

Issue Number 37 - Spring 2007



# FEEDBACK



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## In this issue...

- An inside look at our new website
- New RSPB/BOT leaflet
- Westmoor Barn Owl survey
- Big Ponds project

# Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to the 37th issue of Feedback packed as usual with Barn Owl Trust news. After the appalling breeding season last year we are delighted to report we still have a Barn Owl around, hunting over our field and occasionally roosting in the Trust's barn. There was great excitement last week when a really fresh pellet was found and we have lots of big white droppings on our brand new bio-fuel tank (page 3).

As always we have staff and volunteer changes to report and for the first time in many years a new trustee (page 6). A huge amount of time and energy over the winter went into the selection and recruitment of our two new Assistant Conservation Officers, with over 70 applicants and two days of back-to-back interviews. The successful candidates introduce themselves on page 10.

Our centre page feature in this issue is on our new website which we hope will interest even those of you who don't like computers. If you fall into that category please read it with an open mind! Our cover picture shows a cross section of the litter layer in the Lennon Legacy

Project field (LLP). A smaller colour version of the picture appears in the new RSPB/BOT leaflet included with this issue and, in the news item (opposite) about the leaflet, you can read how it was done.

We are hoping that we'll meet some of you this year at events - see diary dates on page 6 - and on page 11 we are asking for your input on the planning of another Supporters' Day. There is also an opportunity for anyone with a pair of knitting needles to support us from the comfort of their armchair (page 5), and the chance to win a BOT T-Shirt (page 6) if you can sell some extra draw tickets for us. Thank you to everyone who buys the tickets we send out with the Spring issue. This year we have increased the ticket price but we don't expect you to spend any more as we have only included one book for you. This helps us cut down on printing and postage costs.

We think you will enjoy our regular features, Around and About - where we get an update from Shropshire - and Focus on Friends that looks at how one couple's retirement has benefited both conservation in Devon and the Trust. On

page 4 we bring you up to date on the LLP and the Oakley and Flo ponds that have been created. Thank you to everyone who has remembered the Trust in their will.

Harry reports on page 5 that as our financial year draws to a close we are hoping for some positive responses to grant applications; once again our expenditure looks likely to exceed our income. On a more positive note, our website is bringing in a steady trickle of donations and sales income from all over the world and we are shipping out 2 or 3 nestboxes every week - that's lots of potential new homes for Barn Owls.

We hope you enjoy reading this copy of Feedback. If you do, maybe you could pass it on to another potential supporter and help us spread the Barn Owl conservation message.

Thank you for supporting the Barn Owl Trust, your contribution really does make a difference.

**Eds: Frances & Sandra**

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*Cover Photo: Kevin Keatley*

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

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

*Copy date for issue No 38 is 20th August 2007*

*Send your contributions - news, letters, pictures and information to:  
Feedback, Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU*

*Email: [feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk)*

*Website: [www.barnowltrust.org.uk](http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk)*



## Barn Owl Trust Walk & Picnic

**Sunday 13 May 2007 - 11am start**

Join us and share a rare opportunity to walk on a beautiful private estate beside the river Erme in the South Hams and help raise funds for the Trust. See how much sponsorship you can raise whilst doing something really enjoyable in a lovely place.

◆ **Bring a picnic**

◆ **Dogs on leads welcome**

Includes a river crossing by canoe on the longer route (we'll do the paddling for you!). Please see our website or phone for details.

# BOT News

## New RSPB / BOT Leaflet

Our first collaborative publication with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has just been published (copy enclosed) and represents the culmination of a 12-month project run by Nick Askew at the University of York. Nick's PhD study, supported by the Barn Owl Trust, investigated the suitability of landscape for Barn Owls and quantified the species' habitat requirements for the first time. This is real ground-breaking stuff! We can now look at any 1 km square in England, Scotland or Wales and know whether or not Barn Owls are likely to occur. We can also look at arable, pastoral, or mixed farming landscapes and know how much rough grassland needs to be provided in order for the owl population to achieve sustainability.

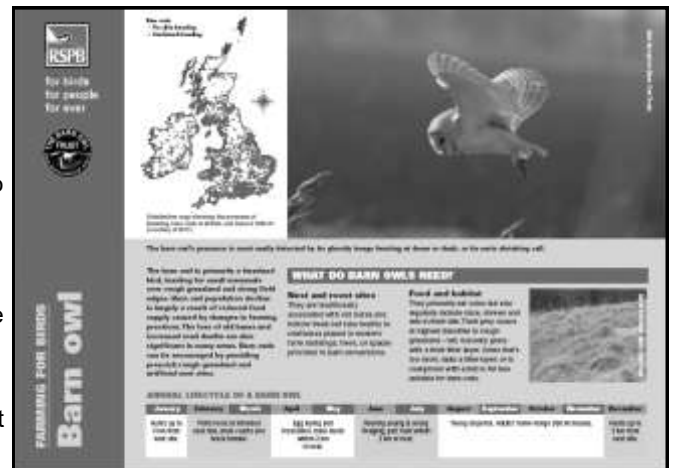
Nick's earlier research on Barn Owls had demonstrated the importance of the litter-layer. This is simply a thick layer of mostly dead grass at the base of the live-grass sward - essential for maximising small mammal numbers.

While Nick was busy in York working on his PhD, we set ourselves the challenge of trying to photograph the litter-layer we had created beneath the Trust's own grassland. Because it's out of sight, most people don't know what a litter-layer is and it's also really hard to photograph. We soon hit on the idea of a cross-section picture and with the help of a chainsaw, some plywood, a pick and shovel, a wildlife photographer (Kevin Keatley), and a very cooperative vole(!), we eventually created the unique image you can see on the front cover.

The prospect of an A3 double-sided colour leaflet with RSPB also presented a chance to promote our new safer nestbox designs and use some of the stunning images of Barn Owls donated to the Trust

by Nick Sampford just before he passed away last year.

We are really proud of the new leaflet and thanks to Nick Askew, RSPB and BOT's innovation it's by far the best all-round Barn Owl leaflet ever produced. Please have a good look at it. Further copies are available on request. □



## Barn Owl Training

In November, February and March the Trust ran four more Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys & Signs (BOESS) one day training courses.

Well over 60 participants travelled from different parts of the UK to attend the events held at Fowlescombe in the South Hams. Most of them work for ecological consultancies, wildlife trusts, FWAG or statutory bodies but there were a few students and individuals who wanted to increase their knowledge of Barn Owls too. We were also able to use the days as training for our own new staff.

The feedback from participants has been extremely positive and some consultancies have decided all of their staff should attend as part of their companies' skills development. Consequently we are now planning further BOESS days in July and November. For more information contact [kelly@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:kelly@barnowltrust.org.uk) or ring her at the office on 01364 653026.

A big thank you to staff: Kelly for organisation and David for delivery of the training; they have put in some very long days; also to Peter for allowing us access to his farm and buildings and Richard and Barbara Barker for the wonderful venue and delicious lunches. □

## Cooking Oil Cars



Photo: David Ramsden

Kelly fills up the Caddy

In the last issue of Feedback there was an article on 'Greener Motoring' and how the Trust wanted to do its bit to reduce carbon emissions by converting its three diesel vehicles to bio-fuel. This has now happened. It was decided to go for a fuel system that allowed the vehicles to be run on a mixture of bio-fuel (used cooking oil) and mineral diesel. As mentioned in the previous article, even if you are using as little as 5% bio-fuel you can still be reducing your CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 4.5%.

As part of the conversion process it was decided to have our own bio-fuel tank at the Trust. This seemed like the most sensible option, as the nearest pump is 20 miles away – not very handy!

BOT are now running the vehicles on a 50/50 mix of the fuels and this will gradually increase to almost 100% bio-fuel by the summer so we are well on our way to reducing our emissions and of course recycling as we drive.

# LLP News



Creating the island Photo: David Ramsden

## Big Ponds Project

Regular readers may recall that last year we mentioned our intention to create two large wildlife ponds in memory of two significant legacies we had received. Well, twelve months later we are very pleased to be able to announce that the Big Pond Project is now almost complete! There are now two lovely ponds: the 'Oakley Pond' named after the late Major Charles Oakley and the 'Flo Pond' named after the late Florence Parsons within the Trust's 25 acre land holding purchased after our first extra-special legacy from Vivien Lennon (hence the name 'Lennon Legacy Project') in 2001.

The design includes a small amount of water abstraction from the River Ashburn, unfortunately the pipes are becoming clogged with debris but ground water levels are currently so high this has no significant affect on the ponds at the moment - we hope this will be sorted before the summer when water levels usually drop. In theory water from the river flows underground and into the Oakley Pond, which is about 20 metres long by 8 metres wide. Because the land drains naturally, each pond had to be lined. The Oakley Pond has a butyl liner with a life expectancy of at least eighty years and the design incorporates a small island which we hope will eventually attract nesting birds such as Moorhen – a species that only visits the area very occasionally.

From the Oakley Pond the water trickles down through a series of three small bog ponds but here again we have had some teething problems, one of the pools has breached, dumping its clay lining into a

lower pool. The water then runs into the Flo Pond which is about 9 metres by 6 metres and lined with clay brought down from north Devon. One advantage of clay is that it should last almost indefinitely but a slight disadvantage is that the water tends to be a bit cloudy. After leaving the Flo Pond any excess water flows back into the River Ashburn. As the construction was only finished in November the area still looks very bare but should soon start to green-up, eventually supporting a range of wildflowers and grasses plus wetland pond-margin plants and aquatic wildlife. Frogs have already moved in and spawned in both ponds!

In keeping with the rest of the LLP area, we are not introducing anything at all. All of the wildlife colonisation will be natural. One possibility is that trout eggs or even small trout will come through the water supply pipe and trout will colonise the Oakley Pond. Although we don't particularly want to have fish in the ponds, it's likely that the local Heron will benefit. In twenty years we've had three Kingfisher sightings – perhaps we'll see more Kingfisher visits in future too! We are expecting a very wide range of pond life to benefit from the project (including dragonflies, damselflies etc.) but it may take quite a few years for diversity and abundance to reach a peak.

You may be wondering why the BARN OWL Trust is creating ponds!? Fear not! The vast majority of our resources are of course being used to benefit Barn Owls. In fact most of the income from these two legacies was used for Barn Owl

## LLP Update

This 25-acre land-transformation project started in 2001 when we received our first large legacy (from Vivien Lennon) and over the past five-and-a bit years it has been an amazing experience – witnessing the appearance of so many new species and huge increases in previously scarce species. Only last week we found a really fresh pellet in the barn and yesterday evening a Barn Owl flew out of the barn and across the field.

Thanks almost entirely to volunteer effort, the final section of the drive hedge has been coppiced and in a couple of years the first section should be ready to lay. Our ancient tractor is about to be replaced with a younger version thanks to grants received totalling £8,500 with the greater part coming from the Garfield Weston Foundation. The tractor is used for path mowing, scrub control, and for topping creeping thistles.

The most major recent change (apart from the creation of the wildlife ponds has been in the amount of information on the project that is now available. As a follow-up to our illustrated talks ('Restoring the Balance') we are now giving a talk entitled 'The Lennon Legacy Project' which is proving extremely popular. For those of you who don't live within reach of a presentation there's a page on our new website that tells the LLP story, see pages 8 & 9 for more info. □

conservation work. However, we've always been interested in all wildlife and the possibility of creating these ponds was too good to miss – especially as we were able to reclaim half the cost from the government's ESA (Environmentally Sensitive Area) Grant Scheme!

All legacies are special. Larger legacies are just extra-special as they enable us to do something really amazing that will benefit wildlife for many years to come. Naming something after a benefactor helps us to remember; to honour the gift.

Many, many thanks to Charles, Florence, Vivien, and all the other kind souls who make our work possible. □

# More BOT News

## Funding Update

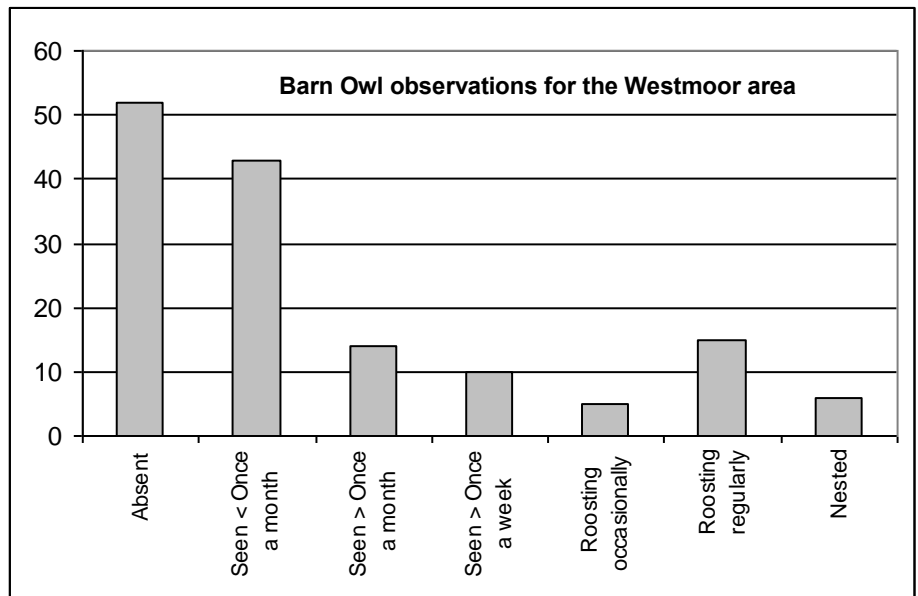
As another financial year draws to a close I begin to get excited as many charitable trusts wait until now to allocate support to organisations such as the Barn Owl Trust. In March last year we received £8,750. Since working here I have written to charitable trusts and foundations asking for support for a wide range of projects, trying to find imaginative and interesting ways of appealing to their Trustees so that they will look favourably upon our requests. Now, more than ever we are in need of external funding as we estimate that in this financial year our expenditure will exceed our income by about £45,000; that's double the loss of last year, and this can only be expected to rise in the future. It is a very competitive world where a lot of support is aimed towards charities involved in combating human suffering and helping the less privileged. The big providers, such as the Lottery, have a particular bias towards people charities and I feel I am disadvantaged from the start when asking for support for conserving a species such as the Barn Owl. I will say that I am persistent, and the joy of receiving a big cheque in the post is one of the highlights of my job encouraging me to keep battling away.

At the beginning of March we had a surprise visit from Trustees of a charity which has donated £3,000 to the Trust over the past three years. Today we received a cheque from them for another £1,000. If only all charitable trusts could visit the office and the Lennon Legacy field and see the good work that we do they may be more willing to support the Barn Owl Trust.

**Harriet Davies**  
Support Officer

## Scarves for Owls

We are planning to raise money by selling fluffy, warm Barn Owl coloured scarves this Christmas - lovingly hand knitted by you, our supporters! Phone 01364 653026 to ask for your knitting kit or email [info@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:info@barnowltrust.org.uk). This project can only work with your support so please ask for your kit today!



## Westmoor Barn Owl Survey

Throughout the winter BOT conservation assistants, Chiara Bettaga and Paul Winney, spent much of their time in West Devon carrying out the 'Westmoor Barn Owl Survey' - gathering information about past and present roost and nest sites. Through a media appeal they also collected Barn Owl sightings reported by members of the public. So, why the sudden interest in West Devon?

Whilst numbers across most of the county have been gradually increasing, the number of Barn Owls in this area appear to have plummeted - and we have no idea why! The 2003 Devon Barn Owl Survey - by far the biggest county Barn Owl survey ever carried out in the UK - showed that the number of nest records between West Dartmoor and the River Tamar fell from 16 in 1993 to only 2 in 2003.

The Barn Owl Trust is hoping to reverse this decline by creating a new Barn Owl conservation scheme targeting the area between Plymouth and the A30, West Dartmoor and the Tamar. In the coming months we will be contacting potential partners to ask if they will join the Barn Owl Trust in creating the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme. Our aim is to secure existing breeding sites by delivering a package of measures: advising landowners on habitat management and safer rodenticide use, as well as putting

up nestboxes and making floats for water troughs to reduce drowning incidents.

Getting Barn Owl numbers up in this area will be a huge challenge as the Westmoor area lies between two major roads, the A38 to the south and A30 to the north, which together pose a significant threat for the Barn Owl population. The problem most often associated with declining Barn Owl numbers is habitat availability. The Westmoor area is predominantly intensively grazed pasture with little mixed farming or set-aside. Through the scheme it is hoped that we can advise landowners on ways they can improve habitat for Barn Owls and how the Entry Level Stewardship Scheme (open to all farmers in England) can provide financial assistance.

During the recent Survey our staff visited approximately 100 sites. We found that just over one third of sites reported that Barn Owls were absent from the area and just under one third of sites reported them being seen occasionally (less than once per month). As the graph above shows, only 21 sites (14%) reported Barn Owls roosting regularly or nesting. Our results still suggest a low population level within the area and demonstrate the need for a Barn Owl Scheme to help increase Barn Owl numbers. □

We need **YOU**  
to Knit a scarf  
(or two)!

Knit a scarf for us to sell  
and help raise money for the Barn Owl Trust!  
Contact us for your kit Tel: 01364 653026



## ... Diary Dates

### ☺ Friday 20 April 2007

Restoring the Balance - Barn Owl Trust talk and slideshow for the Exmoor Society - 7.30pm at South Molton Methodist Hall. Details 01769 574108.



### ☺ Sunday 13 May

Annual Sponsored Walk and Picnic on the Flete Estate. Bring a picnic and enjoy a rare opportunity to walk on this beautiful private estate beside the river Erme in the South Hams, whilst raising funds to help support the work of the Barn Owl Trust. 11am start. Includes an optional river crossing by canoe. Please see our website or phone for details.

### ☺ Thursday 17-Saturday 19 May

Devon County Show. We will have a stand, sales goods and be providing information and conservation advice over the three days of the show. Please come along and introduce yourselves; we would love to see you!

### ☺ Thursday 7-Saturday 9 June

Royal Cornwall Show. Look out for our stand at Wadebridge where we will have information, sales goods and conservation advice on offer.

### ☺ Saturday 7 July

Bracken Bashing Day. An opportunity to come and see the Lennon Legacy Project and help us to control the bracken. We provide gloves and big sticks. You need to bring suitable clothing (sunhats and/or waterproofs) and also a packed lunch. Please contact the office to book a place (10am start).

### ☺ Thursday 12 July

Restoring the Balance – Barn Owl Trust talk and slideshow for West Hill Garden Club, West Hill Village Hall, Ottery St Mary. Tel 01404 815905 for details – 7.30pm start.

### ☺ Wednesday 18, Thursday 19 July

*(date to be confirmed)*

Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys & Signs. Held in South Devon, BOESS is a one-day training course for professionals involved in (or wishing to become involved in) Barn Owl survey work. Numbers are limited so booking is essential (course fee £150). To apply for a place please email Kelly Wakeham at [kelly@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:kelly@barnowltrust.org.uk), confirming your name, job title, organisation and nature of work.

### ☺ Thursday 11 October

Restoring the Balance – Barn Owl Trust talk and slideshow for the National Trust at Colyford Memorial Hall, Lyme Regis. (Small admission fee – 2.30pm start).

### ☺ Friday 14th December

Grand Draw and Quiz Night. Venue in South Devon to be confirmed - please let us know if you are interested in coming along. □

## Grand Draw 2007

You will have seen our 2007 Grand Prize Draw tickets enclosed with this issue. The draw is one of our main fundraising events for the year so please give us your support by selling as many tickets as you can! As in previous years, the top prize is a day out at the Barn Owl Trust with our Senior Conservation Officer (see page 12 for an account by a previous winner).

Other great prizes this year include a year's subscription to The Countryman Magazine, theatre tokens for a production at the Theatre Royal in Plymouth, a family ticket to Marwell Zoo in Hampshire and a tour of the Met Office in Exeter (did you know the Met Office houses the second largest computer in the country?). This is just a small selection of our prizes to tempt all your family and friends to buy a ticket!

This year, to save postage and paper costs we have increased the cost per ticket but are enclosing one booklet instead of two. If you are able to sell more tickets – please, please let us know.

We are offering a prize of a Barn Owl Trust T-Shirt to the supporter who can sell the most tickets! Good Luck and many thanks for supporting this event. □

## New BOT Trustee



We were delighted to welcome Chris Robinson to the ranks of BOT Trustees in January. Chris has supported the Trust for many years and played an active role since the mid '90's. She was our education advisor until 2004 when she retired from full-time teaching and has continued to attend Trustee meetings in an advisory capacity. Chris fills the vacancy left by Sandra Perry who stepped down in December after almost 10 years as a BOT Trustee - thank you Sandra. □

## Reduce, Reuse and Recycle



We have now raised over £1,150 since we started recycling ink cartridges and mobile phones in 2003.

The collection of used postage stamps has raised a further £53.66. We have been advised that stamps still on their envelopes cannot be processed due to the work involved. Foreign and British Commemorative are 8 to 10 times more valuable than normal stamps so are worth sorting. Please contact us or see our website for more stamp recycling details.

For those of you who like to reuse your envelopes, you might like to know that the new style BOT reuse labels are currently at the printers. These gummed A6 labels are printed on recycled paper and are

available from the Trust at £1.50 for a pack of 50.

Our local authority is now recycling batteries; perhaps you could contact yours to see if they provide the same service.

More recycling information can be found on our website under 'Green Links' Thank you all for your continued support and for helping in a small way to preserve our planet's dwindling resources.

**Remember the 3 R's - "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle".**

**Pete Webb  
Admin.**

# Bird News

"Those two are preening each other again," said David as he walked into the office. Having glanced out of the window and established that he wasn't talking about Tim (our handyman) and Graham (our handyman volunteer), we realised that he meant Hazel and Valentine the two Barn Owls in the web-cam aviary. It's well worth taking a look... (www.barnowtrust.org.uk).

Because of the poor breeding season in 2006 we have had fewer winter casualties than usual. However, early in October 2006 a wild Barn Owl was brought in which must have been hit by a car; it had a lot of blood on the right side of its head and was very bedraggled and dirty. We held little hope that it would still be alive the next day as its injuries were pretty bad but Wednesday (as he was later to be called) was checked day and night, fed and kept warm under a heat lamp for several days. Eventually he began to show signs of recovery and was moved to one of the aviaries. Our local owl-friendly optician, came and took a close look at his right eye and confirmed that the retina had become detached so there was no chance that he could be released. Wednesday is now established in an aviary with a mixture of Barn and Tawny Owls, one of which is called Thursday!

Sadly one of the Barn Owls at our sanctuary has died since the last issue of Feedback. Poppy was about nine years old and a captive bred owl that was found flying around near Plymouth in 1998. Poppy was a rather enigmatic Barn Owl; keeping us guessing as to whether it was male or female. Poppy started out as Pop (keeping options open – could be male or female), to Poppy (more of a female name) and then to Poppleford (a good manly name). Baley has now taken over the role as 'volunteer owl' for school visits and press calls etc. from Dusty. Dusty has



*Hazel and Valentine preening each other in the webcam aviary*

*Photo: David Ramsden*

developed a slight impairment in her vision and it was becoming less predictable where she would land after doing her circuit of the classroom or school hall so we've decided that at nearly fifteen years old she has earned a peaceful retirement. Baley seems to have taken to her new role and already has a few school visits under her belt.

One of our casualties made the local papers a couple of weeks ago. We received a call from Channings Wood Prison to say that the prisoners had spotted a Tawny Owl being mobbed by crows in the prison grounds. We suggested that they should catch the bird and box it up if possible and we sent Julie off on her first live bird emergency to pick it up. The owl was thoroughly checked over and found to be free from injury; just a little stressed and hungry, so it was placed in the birdroom for observation. On the next morning – what a surprise – it had laid an egg! I think that this is

probably a first for the Barn Owl Trust. A few days later at dusk we met up with one of the prison staff and were able to return the owl to where she had been found. We hope that she will be re-united with her mate and raise a family.

Other news on the bird front: Tim and Graham have been building up our stock of outdoor nestboxes for use in trees, and plans are being made to build a new aviary to enable us to have somewhere for short-term visitors or 'stropky' (anti-social) birds that need to be isolated.

**Sandra Reardon**  
*Office Manager*

## Wildlife Refuge Update

David and I checked the wildlife refuge at the end of February. It was designed by the Trust and built during the making of 'Wild Thing I Love You', a programme made by RDF Media for Channel 4 Television. It was screened in December of last year and featured in the last issue of Feedback. This building has provision for Barn Owls, little owls, kestrels/stock doves, sparrows, reptiles amphibians and insects. It also has three separate chambers to accommodate a variety of bats for winter hibernation and breeding.

We navigated our way across some rather soggy terrain to reach the refuge and began our search for evidence of wildlife using the building. David found a

little owl pellet at the back and I found another one at the front, which was very encouraging. On closer inspection we found bat droppings, hibernating butterflies and a little wren flew out as we approached. It was great to find that wildlife was already using this amazing structure so soon after its completion.

Looking out over the open countryside I felt very optimistic that this perfect, peaceful location will become a popular haven for a multitude of wildlife.

**Julie Matthews**  
*Assistant Conservation Officer*

## In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies from the estates of the late Mr D & Mrs G Beddall, Irene Laycock and Beatrice Hall and donations in memory of Valerie Chapman

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

# BOT on ...



Those of you who don't like computers will think that this page isn't for you but please bear with us and maybe you will get a different perspective.

These days the World Wide Web is the source of huge amounts of information, not, we know, all of it good. For a small national organisation like the Barn Owl Trust with limited resources the internet makes it possible, via our website, to reach far more people than we ever could without it. Someone finding a casualty owl may find



it difficult to get through to us on the phone outside office hours. However if they go to our website they can read a web page that tells them exactly what to do. They can look at photographs of our common owl species to allow them to identify the bird and even hear their calls.

If you want to make and erect a Barn Owl nestbox we can post you leaflets but if you have access to the internet you can visit our website and get far more information than you ever could from a

leaflet. First you can read the page 'Getting the best Barn Owl nestbox for your site' and then, having decided whether you want a box for a building or a tree, you can see slideshows that show you how to assemble your box, select its position and fix it in place. There is detailed information on habitat for Barn Owls with lots of pictures and the opportunity to see if your area of the UK is likely to be suitable for the species.

As you would expect, the BOT website has a vast amount of information on Barn Owls but there is so much more! There's a section called Green Roots, which, amongst other things, looks at recycling, shopping and travelling and explains how the Trust works to minimise its environmental impact. We have links to organisations that can help you do the same. The Lennon Legacy Project has 17 slideshows, including time-lapse pictures, butterflies, birds and stone wall restoration. If you want to know how the project came about you can read "The Lennon Legacy Project – a true story".

The website also has a section for children which includes Barn Owl facts, jokes and even a recipe for chocolate owl pellets! All of our leaflets and reports are available free of charge as downloads and there are great pictures of Barn Owls, owl feathers and even frog spawn that you can use as your desktop wallpaper or print off as pictures. You can support the Trust on-line by making a card payment to become a Friend or make a donation. You can adopt

an owl or buy an enviro gift for yourself or somebody else and of course you can visit our on-line shop to purchase any of our sales goods. Recycled pens and labels, T-Shirts and bags, cards and cuddly owls, educational items, a nestbox, Christmas puddings and much, much more are all available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week wherever you live in the world. You can also find out about job and volunteer vacancies.

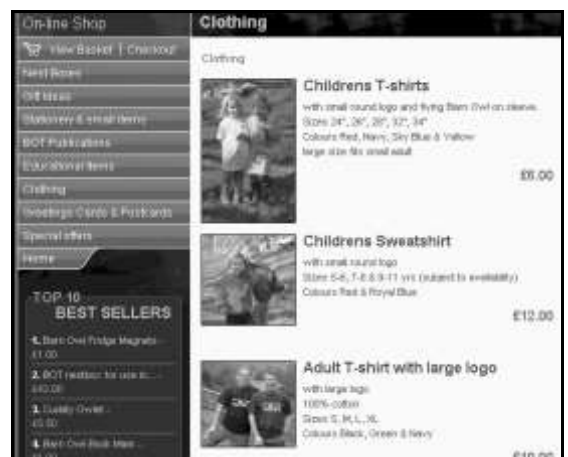
Our webcam is sending out live moving images from one of our aviaries; we have heard from people in Japan and the USA who regularly switch on to watch Valentine and Hazel. The Owls spend most of the day roosting so it's very exciting when they fly around or preen each other.

There is a news page, a who's who, forthcoming events and of course a history of the Trust. Staff are constantly reviewing the site to keep it up to date. The Barn Owl Trust website is a tremendous resource for conservation professionals and for anyone who loves owls or just wants a bit of information. There is so much to see and read that even if you've visited the site we recommend you come back and explore some more, there is bound to be lots you haven't seen yet. For those of you who don't have a computer, most local libraries have them available and staff can show you how to use them. These days almost everyone knows someone who has a computer, so if you really don't want to touch one yourself ask someone you know to show you the site; hopefully you will see why we think you'll like it. The next page has a more detailed site map to tell you what you can find.

Visit [www.barnowltrust.org.uk](http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk) - enjoy.

## About the Trust

How the Trust started and grew, Our achievements, What we do, Organisations we've worked with *Who's Who* The Trustees, Staff and Volunteers





# ...the www

## GALLERY

Pictures of Barn Owls, Little Owls, and Tawny Owls



## Site Map

### News and forthcoming events

Forthcoming events, News, Wild thing I love you, News archives

### About the Barn Owl

Live Barn Owl web cam, A brief description

### Info for kids

Info for kids, Make your own Barn Owl pellet truffles, Make a Barn Owl mobile, Barn Owl colouring page, Owl Jokes,

**Wild thing I love you**

The making of Barn Owl TV

From October to December 2006, Channel 4 broadcast a series of ten programmes called "Wild thing I love you". Each week presenter Phil Bailey led a team of experts as they attempt to solve an urgent wildlife crisis. Each show featured a different animal/issue with the team helping the animals overcome problems that mankind had set in their way.

Owlet picture gallery, Latest news, How can you help

More detailed descriptive information Adaptations, Ecological role and foraging behaviour, Optimum habitat in Britain, Pellets, Diet, and predator-prey relationships, Lifestyle, Roosting and nesting places

### The annual life-cycle

Spring - nesting, Summer - rearing young, Autumn - dispersal of young, Winter - hardship

### Population changes

Factors which determine the overall population level, Reasons for the historical decline, Causes of mortality, Current distribution and numbers, Barn

There are over 70 picture galleries/slideshows on the site

Owl conservation in Britain (who does what)

### Our Work

The Trust's work - Conservation Protection of occupied sites, Habitat advisory, Dealing with planning applications etc, Erecting nestboxes, Prevention of drowning, Rodenticide advisory, Lennon Legacy Project. A true story...

### The Trust's work - Rehabilitation and Sanctuary

Live bird emergency calls, Care and rehabilitation, Our sanctuary, a place of peaceful retreat

### The Trust's work - Training and Education

Training for ecologists and planners, One-off specialist presentations, Nestbox workshop one-day events, Visits to junior schools and youth groups, Talks to general-interest adult groups, Other educational resources we provide The Trust's work - Enquiry Service The service we provide, Contacting us The Trust's work - Research and Development Research and development

### Information and Downloads

Getting the Best Barn Owl nestbox for your site, Small stone building for Barn Owls and other wildlife, How to make and erect a Barn Owl nestbox, How to manage land for Barn Owls, Barn Owl habitat requirements in arable landscapes, Barn Owl habitat requirements in pastoral landscapes, Barn Owl habitat requirements in mixed landscapes.

Is your local landscape suitable? Entry level stewardship for Barn Owls, Higher level stewardship for Barn Owls, Major roads and Barn Owls, Rodent control and Barn Owls, Barn conversions and Barn Owls, What to do if you find a dead owl, What to do if you find an injured owl, What to do if you find a very young owl, Thinking of having a Captive Barn Owl, How to encourage other owl species, Other Downloads

### Free information Leaflets

Wild Barn Owl conservation leaflets, Other Barn Owl information, Nestboxes for other owl species, Owl rehabilitation, Barn Owls in captivity, General information

### Reports

Reports published by the Barn Owl Trust

### Links

Links, Green roots - links

### Supporting the Trust

**Information & Downloads**

- Getting the Best Barn Owl nestbox for your site
- How to make and erect a Barn Owl nestbox
- How to manage land for Barn Owls
- Barn Owl habitat requirements in arable landscapes
- Barn Owl habitat requirements in pastoral landscapes
- Barn Owl habitat requirements in mixed landscapes
- What to do if you find a dead owl
- What to do if you find an injured owl
- What to do if you find a very young Barn Owl
- Thinking of having a captive Barn Owl?
- How to encourage other owl species

**Other Downloads**

To set one of these beautiful images as your desktop background, simply click on the image. Once it has loaded, right click on the image and select "Set as background".

Become a friend of the Barn Owl Trust, Become an Owlet!, Adopt a Barn Owl, Giving a donation, Leaving a legacy, Do you have something we need?, Green roots

### On-line Shop

Nestboxes, Gift Ideas, Stationery, Publications, Educational Items, Clothing, Greetings Cards & Postcards

### Jobs & Volunteering

Administration Team Opportunities, Conservation Team opportunities, Do your own thing?

### Legal

Terms and Conditions, Privacy, Accessibility, Credits

### Contact Us

.... the last word from someone who has just visited the site:

"Please may I congratulate all of you not only for the fantastic work you do! but for a wonderful informative, and well presented web site. It really is to be commended; many sites are too hard to navigate!!"

John Tate

**The Barn Owl Trust**  
Conserving the Barn Owl and its Environment

Home | About the Trust | Conservation | Downloads | Stewardship for the Trust | Live the Owl | News & Information

**About the Barn Owl**

- The Barn Owl web cam
- Owl identification
- A brief description
- Wild thing I love you
- Wild thing I love you information
- The annual life-cycle
- Population changes
- Home

**Owl Identification**

Barn Owls have buff coloured upper surfaces, white underparts, a distinctive white facial disc, and face seen in flight the overall appearance is usually of a large white bird. Rearing Barn Owls generally fit into one of two categories, "wintering" birds of rough appearance. Barn Owls make a variety of sounds, hisses and snoring sounds, but they don't look like the "Tawny Owl". Although Barn Owls sometimes roost in hollow trees and tree trunks, they are not wood and bark eaters. Most reports by the public are of birds seen whilst diving. Although daylight hunting does occur, dusk and dawn are the main periods of activity.

Tawny Owls are the most common, the most visible, and also the most popular of the three owl species. Their call "hoo-hoo-hoo" and "hoo-hoo-hoo" are very similar to Barn Owls. They are slightly bigger than Barn Owls and have a colour from dark brown through to pale grey. In a light or bright light you can

**Partners of Barn Owls, Little Owls, and Tawny Owls**

**What to do if you find a young Barn Owl**

**Owl website**

**Tawny Owl Nestboxes**

**What to do if you find a young Tawny Owl**

PDF Documents are used throughout this site. Click here to get Adobe Reader to be able to view these documents.

# Team Talk

Since our last issue both Lisa Hann and Chris Richards have left the Trust due to the imminent birth of their babies. Lisa's baby is due on 4th April so by the time you are reading this issue she will probably be dealing with sleepless nights (not her strong point!). Chris and his wife decided to return to the Midlands to be closer to friends and family in time for their baby's arrival. This means that we now have two new members of conservation staff and they introduce themselves below.

Hello - I'm Julie and I'm married with two



teenage sons and live near Dawlish. I have always had a passion for wildlife and when home circumstances allowed (children more independent) decided to do something about it! I completed an HND in Managing the Care of Animals at Bicton College, and continued my studies to degree level gaining a BSc (Hons) Animal Science (Behaviour and Welfare) degree at Plymouth University. Whilst at Bicton I undertook an assignment on evaluating conservation programmes and chose the Barn Owl Trust as my subject. Since then I have intermittently been on the BOT web site to keep up to date with things and was delighted when I found that there was a post available for Assistant Conservation Officer. I contacted the Trust straight away, and after waiting agonizingly to hear - here I am having landed my 'dream' job.

I am also a qualified Montessori teacher and whilst teaching at Lanherne School in 1992 had my first meeting with a real Barn Owl! David Ramsden gave a marvellous talk on the plight of the Barn Owl called 'The Wings of Change' and we were all treated to a personal appearance by 'Moon', a stunningly beautiful Barn Owl.

I went on a field study trip to Danum Valley in Borneo eighteen months ago, where the biodiversity and ecological status of primary and logged-over forests was compared, and having been involved with conservation on a large scale

overseas, it is amazing to have the opportunity to be working directly with Barn Owl conservation in this country. I am looking forward to all aspects of the post which will involve among other things: practical conservation work, carrying out educational visits to schools to present the Wings of Change talk, Health and Safety responsibility and the day to day care and record keeping of our resident birds and any casualties that come in.

Although originally from this area I have spent some time living abroad including Hong Kong (where my eldest son was born), Brunei and Germany and have now come full circle back to live and stay in this beautiful area. I enjoy country walks with my family and our three dogs, and have a small collection of pets that were no longer wanted by their owners. I love reading and anything to do with the natural world and am part of Operation Otters survey team. I do a quarterly survey of a stretch of Dawlish Water for the presence of otters, where there has been evidence of otter for the last two years.

**Julie Matthews**

**Assistant Conservation Officer**

Hi, I'm Matthew and I started with the Trust in February. I have always been interested in (some would say obsessed with) birds and had undertaken various voluntary surveys in the past for the



RSPB and BTO, as well as being Conservation Officer (North) for the Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society. After ten years in education I began to realise what I had suspected for some time; that I preferred birds to teenagers, so to that end I decided to start studying for an MSc in Countryside Conservation and Management from UWE, Bristol in the hope of a career change.

I hadn't actually got very far with my studies when I noticed the Trust was advertising for Assistant Conservation

Officers. I decided to apply, really just for the experience. However, I was fortunate enough, and quite surprised, to be offered an interview, and after a rigorous afternoon of climbing up and down ladders, failed woodwork tasks, a very wobbly presentation and being grilled by some disarmingly charming people, I went home breathing a huge sigh of relief.

To my great surprise, I was absolutely delighted to be offered the job, and since I started here no two days have been the same. I'm excited about the challenges in front of me, am thoroughly looking forward to learning more about Barn Owls and getting more involved with the essential and valuable work of the Trust.

When I'm not reading about Barn Owls and Barn Owl conservation I like to go birding (I have a particular interest in owls in general, and also in bird migration). Other interests include butterflies and moths, drawing (pen and ink technique) and long-distance running.

**Matthew Twigg**

**Assistant Conservation Officer**

*Sadly we have had to say goodbye to Chiara who has returned to Italy at the end of her contract after thirteen months here at the Trust. We'll miss you Chiara. She writes:*

It seems to me that it was yesterday when I arrived in Devon one cold, windy - surprisingly not rainy - evening, my heart full of excitement and fear for the adventure that was just starting for me. It was February 2006 and I had left Northern Italy to come here and work for the Barn Owl Trust as a research volunteer supported by a grant I got in my country.

It didn't take me too long to feel on the same 'wave length' with all the staff at BOT as well as to be confident with the work I had to do, each day becoming more comfortable with the language. I helped to create two reports on rehabilitation of wild owls at the BOT and on fallen owlets. Seven months passed as fast as the clouds in the South West sky and just when I was starting to think what would have been next I was offered a six-month contract, the Barn Owl Trust didn't want me to leave! ⇒

⇒ This offer meant many things to me: I felt that my work had been appreciated, I was not a volunteer anymore and last but not least I could go out of the office and at last do some field work as the Trust wanted to start a Barn Owl survey in part of West Devon. I really enjoyed driving around the countryside with Paul, getting the chance to have very close encounters with wild Barn Owls, to see

# Team Talk Two

dramatic landscapes and to discover the strong, genuine Devonian accent of farmers.

I helped with the creation of the new website and with other conservation and administration tasks and started work on a new research project about nesting trends at the sites the BOT monitors every year.

More than one year has passed and let me say I am a bit proud of myself for all the things I have done and learnt, for my now pretty good English, for having survived the rainy English winter and for much more... I have to thank the Barn Owl Trust for more or less the same things. I will leave with much more experience than when I arrived and hopefully it will be helpful to get a job back in Italy, although there are not many opportunities in conservation.

I am happy to go back home, full of hope for the future, but I will certainly miss the people at the office and the quite unusual place I worked for nearly 13 months.

Arrivederci!

**Chiara Bettiga**  
**Conservation Research Assistant**

*Lesley Ford started with the Trust as a volunteer and in 2002 became a receptionist/admin assistant three days a week. As well as answering the phone and sorting the post, Lesley is known to many of you as she manages the Friends scheme, she is retiring in July. She writes...*

I have enjoyed my time at the Trust very much. Starting as a volunteer back in 2001 I learnt more than I ever thought possible. I had never even turned on a computer let alone used one. Everyone was so patient with me and gradually I became more confident as time went on. Imagine my surprise when I was offered a job. I have to say I was amazed. The work has been so varied I have never been bored.

I want to thank everyone at the Trust for giving me the chance to stretch myself and having confidence in me. I'll miss you.

**Lesley Ford**  
**Receptionist/Administration Assistant**

*... and we'll miss you too!*

*We also have two new volunteers working with us, Les and Hollie introduce themselves below:*

I escaped from captivity twenty five years ago and settled in Totnes where I helped rear two young. For a considerable time I worked at Dartington College of Arts until deciding to rely on my skills as a musician to keep the wolves from the door. Fortunately my wife works as a librarian otherwise we may as well have turned our home into a boarding kennel for large grey dogs. However my skills as a

musician include writing publicity materials, and when I saw the Trust's appeal for someone to help with



Photo provided

promotion, I was glad to offer some time. Hopefully I can make some useful contribution to help preserve Barn Owls and their environment in addition to driving home a little more slowly after gigs now that I know how many are killed by the roadside.

My interest in environmental issues goes back a long way and I've even written a musical for primary schools based on 'green' poetry. It starts with a barn dance, and I think I'll include a BOT nest box & fluffy owlet at the first performance.

**Les Thompson**

My name is Hollie and I am 22 years old. I am currently studying for a National Diploma in Animal Management from Bridgwater College at Paignton Zoo, but wanted to give some of my spare time to help the Barn Owl Trust. I do this by coming in once a week and cleaning the aviaries; this involves me picking up the pellets and power washing the aviary - which includes everything from the perches to the nest boxes. My family have always kept birds, such as parrots, canaries, quails, pekin robin as well as a Boobook owl so I knew what the work involved but wanted to help care for



Photo: Paul Winney

others. Eventually I hope to work in a zoo and I hope my time here, will give me even more experience to enable me to achieve this.

**Hollie Gray**

It is now two years since our last supporters' day at the Trust and we are

considering a similar event sometime in July, either this year or next. This would give those of you who visited before an opportunity to see how the LLP field is developing and first timers an insight into our current work and future plans. Our last supporters' day was held on a Saturday but we would appreciate your views on whether a week day would be just as convenient for you.

The format of the day would run on similar lines. There will be a short presentation explaining the objectives of the LLP and you will see slides of the field

## STOP PRESS

Ex-ACO Chris & his wife J had a little boy Elijah (7.5lbs) on 14th March

## Supporters' Day

as it was when we bought it and the changes month by month. You will have an opportunity to see where we work and a one hour guided walk around the field so you can admire it at first hand; the site is an upland field and the terrain is uneven. You will get to see conservation in action and an insight into the work of the BOT as well as wonderful views from the top of the hill. Bring along a packed lunch and we will provide refreshments and maybe even a cream tea!

We need feedback from you! Please let us know if you'd be interested in attending and whether a weekday would be more/less convenient. Phone us on 01364 653026 or email [info@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:info@barnowltrust.org.uk).

If you want to be sure of a visit this year, why not come along to our .....

## Bracken Bashing Day

**Saturday 7th July - 10am-4pm**

We provide gloves and big sticks!  
It's a fun day and really helps to control the bracken.

Please contact the office to book a place

# Your News

*Gil Gaylor and his work on the Isle of Wight featured in our first 'Around and About' article in Feedback 23 (Spring 2000).*

Dear BOT

2006 was a lousy year for my nest boxes averaging only two and three Owlets per box. Some established pairs didn't even lay. My tally was 49 youngsters (it was a poor vole year).

A tap at the door in early August was a farmer bringing me a 6-week-old Barn Owllet. It had kept falling off a narrow barn ledge (it was the only chick – 3 dud eggs). Fearing the worst with it continually tumbling he put it into my capable hands. It looked almost dead and was very thin. I placed it in a cardboard box and within the hour of its arrival headed to the spinney with a dozen mouse traps. Four hours later I had five wood mice awaiting me. I cut up the first mouse into small morsels and gently fed the owlet; four hours later I fed it again with another cut up mouse. Next morning miraculously it was still alive. I bolted over to the spinney to check the traps and this time three wood mice and four voles. I continued to hand feed for three more days. On the fifth day I placed in three whole voles and next morning they had all been devoured. I was really delighted; the owlet was now standing and looked much stronger.

On the ninth day I decided to foster the owlet into a nearby nestbox; there were two chicks in the box roughly the same age. It was also in my favour that the female was no longer brooding on her young. I placed the owlet into the box and dropped in all the surplus prey I had – four wood mice and nine voles. I went back early evening ten days later and three well-grown youngsters greeted me. They looked about nine weeks old and by the remnants of fluffy down on branches let me know they'd explored outside.

I decided to watch from 100 yards in hedgerow cover. I didn't have long to wait. About 15 minutes later I observed one of the adults flying in with prey and once one adult left the other flew in, flying over my hiding place. One week later about an hour before darkness (keeping my distance) I noticed all three youngsters hissing and flying wildly in and around their home tree. I waited another 30 minutes and once again saw prey deliveries from both adults. It's all-quiet around the site now the young have dispersed.

I'd like to think that "this charmed life owl" has a decent spell of longevity. I'm gratified that I helped to get it back to the wild and indebted to the farmer who took the time and trouble to bring the owlet to me. I've since visited the site and erected a nice deep nest box on the rafters. The

adults are already using it, going by all the whitewash excrements on the landing platform and down below on the barn floor.

**Gil Gaylor**  
**Isle of Wight**

*Although staff collect Barn Owl pellets whenever the opportunity arises, more and more schools have been requesting them and supply hasn't been keeping pace with demand. Last year we contacted people with wild sites to top up our stocks. Here is one response we had from a site owner:*

I was just catching up on a few things and thought I'd e-mail out of curiosity really to see if the pellets were of any use. Glad they arrived ok. I hope they'll be useful, I'll also send you some fresh ones as and when I find them.

I have a team of vocational construction students designing and building a barn owl pellet catching tray for me, so this should be a bit easier in the near future. Fingers crossed!

I should be back in touch with more pellets asap. I hope the other ones will be of use and help top up your stocks just slightly! Best wishes,

**Lorna**  
**Essex**

Dear BOT

All of Year 4 really enjoyed our science lesson, picking out scabby bones, it was fun but revolting. We all went home telling our parents what a fabulous lesson it was! Even the teachers enjoyed it. We went to Woodsmill and learnt about food chains, after we finished the owl pellets we drew pictures of the owl chain. Thank you for the owl pellets. It was great fun, we have learnt a lot about how they make owl pellets and what they eat. It is fascinating how they make the owl pellets.

**Gemma, Louisa and year 4,**  
**Thornberry Middle School**

Dear BOT

What a wonderful organization you are! Not only are you doing good in the natural world, your online store is efficient, the shipping prompt, and the communication from staff excellent. I love all my "stocking stuffer" goodies, and thank you for the kind card signed by everyone.

**Donna Skemp**  
**California. USA**

Dear BOT

We were very grateful to my wife's cousin who won a day out with the Trust but was unable to make the trip to Devon so passed her prize to us and we rejoiced in the day that followed. We were met by David Ramsden and offered coffee over which he outlined the itinerary for the day.

My first owlet encounter was with an 8 week old owlet. The joy of seeing and handling such a beautiful bird was such a privilege, a stunning mini creation of the full size. It was also very photogenic; thank goodness for the introduction of the digital camera.

Our second visit was to a well established site within a barn on a very busy farm where we were told to walk to the end of the barn to observe the parent birds which flew out as ordered creating a beautiful sight as they outdid the flying skills of the Red Arrows. It's amazing just how big a 34 inch wingspan is at close quarters.

The farmer's wife joined us as David climbed and brought down the owlets for ringing, the first was a 5 week old white, soft, downy handful, not pretty by any standard, but certainly very vocal, hissing at every opportunity. The second, wow!!! what an ugly little tinker--- prehistoric or what, the size of my palm, at 2 weeks old. It presented a featherless slightly downy belly and was indeed a caricature of a bird from the "Flintstones" cartoon.

After lunch, we walked the boundaries of the Lennon Legacy Project fields which had been taken back to their natural states - a haven for wildlife, fauna, butterflies and insects. David's enthusiasm and knowledge is apparent in his excitement to explain the vision for the Trust, including the design and location of two new ponds that will be left to naturalise; I would love to see them in time as they mature.

It was a full day, a real joy to visit the Barn Owl Trust... to see the enthusiasm and above all the passion which they totally commit to the Barn Owl. We were both left with a greater understanding and heightened interest in owls of all types, so much so that wood is being cut and assembled for the Tawny box. Alas our garden does not lend itself to encouraging Barn Owls... Many thanks to David and his team at Waterleat for a day to remember.

A cheque follows for the adoption of two owls.

Best wishes to you all from,

**Ellie & David Hill**  
**Devon**

# Around and About

*In Feedback 28 (Autumn 2002) we heard from the new Shropshire Barn Owl Group (SBOG) - here they bring us up to date with their work since then:*

## Surveys and nestboxes

SBOG was formed with the specific aim of providing nestboxes for, and promoting the conservation of, Barn Owl habitat. In 2002 we began making contact with farmers and other landowners through articles in farming magazines and by contacting them direct. Many sites were of little value to Barn Owls but our spirits were lifted when we found sites with permanent tussocky fields or grassy field margins created under the various agri-environment schemes. Not unexpectedly, many of these sites had no natural cavities for Barn Owls to nest in so we began an intensive programme of nestbox provision.

We use modified tea chests in buildings



*Installing one of 212 nestboxes erected since 2002  
Photo: Mike Wooton*

and rectangular or 'A' shaped nestboxes on isolated trees or on poles where there are no trees available. We have come to prefer the flat roofed rectangular boxes, which, unlike the 'A' shaped nestboxes, provide a safe platform on which young owls can settle and exercise prior to fledging. Initially, we followed convention and installed at least two tree nestboxes in close proximity, perhaps less than a few hundred metres apart, to provide both nesting and alternative roosting sites but found that though one box might be occupied by a breeding pair, the second often remained empty. We now tend to install just one box on a good isolated tree bang in the middle of good habitat. This is more cost effective in materials and time spent installing and monitoring the boxes. Although some boxes have yet to be occupied, one of our pole boxes succeeded in attracting a roosting bird within 28 days and tree nestboxes have

been occupied by roosting Barn Owls within two months!

## The Weald Moors Project

The Weald Moors is an area of mixed farmland covering 50 square kilometres immediately north of Telford. Historically marshland, much of the land has been continuously drained since at least 1576. However, the water table remains near the surface and Barn Owls are able to hunt along the grassy ditch banks and patches of marsh. Several farms are enrolled in agri-environment schemes with grassy margins and low density grazing providing extensive areas of good habitat. In 2002 the Weald Moors had only one known pair of breeding Barn Owls. Clearly, the lack of suitable nest sites was inhibiting the population. A nestbox scheme on a few farms, initially funded by the Environment Agency, was widened to include other farms on the moors. By 2005, with 29 nestboxes in place, there were nine breeding pairs, eight of them in nestboxes – they have produced 39 chicks since 2002.

## A summary of Barn Owl breeding results 2002-2006

All nestboxes and natural sites are monitored every year and we have data on the owls' breeding success for the five years to 2006. 106 chicks have been produced in SBOG nestboxes and 108 in natural sites, with an average of 3.08 chicks per pair. Productivity is marginally higher in buildings where the birds are not in boxes at 3.25 chicks per pair and lowest in natural tree sites at 2.87. but the relatively small amount of data from building nest sites should presently be treated with caution. Nestboxes have produced an average of 3.02 chicks per nest site with productivity marginally highest in tree nestboxes.

We like to believe that our policy of targeting nestboxes at farms enrolled in agri-environment schemes with extensive areas of grassy headlands is proving to be effective. 2005 was an exceptional year for us with many nestboxes occupied by breeding pairs for the first time. 2006 proved to be very poor but was not unexpected, with few breeding pairs, mainly attributable to the cyclical crash in the field vole population.

## Four years on, is it working?

So, 141 site surveys and 212 nestboxes later is there any signs of an increase in the Barn Owl population? Our database would suggest that there is. With a steady flow of high quality records coming in from the Shropshire Ornithological Society our database continues to expand and be more reliable. Particularly encouraging are the 33 successful breeding attempts and 106 chicks in SBOG nestboxes since 2002 - birds that probably would not be there without our intervention.



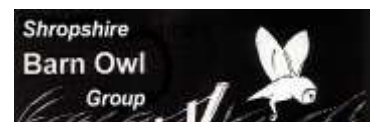
*Weald Moors drainage ditch*

*Photo: Glenn Bishton*

On a resource level, we have worked doggedly to build up funds so that we can respond quickly to requests for nestboxes and to proactively target sites that have good Barn Owl habitat. Though still a small group we have a network of helpers informing us of any developments on their patch and ringers providing valuable information on Barn Owl movements. Each year we produce an annual report summarising the results of our nestbox scheme and other activities which we distribute to site owners and supporters. We have built up good relations with statutory authorities which enables us to comment on planning applications where they affect Barn Owls, we give talks and guided walks which spread the conservation message, maintain records on road casualties to inform relevant bodies such as the Highways Agency. We have also provided assistance to other bodies setting up nestbox schemes including the Forestry Commission, Severn Trent Water and the Upper Onny Wildlife Group.

When we started out in 2002 there were very few farms enrolled in agri-environment schemes with rough grassland for Barn Owls. In the last few years we have noticed a definite increase in grassy margins, either wide arable margins several metres in width or more recently, one metre wide margins following the lines of hedgerows. As they mature and attract field voles, and as long as we continue to provide nestboxes and there are no sudden unforeseen environment problems, we are optimistic that the breeding population in Shropshire will continue to recover.

**Glenn Bishton & John Lightfoot**



# Out and About

*Caroline our Publicity and Events Officer has been getting out of the office to spread the word about the Barn Owl Trust:*

Did you know that the modern day Father Christmas originated from St. Nicholas? He was portrayed by illustrators in many different ways; tall and slender or small and elf like, often wearing furs or cloth suits of red, blue, green or purple. It wasn't until the 1930s when Coca-cola developed Santa Claus for an ad campaign that he became the red suited, jolly faced, white bearded man that we all recognise today. With this in mind, we decided to 'go vintage' and wear green Father Christmas outfits for our trip to Riverford Farm shop promoting The Barn Owl Trust.

The December air was crisp and cool as Paul and I put on our outfits. We set up our display table with a range of 'goodies' and trade was soon brisk with a steady stream of shoppers keen to support us and find out more about the work of the Trust. Owl adoptions and enviro gifts proved particularly popular with people keen to think about the environment at Christmas time. It was heart warming to receive such positive feedback and words of encouragement to 'keep up the good work' (particularly reassuring when we were so cold that our fingers and toes had gone numb!).

We are hopeful that Riverford Farm will let us build on the success of Christmas

and allow us to have a stand at other seasonal times during the year – watch this space!

February half-term found us at Pennywell Farm, award winning Farm Activity Park based in South Devon. We had a very glittery, sticky and colourful four days running Barn Owl mask making activity workshops for children aged between 2–12 years old. As well as mask making, Graham, our volunteer handyman put up a huge Barn Owl picture which we labelled with interesting facts about Barn Owls.

Our activities were so popular that at the end of our first day we had nearly run out of masks – urgent help was required! Our thanks to Kingfisher Print and Design Ltd who donated cardboard to make more masks and Mark Rumbelow, a gas service engineer for cutting out 200 eyeholes with his router.

Children and their parents queued up to take part in our activity workshops. At our busiest time we had 41 children gluing, sticking and colouring their Barn Owl masks to take home. Paul was on hand to give out Barn Owl colouring information sheets, leaflets and stickers to every child whilst I 'flew' around the room in my Barn Owl costume (remember the Victorian Christmas market last year?) with further supplies of glitter and glue. The activity sessions were frantic and fun with the venue left with that 'day old party' look at



*Mask Making at Pennywell Photo: Caroline Lewis*

the end of each session (the staff will be finding glitter for many months to come!).

The children and adults who took part in the activity learnt a little bit about Barn Owls and why they need our help. Hopefully the first spark of interest has been nurtured and these children and their families will have a lifelong affection for the species and its conservation.

**Caroline Lewis  
Publicity Officer**

## Barn Owl Tea Towels

Staff at the Trust were delighted when an envelope full of Barn Owl colourings and questions about Barn Owls arrived from Hythehill Primary 3 in Scotland. We selected our favourite colourings and put them on our website. The Conservation Team answered the children's questions and sent back the answers along with posters and some owl pellets for analysis.

In December we received a letter from Primary 3 describing how much they had enjoyed analysing the pellets (and scaring the teacher next door with one of the skulls!). The children had also visited our website and watched the tv programme featuring The Barn Owl Trust, 'the building of an owl refuge' from Channel 4's 'Wild thing I love you!' series.

All this 'owly' activity inspired the children to fundraise for the Barn Owl Trust by designing and producing fantastic tea towels showing their drawings of Barn Owls. The money raised from the sale of the tea towels enabled Hythehill Primary



3 to adopt 3 Barn Owls for the school. What a wonderful example of how learning can generate such enthusiasm and just goes to prove that fundraising can be fun! – well done Hythehill Primary 3!

## Flyer Winner

*The Flyer is our small bi-annual publication for smaller people - Owlets - junior Friends of the Trust. We were pleased to hear our competition winner enjoyed his prize. His mum writes....*

'Many thanks to all at the Barn Owl Trust for a very enjoyable family day out at the West Midlands Safari Park in October. An email informed us that Theo, then aged almost three, had won "The Flyer" Spring competition; the prize being two complementary tickets to the Park.

It proved to be a very memorable day and Theo is still happy to describe it in detail to anyone who happens to ask him what he has been doing!,

**Rachel Edwards  
Sutton Coldfield**

*Thanks to all of the individuals and businesses that support us by donating prizes - we have some great ones for this year's Grand Draw - see page 7 for more details and your chance to win a Barn Owl Trust T-Shirt.*

# Focus on Friends

*Friends of the Trust John and Jen Woodland explain how their retirement has benefited both conservation in Devon and the Trust:*

1992 is a long time ago, it was during that year, so I'm told, that we first contacted BOT. Jen and I had both recently retired and with time to spare were looking to help as volunteers on the conservation front in Devon. However, BOT lost out to BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) as they asked me to take on the volunteer job of Regional Representative for Devon. So our relationship with BOT has been that of supporters rather than working volunteers.

Both Jen and I have been keen 'birders' for most of our lives but earning a living had always got in the way leaving both of us with only cursory knowledge of a few common birds. We had much to learn. Making sound recordings of bird song and calls does focus one's attention. It also requires hours of time spent in the 'field' waiting and watching and of course listening. Using a cheap lapel mic and tape recorder it is surprising what fun it can be. The results are not up to professional standards but we are proud of those early efforts. Our first Pied Flycatcher recording is more valuable to us than all the tapes and cds we have bought since.

The next move was into filming. Our study bird over the last 15 years has been the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. It would have been sensible to have chosen a less shy and secretive species. But the challenge of filming the lives of this species in the Teign Valley has allowed some rare wildlife moments. Filming became a real hobby and we were thrilled when we were asked to consider making a film, which the Barn Owl Trust could use for publicity. Having the camera within a few feet of a Barn Owl nest, watching the parent birds feeding tiny scraps of 'mouse meat' to their young hooked us on Barn Owls. One day David



*Jen (left) and Stella*



*John leads a group on a bird survey course*

*Photos: Frances Ramsden*

took us to a barn where he was due to ring the two young. So here was a great filming chance, plus a chance for Jen to hold a pulli which she has never forgotten. It also showed at first hand the co-operation between BOT and BTO, for it is BTO rings which are used for all ringing.

The job of the BTO county representative is to organise all the ornithological surveys which take place in the county year by year. Recruiting volunteer birders, usually BTO members, to carry out the fieldwork and collecting in the resulting data, plus a whole lot more has kept me busy and happy for the last 15 years. Survey coverage in the county has grown from a few tens to several hundreds of sites every year and we have a great and loyal band of fieldworkers who give freely of their time and expertise. I also became one of two 'conservation officers' for Devon Bird Watching & Preservation Society (DBWPS) looking after East Devon, Teignbridge, Mid and North Devon. This was an exciting time with the Biodiversity Action Plans being written for both species and habitats, which are special to Devon. These plans included one for Barn Owls, so much of which has been the responsibility of the BOT.

Both of these jobs enabled me to promote the Barn Owl Trust with both farmers and birders. It also enabled me to persuade DBWPS to support with hard cash both the East Devon and the North Devon Barn Owl Projects so successfully carried out by BOT

Another of our interests has been Moths.

We were asked to come and see the land the Trust had purchased with the Lennon legacy. All the plans for making the fields really wildlife friendly were exciting but what we realised was that it also could be a great place for moths. Moths and their larvae are a vital food source for many creatures. We have now run two moth traps between the woods and the fields thus giving the chance to attract moths from both habitats. In July 2005, we trapped 52 species. They knew there were a few moths about but this was beyond their dreams. We even had a Barn Owl sit on one of the fence posts to see what all the fuss was about. Last year in July the catch increased to 90 macros and 26 identified micros courtesy of Stella Beavan whose mothing knowledge is far greater than ours.

Working for Barn Owls has far reaching benefits for so much of our wildlife. I explained this to DBWPS Council one meeting several years back when they were wavering about the money I was asking for to support the Trust's North Devon Barn Owl Project.

If we may, please, we will come down and try for an even larger catch next July.

**John and Jen Woodland  
Devon**

# Thanks and Things

Thank you very much to everyone who has given their help and support since the last issue of Feedback.

We received a fax machine from Graham Wilson, Pat and Jenny Ford gave us an office fan (for moments of stress!) and various stationery items, not to mention Christmas goodies for the staff. Thank you also to Hazel and Derek from Ashburton Post Office, Heather Buswell and Valerie Lurcock for Christmas presents in the form of choccies, biscuits and wine for staff. Thank you to Anne Holford from West Sussex for the collection of owl ornaments which had been left to her by Jean Lyle, a former supporter of the Trust (these will be really useful for fundraising). We are also very grateful to all those people who donated prizes for our grand draw and to the Barkers at Fowlescombe and Peter H. for allowing us to make use of their buildings for our BOESS courses. Lastly, thank you to all those of you who donated

empty inkjet cartridges, old mobile phones and postage stamps, both new and used.

And here's our list of 'wants' that you might have lying around doing nothing:

- 👉 Headphones to connect to phone
- 👉 Ophthalmoscope
- 👉 Heavy duty rotary cutter/guillotine
- 👉 Carpeting for office (hardwearing)
- 👉 Staple Gun
- 👉 Postage stamps (both new & used commemorative)
- 👉 Pitchfork
- 👉 Good photographic quality colour printer
- 👉 An architect with a few hours to spare to help with some simple drawings
- 👉 A wildlife rehab group looking for somewhere to release house sparrows (we have the perfect release site!)
- 👉 Wild bird seed
- 👉 Good quality Barn Owl winter scenes,

either photographic or illustrative for Christmas card images

- 👉 Empty inkjet cartridges and old mobile phones
- 👉 Wild Barn Owl pellets (we can never have too many)
- 👉 Inkjet cartridges for Hewlett Packard colour printers Deskjet 3820 and Deskjet 930C.

Tired of finding funny foreign coins in the bottom of your purse? Euros that you keep mistaking for pounds?

We can turn them into a worthwhile donation toward the conservation and preservation of the Barn Owl and its environment. Please send us any loose change and notes with a note of what currency they are.

## Tail Piece...



As I sit down to write this the sun is shining and the sky is blue. The last few days have been glorious, such a change from earlier in the year when it seemed to rain here every day. In fact it wasn't quite every day, we had 22 days with rain in February and 24 in January, about 78%. But it felt like it was raining every day, the ground was sodden and they even lifted the water restrictions in the South East. Along with rain we had fairly mild temperatures in the South West and consequently plants that we wouldn't expect for another month are performing now. We have had primroses flowering in Corner Wood for the last month, a peacock butterfly displaying along the hedgerow and blackbirds singing their hearts out in their quest for a mate. It's really lovely but with the Met Office predicting another cold snap next week you wonder how these 'early birds' will cope.

These days global warming is an accepted phenomenon; we all know it's happening but no-one can predict exactly how it'll affect us and what the consequences will be. We do know though that things will change and there will be an impact on our native wildlife. Despite having been aware of the problem for years, the powers that be are slow to tackle the issues and reluctant to introduce measures that will affect their ratings in the polls. Most big businesses and multi-national companies are more concerned with profits than investing in the development of sustainable policies. In our disposable society those of us who want to minimise our environmental impact are faced with consumer goods that are

cheaper to replace than to repair and a public transport system that is woefully under-resourced. Am I the only one who thinks it's crazy that it's often cheaper to fly or drive than to go by train?

Here at the Trust we have invested time and resources in the conversion of our vehicles to run on recycled vegetable oil, but if everyone who drove wanted to do the same there wouldn't be enough. There is concern that now a commercial market exists for alternative (non fossil) fuel, vast areas of crops will be grown to exploit the profit potential. This is likely to create huge monocultures and could well destroy valuable habitats just like the production of soya has in South America.

These days it can be really hard to be an ethical consumer. Our shops are stuffed with things that are imported from third world countries where people (including children) work long hours in poor conditions. If we compare the price of something sustainably produced in the UK to something imported from the Far East it's hardly surprising that most of us will opt for the cheaper option. Consumer opinion has meant that some high street companies are now adopting ethical policies which is good, but wouldn't it be great if they'd done this because it was the right thing to do rather than because they thought it might help their market share.

Those of us who love the natural world and want to preserve its diversity for future generations can often feel swamped by ethical and environmental considerations.

It is really hard to 'walk lightly on the planet'. But everything we can do as individuals that lessens our personal impact is worthwhile and it does change things.

The main reason that governments and businesses have made some steps in the right direction is public opinion; it is a real force.

If you have access to the internet visit our website and read our Green Roots page. See if there are any ideas there that you'd like to try and let us know if you have some others you'd like to share. Check out some of the Green Roots Links to organisations that can help you. As important, make sure you get out and spend some time in the natural world. Feel the sun (and the rain), hear the birds and see the trees coming into leaf. This is a beautiful time of year filled with new life so enjoy it; find the time to rejuvenate your spirit.

Thank you for supporting the Barn Owl Trust. You help us not only to conserve Barn Owls, but also a wide range of species that share their habitat.

*Together we can make a world of difference.*

**Frances Ramsden**