



Issue Number 35 - Spring 2006



FEEDBACK

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



Loads of BOT News and...

- Imerys Project Completed
- Barn Owl Training Courses for Ecologists
- Barn Owls at the Lost Gardens of Heligan
- Trust Winter Nestbox Project

Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to Feedback. Over the Autumn and Winter we had loads of live bird emergency calls which we hope reflect not just that there are more owls that need help but, that there really *are* more owls about. We have a new leaflet ready for the breeding season which should help to minimise the time taken dealing with calls about Barn Owlets that fall from the nest - page 3. We've been extra busy lately and our news pages will tell you some of the things we've been up to.

There are lots of new faces who introduce themselves on page 13 including an Italian student who was resourceful enough to get herself a grant to come and work with us for six months. Sadly Amy Oliver says goodbye on page 12 after more than three years at the Trust.

The Lennon Legacy Project continues to be an inspiration to everyone that works here or visits. Last month we were lucky

enough to spend 20 minutes at dusk watching a Barn Owl hunting over the wonderful rough tussocky grass full of vole holes. There is now an opportunity for groups that book talks by the BOT to choose a presentation about the field and the project to turn what was intensively grazed grassland into Barn Owl heaven.

To further increase the bio-diversity in the field, we are hoping to create two ponds later this year (see page 3) and if we do this, it will provide the soil to create a second hedge bank along an original hedge line. There will be a chance to see the field this summer and some of its flora and fauna if you fancy joining us for bracken bashing - details below.

In a previous issue of Feedback (No. 25 - Spring 2001) we reported on two incidents of conflict between Buzzards and Barn Owls. On page 7 we have the most incredible tale of an owl that was

very 'Lucky' to survive this kind of encounter. Friend of the Trust, John Lightfoot from Shropshire, who volunteers for us in his holidays, also reports on interactions between species on page 15. - maybe these kinds of incident are not so isolated.

We ran a nestbox workshop in November with Devon Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group and in September and February we started a new initiative - training days for environmental consultants. We were delighted with the response we had and on page 5 Amy has written an item about the 'BOESS' days.

Back in 2004 we were visited by a Hungarian student called Ákos Klein and we featured an article on his Barn Owl work in Issue 31 of Feedback. This August we will have the opportunity to see this at first hand when we visit Hungary to attend the European Congress of Conservation Biology conference. The BOT has been asked to present a paper on Barn Owls and Major Roads. We plan to stay with Ákos and he hopes to introduce us to some Hungarian Barn Owls - more in the next issue.

Thank you for supporting the Trust - it really does make a difference. We hope you feel that Feedback is interesting and keeps you informed - enjoy your read.

Eds: Frances & Sandra

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Cover Photo: David Ramsden

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

Many thanks to everyone who provided words and pictures for this issue. Editorial team: Frances Ramsden 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 or email : feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk

Join us for a
Bracken Bashing Day
on
Saturday 8th July
10.00am - 4.00pm

This is an opportunity to see the Lennon Legacy Project field 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

Rodenticide Labelling

Following a recent meeting between the Barn Owl Trust and a representative of all the major rodenticide manufacturers, the Trust's leaflet "Rodent Control" and the information attached to rodenticide products is set to change. Thanks to the efforts of Alan Buckle, the Health and Safety Executive, and pressure groups like the Barn Owl Trust, the fact that rat and mouse baits **are** harmful to wildlife will soon be publicly acknowledged by the rodenticide industry. Individual Pest Control Officers won't find it so easy to state that their poisons don't affect wildlife – the products they use will have "Harmful to Wildlife" clearly written on them. The same words will appear on products licensed for amateur use and available through agricultural merchants and garden centres.

In the last 22 years the proportion of wild Barn Owls that have rodenticide poison in their bodies has risen from 5% to 45% and there is absolutely no doubt that some Barn Owls die as a direct result of

*Resident Barn Owl Hazel enjoys the → new aviary - our new website (see page 4) will feature a live web cam of the aviary
Photo: BOT staff*

eating mice or rats that have eaten rodenticide bait. The manufacturer's response to increasing pressure was to set up and fund the "Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use" (CRRU). During his visit to the Barn Owl Trust, CRRU chairman Alan Buckle, conceded that even where rodenticides are used according to the manufacturers' instructions there is still a significant risk of Barn Owls being poisoned. The Barn Owl Trust has suggested that the wording of new information sheets on rodenticide use be made more explicit about the risks to Barn Owls. At the same time CRRU have suggested changes to the BOT's own information leaflet. Although the planned labelling does not give as much information as we would like, it is a major step in the right direction - at last! □



New Leaflet

The Barn Owl Trust's range of free information has increased yet again with the addition of Leaflet Number 49 entitled "What to do if you find a young Barn Owl". Readers may recall that last year we produced our first owl rehabilitation leaflet entitled "What to do if you find a young Tawny Owl" and it was such a great asset that we decided to do a Barn Owl one as well. Every spring we have lots of calls from people who've picked up a fluffy young Tawny Owl whilst walking in the woods (and assumed it needed rescuing) and every summer we get calls about young Barn Owls that have fallen from the nest. Usually the caller is willing to check the owl over so we talk them through the process before deciding on what further advice to give. This usually involves a long conversation about hand feeding, (and/or), taking the owlet back and providing a temporary box up a tree (in the case of Tawnys) or getting it back in the nest (in the case of nestling Barn Owls). Each call generally takes at least half an hour to deal with and that's time we can't spend doing other valuable things.

Last year, with the new leaflet on our website it was great! Every time a Tawny owlet call came in we simply said "go to www.barnowltrust.org.uk and download the leaflet, follow the instructions and if you need any more help get back to us". Sorted in two minutes! Now that the Barn Owl version is ready, we decided to send a copy of each leaflet to all the wildlife rehabilitators we are in contact with in the UK. Hopefully they will find them really useful and it will save them lots of time too. □

Barn Owls and Major Roads Update

More than half of all the Barn Owl deaths reported in the UK are road casualties and in November 2003 the Barn Owl Trust published a 109-page report on the effects of major roads on Britain's Barn Owl population. The report, which used fifteen years of data collected by BOT and was written up over a 7-year period, contained recommendations for changes in the design of major road verges that would help reduce Barn Owl mortality.

The most radical of the Barn Owl Trust's recommendations involved the creation of hedges and closely spaced trees along both sides and directly adjacent to

the carriageway forcing birds to fly higher whilst crossing.

Contractors designing or maintaining verges across the trunk road network are required to follow the "Design Manual for Roads and Bridges" (DMRB) published by the government's Highways Agency. For the first time ever, the DMRB is going to have a section on Barn Owls! The BOT is currently providing comments on the Highways Agency's draft Barn Owl guidance. It remains to be seen whether this results in significant changes on the ground, but at least Barn Owls are being considered. □

Ponds Planned for Lennon Legacy Project

In memory of two separate legacies received last year from the estates of Major Charles Oakley and Florence Parsons, the Barn Owl Trust has decided to create two beautiful wildlife ponds within Forde Orchard – part of the Trust's 26-acre Lennon Legacy Project. To give you some idea of the scale, we hope each pond will be about the size of half a tennis court (but not rectangular!). As well as having lots of 'edge' and extensive shallows, we hope to create a

small island encircled by deep water as a safe nesting site for water birds.

There's a real shortage of still water in the area so we are hoping the new ponds will support plants, invertebrates, amphibians and bird species that are currently absent. Rather than introduce any species, we'll just create ideal conditions for natural colonisation. The whole project is subject to planning consent so it's too soon to say when it'll happen but hopefully there will be more

More BOT News

Rehab Report

Thanks to the arrival of Chiara Bettega, a new research volunteer from Italy, we're now able to do something we've never had time to do before... produce a report on all the rehabilitation work we've done over the last sixteen years...

Dealing with casualty owls has never been a major part of what we do – mainly because Barn Owls are rare, most of those found are dead, and there are other rehabilitators taking live birds in. We've never advertised that we take in injured owls and until 2005 we didn't produce any advisory information for people finding or treating owl casualties. In spite of the fact we don't deal with huge numbers, we've been doing it for so long that we've built up a considerable amount of experience and as a result our owl rehabilitation work is gradually coming to the fore.

Our presentation on release methods for rehabilitated owls, first produced in 2000 at the request of the British Wildlife Rehabilitation Council, has since been presented at various colleges running animal care courses and the Veterinary School of Bristol University. Through our live bird emergency number we've advised owl-finders, rehabilitators, and vets across the UK. The rehabilitation article in the last issue of FEEDBACK 'Life and Death Decisions at the BOT' received a very positive response and our first rehabilitation leaflet 'What to do if you find a young Tawny Owl' has proved to be a huge asset.

Once the new report is published, Trust supporters will be able to see exactly how many birds we've had in (mainly Barn, Tawny and Little Owls), what injuries they had, how many died, how many were released etc. etc.

Copies will be available later this year. □

New Website

These days, if you want information on something, the chances are you'll go straight to the internet rather than your telephone directory or local library. "I don't, I hate computers!" I hear you say. Okay, so not everyone uses the net, but most people do and, like it or not, it's happening more and more. If providing information is a major part of your work, then you need a really good website.

The Trust's current site was created five years ago as a student project (it cost us next to nothing to create) and is now being managed and updated by BOT staff and our wonderful IT support guy Alan Lewis. It's been great, but, as you might have noticed, there's lots of things

we do that are not mentioned; you can't purchase anything on-line, and we can't change it very easily. So, last year our trustees decided to investigate the possibility of us having a brand-new professionally built site that would fulfil all the needs we've identified.

We've just heard that The Donald Forester Trust has awarded us a grant of £5,000 towards the cost – fantastic news! Another £500 is being covered by a grant from The Patrick Charitable Trust. Many thanks to both. We are hoping the new site will be launched this summer on the same address www.barnowltrust.org.uk □

New Homes for Wildlife

As spring approaches, the woodland areas within the Lennon Legacy Project (LLP) will hopefully become a new home for a multitude of birds and small mammals. ACO Lisa Ashford has been actively encouraging this by erecting a selection of nest boxes over the winter. The boxes are intended to increase the species already nesting within the LLP and to attract new ones.

Tree creeper, woodpecker and a number of open and 'small hole' fronted nest-boxes have been positioned, together with dormouse and bat boxes. Green and Great spotted woodpeckers have been seen in and around the field and woodlands, along with a whole host of other birds. There has also been some evidence of dormice in the LLP amongst the coppiced hazel and it would be great to discover

that they have taken up residence in our boxes.

As the field continues to transform from intensively farmed land to a wildlife haven, it's amazing to see how much flora and fauna have already discovered the benefits. The Trust hopes the introduction of the nestboxes will enhance the LLP field even further. □



The little pond outside the barn, built to supply mud for nesting swallows has provided a new opportunity for local frogs. Photo: David Ramsden

Progress on BOT-funded Habitat Research

The joint project between the University of York, the Barn Owl Trust and the Environment Agency run by Nick Askew is on target to achieve its goals. Its success relies upon the acquisition of Barn Owl data from a broad geographic area. Consequently, the initial stages have focused upon contacting individuals and groups involved in Barn Owl conservation across the UK. Data relating to a total of 3,937 monitored Barn Owl nest/roost sites has been received and the deadline for submission has now passed. The next stage will entail comparing the landscapes

surrounding sites used and not used by Barn Owls in order to highlight the features that determine the suitability of each location and thereby study the landscape requirements of Barn Owls across Britain.

Information on the species habitat requirements in a variety of landscapes will enable the provision of more appropriate land management advice to farmers and landowners. This is vitally important as habitat determines food supply which, in turn, is the main factor determining nesting success and survival.

Nick is also working with a student colleague whose own project involves an in depth study of the BOT Devon and Cornwall datasets, again looking at site occupation in relation to environmental factors. The aim is to refine our understanding of habitat needs and evaluate the extent to which agri-environmental grant schemes have contributed to Barn Owl conservation. □

Barn Owl Ecology Surveys & Signs

BOESS - A successful new training event.

It started in 2004 when we noticed we were receiving an increasing number of enquiries from developers, asking us to recommend ecologists who could carry out combined bat and Barn Owl surveys. Barn conversions are still as popular as ever and fortunately, many local authorities are beginning to pay more attention to the

possible effects on wildlife, particularly on protected species

such as bats and Barn Owls. It is quite common these days (in the South West at any rate), for Local Authorities to request the results of bat and Barn Owl surveys before they even look at applications to convert rural buildings.

At the time, nobody at BOT had any bat training/experience, and it crossed my mind that getting a bat licence would be worth looking into so we could provide combined bat and Barn Owl surveys ourselves. Development-related Barn Owl survey work is one of very few things we actually charge for, and is therefore an important source of income.

So in May 2004 I attended a 3-day course run by the Bat Conservation Trust at a Field Studies Centre in Somerset. It was a foundation course for ecologists hoping to move into bat consultancy. In the end we decided it wasn't really viable for BOT to pursue bat survey work, but the course certainly wasn't a waste of time. Something very exciting and significant resulted from this trip....

The other attendees at the course were from all walks of life. There were FWAG officers, tree surgeons, planning officers and ecological consultants. They all had one thing in common – a lack of knowledge and training relating to Barn Owls, and an ambition to learn more.

It became apparent there was a need for training courses for people involved in Barn Owl surveying and mitigation work with regard to planning. It struck me there may be a nationwide demand.

After the bat course I returned to the office with grand ideas for a training course of our own, designed for people involved in or hoping to become involved in Barn Owl survey work. I aired these ideas to David who gave me the go-ahead to put something together.



In the field - attendees prepare to inspect a nestbox as part of their training

On Saturday September 10th 2005, we held our first BOESS training day. Publicity had been rather low key but places were booked up in no time. I was delighted to see planning officers, FWAG officers and ecological consultants on the day. David gave illustrated presentations covering Barn Owl ecology, protection, licensing and mitigation strategies. We had a fieldtrip in the afternoon, to a set of barns used by Barn Owls, to demonstrate survey techniques. The day went down really well and at the end we asked everyone to complete a questionnaire so we could use their comments for future events, we had some really encouraging feedback.

We held our second BOESS event on Saturday 18th February 2006. Again, everybody was eager to say how much they enjoyed it. The field trip on this occasion was especially popular because, as well as identifying and ageing owl pellets, they all got to see a wild Barn Owl! Both events were held in a converted barn especially designed for educational purposes, owned by Friends of the Trust Richard and Barbara Barker who also provided lunch for everybody with veggies and meat grown and reared by themselves on the farm.

After this event we also asked for feedback and much of this has contained a running theme – make it longer. It seems people want even more training than we've included so far. We're really pleased the course has proven to be so popular. We are hoping to run it on a regular basis.

Amy Oliver

BOESS Feedback Summary

Several participants said they would have liked more time on particular topics. They were all asked to score the following questions :

The presentations were clear and informative
97% = agree 3% = indifferent

I was not overwhelmed with information
81% = agree 16% = indifferent
3% = disagree

Every subject was satisfactorily explained
74% = agree 19% = indifferent
6% = disagree

I would definitely recommend the course to friends or colleagues
100% = agree

Feedback extracts :

Thank you for organising such a good course. The content and presentations were excellent and the information pack is wonderful.

Dr Jackie Underhill - Worcestershire

Thank you for organising such a great day. I went home thoroughly inspired. The skills we learnt will definitely be useful for my work.

Kate Walls - North Norfolk

Many thanks for a very interesting and informative day. I left with many ideas to incorporate into the way I work. I will certainly recommend other staff come along.

Steve Marshall - Cornwall

Thank you for a very good day. It was very well organised and informative with lots of information given clearly in a short space of time. Also great surroundings at Fowlescombe and fantastic to have some "proper" food for lunch!

Jo Clayton - Somerset



Group discussions during a mitigation case-studies exercise Photos: Frances Ramden

Winter Nestbox Project

Over the past four months the Barn Owl Trust has erected a huge number of nestboxes in an effort to eradicate the dreaded 'Nestbox Waiting List'. The list had grown to around 160 sites largely due to the Devon and Cornwall Barn Owl Surveys identifying sites where boxes were needed. Being a small organisation, finding the time to undertake this task was difficult and this is why the Nestbox Officer position was created - and I filled it!

My target was to completely clear the backlog of sites needing nestboxes in advance of the 2006 breeding season. Due to the size of the list this was no mean feat, especially given the fact that on average erecting three boxes a day is classed as an achievement. It is also really difficult contacting people and arranging appointments across two counties when some of them have been on the list for several years, some have moved, changed their phone numbers or their minds about wanting one and a few even forgot that they'd asked for one in the first place.

It's been a wonderful opportunity to visit lots of sites that we would not otherwise have been to, and further our aim of creating Barn Owl habitat through advice to farmers and landowners. Sites where we've given land management advice included St. Mellion Golf Club - a holding of over 300 acres where Barn Owls will be encouraged to hunt over the rough sides of the fairways.

Erecting nestboxes can be vital for the continued occupation of sites. For



Chris inspects the old nestbox that had fallen down

Photo: David Ramsden

example, at one farm an old tea-chest containing the nest had fallen and been crushed by straw bales (see photograph). If we hadn't erected a new box the birds could not have nested again. At many other sites we've been replacing old-style boxes from which owlets have fallen and died - our deep nestboxes are much safer. Every owlet saved by a well-placed well-designed nestbox and every acre of hunting ground created through the right

management brings the Barn Owl Trust closer to fulfilling its aims.

Chris Richards
Nestbox Officer

Chris introduces himself to you on page 11. (Eds.)

Wind Farms

In the last issue of Feedback we promised you an item on wind farms - so here goes: Are they good clean energy or ugly eyesores?

We're receiving an increasing number of enquiries from people concerned about the impact of proposed wind farms in their area. Naturally, the thousands of people who are in favour of wind farms (or disinterested) don't get in touch.

Most of those who contact us are trying to find grounds for objection and assume that Barn Owls will be killed by the rotating blades. Some of the early wind turbines built in California and some of those in Spain certainly do kill lots of birds - including rare birds of prey - but this is because they were built in the wrong place.

In the UK a full Environmental Impact Assessment must be carried out as part of the planning process and groups like the RSPB, and sometimes smaller groups, like the Barn Owl Trust, are consulted. Wildlife conservation organisations are generally in favour of wind farms and normally only object if

the planned turbines are in a regular flight path and likely to kill birds.

Fortunately Barn Owls don't normally fly more than a few metres above the ground and there is (as far as we know) no evidence that tall wind turbines are a threat. However, high-flying birds such as geese, swans, and some waders are a different matter but mortality can be minimised by positioning wind farms away from their regular flight paths. Soaring birds of prey tend to concentrate where the prevailing wind rises up west-facing slopes - these too need to be avoided.

During our county Barn Owl surveys we've recorded several sites where Barn Owls breed annually very close to wind turbines and appear to be unaffected. So, if you are concerned about a planned wind farm, don't worry about increased Barn Owl mortality but do check that an Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out. □

In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies from the estates of the late Iris Mae Billings, Iris Janes and Dorothy Woodville

and donations in memory of

Michael Tregear, Reg Comer and Vernon Coad

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

Bird News

Since the last issue of Feedback we have taken in quite a few Barn Owls as permanent residents at our sanctuary. Miracle, a young disabled wild female came all the way from Guernsey in November and travelled many miles (accompanied obviously!) by boat and car to reach us. Noel, as his name suggests, also arrived not long before Christmas. He is another wild disabled Barn Owl but was comparatively local coming from east Devon. He was found with an injured wing underneath overhead power cables. More recently we have given sanctuary to Barny - an eleven year old captive bred Barn Owl whose owners have reluctantly had to re-home him due to changes in their personal circumstances. He is settling in well and will soon be introduced to some of our other residents. Lastly, and possibly one of the most intriguing arrivals, – a wild Barn Owl “Lucky”, that had been caught by a buzzard (more in the item below).

Sadly five of our resident owls have died over the winter months. New Moon, Angel, Pilgrim, and Kirk were all over ten years old, and Woodland was about sixteen. All will be missed by everyone here particularly New Moon who was bred at Waterleat and used to go on educational visits with David.

There have of course been the usual comings and goings of owls that we have been able to nurse back to health and return to the wild and one rather interesting captive bred owl that landed on someone’s balcony in the middle of a city. Luckily the owner of the balcony had some experience and knowledge of owls so he was able to catch the bird and bring it to us. Because the owl was very tame we felt sure that there must be a

That’s Lucky!

At dusk, on March 5th near Chumleigh in Devon, James Martin was driving home from the vets with Janet Rowley nursing their dog who’d just had major surgery. They spotted what looked like a bird on the side of the road and stopped to investigate. James got out and realised it was a buzzard with a live Barn Owl in its talons!

This is unusual enough but what happened next was amazing... James tried to shoo the buzzard off but it wouldn’t go! He got right up to it and it still didn’t fly off! Bravely, he managed to prize open the buzzard’s talons and release the Barn Owl from its grip.

Even after the buzzard had let go it didn’t fly off far and whilst James was walking

loving home somewhere quite close and after having him scanned at the local vets we discovered that he had been micro-chipped so were able to re-unite Barn Owl and grateful owners. It turned out that the owl lived quite close by and had just landed on the wrong balcony. Most stories of captive bred Barn Owls that escape their keepers unfortunately do not have such a happy ending and are more often found dead than alive.

We now have a beautiful new hospital aviary thanks to Tim our once handyman volunteer and now our handyman employee. Whilst on the subject of volunteers, is there anyone out there who would like to spend two or three hours every week (or even fortnight) helping to clean our aviaries? This is a job best done with a companion and if you enjoy playing with water and don’t mind getting a bit wet and mucky please... please give us a ring!

We were all very sad to discover the remains of the Barn Owl that had been resident at Waterleat and roosting regularly in the barn in the LLP field – we can only surmise what its fate had been. However, it’s not all bad news, another Barn Owl has been spotted several times hunting over the LLP field quite recently.

For those of you who remember Rave (our disabled Raven), she has now been living with her new partner at Birdworld for over a year and we are reliably informed that she is enjoying life and devoted to her mate.

Sandra Reardon
Head of Admin

to the car the buzzard flew back and tried to grab the owl out of his hand!! James got back in the car and as he pulled away the buzzard flew at the car still trying to get the owl! Unbelievable but true!

They drove home with Janet nursing the dog and the owl in the dog cage. As soon as they got home, Janet phoned the Barn Owl Trust’s live bird emergency number and related the whole tale. Fortunately Chris (our Nestbox Officer) didn’t live too far away so he collected the owl, which was still suffering from internal bleeding the following morning. Amazingly, “Lucky” as she is now known, survived and we are currently planning her release... □



*During the annual health check Lisa and David weigh a Barn Owl whilst Harry keeps the records
Photo: Amy Oliver*

Bird ‘Flu

With confirmed cases of Avian Influenza getting closer and closer to the UK we are becoming more concerned, particularly about the birds in our sanctuary.

Current advice suggests that wild bird populations are unlikely to be affected because infected birds die so quickly that they have very little time to infect others – outbreaks are deadly, brief, and only very local.

However, captive birds kept at high densities are at much greater risk. We wait to see how events unfold and how preventative advice changes. Covering our aviaries in tarpaulins is a possibility but could only be a temporary measure.

We are given to understand that when the virus arrives it will be around for at least a couple of years... We will, of course, take all reasonable steps to protect the birds in our care...

Anyone handling birds, or anything that has had contact with birds e.g. bird feeders, is advised to keep any cuts covered and wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water afterwards. □

Imerys Project Completed

As part of their commitment to enhancing biodiversity on their land, Imerys Minerals Ltd (an international company extracting china clay in mid-Cornwall) joined up with the Barn Owl Trust for a five-year project. The aim of the Imerys Barn Owl Initiative was to increase the Barn Owl population in the china clay works area. Imerys and the Trust have been working together to maximise the suitability of the company's land holding for Barn Owls through habitat improvement and the provision of nestboxes. An initial survey of reported Barn Owl nest and roost sites provided a baseline estimate of the existing population against which the success of the project could be measured. The aim was to maintain or establish areas of foraging habitat and provide roosting and nesting sites in the form of nestboxes nearby. All the nestboxes were inspected annually to monitor occupation by Barn Owls.

Anyone who has been to mid-Cornwall could not help but notice the 'Cornish Alps'; huge mounds of sand that dominate the landscape. For 200 years waste materials have been dumped on the surrounding land, creating a unique lunar landscape of deep pits and white tips, blue lagoons and wasteland. A solution is to restore these barren waste areas to natural habitat or agricultural land. Over the past few years significant improvements have been made with many areas landscaped and planted with trees, shrubs and grasslands. Imerys and other clay producers are working with English Nature on a project that will transform the redundant clay works to a new landscape of undulating heathlands, woodlands and farmland.

The Barn Owl is a specialist, adapted to catch small mammals, mainly field voles, in open habitat at night. They are not woodland birds and heathland does not usually support significant small mammal populations. It is the pasture and edges that provide rough grassland foraging habitat for Barn Owls, and it is these areas that have been the focus of the Imerys Barn Owl Initiative.

Out of thirty possible indoor nestbox sites, the Barn Owl Trust found enough suitable buildings to erect only thirteen. There are few mature trees in the area suitable for outdoor nestboxes and so we reduced the shortfall in nesting provision by the use of pole boxes. Pole boxes have the advantage that they can be placed more or less exactly where you want them, often in the heart of rough grassland. On the other hand, they are more expensive, weighty and more complicated to erect

than other types of nestbox. Some of you might remember press coverage of the first Barn Owl nest discovered during the



An old style Pyramid tip - a reminder of our industrial heritage. Photo: Amy Oliver

project in the summer of 2003. Barn Owls bred in a pole box just four months after it was installed. Since then, Barn Owls have bred in the same box every summer.

Mark Green (previously a Conservation Officer for BOT) did most of the groundwork for the project and ran it until he stopped working for BOT in 2003. It was then down to me to take it on. Initially, I felt slightly overwhelmed by the thought of inspecting over 40 nestboxes and 20



Amy & David Williams show off the Imerys owllets. Photo: David Ramsden

something habitat areas in such a dynamic and unknown landscape. I carried out my first round of fieldwork during July 2004. As I was new to the scene, I had to attend a number of Health and Safety training sessions at Imerys for the various areas I needed to visit. As you can imagine, H&S is very high up their agenda – active quarries can be very dangerous places.

Imerys assigned a member of their staff to act as my escort for the duration of my

visits. This was quite a good idea, as one wrong turn could have led me into a controlled explosion! David Williams of the Landscape Department knew the area like the back of his hand. I would have gotten hopelessly lost without him. The nicest thing about working with David was his enthusiasm for Barn Owls. Eager to be involved, David was a real help.

In the end, running the project turned out to be a real pleasure. I felt privileged to have had the opportunity to experience such alien landscapes and beautiful farmland that are normally out of bounds for safety reasons.

2005 saw the Initiative draw to a close after I completed the final year of annual inspections. We published the Final Report in October 2005 and it shows a very encouraging result.

When the Initiative started in 2001, Mark Green confirmed the presence of three sites used by Barn Owls for roosting within the project area boundary. After five years of dedicated conservation work we were delighted to confirm the presence of eight roost sites and two breeding sites during 2005. Barn Owls have successfully bred four times since the Initiative began, each time using a nestbox specifically erected as part of the Initiative.

This summer, we were thrilled to discover three Barn Owl youngsters in a polebox that had not previously been used. When the youngsters were old enough to be ringed David Ramsden, our Senior Conservation Officer visited with David Williams and myself. All three owllets were very obliging but made their feelings known about the momentary inconvenience by white-washing a couple of trouser legs!

Imerys Minerals Ltd are also delighted with the results of the project. Although the five-year Initiative is officially drawing to a close, there is excellent scope for maintaining and increasing the existing Barn Owl population. The Trust has provided some training for David Williams, so he can take over the monitoring work and continue conservation efforts in a sustainable fashion.

Amy Oliver
Assistant Conservation Officer

Barn Owls at Heligan

The Wildlife Project at the Lost Gardens of Heligan began with the building of a wildlife-viewing hide in 2001 and 2km of underground cable being laid to connect the hide with nearby woodland. This cabling would soon transmit live images from nest boxes and feeders to large screens where visitors could enjoy new and exciting views of wildlife - live and unedited. It was the start of an ambitious project to get everyone excited about our native wildlife, remember these were definitely pre-Springwatch days! Little did we know that one of the first birds to take up residence would be wild Barn Owls, choosing to live in our box! Our project was born.

Five years later and with the renewed public interest in our native wildlife, the project is thriving – not least because of the owls. The ability to watch the minutiae of the owls' lives and the privilege of having such an intimate perspective on a truly wild bird retains its thrill year on year. It hasn't all been plain sailing – the reality is that death and success in the natural world are inextricably linked. Parents feeding weaker chicks to others in the brood so that at least one survives can be difficult to watch live on screen. But we do watch and we make others watch too. What we've seen has been an intriguing, joyous and often painful experience that has moved us to make the best of the land at Heligan in order for it to support a diverse and healthy wildlife population.

Looking back to the first few years we were building up information not just from the cameras inside the box but also the roost sites and hunting grounds. David Ramsden (BOT) ringed the chicks and where possible the adults; this became key to identifying our individuals the following year. The cameras would show us the comings and goings of the owls and chicks, but also details of individual birds, their habits, their differences and the way in which they interacted together and with other Heligan wildlife.

One of the first things we observed was that every year our adult pairs were changing; we have never had the same pair breed in consecutive years. Every year we have lost either a male or female bird; two years being the longest any bird has been with us. Although not unprecedented this rate was, and still is, very concerning as we have seen either a male or female with a new partner every breeding season.

The regular change of nesting individuals did allow us the opportunity to see that there were quite obvious and distinct variations in behaviour between individual birds. In 2004 our female a.k.a. Red-legs (the name reflects our unimaginative

streak as she had a red leg ring!) lost her old mate Black-legs (sorry!). We were thrilled to see she had attracted a new



Inside the box with mate - 2005. Photos provided

male to father her chicks and provide for her when times got hard. It wasn't quite that straightforward though – the cameras revealed what could only be described as a timid, shy bird that during courtship kept his head bowed towards the hen. It was quite obvious that he was a visitor in her residence! We watched with interest as this male appeared to 'dance' in front of the hen; a sort of shuffle not unlike Michael Jackson's moonwalk. Timidity overcome, the hen soon began to lay and incubated a total of six eggs. The success was short lived, two weeks into incubation we watched as the cache of mammals diminished. Red-legs looked uneasy and began to leave the eggs to perch and wait for him to return with much needed food. He never returned and I remember very clearly her pacing back and forth from her clutch to the box entrance before she finally decided to leave to look for food. We all thought that would be the end of her chances for the year.

Luckily, days later, we spotted a new male flying around the box in answer to her calls. We were so excited yet shocked to see the hen wasn't so sure about her new mate! At first she defended the box, even chased him away, seemingly unsure as to whether she should welcome him. After three days he was accepted into her nest box and what a difference! The footage

we recorded showed a complete role reversal. This male was so confident and she was adopting a diminutive pose as he looked around and inspected his new roost. Unlike his predecessor he was the one who instigated copulation and within a few weeks she had laid another clutch. The two males could not have been more different in their response to the hen and she too in her response to them.

Interactions between the owls and other birds have also proved eventful. Previously we had recorded a great deal of noisy copulating between Red-legs and her first male, which had attracted a Tawny Owl that landed on the front of the box, peered in for about 20 seconds then flew off; a sort of 'will you keep the noise down please' visit. The cameras revealed two terrified Barn Owls that immediately froze with big, wide eyes and rounded faces, ears alert for any sounds. They were frozen to the spot and remained like this for nearly 5 minutes.

Lately it's been buzzards, whose territory overlaps that of this year's roosting female, which have been the troublemakers. A chance recording made by a member of the Heligan staff of a buzzard swooping behind the Barn Owls' nest box and startling a male who was perched outside made us realise that the two species weren't the best of friends. It wasn't an attack but certainly a warning.

Locking up the Hide one Sunday evening, two visitors came and purposefully sat at the viewing point; they told me they came regularly to catch a glimpse of the owl. Sure enough 'Dot' (her plumage looks stunning under infrared light!) perched in the entrance and surveyed the grassland, moving her head from side to side. She flew down from the box, swooped up and perched on the post we'd placed outside the Hide. What a view! Our visitors were so thrilled and it got better... She proceeded to catch a vole in front of us then took it back to the box where we could watch on the screens as it was



Dot's mate in 2005 with the nest box in the background

Team Talk

Since the last issue of Feedback we've seen lots of changing faces at the Trust - fortunately more comings than goings. We said goodbye to ACO Simon Balmford who was with us almost a year and we enjoyed spending a month with Caroline Lewis who joined us as Publicity Officer but unfortunately for us, couldn't stay.

Here ACO Amy says goodbye and our new faces introduce themselves:



Amy Oliver spent over 3 years with the Trust
Photo: Frances Ramsden

Well it's the end of the road for me, or a move to pastures new at any rate. Since September I've been attending college for three days a week to study for a City and

Guilds Certificate in Plumbing. Over the last three years my partner Darren and I have been doing up houses in our spare time. During this time I have found the construction industry quite a pleasant atmosphere to work in. Ideally I would have loved to stay working in conservation but competition for jobs is very high for famously low wages.

I began the course with some apprehension and trepidation (particularly being female), but so far I can't believe how much I've enjoyed it! In order to qualify I need to complete a period of work based experience, and in order to do this I've had to give up my days at the Barn Owl Trust.

I have worked here now for over three and a half years. I cannot begin to articulate the amount I've learnt in this time about Barn Owls and natural history in general. The biggest highlight throughout has been having the privilege to visit places normally out of bounds to the general public. I have seen some truly stunning countryside. I also have a bit of a passion for vernacular architecture, so exploring old barns when on the job has been a real perk. One of my favourite memories is staying in Cornwall for a few weeks in August 2004, to carry out survey work for the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey. I spent day after day in the glorious summer countryside exploring and searching for owls, and winding up with a

gentle stroll on the beach before sundown. Heaven!

I've also really enjoyed having the opportunity to take on various challenges from which I have gained a real sense of achievement. Such challenges have included the Imerys Barn Owl Initiative and organising our BOESS training event. I suppose having run BOESS from its conception is probably the thing I am most proud of. I'm really glad I've managed to leave the Barn Owl Trust with something that can not only improve understanding of the Barn Owl and its habitat by ecologists and environmental consultants, but could also help to generate much needed funds for the Trust.

After a couple of years experience in the plumbing trade, Darren and I hope to continue renovating properties where I can devote a full-time input. In the meantime, I'm really going to miss the Trust. At the office I'll definitely miss the people, the owls, the stunning scenery and last but by no means least, Dunkle the cat! I hope to keep some involvement going in the future when I've found my feet a bit.

Farewell for now.

Amy Oliver
Assistant Conservation Officer

⇒ Barn Owls at Heligancontinued

being consumed. Out she came again and perched on our pan and tilt camera. Then just as quickly as before she dived into the tussocky grass to make another kill. This time though she had been spotted. Luke called from the other window to say the buzzard we'd seen circling earlier was gliding over from the ash tree towards the hide. Dot had seen the buzzard a few minutes earlier but was undeterred, still she sat in the long grass determined to finish her meal. Not quickly enough, the buzzard landed right in front of her, dwarfing her from less than two feet away. Not easily scared off Dot took the remains of her vole in her beak and took off in a flash of bright white to the safety of her box. Needless to say we had two very happy visitors who'd witnessed such a great interaction.

The most recent buzzard encounter was of a different kind when a BBC crew was here to film our winter wildlife. Dot, my 'reliable' barn owl, had been typically leaving her nest box at 4 o'clock then perching right outside the hide, great for

the cameras I thought. Needless to say when the producer arrived she became camera shy. I was concerned about this; her behaviour seemed so different from that of only a few days before and something was definitely bothering her. Sure enough when quartering in near darkness, over came the buzzard and made a beeline for her even though she was at least 400 yards away. We watched as it flew straight to Dot. Could I possibly lose another owl and with the BBC watching too? I needn't have worried as 'Dot' lived another day; in fact she is doing fine as I write this piece. Sadly no male yet but we all keep a watchful eye over our favourite member of the Heligan team as she roosts oblivious to the children and adults alike who watch her every move live in the Hide.

All in all the highs and lows of having the lives of a wild Barn Owl inextricably linked to your daily life and work has been a real pleasure. Our thanks go to David and Amy from the BOT who always advise and ring for us each year, and to Peter Stafford at



Heligan whose brainchild the Wildlife Project was in the beginning.

To watch our hen 'Dot' as she roosts log on to www.eco-watch.com. Barn Owl nights are held at The Lost Gardens of Heligan in the summer months for all those wanting to watch the family from the Hide, please call 01726 845100 for more details from June onwards.

Lisa Phillips
eco-watch wildlife surveillance
lisa@eco-watch.com

More Team Talk

*Harry Davies - Support Officer
All photos: Frances Ramsden*



I initially applied, unsuccessfully, for the ACO post early last year and was thrilled

when I got a second chance to join the Trust under the guise of Support Officer.

As part of my role I have had to become familiar with all the general admin tasks and I have taken on the search for funding for the organisation. I have also succeeded Sandra in managing the adoption scheme. I was thrown in at the deep end at Christmas as this is our busiest time for new adoptions but it did mean I now have a pretty good understanding of it all!

Highlights so far have included attending the Newton Abbot Victorian Market dressed as a Barn Owl (see page 14) helping with the annual health checks and

also getting to feed the resident owls twice a week.

I grew up in Devon and first moved away to study Ecology and Environmental Management at Cardiff University. Before going to university I travelled to New Zealand and Australia, spending six weeks as a conservation volunteer in Indonesia. I have just completed an MSc in Biodiversity, Conservation and Management at Oxford University.

I have greatly enjoyed my time at the Trust so far and am looking forward to the busy summer months ahead.

Harriet (Harry) Davies
Support Officer

Chris Richards - Nestbox Officer



I arrived here from Italy at the beginning of February having got a grant to work with the Trust as a research volunteer. I am helping to create a report about the Barn Owl Trust's rehabilitation work and wishing to learn more about wildlife conservation and owls (and, moreover, to improve my English!)

I come from a small dolomitic valley in North-East Italy. I graduated two years ago in Natural Sciences and since then I worked seasonally as a guide at the Paneveggio-Pale di S.Martino Natural Park. Last summer I worked as a

Hi all. I'm Chris the new Nestbox Officer for the Trust. I have been working here since November and enjoying every minute. My interest in wildlife and conservation has been with me from an early age, and is backed up by a BSc in Zoology and a Postgraduate qualification in Marine Environmental Protection.

As well as being lucky enough to work for a conservation organisation, I also continue this interest in my spare time as a Voluntary Trainee Bat Warden.

The rest of my time is taken up with my other hobbies, which include motorcycling, green woodwork and keeping poison dart frogs.

I have just been told that at the end of my Contract there is a job for me as Assistant Conservation Officer so I hope my time here will be long and fruitful, and I look forward to maybe meeting some of you at BOT events and county shows.

Chris Richards
Nestbox Officer

*The Italian connection - Chiara Bettega
Research Volunteer Placement*



*Kelly Wakeham - the woman with two hats -
Admin Assistant and Conservation PA*



I started working for the Trust for one day a week in January this year, and I have now been asked to come on board full time, which I am really pleased about. Having studied Rural Environmental Management I have been keen to work in conservation for some time, especially wildlife conservation. In the past I have volunteered as a Warden for the National Trust in South Devon, and also implemented an environmental scheme for a company I used to work for also in Devon.

I have two roles here, one to work as part of the Admin team and the other as

personal assistant to David – the Senior Conservation Officer. During my short time working at the Trust I have been able to attend a number of David's talks for both adults and children and have been lucky enough to attend a Barn Owl Ecology day run by the Trust. This has allowed me to develop my understanding of the Trust's work and the Barn Owl itself.

I look forward to many more informative days and a positive future with the Trust.

Kelly Wakeham

Around and About -



*Garry at Sibsey Church
All photos provided by Garry*

I doubt that now I will ever be able to quite put my finger on exactly when, or how my passion for natural history first began. It's lost in the eons of time – well back to the late 1950's at least, as a young boy growing up in my native Derbyshire.

Certainly in the early days it must have partly been triggered – dare I admit it, through bird-nesting! All of us lads did it at that time. For me it was never about taking eggs ('honest, Constable') but more the fascination of discovering the secret places where many nests were tucked away and the beautifully marked eggs they often contained.

By the late 1960's things had moved on, at the age of 15 after a chance discussion with a fellow school pupil by the name of Steve Jackson. I discovered he had acquired a second-hand pair of binoculars and just started going off on trips on his push bike to places like the Peak District and the Trent valley. I went with him looking for and identifying birds that did not occur in our local area.

It wasn't long before the aims of these shared trips began to widen, endeavouring to identify the many plants, animals and insects we also encountered on our travels and around the same time becoming involved in the budding nature conservation movement.

It's much too long a story to relate in detail here, but back in the mid-1970's I ended up moving to Lincolnshire where, after quite a few years of voluntary effort with the local Wildlife Trust and involvement with wildlife projects in another life working as a Scientific Officer in the now defunct Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food (MAFF) I took the plunge in 1999 and formed my own ecological consultancy business – with a good part of my work being intentionally concerned with protected species, including Barn Owls.

Back in my Derbyshire days Barn Owls were certainly a rare site, but on my move to Lincolnshire it was immediately apparent, (sadly all too often through seeing them as road victims) that they were still around in relatively good numbers. Perhaps surprisingly they appeared to be, and in fact still are, more frequent in the east and south of the county in the very intensively farmed and what I term the 'arablized' Fens. It is here that the Barn Owls have cleverly adapted to hunt in straight lines along the rough banks of the numerous dykes and ditches criss-crossing the flat landscape for field voles and other prey which themselves have adapted to survive in these narrow bands of linear habitat.

Through my association with the Lincolnshire Bird Club, towards the end of the 1980's I was contacted by Bob Shepherd, one of Lincolnshire's leading pioneers in the conservation of the county's Barn Owls and the voluntary regional advisor for the Hawk and Owl Trust, to help in a Barn Owl pellet study. My allocated site was a classic red brick and clay pantile roofed, farm barns crew-yard complex – typically abandoned following the large-scale, post-war trend in Lincolnshire away from mixed to arable-only farming. It contained an already occupied Barn Owl box recently erected by Bob. From the moment I witnessed the white apparition of the adult barn owl ghosting silently out of the barn and being shown the brood of hissing owlets in the box I was totally hooked.

It was then only a short time after this that I joined the ranks of a few dedicated county enthusiasts including Bob, trying to do their bit for this wonderful creature - now so rare in much of the country, by installing and monitoring under licence my own nest boxes for Barn Owls in my local area.

None of this would have started without the help of my late, great friend and fellow Barn Owl enthusiast, Mr Ron Humberstone. When I first met Ron in 1990 he was already turning out large numbers of small bird nest boxes and bird tables from his little garden shed for members of the local RSPB Group. It was therefore a fairly easy step to persuade him that he could scale-up his skills to start making Barn Owl boxes and eventually boxes for other birds of prey. These were erected at sites I had negotiated with local cooperating farmers and land owners wanting to do their bit.

For around 10 years before his untimely death in 2000, Ron and I formed something of a team, providing a birds of prey nest box and installation service for

farmers and land owners, all for free, erecting over 100 boxes in that time.

Given the almost total absence of suitable trees locally, it soon became apparent that these traditional barns which the Barn Owls were so reliant on for roosting and breeding, were invariably not a long-term safe bet if we were going to really help continue to conserve them in our local patch.

Invariably we found the barns were either beginning to collapse through lack of maintenance after becoming redundant, were scheduled to be taken down for their reclaimed bricks, suddenly roofless and laid open to the elements after having all their pantiles not unusually stolen to order, or due to be converted and heavily modified to form dwellings or holiday lets. All too often we were witnessing the demise and irreplaceable loss from the fenland landscape of much of our local agricultural built heritage – but then that's another issue!

Our 'Owl Boxes in Churches' project began in 1993. I must straight away admit that this was inspired by our knowledge of a church in the neighbouring village of Stickney, near Boston, the stone tower of which amazingly supports two breeding chambers for Barn Owls. These were incorporated into the tower way back in 1900 when it was rebuilt and are still occasionally being used by Barn Owls to this day, 106 years later. The story about these, the vicar who insisted on their inclusion and the stained glass Barn Owls in the chancel window dedicated to his memory is another tale in itself! Ron and I began our project with my local church in the village of Stickford where I live, installing, after permission was given by the local church council, an internal box with access made available through a window slot on the east face of the tower. All did not initially go quite according to plan however, as yours truly forgot to check the width of the entrance at the bottom of the spiral stairway, which



The resident Barn Owl flies out

...visits Lincolnshire

then meant Ron's beautiful and specially prepared spanking new nest box had to be sawn in half and reassembled up the tower! The heart-warming ending was however that by 1996 we had our first breeding pair of Barn Owls in the box which has since produced young in every successive year since that time, including last year when all five young successfully fledged. Over the next four years we installed three more boxes either in or on other local church towers, two of which are today still regularly being used by Barn Owls for roosting and breeding.

As a way to ensure that all Ron's efforts and dedication did not go unrecorded,



With Ron and the wrong sized box!

in 2001 - the year following his death - I decided to enter our project into the Lincolnshire Environmental Award competition. I am thrilled to say that I/we won the 'Individual' category of this quite prestigious county event, winning a bursary in Ron's memory of £500, long-since spent on wood for further nest boxes. Along with Ron's widow, Maureen I met Professor David Bellamy, one of the judges.

Today things go on apace, I continue to run my own voluntary birds of prey nest box scheme, ably backed by Ron's successor, Mr Keith Seaton of Spalding, equally dedicated to the cause of producing top-quality 'Des-Res's' for Barn Owls and many other bird species. Wherever possible, we have a standard policy of always providing two boxes for Barn Owls at a site to enable the male attending the brooding female to roost

undisturbed. Keith and I have recently embarked on an exciting new project with the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT), a national organisation dedicated to caring for the growing number of redundant churches. Last spring we erected a box inside a church in Lincolnshire, which no longer has glass in the windows. A recent check of this, along with the second box fitted to a tree in the churchyard, found both already have been commandeered by Barn Owls. Two further boxes are soon to be incorporated into the tower of another CCT church in the county that is currently under repair.

For several years now I have been giving illustrated talks on Barn Owls and other wildlife topics to interested groups and clubs around the county. I also regularly carry out Barn Owl pellet dissection activities with school science clubs, Wildlife Trust 'Watch' groups, Guides and Scouts and have also done this for a recent edition of the children's television CBBC channel. It's a great way to enthuse adults and children about Barn Owls and the wonders of the natural world.

Through my work as an ecological consultant I specialise in carrying out independent protected species site surveys as part of the planning consent process. Often these are old farm buildings earmarked for conversion into dwellings or holiday lets. We are very likely to see a decline in Lincolnshire's Barn Owls if we remain over-reliant on the old redundant farm buildings to maintain their numbers

I recently undertook four such commissioned surveys of buildings of this nature within a single week, all of which were currently being utilised by Barn Owls for roosting or previously for breeding. In these situations it then becomes part of my job to provide what is referred to as a mitigation strategy for the developer. This means making recommendations on the timings of work and providing alternative suitable accommodation for Barn Owls at or close to the site, subject to approval by English Nature, the statutory nature conservation organisation.

In connection with this I have recently been actively seeking with Local Planning Authorities formal approval for the use of the brick-built Barn Owl towers – a wonderful concept, but much costlier and with many obvious advantages over the often deployed pole-mounted nest boxes. These were originally developed by Bob Shepherd and a dedicated local Lincolnshire farmer and recently reported on in 'Feedback' (Autumn 2004). A Mark II version of such a tower, soon to be erected locally for the purposes of mitigation, has been redesigned to additionally offer roosting opportunities for

bats in the lower half (another protected species I specialise in, also often requiring mitigation).

In 2004, exploring the possibility of the use of these towers formed part of a professional training course I was asked to run for members of a large ecological consultancy based in the Midlands aimed at learning how to survey sites for the presence of Barn Owls and provide suitable alternative roosting and breeding places, along with feeding habitat where they are threatened by development.

Somebody once asked me why I do what I do. The answer was quite simple really – I don't want to ever have to live in the country of my birth in which there are no longer any Barn Owls! Barn Owls are without doubt one of our most stunning birds, with a capacity to add so much richness and splendour to our daily lives and which, even after all this time still cause me to stop in my tracks with my jaw dropped open in awe every time I see one effortlessly floating past.

Garry Steele
Lincolnshire



Barn Owl with food on Stickford Church chancel cross

Event Feedback

Hedging with Barclays

Our hedge coppicing day took place in December last year and saw volunteers from Barclays Bank, together with a long term Barn Owl Trust volunteer and members of staff, complete the third section of a Lennon Legacy project field hedge.

A generous donation from Barclays provided much needed funds towards the purchase of a new chainsaw for the Trust. This was used to cut the hedge vegetation almost to ground level to encourage re-growth for future laying. Hedges are important as a home for a

variety of wildlife including small mammals and therefore an important food supply for Barn Owls.

In spite of horrendous weather conditions Barclays staff members worked very hard and did a splendid job. They kept smiles on their faces throughout the day and seemed to enjoy doing a very different kind of 'banking'.

Thank you very much to everyone who helped. □



Our two owls - Caroline and Harry

Dressing as Owls

Just before Christmas Caroline Lewis and myself gallantly dressed as Barn Owls and set up a BOT stall at Newton Abbot Annual Victorian Market.

Caroline made some fantastic costumes and although we didn't receive the prize for the best stand we did receive many admirable comments.

Despite the miserable weather conditions many people came out to enjoy an evening of entertainment and late night shopping. The lucky dip was a success with the children, and our delicious plum puddings were on offer to tempt the adults!

Thanks again to Caroline (who was briefly Publicity Officer for the Trust) for doing such sterling work with the outfits, which will come in very useful at future events. There is talk of a 'spot the owl' competition at this year's sponsored walk!!

Harry Davies
Support Officer

This years draw prizes include family membership to the Lost Gardens of Heligan, tickets for Longleat and other popular attractions plus much, much more. Tickets are enclosed with this issue of Feedback.

Last year the draw raised an amazing £1,281.34 to support our work which we hope to match or even exceed this year. If you feel you could sell more tickets we would be delighted to send them - just call the office on 01364 653026 or send us an email. (Eds)



Grand Draw and Quiz Night

It was our first time at a Barn Owl Trust Quiz Night (Friday 2nd December) and also the night of the Trust's 2005 Grand Draw.

We went with a little trepidation as the only other two pub quizzes we had entered we had come last or joint last in, displaying our exquisite lack of knowledge, particularly with regards to pop music, but also history, geography ..

However, we presumed (correctly as it turned out) that the BOT quiz might have the odd nature related question (our strong suite) and a more general knowledge theme. So hopefully the outcome would not be quite so embarrassing.

We arrived to find everyone stuffing their faces (we hadn't realised there was food involved so had already had tea) but we still managed a rather nice sherry trifle! Tables were reserved for the participants and we were later joined by a couple of older friends and became "The Stonewallers" as Diana we discovered had taken this up in recent years and was still doing work for people

in her 70s. The quiz began and yes we could actually answer several of the questions but our new acquaintances really were responsible for our respectable score, and we weren't last or even second to last this time!

Then came the Grand Draw and the announcer said, "It will be highly unlikely that anyone here will be amongst the winners". The draw began but I didn't take much notice until Frances exclaimed that I had won 3rd prize – golf and lunch at the exclusive Bovey Castle on Dartmoor! A couple of weeks later a large envelope arrived containing a very posh brochure and DVD as well as the official letter. It looks an amazing place and we're really looking forward to using this in the coming year. Who knows, perhaps next year, it could be you!

Karen Barton
Friend of the BOT

Thanks to Derek Foulds for being an excellent quiz master (Eds)

Focus on Friends

Jean Lethbridge: 1919 - 2005

We first met Jean in 1987 when she and her husband Michael visited us to persuade us that we should release Barn Owls at their site at Sutcombe in north west Devon, which we did in '88. The birds were released with one owlet in the nest and afterwards they stayed around and had a 2nd brood of four, which they successfully reared, but unfortunately they didn't stay beyond the end of '88. However this was the beginning of our friendship with Jean and we would visit a couple of times a year often staying over and putting the world to rights over her homemade wine.

Jean was an only child raised by her mother when her father was killed in India. Jean's mother was her inspiration. She supported Jean and her own ailing parents by teaching – she also stimulated Jean's passion for the natural world. When Jean left school she wanted to be an actress but her mother insisted she get a teaching qualification before starting to 'tread the boards'. Having achieved this Jean then became an actress and spent the next few years living her dream and having a 'wild time'.

Jean met and married Michael in the early '50's and they first lived in Surrey, moving to Bideford in Devon to look after Jean's mother who had retired there. She applied for and got the headship of Sutcombe primary school in the mid '50's. At the time she was the youngest headmistress ever to be appointed in the county. This was a tiny village school with just 2 classes for children from 4 to 11 and an adjoining house for the Head. Her two daughters Naomi and Rebecca grew up here.

Jean was an independent spirit and this was a huge benefit for the children lucky enough to pass through her school. She was proud of the fact that all of 'her children' learnt to read and write and had the opportunity to develop their potential. One young lad who was considered to be backward went on to become a professor after Jean discovered he just needed glasses to see properly. She introduced amateur dramatics to the school, and even staged a performance of a Gilbert and Sullivan Operetta, which is still remembered today. She also involved parents in acting in the school nativity plays. If it was a nice day she would take the children out; the classroom could be anywhere - on a beach, at a museum or in the woods.

Jean loved music. Well known for her incredible hospitality and delicious fare Jean would host visiting musicians from

all over the UK (and further afield) on behalf of the renowned Bideford Music Club of which she was a member for 48 years.

In the 1970's whilst still living and working at the school, Jean bought 3+ acres of woodland just outside the village and Michael began to build a house for them to retire to. The land was managed for wildlife and Jean encouraged and re-established much of the native flora that had declined or been lost.

Jean retired from teaching in 1979, despite serious arthritis in her hands she was always busy gardening, cooking, wine making, reading or walking her dogs. She loved Dalmatians and had always had at least one since the '70's and would walk several miles a day with them observing the countryside and its plants and creatures.

We visited and often stayed with her during the ringing season when we were visiting Barn Owl sites in the north of the county. A long standing Friend of the Trust, she was always keen to catch up on the Trust news, hear tales about owls and swap stories. For years she fed badgers at the bottom of her garden and a real treat for her visitors was to be able to go out after dark with Jean and watch them. Last summer when we visited and went out to watch the badgers we heard a familiar hissing sound and when we investigated the garage we discovered that wild Barn Owls had moved in. Jean was absolutely thrilled, we sat outside and watched the owlets peering out of the hole - it was wonderful to see. The next morning before we left we ringed a brood of 3.

In the summer of 2004 Jean was told that she had cancer but as expected she took the discovery of her illness in her stride, making few concessions in her lifestyle to it. She was determined to remain independent and she managed this completely until just a couple of months before her death at the beginning of December.

We feel privileged to have had Jean as a friend. She was a strong and forceful lady with a passion for natural history and the natural world, she really cared about the earth and all its creatures. I knew her as a passionate gardener, a generous hostess and a great cook who loved her home and never wanted to be anywhere else. Human beings and their attitudes often exasperated her but she loved her family and her friends. We will miss her.

Frances Ramsden



Jean and Dolci

Photo: Neil Lindsay

Jean's last Dalmatian, Dolci, is now 8 and has come to live with us at Waterleat. She will be doing the Sponsored Walk in aid of the Trust in May.

Barn Owl v Raptor

John Lightfoot (a regular BOT volunteer) and Wendy from the Shropshire Barn Owl Group report:

Last year we were watching a male Barn Owl hunting in daylight, catching prey and returning to a nearby building, where we presumed there was either a female or young birds present. On the owl's third hunting foray, we observed it drop to the ground and then start to fly back to the building with its prey. We then heard a male kestrel call and observed it attack the Barn Owl, causing both birds to fall to the ground. The kestrel almost immediately flew off landing on a nearby post, having snatched the owl's prey whilst on the ground. The Barn Owl then flew back to the building empty-footed.

The same month a gamekeeper at Shrewsbury told John he had seen a buzzard in flight carrying what appeared to be a plastic bag. He then saw the buzzard drop whatever it was and on investigation he found it was a Barn Owl, which was still whole and warm but unfortunately dead.

Thanks and Things

Our ink cartridge recycling continues to bring in money and, with the mobile phone recycling total, income is up to just over £900 since 2003 – not bad for things that would normally go in the bin.

Thank you to everyone who has supported us in any way since the last issue of Feedback. We would especially like to thank Pat and Jenny Ford for the microwave (*hot lunches on time now*), John and Sheila Prickett for Sunflower seeds (*for the wild birds of course*), Cathy Pole for the brush cutter and strimmer, Tim Revell for the water heater which he kindly installed in our loo, Heather Buswell for Christmas chocolates, Don Woodman for a two drawer filing cabinet and everyone who donated stamps, phones and ink cartridges for recycling.

Special thanks also go to Derek Foulds for arranging the wonderful pub quiz evening and being an excellent quiz master. We would also like to thank Richard and Barbara Barker of Fowlescombe for hosting our BOESS

courses and kindly donating a prize for the grand draw and, of course, all our other volunteers who help in so many different ways throughout the year.

As always we have a list of things, new or recycled, that we could make good use of:

- 👉 New and commemorative postage stamps
- 👉 A shovel (not a spade)
- 👉 Set of front weights for the tractor
- 👉 Wild bird seed
- 👉 Heavy duty rotary cutter/guillotine (20+ sheets)
- 👉 Heavy duty 2-hole punch
- 👉 Multimeter (electrical tester)
- 👉 Electric/electronic postal scales
- 👉 Hardwearing carpeting for reception and the post room (current carpet has a few holes).
- 👉 Volunteer aviary cleaners (*see page 7 for more info*)
- 👉 Volunteer with IT/graphics experience to help on an occasional basis with

- posters, display boards, signs etc
- 👉 A set of jump leads and fire extinguisher for all four vehicles
- 👉 Modern 4WD tractor (at least 60hp) - *this is carried over from our last issue surprisingly enough!*
- 👉 Good quality Barn Owl winter scene images for our next range of Christmas cards

Please keep sending us your used ink cartridges (not Epson) and old mobile phones and used commemorative or foreign stamps as we can turn them into money. It's no longer worth sending used normal or Christmas stamps as the postage paid is more than we receive in payment.

Contact Pete Webb if you need more details about supporting the Trust by recycling or Sandra Reardon if you have a few hours to spare and would like to put them to good use by volunteering for the Trust. □

Tail Piece...



Over the last few years I have, somewhat erratically, kept notes about the weather and when I've noticed the first frogspawn or a different bird on the feeders.

Unfortunately I've never been really consistent about it so it was brilliant when my parents gave me the money to buy a weather station for my birthday last Autumn. One of my daughter's friends is a bit of a weather boffin and he's given me his data for the last few years; it's really fascinating comparing rainfall and temperature over different months and years.

It's interesting how our perspective of things changes over time, how we remember things compared to how they really were; I wonder how many people remember April 2004 being the wettest since records began in 1766 or even if anyone thinks it's really important. But, it was to the Barn Owls that were trying to breed at the time and the conservation workers that were monitoring them.

Our perspective can also change depending on our mood, our character, our experiences and the things and folk that influence us, but everyone has a unique way of looking at life. If you take any group of people and ask them to describe a place or a situation they've shared you will get as many variations as you have folk even if they're all together in the same place at the same time. Some

will be positive, some negative and most somewhere in between but they will all have an individual perspective.

If there is something that you do regularly it's interesting to notice how your perception of it changes. For instance, I'm lucky enough to have a lovely view out of the window where I work. If I look up I can see a robin, chaffinches and a dunnoek, all feeding but most of the time I'm not looking and sometimes, all I can see is that I need to clean the windows! Of course it's important to get the work done and if I never cleaned the windows I wouldn't be able to see out of them at all.. But, I think the vital thing to remember is that if I never look up I miss something wonderful. It's very easy in this hustling bustling world where we all have so much to do, to forget to appreciate what is right in front of us.

Last year two of my close relatives and two good friends died and it made me reflect on mortality and think about how transient human life is. We have a wonderful opportunity whilst we are here to enjoy life but most of the time we are rushing about and planning ahead too busy to stop and appreciate how fortunate we really are.

Someone once said that to get the most from life we should; "Live every day as though it was our last and treat the earth as though we will live for ever". I think this

is a brilliant philosophy and although somewhat difficult to adhere too it's certainly worth trying. Also trying to see the positive rather than the negative side of a situation really does help to give you a more constructive perspective on life, the universe and everything.....

So when it pours with rain instead of feeling fed up that the washing is getting wet again, maybe we should just be grateful that the reservoirs will be filling up a bit and that we won't need to water the garden. To quote from Monty Python it's just a matter of trying to 'always look on the bright side of life'.

It is such a beautiful world and there is so much to wonder at, we are all so very lucky. We should make the most of it and enjoy what we have now instead of yearning for more.

Caring and sharing are simple things that can bring us countless pleasure.

Together we can make a world of difference.

Frances Ramsden