the country we use a directory to put enquirers in touch with a local wildlife rehabilitator.

Calls come at all hours of the day and night and this year we have seen a dramatic increase in the number we've received and the number of birds that have arrived here for treatment.

We are extremely grateful to the volunteers who have cared for and moved birds on our behalf and to the Veterinary Hospital at Estover in Plymouth for treating any casualties requiring surgery.

If you find an injured Owl please use this service but do remember it is for live bird emergencies only, all ⇨



More Barn Owls means more casualties, which means more recoveries and then more releases - one of the casualties being given the once-over

other enquiries during office hours please - the conservation team do need to have some time off. □

# More BOT News

## Basket Case



Paul and Tawny Owlet Photo: David Ramsden

After driving around Cornwall for most of the Autumn (surveying) and staring at a computer for most of the winter (producing the Cornwall Survey Report) our Survey Officer really fancied doing something different. When the first young Tawny Owl arrived Paul French volunteered to sort it out. As is usual in these cases, there was absolutely nothing wrong with it so Paul popped the owlet, some owl food, a few tools and an old basket in the 4x4 and took it back to where it was found. Within a few minutes the basket was fixed up at a safe height – just above the spot where the owlet was found on the ground – and the owlet was put inside. This usually works really well as Tawny Owls will generally feed their young anywhere. Sure enough, within a couple of days the finder reported that she'd seen one of the adults fly out of the basket when she approached to check the owlet was OK. In most cases the owlet soon climbs out of the basket and up into the trees never to be seen again. Imagine our surprise when two days later we got a call to say there were now two Tawny owlets in the basket. □

## Ten Years on ...

Amazingly it is 10 years ago that the Trust completed the Barn Conversion Research Project and produced the booklet 'Barn Owls on Site - a guide for developers and planners'. Back in 1995 the booklet was mailed to every planning office in the UK and as a result of our recommendations some Local Authorities revised their policies on barn conversion applications. In North Cornwall and Derbyshire Dales barn developers are now required to make provision for Barn Owls in every conversion. Other districts have been slower to pick up the conservation message but are increasingly requesting wildlife surveys before consent is given.

The booklet is now in its 2nd edition having been updated by the BOT and reprinted by English Nature in 2002. □

## Internet Aid for Owlets

Every year in April and May we receive numerous calls from folks who have found a young Tawny Owl whilst out in the woods. In most cases they've made the assumption that the owl is in some kind of trouble and taken it home. In previous years each of these calls have taken up about 20-30 minutes of our time: talking them through a checklist of the owl's condition and explaining how to treat it and/or get it back into the wild. This year the Internet has saved loads of

time. In almost every case the caller has internet access so all we've had to say is; "Go to [barnowltrust.org.uk](http://barnowltrust.org.uk), on the home page (top LHS) click to enter, select 'information leaflets', scroll down to the 'other owls' section, and click on 'What to do if you find a young Tawny Owl'. Having read the leaflet if you need any more help please call back." Sorted in just a few minutes! □

## Amazing News

When the Trust made its first land purchase in October 2001 we reckoned it would take several years to get the habitat right and probably at least five years before we'd manage to establish resident wild Barn Owls. Imagine our delight at discovering our first resident pair and then finding we had two pairs nesting in the valley! We must confess that one pair are birds we rehabilitated and released (this in itself is quite an achievement) but the other pair are entirely independent and moved in naturally. Both pairs are using nestboxes we've provided and we've had some stunning views of them hunting over the field – fantastic! □



The resident female regularly visits our barn - this picture was taken after a night of heavy rain when she appeared earlier than usual Photo: David Ramsden



## Barn Owl Football

Earlier this year ACO Simon Baimford (far right) attended a football match on behalf of the Trust. He represented the BOT at Torquay United's home ground where they were playing Port Vale.

It was Simon's first football match and he and his girlfriend Kerry were seated in the Directors' Box and treated to great hospitality. After a goal-less first half, Simon and representatives from other charities went onto the pitch to receive

cheques for £2,850 each on behalf of their respective charities; it was Torquay United's share of the FA Community Shield. Thank you TUFC.

Simon spent most of the second half anticipating a Torquay United goal to increase their chances of avoiding relegation. Just a few minutes from the end a penalty kick put Torquay United in the lead, the only fair result after such a generous donation! □

# Rehab and Release

Last March, we issued a press release appealing for a site in the South West to release a trio of wild Barn Owls. The 3 young owls all came to the Trust last year with injuries. 'Tam' was found near Tamerton Foliot in November, severely concussed and underweight. 'Ratty', a beautiful female was found near Rattery with a badly broken wing, which was successfully pinned. 'Dippy' was found near Diptford in August 2004 and taken to the RSPCA with multiple puncture wounds. On arrival at the Barn Owl Trust he was found to have a lot of broken feathers. These eventually moulted which meant we could finally consider him for release.

We've been rehabilitating injured wild Barn Owls for twenty years but this was the first time we had appealed for a release site. Normally birds are released where they are found (this is particularly important for adult birds that depend on their local knowledge for hunting success), or from our headquarters. On this occasion we were aware that a pair of Barn Owls was already present in our valley so we couldn't release them here.

The birds were to be released from the Trust's mobile release aviary once a suitable site was found. We needed to find a landowner or farmer who was prepared to feed them for several weeks. Barn Owls mainly eat Field Voles that thrive in areas of rough, tussocky grassland. Where fields are intensively grazed by sheep or cattle, owls struggle to find enough food. We appealed for a site with at least five acres of rough grass. It had to be more than a mile from the nearest motorway or dual carriageway – we didn't want these birds to become road casualties!

The press release proved to be really popular with newspaper editors and appeared in numerous local rags. I was nominated to deal with the public response. In the first week we received well over a hundred calls. I was faced with the task of analysing every site for its potential, before making a shortlist of possibilities. I finally narrowed it down to a few which I decided to visit to check out their suitability. In the meantime the enquiries continued to flood in. It seemed that the papers were so taken with the story, it started to spread across the country from paper to paper, each time losing a bit of vital information, just like Chinese whispers. This continued well after the actual release took



*The mobile release aviary*

*Photo: Amy Oliver*

place. People were phoning in from Yorkshire and even further afield!

One of the people who had phoned in was Peter Howlett. He tenants a farm on National Trust land in South Devon. He explained that much of the land in the local vicinity was in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This had given rise to the creation of many field margins offering plenty of rough grass. The coastline nearby also offered long stretches of grassland, which were never intensively grazed. He explained he had a small barn complex down the road where two Barn Owl nestboxes had already been in situ for some time. National Trust warden Mike Ingram had erected the boxes. I recognised the name and remembered having spoken to Mike before regarding previous Barn Owl sightings. He was obviously enthusiastic about Barn Owls so I gave him a call.

Being the local warden, Mike had good access to land across the area and was in the perfect position to show me around. Sure enough the extent of field margins and rough grass coastline were impressive. The barn complex also seemed ideal with a perfectly flat and secluded area to park the mobile release aviary. Even more promising was a plot of land nearby which contained well over



*Good foraging ground in the foreground with the release site in the distance*

*Photo: Amy Oliver*

15 acres of excellent foraging ground. I was totally confident that this site had everything going for it, so the release date was set for the beginning of April. Peter and Mike were delighted.

Simon, our Assistant Conservation Officer drove the owls and the mobile aviary down to the site. Once the aviary was set up he put the birds inside and provided Peter with a very large supply of owl food. Tam, Ratty and Dippy stayed in the aviary for a couple of weeks to acclimatise. Peter visited the aviary every day to feed the owls. When a period of fine weather was forecast, we finally asked Peter to release the birds. The aviary remained in place and accessible to the birds for some time afterwards. Peter continued to leave food for them, and they continued to visit night after night for a good meal. Establishing this type of 'return for food' regime is vital in trying to secure survival, and we were all relieved to learn that they were coming back. Mike reported having seen at least two of the owls flying around during the evenings soon after their release. To everyone's delight they seemed to have taken to the barns adjacent to where the nestboxes were located.

In April, tragedy struck. Simon received a phone call from a local resident who lived just over 1km away from the release site. The man was devastated to report he'd found a dead Barn Owl in his garden. It had become entangled in a small net that he'd strung up to prevent golf balls flying in from a nearby putting green. The ring number on the owl matched that of Dippy's. We were now on tenterhooks to learn if Tam and Ratty were OK, Peter reported they were being sighted pretty regularly in the evenings. A few weeks later we retrieved the mobile aviary.

At the beginning of August Peter informed us that the owls were still being seen around. They are no longer fed and pellets containing wild food have been found in the barns. All the signs indicate that Tam and Ratty are self-sufficient and have successfully been reintroduced to the wild where they belong. We have our fingers crossed that the site may one day play host to a brood of fluffy owlets.

**Amy Oliver**  
*Assistant Conservation Officer*

# Bird News



Inside our wonderful new aviary  
Photo: Simon Balmford

Our resident owls have spent quite a lot of time moving house over the past few weeks whilst the pond aviary was being demolished and then rebuilt. The beautiful new pond aviary now houses six female Barn Owls and each bird has taken over one of the gaps between the straw bales which cover the end wall. It's rather like a six-story block of flats. Because all the birds in here are female we don't have to worry about them breeding in the bales.

It even incorporates a square of what will become tussocky grass; what owl could ask for anything more!

We are all really delighted that Rave has found a new home with a companion at long last. Thinking she would be happier with other ravens we have tried to rehome her in the past but have never found anywhere suitable. Some years ago we even approached the Tower of London but they do not take on disabled Ravens.

Anyway Rave is now relating well to her new male companion and we have a picture to prove it below - unfortunately it's a bit black on black.

This year our Live Bird Emergency Service has been busier than ever. As usual we've had calls about juvenile Barn Owls, Tawny Owls etc, in distress, hungry, lost or injured and in almost all cases we've been able to help them on their way in the big wild world. Only this morning a lady telephoned to say that she had a Barn Owl in her wardrobe – what should she do – I think that's probably a first, and a few days ago David had to rescue a Tawny Owl that was flying around in a motor works (a sort of warehouse with a very high roof and low windows and doors). Fortunately he was able to net the bird with our oversized butterfly net and bring it back to the Trust for a square meal and an opportunity to recover from its ordeal. After a couple of weeks the owl

was able to be released from the mobile aviary at Waterleat and our last sighting was its flight up into the branches of a large oak tree.

Our new leaflet giving advice on what to do if you find a young Tawny Owlet really came into its own in the late spring and we were able to help many people all over the country deal with Tawny Owlets that appeared to be abandoned. The sweetest story was of the Tawny Owlets and the cat basket (see page 5).

All our resident owls are present and correct since the last issue of Feedback and our oldest Barn Owl, known as Woodland, is now fifteen. We know exactly how old Woodland is as we ringed him as an owlet (in the wild) in June 1990. We met him again in 1993 when we rescued him after he had flown into a wire fence. He had a badly dislocated wing and unfortunately it never regained full strength so he has been at the Trust for the past twelve years.

Returning briefly to the new Pond Aviary maybe someone has spotted the deliberate mistake - no pond! Any ideas for a new name?

**Sandra Reardon**

## Raven Success

After 12 years at the Trust Rave has finally left us in the hope of finding true love. In the spring we sent out emails to see if there was anyone who had another Raven that required a mate. We received a reply from a keeper at Birdworld in Farnham saying that they had a male Raven that had been on his own since his partner had died earlier in the year. It sounded like a great opportunity for Rave to be able to pair up with another Raven.

I arranged to meet the head keeper at the end of June to have a look around and settle Rave into her new accommodation. Catching Rave has always been a bit of a mission in the past but on this occasion she just let me gently pick her up and place her into the new transporting box that I had made for her. So from the Trust we headed up to Farnham, a journey that was to take about 6 hours - it rained most of the way. We were met by Steve the curator at Birdworld. Together we transferred Rave into one of their hospital aviaries ready to be introduced to her

prospective partner after a few days of quarantine. Four months on and they are getting on really well. We all wish Rave the best of luck with her new chap in her new home.

Since writing this we have received this report from Kerry Banks at Birdworld: "The raven is getting along really well, she is moving around the aviary like a pro and eating really well. There is a lot of positive interaction between her and the male; in fact he seems to be much more bonded with her than he was with the previous female. This could be because the previous hen was quite nervous, whereas your hen is quite aggressive with the male sometimes if he steps out of line!! Perhaps he just prefers feisty women!! The hen is just going through a moult, and is starting to look very smart with her new feathers."



Rave (on the left) and her new mate Photo provided

Our thanks to Birdworld for making Rave so welcome. We are all really delighted that she has found such a brilliant new home.

**Simon Balmford**  
ACO

# Barn Owl Trust...



*The first mini bus arrives*

Regular readers will be familiar with the Lennon Legacy Project and our plan to create 26 acres of Barn Owl heaven here at Waterleat. For those of you who don't know, we were fortunate enough to receive a large legacy that enabled us to buy the 26 acre field in 2001. The project is named after the lady who kindly bequeathed the legacy, Vivien Lennon.

In order to transform the field into species-rich rough grassland (with thousands of voles) we drastically reduced the amount of grazing. We received grants towards the costs of 'capital works' such as fencing, hedge creation, and stone wall restoration. We devised a Management Plan that complies with the grant scheme requirements whilst ensuring that it is entirely compatible with our objective of turning the field into optimum Barn Owl habitat and at the same time encouraging a broad range of other wildlife.

The field itself is very beautiful and encompasses many different habitat types: rough grassland, hedgerow and woodland. There has been a dramatic increase in the diversity of insects, mammals, birds and plants on the site since 2001; we never expected to see so many species take advantage of the changes so quickly!



*Presentation in the barn*

The progress so far has been brilliant; the field has great potential as an educational showpiece. The project has given us the opportunity to practice what we preach and prove that creating Barn Owl habitat benefits a huge range of wildlife.

After four years of managing the site BOT style, it was time to share the 'LLP experience' with other people. Maybe some of our supporters would like to have a guided tour of the field and learn about what we've been up to here at HQ. In April 2004 a wooden barn was built on the edge of the field offering the perfect venue for this kind of event (our offices are very small!). So at the beginning of 2005 we decided to organise a "Supporters' Day" to be held in July when the field looks at its best. The event was advertised to Friends and supporters in the spring edition of Feedback. We had a steady number of enquiries and soon had two groups of



*Just about to start the walk*

around 14 people. Nerves can run pretty high when you're planning your first ever Open Day (I was also acutely aware of having to give my very first power point presentation on the day), so this was a nice comfortable number of people to accommodate.

A week before the event took place, we arranged a similar but smaller day for local residents living within a mile or so of our offices. Many of them were aware of our presence here, or at least seen our vehicles running around the place so it seemed a nice idea to explain to our neighbours what we actually get up to. The event also doubled up as a sort of trial run for the Supporters' day. The Neighbours' day went really well and it was good to talk to such an interested group of people. The fact we didn't bore the pants off them gave us more confidence for the following week!

As the organisation progressed for Supporters' day it became increasingly obvious we were going to need all hands



*Setting off into Kiln Close*

on deck. Some of our regular volunteers were kind enough to come in and help out on the day. The barn became the 'base camp' for our visitors, where volunteers provided the all-important array of beverages, biscuits and cake.

The local school provided parking and we mini-bused people in from there. A big thank you to Peter Flemming for paying for the minibus hire. On arrival each group was given a quick tour of our offices by a member of staff who explained about all areas of work carried out by the Trust. After a short break for refreshments in the barn our visitors were given a 30 minute presentation about the LLP field. There were lots of slides and a talk about all the work that's gone into transforming the field from intensively grazed and fertilized sheep pasture with little wildlife, into dazzling rough grassland abundant with butterflies, birds and singing insects. We showed a lovely selection of photos portraying all sorts of wildlife that has arrived in the field. These included butterflies such as Marbled Whites, Gatekeepers, Large Skippers, Small Skippers, Small Coppers and Burnet Moths, many of which have been taking great advantage of the wonderful Musk Thistles. Other pictures showed the ever increasing numbers of Grasshoppers, Hover flies, Swifts, House Martins, Voles, Roe Deer and plants including Great Mullein, Dark Mullein, Wild Pansy and White Campion.



*Stopping half way around Kiln Close to admire the flowers and butterflies*



# ...Supporters' Day



Walking along the restored hedgerow at the top of the field

It was then time to take everybody around the field for the 'proof of the pudding'. The weather was perfect and many of the animals and insects appeared right on cue as if staged (including a Roe Deer much to our delight). It was really encouraging to see just how engrossed everybody became. So much so that I had quite a job keeping the group together – there were so many distractions! One little boy developed quite a knack for capturing Burnett Moths in cupped hands (none were harmed). I was really glad to be able to show people the polebox which this year, hosted the first wild Barn Owls to nest in the field. The lack of grazing has allowed a deep litter layer to develop, leading to an ever-increasing population of voles. The breeding success of the Barn Owls brilliantly illustrated how the changes in management had paid off.

At the end of the day, everybody seemed to have enjoyed themselves and were very grateful to us for laying on the event. All the thanks we received made us feel the effort had been really worthwhile and we hope to hold the event again; we have included extracts from some of the thank-you letters.

Dear BOT

Our visit to 'The Barn Owl Trust' was deeply appreciated. The warm welcome by Simon, giving details of 'How the wheels turn' and then a look around the office. Off to the barn where David Ramsden gave his most interesting slide



Looking at the vole runs above the barn

lecture on 'The Lennon Legacy Project Field'

We were generously given refreshments by two lady volunteers, followed by the guided walk around the field – most fascinating. Now the section on grasses etc in Keble's book will be studied more closely!!! Back for lunch in the barn, where we were able to purchase 'gifts' and share the Barn Owl Trust with Friends. A really happy satisfied 'first ever' invited group boarded our coach with such happy memories - Thank you very much.'

**Neville & Vanessa Wheeler**  
Devon

Dear BOT,

A brief note to thank you all so much for a fantastic day on Saturday. We found the field trip very informative and it gave us ideas for our field when we move. To meet you all and see what you "get up to" was great. A very enjoyable time!  
Many thanks

**Christine Mercer**  
Lancashire



One of the three pole boxes

Dear BOT,

Thank you all so much for a wonderful day on Saturday. We appreciated all the work that went into the preparation for the event but even more than that we appreciated everything that has gone on at the Trust - your enthusiasm is very infectious! I re-read some of your newsletters when I returned home and they took on new meaning having met you and seen the site. Since returning home to Wiltshire we have heard that there are a pair of Barn Owls with young in our village. We have two nesting boxes on land we own - one less than a mile from where they are so we are hopeful!

**Chris & Diane Gater**  
Wiltshire

...and from two of our younger visitors:

Dear BOT

I had a brilliant day seeing how you look after the Barn Owls. I loved going for a walk around the field and finding things



Back at the barn for tea & cake

out about nature. Thank you for a lovely day.'

**Bridie Head**

Dear BOT

'Barn Owls hunt at night and have a fantastic flight. From dawn until evening light. And in the day they snuggle up ready for another long night.'

I had a nice day. Thank you for a lovely walk.

**Cian Head**

A big thank you to all our ever-faithful volunteers who helped out on the day. We are also very grateful to all of you who came along not only for your continued support but for making the event so worthwhile. Many thanks.

**Amy Oliver - ACO**



Finally - saying goodbye

All photos: Frances Ramsden

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# Staff & Volunteers

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## Situations Vacant

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As regular readers of Feedback will probably have noticed almost every issue features staff comings and goings. Since the last issue Survey Officer Paul French has completed his six month contract and gone back to the Shetland islands and on the admin side Stacey Sewell has moved on to pursue a musical career. We are currently interviewing for two more members of the admin team, one full time and one part-time to help cope with the workload. These posts will include fundraising, grant applications and press releases as well as management of our website and digital photo library.

When we advertise for conservation staff there is no shortage of applicants - during the last round we had 97. However most people that apply see the post as a stepping stone to other work in conservation. Surprisingly we hardly ever get applicants who are really keen ornithologists and we've never had anyone apply who is passionate about Barn Owls and wants to spend their life working with them.

Because we need our staff to be incredibly versatile our selection process is notoriously rigorous - amongst other things it includes practical tasks and a group exercise. As a result we have trained some excellent people over the years who have been really good at their

jobs. However in order to develop sustainably we are aware we need people to stay longer and develop the knowledge that can only come from experience.

If you, or someone you know is passionate about Barn Owls and interested in working for the Barn Owl Trust as a member of either the conservation or the admin team send us your CV and a letter telling us about yourself and we will contact you next time we advertise.

Contact:  
[sandra@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:sandra@barnowltrust.org.uk) □

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## ACO - Lisa

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Joining the Trust has been somewhat of a staggered start for me with one thing and another. However, I'm now settled in and training to become a fully-fledged Assistant Conservation Officer .

Starting at the end of May threw me straight into the Barn Owl breeding season, which has proved to be a busy time here at the Trust. My first visits to Barn Owl nesting sites were fantastic; to be actively involved with Barn Owls is a real experience. Assisting with the rehabilitation of injured Barn Owls is one aspect of the job that I really enjoy, as is attending Live Bird Emergencies; I have attended two on my own so far.

I've completed a number of training courses, the most enjoyable being the 4x4 off road driving (I think I may need a refresher course, just to make sure I took it all in!). Demolishing the old pond aviary and rebuilding it kept the team and me very busy for a week or two. All the hard work was worth it, as we now have a great new aviary. Also keeping us busy are the different shows around the South West and I've been helping out at a number of them.

The warm weather has encouraged numerous butterflies out this year in the

Lennon Legacy Project (LLP) field, giving me a good opportunity for me to get out and survey them. I have also been assigned to make provision for small mammals and birds in Corner Wood and Riverbank Wood; parts of the LLP.

Completing a degree in Rural Resource Management at Seale-Hayne (University of Plymouth) enabled me to work at DEFRA as a Countryside Stewardship Adviser and then later, for the National Trust as a Countryside Warden on the Killerton Estate near Exeter - this has given me sound experience for working at the Trust.

I have travelled extensively in Europe over the years, then in 2002 I fulfilled a lifelong ambition to visit the Southern Hemisphere, spending the best part of the year touring and working my way around, enjoying the different cultures, places, people and the wonderful wildlife. Despite my passion for travelling, I always return to Devon where I was born and grew up. I find it a wonderful place and enjoy all it has to offer.

The staff at the Trust are very helpful and supportive, making me feel welcome and part of the team. I look forward to my future with the Barn Owl Trust.

**Lisa Ashford - ACO**

Tim started volunteering for the Trust at the beginning of June this year and has been an incredible help.

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## Handy Man - Tim

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He used to be a plumber/ heating engineer and spent 20 years in the building trade. He then decided to change pathways and became a Care Assistant, mainly for the elderly and the mentally ill which he did for 7 years.

Tim then chose to become a nurse and after training he set up his own agency caring for people in the community, mainly the elderly and the terminally ill.

Tim's wife became ill and they decided to move down to the South West where they now live. As he puts it, it was then Tim's turn to be ill, and it was while he was off work that he saw us mentioned in a package sent to him by the Teignbridge Voluntary Service, and here he is....

Tim has added the finishing touches to the clay pond by installing a dripping tap from a tank filled by rainwater gutters to keep it topped up, plumbed in taps, fixed motion sensor lights around the office and barn, helped finish off the new aviary and re-roof the area outside the office and somehow, finds time to keep our vehicles clean. The list is too long to mention everything that Tim gets done. He's a great asset to the team and a tremendous help and great to have around, thanks Tim! □



Lisa Ashford and Hazel Photo: Amy Oliver



Photo: Simon Balmford

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# Misconceptions and Musings

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## Popular Misconceptions

*This regular Feedback feature has been exploding myths twice a year since 1999 so we thought it's time to give it a rest – to end with, let's finally blow-up a really persistent one!*

### No. 12

“The Barn Owl Trust breeds Barn Owls in captivity and releases them into the wild” – **WRONG!**

Although we used to, we don't now, largely because it's virtually impossible to get a licence to release captive-bred Barn Owls and without one it's illegal.

Back in 1984 a very small group of volunteers started carrying out a local Barn Owl survey around their first release site – just to make sure there were no wild Barn Owls there already and to check that the habitat was suitable. Homemade survey posters attracted newspaper attention, which led to a feature on BBC TV, which resulted in more and more people asking for birds to be introduced to their sites. Over the next few years more and more release sites were surveyed and by 1988 they'd bred and released 140 Barn Owls from twenty-four release sites. All the release areas were thoroughly surveyed, all the birds were BTO-ringed, and detailed records were kept of all the sites, the birds, and the outcomes. This was the beginning of what in 1988 became the Barn Owl Trust and by '92 the Trust had carried out 56 releases from 41 sites involving 223 captive-bred Barn Owls.

Through the 1980's the number of independent people and groups

involved in Barn Owl release across the UK increased tremendously and by 1990 it was estimated that about 600 operators were releasing 2,000 birds each year. There were real concerns about the completely inappropriate way in which many of these releases were carried out and horror stories abounded. By 1992 the government decided to introduce a licensing system based on a *Code of Practice for the Release of Captive-bred Barn Owls* - this was drafted by the Barn Owl Trust and based on our well-proven release methods.

Due to a combination of factors, the number of release licences issued by DEFRA declined from 44 in 1993 to only a handful in 2001. Despite the small scale of the scheme, the government reckoned it was costing the taxpayer £60,000 a year to administer the licensing system and decided to stop issuing licences. For the time being, the captive breeding and release of Barn Owls in Britain is a dead issue.

The Barn Owl Trust does release a small number of Barn Owls from captivity every year but these are wild-bred birds that have come in injured or starving rather than captive-bred birds. If you'd like more information about our Barn Owl rehabilitation work, check out the major article on pages 8 & 9 of the last issue of FEEDBACK. □

## Wildlife Provision

Not long after I started at the Trust I was asked to build a small pond outside the barn, to provide mud/clay for Swallows and House Martins; hopefully encouraging the birds to collect mud to build their nests in the Barn.

Imerys in Plympton donated the clay that we needed, and we purchased a pond liner and some builders' sand. The pond was finished with the help of John Lightfoot who spent a week with us in June. Three months later the water is clear and there are a few plants around such as Buttercups and Foxgloves so it doesn't look as stark as it did. We have not actually seen the Swallows and House Martins using the mud but Swallows have nested nearby for the first time in over twenty years and are to be seen flying overhead in large numbers.

A variety of small bird boxes and insect boxes have been provided in the barn as well as provision for Kestrels, which have been seen hunting over the field. The front of the barn is open to provide access for Barn Owls and we have drilled lots of different size holes in the sides of the building to provide access to the rows of small boxes – in fact there are so many boxes it looks rather like a housing estate. The only box used so far has been a tit box in which we had a brood of four young Blue Tits but we hope for more occupants next year.

**Simon Balmford**

*Assistant Conservation Officer*



## Reduce, Reuse, Recycle



Our cartridge recycling schemes have continued to bring in money but have slowed a little. Part of the reason is that many more charities are now collecting them; good for the environment as fewer metal and plastic parts are manufactured and less is going into landfill.

Altogether we have received over £675 from your donated cartridges and old mobile phones, much better than throwing them in the bin! But we can do better so keep them coming. For larger toner cartridges, phone us and we'll send you labels. We can also send labels via email and have done this for several supporters. We still get the odd batch of Epson cartridges, but we haven't yet found anyone to recycle them. They're being saved until we do, any ideas?

We are still recycling used stamps but are finding the larger quantities of ordinary British stamps are now worth so little we would prefer only British Commemorative (not including Christmas) and foreign at the moment. If you're still collecting large quantities of ordinary and Christmas stamps for us can you please send them directly to the Robert Murray Stamp Shop, 5/6 Inverleith Gdns, Edinburgh EH3 5PU, Scotland clearly marked “Barn Owl Trust” please. If they are being sent direct, please can you also cut them out with a small border of paper backing. They have changed their policy and will accept them directly from supporters.

We recycle our plastic and used batteries and always use recycled products whenever they are available. We are also grateful to the two or three

supporters who regularly send large padded envelopes.

I have recently completed two NVQ units. These are in Environmental Good Practice at Work and Community Recycling. Please feel free to contact me if you need more information about our recycling schemes or want contacts to set up your own.

Remember the three R's –

**‘Reduce, Reuse, Recycle’**

**Pete Webb**

*Admin*

**NB** We are now selling pencils made from recycled paper cups as well as our ever popular ballpoint pens produced from recycled paper. □

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# Eventful Days

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Amy in action at the Cornwall Show  
Photo: Frances Ramsden

As well as the Devon County Show (May) and the Royal Cornwall Show (June) this year we have attended a number of other events.

We had a display at the Falconry Fayre at Pennywell Farm in Devon and on the same afternoon had a stall at the Ashburton Carnival Fete. Pete covered both events with volunteer Sue Love

helping to man the stall at the fete. It was a lovely sunny afternoon and the first time for many years that we'd had a presence at the local fete; very useful for raising awareness of the Trust amongst local people.

A month later we had a three-day display at the Falconry Centre at Woodlands Leisure Park in South Devon. Pete set up on the first day with help from volunteer Janet Watts; conservation team member Simon with volunteer Margaret Crocker did the second and Lisa with volunteer Bridgett Ansell and her two boys finished off on the third day. The event went very well with each day's income from sales and lucky dip increasing. Geoff Pearson, the Falconer, mentioned the work of the Trust at both his daily shows and also provided a prize of a photo holding a bird as star prize in the Lucky Dip each day.

The conservation team also attended the "Really Wild Show" in Torquay and a display at Exmoor Zoo with volunteer Sarah Dimmock in August, where the proprietors, Danny and Lynn Reynolds very kindly made a donation to Trust funds of £400 from their day's takings. Lastly members of the conservation team attended the Dorchester Show in September.

We are always looking for volunteer support to help us out at local events. We are particularly looking for a volunteer willing to train as a "Barn Owl" face painter as we have been unable to offer the service this year. Please contact Pete or Sandra if you are able to help.

We also offer a "Fete Pack" to other similar events around the country that are further afield. This year these have included the Safe Lanes Initiative event in the Blackdown Hills in Somerset and an "Animal Magic" event for Caradon District Council Cornwall.

We also went to Magdalen Court School Speech Day in Exeter. This had been arranged for some time but due to confusion with the organisers over dates no one from the conservation team was available so Pete stepped in. When he arrived he was told that he was, "The most important guest". When reporting back he said, "It went OK. I was just glad there was no time beforehand to worry about it". □

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## What about a Walk

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Sounds simple doesn't it? But I thought you might like to read a little background information about the days and months leading up to the walk which takes place in May/June every year. This is our major fundraising event and preparations start in August of the previous year when we contact the Flete Estate landowner to check that he's happy for us to hold our sponsored walk again and arrange a mutually suitable date. We also check tide times and liaise with Phil Sheardown of Canoe Adventures over the canoe crossing and the St John's Ambulance Brigade over first-aid cover for the day. Everything goes fairly quiet then for a few months with just the occasional reminder to volunteers to keep the date free.

In the Spring we send out information to previous walkers and other interested parties (200/300 letters) and with Feedback we also enclose a leaflet to gain support both physically and through sponsorship of Megan (the Golden Retriever who has walked for the last four or five years); she usually raises nearly £1,000 in sponsorship. We also contact various companies to gain business sponsorship which also raises nearly £500. By April we are preparing all the signboards, notices and leaflets

and shopping for refreshments. In May everything is beginning to come together and with a bit of luck I will have managed to persuade half a dozen or so really kind people to help out on the day; I find that threatening my immediate relatives usually produces two or three 'volunteers' and strangely enough everybody really enjoys doing it (even more so if it doesn't rain).

Two or three days before the event everything needs to be packed – the bell tent, gazebo, dozens of sign boards, miles of rope, full carpenter's kit (at least two of everything), extremely big hammers, enough refreshments for about two hundred people etc... etc.

The day before the walk is taken up with four or five of us setting up and signing the route. Last year it was a pleasant day out in the sunshine – very tiring but otherwise great (see photo above). This year it rained, it blew, it was freezing cold and a day seemed like a week. We were all soaked through to our knickers and our fingers were numb with the cold and could all think of places we would prefer to be whilst trying to pick up nails and hammer them into stakes and boards. Please don't feel sorry for us – just give Megan a few extra pounds next year!

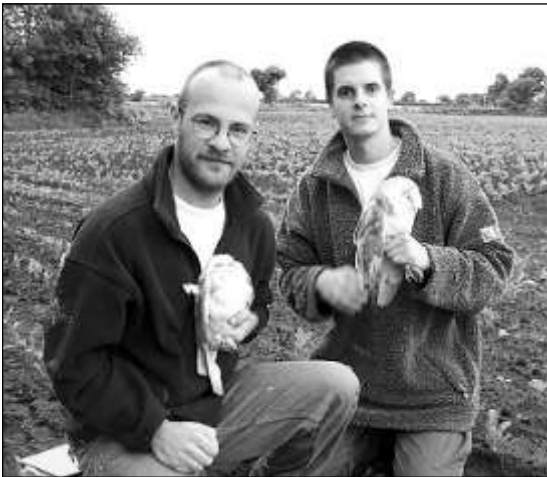


Setting up the day before the Walk in 2004 - this year it rained so no enthusiasm to take pictures!  
Photo: Frances Ramsden

At last, the walk itself. Well this year it only rained during the final setting up in the morning and by the time people were arriving it had turned into a pleasant late spring day. As usual we all had a brilliant time and raised lots of money for Barn Owls (if only they knew). This year's total to date is £2,911, thank you to everyone involved.

**Sandra Reardon**

# Around and About



Craig Ralston and Nick Askew (right)

The ghostly image of a bird, as it floated along the riverbank, filled the view in my binoculars. I was lazily scanning for kingfishers on my first visit to the Lower Derwent Valley, when this vision leapt into my world and filled me with excitement. I had seen my first Barn Owl!

Since that day Barn Owls have been my passion. I was seventeen years old and about to start an Ecology degree at York University only eight miles from the valley. During my first year I attended a talk by Craig Ralston from English Nature entitled "The wildlife of the Lower Derwent". He spoke about its unique landscape - dominated by seasonally-flooding hay meadows - and how the area is a haven for farmland wildlife. After introducing Barn Owls, he went on to mention that they could even be seen on campus, but I was too timid to put my hand up and ask where. My time would come.

At the beginning of my second year I joined the York University Conservation Volunteers. It was great. A small band of fun-loving students who spent their weekends building boardwalks, clearing scrub, erecting fences and, best of all, making fires! I spent four happy years with the group, and through it became good friends with Craig. In 1999, he was co-ordinating the first Barn Owl survey of the valley and asked if I would like to help. I jumped at the chance to see more barnies.

I spent the summer months logging sightings of Barn Owls and helping to locate nest sites. At the end we collated all the sightings, and the results surprised us all. An impressive 69 breeding pairs were identified, which represented a density of 32 pairs per 100 sq km. This was significantly higher than anything previously published. It seemed the valley had managed to hold on to its population when many other areas of Britain had lost theirs.

This survey also highlighted the importance of the hay meadows in the breeding ecology of the owls. In 2000, I went on to study this for my final year project and found strong relationships between the proximity of Barn Owls to the meadows, and the timing of breeding. Birds near the grasslands bred earlier than those further away. However, this was found to be a risky strategy and the early birds were caught out by extensive flooding and subsequently reared fewer chicks.

Through this work we met many enthusiastic landowners who wanted to help the owls.

Therefore, we decided to start making nestboxes and to target areas, which had ample habitat available, but lacked natural nesting opportunities. As a consequence, over the last four years a small group of volunteers - funded by English Nature - have made over a hundred new boxes and erected them on farms throughout the valley.

Like many groups throughout Britain, we now check our boxes annually to monitor their progress. Having a healthy population from the start, we found Barn Owls took very quickly to our sites. We have now ringed over 500 owls in six years and are on target for 200 chicks in 2005. We hope that by securing a healthy Barn Owl population in the Lower Derwent, dispersing young will repopulate areas further afield. Our nestbox schemes are now pushing north and south to link in with other local groups.

With many owls now at my disposal I started my PhD in 2002. My aim was to study the habitat requirements of Barn Owls further, and to assess the potential of *agri-environmental schemes* for providing new foraging areas for the birds. Since the introduction of the setaside scheme more than ten years ago, the amount of rough grassland in the British landscape has finally started to increase. Thus I have spent my last three years using radio transmitters to follow Barn Owls, studying their small mammal prey, and undertaking countless vegetation surveys. Through this work, I have started to scratch the surface into the complex and fascinating world of the Barn Owl.

Along with gaining a better understanding of how to create and manage suitable foraging areas for Barn Owls, I am most proud of the work we have

undertaken on the birds' foraging ecology. By recording the hunting activities of 12 owls during the breeding season we have shown that they display hunting strategies which help to deliver more prey to their chicks. By making repeat-visits to successful locations when within 1500m of the nest, we have found the adults increase their chances of catching more prey from short-term productive areas. We also found that adults make decisions, based upon the prey size, whether to deliver prey to their chicks, or eat it themselves. The smaller the prey, the more likely it was to be eaten by the adult - a bite-sized snack!

Now, with the generous support of the Barn Owl Trust, we are planning further research which we hope will greatly help our conservation plans. We aim to use nest records to produce a landscape suitability map of Britain. This map could then be used to inform conservation groups of where they could be targeting their efforts in the future. In the end, we hope this will mean more owls in boxes for us all. Towards the end of the work we will also be producing a leaflet to disseminate the practical conservation information to those who are interested.

From that first glimpse of an owl nearly ten years ago, I have gained great pleasure from studying the birds and meeting many people who are so dedicated to helping conserve them. I would like to wish the Barn Owl Trust and all their supporters every success in their work, and I greatly look forward to working with them into the future.

**Nick Askew**  
Yorkshire



Measuring an owl

Photo supplied

# Your News

## Wind Farms

With the increase in awareness of climate change and the development of sustainable energy sources we are dealing with an increasing number of enquiries about wind farms. We are planning an item for a future issue and would like to hear from anyone with Barn Owl related tales to tell. Please contact us at Feedback - see page 2 for details.

*Dear BOT,*

There was a resident Barn Owl on this farm some time before we came here, nearly nine years ago. He/she roosted in an open-fronted tea chest in our open-fronted garage but did not seem to have a partner.

So last November I took the opportunity of a Barn Owl box-building course run by the Barn Owl Trust and Cornwall FWAG, and came away with a new tea chest configured to BOT specifications, including landing platform. We erected it next to the old tea chest in late November, and our resident Barn Owl was checking it out within two days. Within a couple of weeks, he was joined by another Barn Owl.

By mid May we noticed a lot of evening activity, with scuffling noises in the box and both parents bringing small creatures into the garage. This was followed by the rasping sound which has continued to date, and now we are seeing the young Barn Owls as they begin to investigate the outside world. Once, we saw four together on the ground, pouncing on passing leaves and feathers blowing in the wind.

It has been a fascinating experience both for us and for our holiday visitors, as we all get grandstand views from neighbouring buildings, without the need for binoculars. So much so, that we have just erected an outside box in an oak tree near one of our setaside fields in another part of the farm.

*Regards*

**Deborah Raper**

*Lower Penhallow Farm, Cornwall  
www.lowerpenhallowfarm.co.uk*

*During the year we send out huge numbers of owl pellets collected during fieldwork to schools throughout the country. Usually we freeze them before sending them out but this year they were going out as fast as we could collect them. Here is a selection of letters from children who have looked at these pellets. Please note that the "maggots" referred to, which they were all so excited about, are actually clothes moth grubs! Ed*

*Dear Barn Owl Trust*

Thank you for the owl pellets, I found 36 ribs and 8 maggots and lots more! We did lots of other work on owls including English, maths, science and ICT.

*Yours thankfully*

**Joel Burrough**

*Dear Barn Owl Trust*

I am writing this letter to thank you very much for the wonderful owl pellets you gave us. I could tell that the owl pellets were fresh as we had maggots in them - cool! I found lots of bones in my owl pellets and we also did some drawings of owls, poems and lots of maths to do with the owl pellets. Once again thank you very much

*Yours sincerely*

**Catherine Voysey**

*Dear Barn Owl Trust*

I am writing to thank you for the owl pellets, they were absolutely wonderful. It was really kind of you to get them for us, they were so fresh. Ms Warwick was stunned with some of them because they had live maggots. Cool or what! We found bits of tail and lots and lots of bones. We have displayed the bones out neatly and made lots of charts like pye charts, line charts and bar charts. Then we made some poems and pictures or paintings. It inspired me so much that I drew the best picture I have ever drawn. I just can not thank you enough for the inspiration you gave me. Some people thought it was disgusting but I thought it was fascinating. There were lots of different reactions when they were put in front of all of us. Thank you very much for letting us use them and dissect them.

*Yours sincerely*

**Austin Wells-Burr**  
*on behalf of class 5*

*Dear BOT,*

Thank you for the recent copy of your report, the 2004 Cornwall Barn Owl Survey. It was without question a great success with a far better coverage of the county than might have been expected. I congratulate you on producing such a detailed insight into the population and distribution of the species in the county.

**Paul McCartney** (*the other one - ed.*)  
**Data Manager at ERCCIS**  
(*Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall & Isles of Scilly*)  
*based in Truro*

*Dear BOT,*

Many thanks for sending me a copy of the Cornwall Survey. Congratulations to all who took part. A good result and a great report, cheers.

**John Woodland**  
*BTO Regional Rep (Devon & Cornwall)*

*Dear BOT,*

We feel so privileged to have a camera's eye view of our nesting owls. It has been great to follow the owlets' progress from eggs to almost fledged young owls. It has also helped us to protect them. Ours is a box with a hole at the base level and one morning when we checked on them there was only one owlet visible. We hastily donned boots and went to see what had happened. Sure enough 4 small birds were huddled together on the floor. Once retrieved and returned to the box they seemed fine and none the worse for their experience. The previous night had been damp and misty and maybe food had been in short supply and they came forward eagerly when an offering arrived. Two days later some visitors were watching the screen when suddenly another fell over the edge - this one practising its flying skills. One night by chance I sat down to wait for the parents to fly off to start the supper run. I could hardly believe what I saw. One or other of the parents entered the nest at least 12 times within the space of 40 minutes carrying voles and mice. It hasn't happened since! But we did have 5 babies.

**Tom & Yvonne Byles**  
*Cornwall*

## In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies from the estates of the late  
Joan Watson  
Mervyn George Sanders  
Mr and Mrs Beddall  
and  
Mr I R Watson

and donations in memory of

Jo Reid  
Gladys Laws  
Priscilla Pappin  
Kevin Paul Elvin

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

# Focus on Friends

Through our work we've met lots of lovely people and discovered beautiful places we would otherwise never have known about. Here we introduce you to a Cornish couple who are Friends of the Trust.



Abi Evans and Vaughan Upson first contacted the Trust in 1991 because Barn Owls were nesting in the derelict house they'd just bought. But this was no ordinary house and, as it turned out, these were no ordinary people... Over the past fourteen years we've got to know them quite well; at least well enough to ask them loads of personal questions for our *Focus on Friends* column! By the way, the house in question is **500 years** old. Vaughan and Abi have not only restored it from an overgrown ruin to a beautiful home, they've done it using 16<sup>th</sup> century building methods and managed to retain the owls which breed every year just above the stairs... even the garden is 16<sup>th</sup> century!

Abi was born in the 50's and grew up not far from where she now lives (in East Cornwall) inheriting an interest in old buildings from her dad. "He just couldn't resist old houses – when I was a kid it seemed like we visited every one that came on the market, he even restored an old Cornish mill and made the water wheel generate electricity." Abi's brother now runs a company that creates small-scale water-powered generator systems. As Abi grew, her fascination with old buildings encompassed not only the

architecture but extended to all the things *in* the buildings and even the gardens, wildlife, and domestic animals that surrounded them. She learned old ways of creating textiles and has been teaching traditional loom weaving and the use of natural fabric dyes since 1980. She's always loved wildlife and had animals of one sort or another, but it was her love of archaeology which led to her meeting Vaughan.

In 1989 whilst Abi was busily engaged in a 17<sup>th</sup> century excavation site next to her mum's house near Launceston, a group of visitors came to help investigate the site - led by a chap called Vaughan – the rest (as they say) is history. Vaughan and Abi have been together ever since.

Vaughan's ancient-buildings background was pretty extensive too having been inspired by his close friend Veronica Cheshire, author of *The Cornishman's House* and an authority on the subject. He's carried out the three-year *Cornwall Vernacular Buildings Survey* for the National Trust and a similar survey for Dartmoor National Park. Together, Vaughan and Abi have become very involved in the Cornwall and Devon Buildings Groups and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

In 1991 Abi and Vaughan had been together for just over a year and were on the look-out for somewhere to live; but not your average terraced house or bungalow, they wanted something old. Very old; "ancient and untouched", in fact. A friend carrying out a buildings survey pointed them towards an ancient dwelling-place near Liskeard. Investigations revealed that there had been a house on this site since 1333. Abi took an instant liking to Halbathic (it was virtually the house of her dreams) a leaking uninhabitable overgrown ruin! Vaughan wasn't quite so sure (seeing the sheer scale of the restoration task) but they took the plunge and became the proud owners of what used to be a 16<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse and ex-Quaker meetinghouse. It was during one of these early visits (to their brand new ruin) they became aware of a peculiar snoring noise which turned out to be a brood of young Barn Owls. Not wanting to lose the house during the restoration they called the Barn Owl Trust.

Abi and Vaughan followed our advice creating a special entrance hole and nest chamber in a small loft above the stairs and Barn Owls have been present ever since. Eighteen broods of young have fledged from the site in the last fourteen years providing live entertainment for Abi's summer-evening guests. "We stand at the window and watch their antics in the garden – it's wonderful. One year

Vaughan found an owlet that was not much bigger than an egg on the ground so we popped it back in the nest. Another year one of the young lived on our windowsill for several weeks; we were concerned it may not be getting enough food but didn't want to frighten it so we tried feeding it by tying a dead vole on a stick and poking it round the corner! Needless to say it didn't work! The owl survived so the adults must have been feeding it okay after all." Abi admits, "they do sometimes keep me awake at night but opening the window and whispering to them usually does the trick".

Abi and Vaughan became *Friends of the Barn Owl Trust* in 1992. In '93 they reported various other Cornish Barn Owl sites for our first survey of Barn Owls in Cornwall, and recently volunteered for the 2004 Cornwall Barn Owl Survey interviewing farmers and landowners in selected map squares. Earlier this year they were featured in an article in *The Times* newspaper on the subject of wildlife in buildings, which also mentioned the work of the Trust.

Having completely restored this house, their latest idea is to find an old building in France, restore it, and keep miniature French sheep. Whatever they do we hope we'll never lose touch. □



The house in 1991 (above) and now (below).  
All pictures provided



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# Thanks and Things

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This year we raised £535 for the Sponsored Walk from Business sponsors so thank you to all of the following companies who helped: Inkost Ltd. J Searle Ashburton, Dartmoor Magazine, Greenclean, Chuley Road Garage, Adams Industrial Packaging, The Ark, Carter & Co., Wildlife Watching Supplies, Millwood Homes, Purple Co. Ltd., Nestbox Co. Ltd, Edwin Tucker & Sons and Andrew Cardy, Your Financial Planning.

We'd like to thank everyone who has supported the Trust in the last six months but here are a few special mentions for: Jane Fineren for a beautiful embroidery picture given in memory of (and made by) her mother Joan Davies, Ben Garwood who raised funds for the Trust at a school display. Dr Barrie Watson who sold 12 fluffy toy owlets and sent us donations raised at an information stall at South of England Show at Ardingly. Our Treasurer Mark Pountney and Trustee Simon Wilson have also sold large numbers of soft toy owlets to all their colleagues - thanks guys. Mary Higgins for her very generous donation along with her Adoption. Mrs Cave of the DAFT group (Devoted to Animals Fundraising Team) who raised funds for the Trust at a plant sale. Margaret Crocker who continues

to raise funds for the Trust with the sale of plants and garden produce at her garden gate.

Also thanks to those who responded to our last Wants List: Hazel and Dennis (Ashburton Post Office) donated an office chair and supplies for the BOT Christmas party. Pat and Jenny Ford bought us a garden fork and craft set and Simon Roper donated lever arch files.

As you may know we include a Wants/Wish List on this page in each issue of Feedback. Some of the things on it may seem a bit excessive but over the years we have had an amazing response to this list and received donations of all sorts of things, including a caravan, which went to county shows for years. If you have any of these items lurking unused in a loft or a shed or would like to make a donation towards one of them we would be very grateful.

We could make good use of:

New unused stamps  
Used and unused padded envelopes  
Cornish Shovel  
Drill bits  
Electric over sink heater  
Modern petrol chain saw *and a*

Modern petrol bush cutter – *no harm in asking!*

New hardwearing carpet for post room, reception and small office  
Wild bird food  
Modern 4WD tractor (at least 60hp) - *well you never know!*  
Microwave - *speedier than present one which delivers lunch at teatime!*  
Rake  
Retracting measuring tapes  
Heavy workbench & vice  
Electric wood plane  
Large rechargeable torches (clulite)  
New large scale UK road map  
Thin leather gloves (medium)  
Set of screwdrivers  
Field identification guides for British wildlife.  
Quad bike (for Simon!)  
2-drawer metal filing cabinet  
'Grasses, Sedges, Rushes and Ferns' by Francis Rose.

We also want your used ink cartridges and mobile phones for recycling please.

## Tail Piece...



Having the Barn Owls breeding in the field this year has been wonderful. Since May we have been going out about 30 minutes before dusk and sitting on the brow of the hill for an hour or so. One night we saw what we are fairly sure was a Nightjar just as it got 'dimpsy'; other times we saw Roe Deer and one night a huge bat gave us an impressive flying display. We watched adult Barn Owls hunting over the field and carrying food to their family in the pole box and in June we saw an owlet peering out of the hole for the first time - waiting for its tea. The night skies have been fantastic this summer and one night when we were lying on our backs watching shooting stars an adult Barn Owl came to investigate us and hovered about 10 feet over our heads it was magical.

I've often gone for night-time walks before but having the owls around has made us stop and be still. With the falling of darkness your other senses become more acute and you can hear the rustling that you don't notice when you're moving. Smells are different at night too, the scent of a fox as it glides almost silently through the long grass, honeysuckle delicately wafting on the evening breeze.

One night in July our friends John and Jen set up their moth trap here. I'd never seen one working before and was amazed at the clouds of moths that appeared out of nowhere and hovered around the bright light; there were thousands. The local bats swooped in to take advantage of so many of their prey gathering together and a Barn Owl came to investigate the light and sat on a fence post watching until it spotted us. In the morning there were 50+ species in John's box, including 3 different Hawk Moths. After being identified and photographed they were all released into the hedge. Some of the moths were incredibly beautiful and some were huge, but what really amazed me was that they are here and we never see them. The moth trap provided us with the opportunity to really look at something that is all around us but we don't normally see.

Most of the time in our society people are being bombarded by advertising messages telling them what they need in order to be happy and content. We look at other people and make comparisons, we want more, bigger, better. The net effect of this is a culture that doesn't

appreciate the good things in life and is never satisfied.

One way to avoid this mindset is to appreciate the natural world; you don't need to go out at night to experience it (although it is very different from daytime), but you do need to be still. Most of the time we are rushing around, trying to get things done. In those moments when we are not doing or thinking we tend to talk or read or watch TV - what we rarely do is stop and just be still. Being still provides the opportunity for you to really notice what is around you and appreciate the incredible complexity of the natural world. It may seem very strange but if you take a few minutes every day to be still and listen to the birds, watch the clouds or smell the flowers it will enrich your life.

*Together we can make a world of difference.*

**Frances Ramsden**