

Issue Number 38 - Autumn 2007



FEEDBACK



Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU - (01364) 653026 - www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Reg Charity: No 299835

**Good Barn Owl habitat
is great for a
huge range
of species**



Printed on recycled paper 



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

Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to Feedback. We are delighted to tell you that 2007 was a much better year for Barn Owls than '06 (page 3). Here in our valley we had a lone male Barn Owl screeching every night until early June, when fortunately he found a mate and reared a late brood of 3; fed no doubt on voles caught in the Trust's field.

Why, you might wonder, does the Barn Owl Trust have a mushroom on the front cover of its magazine? Well, in this issue we bring you the Lennon Legacy Project Diary (pages 8, 9 & 10) and news of some of the other species that have benefited by the management of 26 acres of land for Barn Owls. We hope you will find it as fascinating as we do and possibly be intrigued enough to either: visit our website www.barnowltrust.org.uk and see far more images in colour, join us here for a task one day, or maybe at sometime in the future organise a group visit to the project .

We also tell you about a site made famous by the renowned BBC Springwatch

programme and what happened there once the TV cameras had moved on (pages 12 - 13).

There is loads of news from the Trust and it's great to be able to tell you news of folk who have now moved on - page 10. It's even better to be able to tell you that Assistant Conservation Officers (ACO's) Julie and Matt, who started here in January and February respectively, have settled in really well and are a real asset to the team. As well as having a hand in all areas of our conservation work Julie deals with Live Owl Emergencies (LOE) and Matt manages the Lennon Legacy Project (LLP). They both share their experiences with you in this issue.

On a more sombre note, the Trust has had a funding deficit for the last two financial years. -£23,354 in 2006 and -£38,442 in 2007. In fact we have had a deficit every year since 2003 except in '05 when legacy income provided a surplus which has supported us ever since. A combination of

increasing running costs and decreasing grant income means that for the first time in years we are increasing the cost of becoming a Friend of the Trust. As you might imagine we've talked about this a lot and we don't want to lose any of our existing Friends, so if you pay us by standing order nothing need change unless you feel you would like to increase the amount of your monthly/annual gift (for which we would be very grateful). Those of you who renew annually will be asked to pay the increased rates when we send out your reminders and we hope that you will continue to support us, possibly even consider making your gift by standing order which reduces our admin costs (no reminders necessary!). Anyway, hopefully, this and the item on page 3 about our new colour leaflet included with this mailing, will explain why the increase is necessary and you will continue to help us to conserve both the Barn Owl and its environment. We are really interested to hear from any of you who have any ideas for fundraising or increasing our income. Maybe you work for a company that could support us in some way? We are working on it here, but the bottom line is that we are all much more interested in conservation and education than fundraising..... And so far, luckily that has worked for the Trust.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Feedback. If you do maybe you can pass it on and help to spread the Barn Owl conservation message. Feel free to contact us with comments or contributions. Thank you for supporting the Barn Owl Trust, it really does make a difference.

Eds. Frances & Sandra

In this Issue...

Welcome to Feedback	2
Barn Owl Trust News	3
More Barn Owl Trust News	4
Even More BOT News	5
BOT Info	6
Diary Dates	6
The Lennon Legacy Project Diary	8-9-10
Team Talk	10
In Memoriam	10
Around and About - Manchester & Cornwall	11
Springwatch, Heligan and BOT to the Rescue	12-13
What a Washout - Walk Report	13
Out & About	14
Your News	15
Thanks and Things	16
Tail Piece	16

*Cover Photo: Parasol Mushroom - Frances Ramsden,
other pictures 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.*

Copy date for issue No 39 is 25th January 2008

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

Email: feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk

Website: www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Join us for a Winter Work Day

on

**Saturday 8 December
10am - 4.00pm**

in the LLP field

This is an opportunity to see the Lennon Legacy Project at first hand and get involved in a practical conservation task - scrub clearance - with a group of like minded folk.

We provide gloves and tools. You need to bring suitable clothing and a packed lunch

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

BOT News

A Better Year

Whilst last year was indeed a terrible one for Barn Owls, we are pleased to report that 2007 has been a lot better. The extra-cold weather in winter 05/06 which persisted right through the spring caused reduced small mammal activity resulting in a Barn Owl mortality level (mainly starvation) four times higher than normal. With all the rain, flooding, and lack of summer sunshine this year, you may be forgiven for thinking that the owls have had another disastrous year. Not so!

Following a relatively mild winter, spring 2007 was typically wet and mild so small mammals (and therefore Barn Owls) managed quite well. The breeding season got off to an excellent start with four weeks of summery weather in April, just when Barn Owls were egg-laying, resulting in good clutch sizes. The "typical English summer" that followed (wet!) wasn't too much of a problem as there were frequent breaks in the rainfall and it stayed mild, encouraging good grass growth and therefore good breeding conditions for Field Voles (the owls' main prey). Although there were some sites where it all went wrong (young falling from nests/starving/dead etc.) there were others where large broods were reared successfully and so weather conditions



This photograph is available as an A3 colour poster from the Trust at £2.00 plus £1.50 p&p

Photo: Terry Browse

and food supply were almost certainly not to blame. The exceptional flooding will obviously have caused problems in some local areas but overall it's been a much better year than 2006. As I write we're getting reports of second broods at some nest sites: most encouraging!

Wild Barn Owl populations have always gone up and down from year to year.

What determines the underlying population trend more than anything else is habitat quality. Do you have a bit of land where you could create some lovely rough tussocky grass?

You could start by going to www.barnowltrust.org.uk click on "Information and Downloads" and select "How to manage land for Barn Owls".

MBE - More Barn Owls Everywhere



Photo: Frances Ramsden

Congratulations to our Head of Conservation David Ramsden who was awarded an MBE (Member of the British Empire) for 'services to wildlife' in the Queen's Birthday Honours List this year.

Friends of the Trust Mike and Heather Ross began the process in 2005 when they

nominated David – however, the first he knew was when he was contacted by the Prime Minister's office in May and told that he was being considered for the award. When the List was published he said, "I feel extremely honoured to have been considered as well as shocked and delighted! I'm very happy to accept the award on behalf of everyone who helped to create the Barn Owl Trust and all those who have helped in its achievements".

Thank you to everyone who has sent congratulations to both David and the Trust and as Martin Davies from Exeter City Council said in his message, "MBE means More Barn Owls Everywhere".

David will visit Buckingham Palace in December to collect his award.

Congratulations too, to Friend of the Trust, Major Nigel Lewis. Nigel is a Trustee of the Hawk and Owl Trust, and Group Leader of the Imber Conservation Group. He received an MBE for services to the conservation of birds of prey in Wiltshire.

Full Colour

Please take a minute or two to look at our new Barn Owls Need Friends leaflet enclosed with this issue. This replaces our old black and white leaflet which hadn't changed for six or seven years and we think that the colour pictures will help people to get a better impression of what we do. There were cost implications to going 'full-colour' but the price difference was not that great, it also does the job of three of our current leaflets so that's got to be a saving.

Another reason for producing a new publication was that after nearly ten years we needed to increase our suggested donations to become a Friend of the Trust. Postal charges, wages, electricity bills, etc., etc... have all risen over that period and we hope that you won't feel that an additional £5 a year is too unreasonable to help us continue our work. Making your donation by standing order will help save costs and if you make a monthly standing order for a minimum of £2.50 we'll benefit even more and you'd hardly notice the outlay.

Please keep helping us to help Barn Owls.

More BOT News



Prize winner Harry spent 6 hours a day on her bike

Photo: Caroline Lewis

Devon Car Free Day Award

Friday 21st September was Devon Car Free Day organised as part of the Travel Wise campaign and in support of the International 'In Town Without My Car' event.

Here at the BOT Harry had been regularly cycling to work over the summer months, a 60+ mile round trip taking 3 hours at each end of the day. She suggested the whole office get involved and we all ditch our cars for one day. Kelly and Pete had been cycling to work on the odd occasion and other folk lived within walking distance so she thought it wouldn't prove too much of a disruption. Julie however, proved to be the exception! Living in Dawlish it was always going to be tricky to plan her route to work on public transport but we all had to laugh when she

found the local bus route operating between Dawlish and Ashburton with the following service; Bus 113 Tavistock to Dawlish, passing through Ashburton). *'This service does not run every week. It may run every other week, maybe only once a month, maybe only every other month.'*

As an incentive to organisations and their staff, prizes of £50 vouchers were on offer for the winners of four categories: the best team effort, the most creative way of getting to work, the furthest distance travelled to work by green transport and the regular 'green traveller' award – we were all very proud and delighted when Harry won the latter two. Well done Harry. **q**

Black Rat

The Trust is regularly asked to survey farm buildings for landowners and developers, looking for evidence of Barn Owl occupation. However, one local Devon farm recently provided some rather surprising finds.

Assistant Conservation Officer Matthew Twiggs, who undertook the survey with Serbian volunteer Milan Ruzic, said: "The whole of the floor of the barn was covered in pellets. There were literally hundreds of them piled under certain beams, which were themselves thick with faeces". On taking a closer look there were a huge amount of bones visible, which had fallen out of the pellets as they had crumbled over the years. This was clearly a traditional site, which had accommodated generations of owls.

All the usual suspects were present: the skulls and jawbones of field voles, wood

mice and shrews were found in good numbers. In addition, bones from more unexpected species were also just lying around on the floor; single skulls of house sparrow, a finch species and a wader species were all found. The most remarkable item however, was a mammal skull and jawbone. "We were carefully sifting through the pellet debris and found what we first thought were bones from the common Brown rat. We brought the samples back for a closer look and Milan was astonished to note features usually attributable to Black rats". Having sought expert advice, identification was tentatively confirmed.

Black rats are now one of the rarest mammals in the UK, mainly confined to coastal sites, in particular ports and harbours.



Photo: Dr Pat Morris

Although native to Asia they have spread all over the world due to their close association with man and their habit of stowing away on boats. They have, for the most part, been replaced by the common Brown rat in Britain, so what a Black rat is doing inland in Devon is still a mystery.

For pictures of the Black rat skull and jaw bones and other pellet analysis samples, take a look at our website at: http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/popup_slide.html?id=85 **q**

World Conference

The World Owl Conference will be held in Groningen in the Netherlands between 31 October and 4 November 2007.

The conference will host an international group of owl biologists, conservationists and other interested parties and will coincide with Dutch National Owl-study Day on November 3rd.

The Barn Owl Trust is presenting two papers 'Barn Owls and Major Roads' and 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Barn Owl Nestbox Designs'.

Besides facilitating contact among world owl experts, the conference itself will produce two tangible results; the proceedings will be published as a peer-reviewed book, comparable to earlier proceedings of owl conferences. Secondly, all conference delegates will produce an Experts' Statement on owl conservation, including its scientific and societal aspects, and its importance for nature protection in a broader sense. **q**



Even More BOT News

Volunteer Day

This year the Barn Owl Trust has forged links with National Charity 'Business in the Community' who promote volunteering 'challenges' to employees of large companies. They are encouraged to gather a team of between 10-20 staff to participate in a volunteering 'challenge' and are supported by their employer who pays their wages and covers their expenses. These challenges promote team building and give people the chance to undertake voluntary work very different from their every-day jobs and outside their 'comfort zone'!

Our first event took place in the Lennon Legacy Field on a gloriously hot, sunny day in July. Ten staff from the Rural Payments Agency arrived ready for a day's 'Creeping Thistle Pulling'. They worked very hard throughout the day and it was just fantastic to be able to share the beauty of the Lennon Legacy project with people who hadn't previously known much about the Barn Owl Trust or our work. They managed to pull 3 trailer loads of creeping thistle.

As this was the first time the Barn Owl Trust had played host to a 'challenge' for 'Business in the Community' we were particularly keen to ensure that it was a success (a supply of cold bottled water and homemade cake seemed to help!). At the end of the day we had to ask the team to stop working and several volunteers asked if they could come back for another day to finish the task – always a good sign!

Back at the office, BOT information pack in hand, everyone ended the day with a real sense of achievement, having learned more about the Trust and its work, and having experienced first hand the beauty of ideal Barn Owl habitat and the LLP field. I hope that these events will help us to reach a wider audience, particularly within the business community and give volunteers the opportunity to experience first hand a little bit of life at the Barn Owl Trust!



The first BOT Business in the Community challenge was heralded a success
Photo: Caroline Lewis



Up the pole

Photo courtesy Theo Moye apexnewspix.com

Planning System Fails Owls

The Barn Owl Trust spends a lot of time putting up nestboxes so we were rather surprised to be asked to take one down! It was on a site that had a range of old barns and a modern agricultural building housing a Barn Owl Trust nestbox, which was a regular nest site. A wildlife survey report – conducted in response to a planning application for conversion - revealed the presence of breeding Barn Owls. The owner had contacted us to remove the nestbox as required on his planning permission.

The Local Authority -shire District Council had made a catalogue of errors and omissions in the wording of the conditions that they placed on the planning permission. The most damaging condition that they attached was that the building (containing the nestbox) was to be removed **prior** to the development commencing, meaning the owls would lose their nest site! The condition should have required that the nestbox be left in place until after permanent provision had been made for the birds **within** the barn conversions.

The two most important concepts when mitigating against the potential impact to Barn Owls during a rural development are continuity and permanence. Both can be provided at negligible cost.

Continuity requires making alternative provision nearby as soon as possible, and before any work starts. This allows the owls time to familiarise themselves with an alternative roosting place which can be used during development works when the

original site would be out of action for the owls.

Permanence requires provision to be made and maintained within the development itself, that is, within the roof space of the finished building. If these simple concepts are considered during rural developments, they can provide an ongoing and permanent future for resident Barn Owls.

The owner was really pressing us to demolish the nestbox; he was worried that the box 'in situ' would deter prospective buyers! On arrival we discovered that the nestbox was in fact being used by a Barn Owl as one was flushed from the box. Full of apprehension about the dire situation we made an emergency call to Western Power Distribution who kindly agreed to provide and erect a pole for us (free of charge) onto which we could fix a nestbox. This could be placed near to the existing nestbox thereby providing alternative shelter for the birds. We met the electricity company on site and we soon had the pole, with nestbox attached, firmly anchored in the ground. We had also contacted a neighbour who had agreed to have a nestbox installed in his barn to provide another site for the Barn Owls to use within their home range.

We recently returned to check the status of the pole box and to our delight found a Barn Owl using it as a roosting place. The adjoining building had been demolished and the indoor nestbox was on the ground, but at least we knew that by providing the pole box our mitigation measures had paid off.

q

BOT Info



... Dates for your Diary

J Wednesday 31 October-Sunday 4 November

World Owl Conference in Groningen, Holland. David Ramsden will be presenting two papers: 'Barn Owls and Major Roads' and 'Criteria for the Evaluation of Barn Owl Nestbox Designs'.

J Wednesday 28 & Thursday 29 November

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, confirming your name, job title, organisation and nature of your work.

J Saturday 8 December

LLP volunteer conservation work party. Come along and see the Lennon Legacy Project and help us with scrub clearance. We provide gloves and tools. You need to bring suitable clothing and a packed lunch. Please contact the office to book a place.

J Tuesday 11 December

David to be presented with his MBE for services to wildlife at Buckingham Palace.

J Friday 14th December

Grand Prize Draw to be held at the Trust.

J Wednesday 19th December

Pub Quiz Night at the Rising Sun at Woodland, near Ashburton. Let us know if you are interested in coming along. The quiz starts at 8pm. The Grand Draw prizewinners list will be available.

J February 2008

The BOESS course will be running again this month. Please contact the Trust for details.

J Friday 23 April 2008

Restoring the Balance – Barn Owl Trust talk and slideshow for the University of the Third Age at Rydon Hall in Kingsteignton. 2.45pm start.

J Thursday 15 - Sunday 17 May 2008

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!

J Sunday 22 June 2008

BOT annual sponsored walk and picnic on the Flete Estate with an optional river crossing with Canoe Adventures in their 12-person Native American Indian canoe. Further details in next issue.

Reduce, Reuse and Recycle



Recycling is great for the planet and also helps to raise funds for the Barn Owl Trust. This financial year we have received £213 and since 2004 £1,459 has been generated from things that could have just gone in the bin. We can raise money from used ink cartridges and mobile phones so please send them to us rather than throwing them out.

Businesses and companies can reduce their waste and support conservation by providing a collection point for recycling, so if you don't have one at work maybe you could suggest it. Our website provides links and addresses for sites that collect cartridges, phones, stamps, polythene, foil, tetrapacks and much, much more. Visit <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk> and check out the Green Links pages; this section continues to grow as we find more useful contacts. Not every site will raise funds but if it does please make sure you say you want the BOT to receive them. If you don't have Internet access contact the office for details of what to send where and in some cases we can provide freepost envelopes. Businesses that support us by recycling include job centres in West London, solicitors in Devon and our first Cornish company.

If you're saving stamps for the Trust there are some very definite guidelines about what's collectable, so once again please go to our website or call the office for details. On our website read our Green Roots pages if you want to reduce your personal

environmental impact. Check out our Wants List on page 16 of this issue of Feedback and see if you can help with anything we need and remember to take your own bags when you go shopping, (the BOT cotton bags are really strong and last for years). 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 (Recycling Admin)

Adoption Update

Owl adoptions have continued to trickle in over the past six months thanks largely to the ease of being able to adopt online through our website. The new system is very efficient and saves on paper and mailing costs. Of course we are still processing adoptions through the post and appreciate that the new technology doesn't suit everyone. The Adoption Scheme makes a significant contribution to the Trust's income raising well over £15,000 last year.

We have had two new birds added to the Trust's adoption scheme, Waterloo and Wednesday. Wednesday came to the Trust as a result of a road traffic accident and unfortunately was not deemed fit enough for release, and Waterloo was a captive bred bird whose owner had died leaving no-one to care for him. They both arrived in 2006 and have settled in well. Waterloo was named after the Waterloo Foundation who

Christmas Quiz

Join us on 19th December for a thoroughly good start to the Festive Season at the Rising Sun in Woodland when we hold our Christmas Quiz. A list of Grand Draw prizewinners will be available so don't forget to send back your ticket stubs for an opportunity to win a host of amazing prizes. We hope to see you there. **q**



Waterloo

Photo: Harriet Davies

made a very generous donation of £10,000 towards the costs of updating our educational DVD.

A Barn Owl Adoption makes a wonderful gift for someone (or yourself) and helps to support both our sanctuary and our conservation work. More details can be found on our website and the enclosed 'Barn Owls Need Friends' leaflet.

Harriet Davies, Support Officer

Bird News

Owl's well that ends well!

Earlier in the year I received a call about a young Tawny owl that a member of the public found with something stuck in its beak. This turned out to be a crow's foot! The owl managed to eject it eventually and was given a liquid feed and a night's rest before being brought to the Trust by one of our volunteers.

The owl was found on the ground during a stage called 'branching' where they jump and hop about in the trees, practicing wing movements, which often results in an undignified tumble to the ground. Under these circumstances the parents would normally continue to feed the young on the ground but if the nestling seems to be in trouble, as in this case, or in danger of being predated then it needs to be checked over and either placed out of harm's way or taken to a rehabilitation unit or a veterinary surgeon. The finders were willing to supplementary feed the bird so I decided the best thing was to take it back to where it was found. Armed with a suitable box (open-topped so that the owl could be heard and seen by parents, shallow enough for the owl to climb out of and with drainage holes at the bottom), hammer, nails, torch, a ladder and, of course, the bird, I headed off. The owl was successfully reinstated and I left a supply of food with the family who were prepared to do their very best for 'their' owl.

The next morning I received a call from the lady saying that they had checked the box and there, next to the nestling, was a wild-caught prey item - it was being fed by its parents - success!

The secret nestbox

The Conservation Team visited many sites over the summer months on pre-ringing and ringing visits. A mild winter followed by wet but mild weather in early spring and a fine April resulted in good clutch sizes and some large broods. We've had reports of second broods too and one pair even produced a third brood! So this year's breeding season is proving to be more successful than last year's, which resulted in the loss of pairs from traditional sites. These sites will hopefully be taken up by this year's dispersing young.

My very best visit was checking the status of a nestbox in an isolated barn; it was eerily quiet and nothing was stirring - not even a mouse! - I put the ladder up to the nestbox, no noise, no 'tell-tale' nest smell, nothing. I crept up the ladder, convinced that the nestbox

was unoccupied; slowly lifting the lid I peeped inside - wow! it was like lifting the lid of a jewellery box, as there in the corner were four little 'gems' blinking up at me - how delightful! I drove away smiling secretly to myself! What a magical moment and one that will stay with me for a long time.

Bird rehabilitation

We have been very busy with calls about fallen owlets. At the beginning of June a concerned neighbour had been keeping an eye on some Barn Owls and alerted the Trust that owlets were falling from a very high ledge on the outside of a barn conversion - our 30ft ladder could not reach it! I was able to gain entry to the inside of the building (having gracefully declined the farmer's kind invitation of being hoisted up to the external ledge on a platform attached to his cherry picker!). The nestbox was in the roof space and was completely filled with Jackdaw nest sticks! I could just see the owlets but could not reach them and was very worried that they would waddle off to the high ledge. We removed 6 bin liners full of sticks, eventually retrieved the owlets, checked and fed them and put them back. A couple of days later we had another Live Owl Emergency call: one of the owlets had fallen again. The other owlets seemed a little thin, and were probably venturing out to the ledge because they were hungry, so it was decided that the lady would take on supplementary feeding them, and that the 'fall guy' would come back to Waterleat with me. The lady did sterling work and all the nestlings fledged successfully.

Altogether six owlets came to the Trust from various sites, either because it wasn't possible to return them to the nest or because it was the second or third time that they'd fallen. They were placed in a deep indoor nestbox in our barn and fed. They all fledged successfully and we still catch sight of them now and again which is thrilling and one recently returned to the nestbox to roost!

Two juvenile Tawny Owls also came here from the local area needing some tender loving care, feeding and a slow supported release programme. After being in the

Tawny Owl release aviary for about three weeks, the top was opened and they were free to venture out, with food still being provided if they were to return. One of them is still coming back and has been seen in the big oak tree near the office at dusk, as bold as brass 'hooting' loudly!

In our sanctuary: Woodstock, a Tawny Owl that came to the Trust badly injured in 1990, sadly died in July. He was a firm favourite with us all and will be sadly missed.

One mystery that has still not been explained was a young Barn Owl that was brought to the Trust this summer at 15 weeks old exhibiting severe behavioural problems. There were no physical disabilities apparent. It was one of two owlets (of a brood of five) that kept falling and being put back into the nest. The rest of the brood were normal (*Tyto alba alba*) colour and fledged normally, but the two that kept falling were a very dark colouration (*Tyto alba guttata*). From 9 weeks old both of the dark owlets had been on the ground being supplementary fed but were unable to fly. We were contacted and it was arranged that the birds would come to us. Unfortunately the night before they arrived one died. The remaining owl seemed to have no sense of balance, had no control over its movements and had spates of being very active, then very inactive. We explored every avenue available to us to try and find out the cause of this behaviour but after 10 days or so we felt that it was in the owl's best interest to be put to sleep. We are still awaiting the results of extensive post-mortem tests and would be interested to hear of any similar cases.

Julie Matthews

Assistant Conservation Officer



One of the fledged owlets at Waterleat

Photo: David Ramsden

The Lennon Legacy

Having been left a legacy by the late Vivian Lennon we were keen to do something really special and long-lasting. So when the field next-door came up for sale for the first time in generations, we thought how fantastic it would be to manage it for Barn Owls. We'd talked the talk, but could we walk the walk? Six years later, the 26-acre LLP field is proving to be an invaluable resource; our very own local Barn Owls are exploiting the rough grassland habitat in addition to a wealth of other species, which have made it their home. It's living proof that managing habitat for Barn Owls has a huge knock-on effect to the wider environment. The diversity of the site was extended last winter with the creation of two large ponds, which provide the largest area of still water in the valley. These were named the Flo and Oakley ponds after two more kind folk who remember the Trust in their wills.

But what part does the LLP play in our day-to-day work and how do we ensure it remains attractive to Barn Owls and the increasing number of other species we continue to record within its boundaries? Here are some extracts from the LLP diary over the last few months.

April 2007

Unseasonably clement weather continues in April and by the middle of the month one might have thought it was mid-summer with temperatures in the mid-seventies. Corner Wood is an absolute picture, with a carpet of Primrose, Lesser Celandine, Greater Stitchwort and Dog Violet.

A singing male Blackcap in the hedgerow along Kiln Close on the 3rd did nothing to persuade us any differently and stamped Spring's credentials to the LLP flag post. Half a dozen late Redwing which straggled through the same day however reminded us that winter may not yet have relinquished its hold. The first Swallow for the year was recorded on the 11th and the very next day the first Willow Warbler of the year was heard singing in the trees around the BOT offices.

The Butterfly Conservation Monitoring Scheme restarted this month, with the first male Orange-tip and first Green-veined White for the year recorded on the 11th and 16th respectively. Also on the 16th, the LLP's first ever Common Lizard *Lacerta vivipara* was seen sunning itself briefly by the weather station but typically didn't hang around long enough for a photograph.

Various species of bumblebee and ladybird are in evidence in and around the field but also seem reticent about posing for the camera – must try harder!

At lunchtime on the 30th two Hobby came in from the south and were watched thermalling northwards up the valley.

May 2007

May started with glorious weather but quickly deteriorated to more usual spring conditions with some much-needed rain from the 6th onwards. Surprisingly, this inclement weather seemed to suit the dozens of Swallows, House Martins and one or two Swifts which turned up at about the same time to take advantage of the myriad of insects over the field and barn.

The new 'Flo' and 'Oakley' ponds in Forde Orchard continue to naturalise with the appearance of two large patches of Bluebells nearby. Some of the white variant of Bluebell have also appeared for the first time in the grassland near the edge of Corner Wood. Buttercups, Germander Speedwell and Common Bird's Foot Trefoil are all in flower in the grass now, and there is a stand of Fumitory along the path at Kiln Close. Our first ever stand of Yellow Archangel has appeared along the LLP lane boundary.

Large numbers of ladybird larva have been seen on and around one of the camera posts at the top of the field.

The tadpoles in the "Flo" pond have started turning into froglets and are hopping around on the pond margins. The mystery concerning the odd bits of bunny that have been turning up around the field is finally solved when a fox is spotted. A Small Heath was recorded on the 23rd May in Kiln Close, constituting the first ever LLP record for this

unassuming little butterfly.

The LLP nest boxes were checked on May 28th. Most were in use by either Blue Tits or Great Tits, but two boxes encouragingly had Pied Flycatchers. By the end of May, up to 40 House Martins and a dozen Swifts had taken to feeding low over Kiln Close, and a male Pied Flycatcher was in song in Corner Wood.

June 2007

The lone male Barn Owl that had been flying over the field screeching every night since March went quiet.

On 12th June, committee members from Cornwall Wildlife Trust's Churchtown Farm Community Nature Reserve visited us for a talk and tour around the LLP field. On this beautiful sunny, warm afternoon we recorded a dozen Skippers, the first three Marbled Whites of the year, and an increasing number of Meadow Browns were noted.

On the same walk a male Beautiful Demoiselle damselfly was recorded near Corner Wood. These are stunning, the males have a metallic blue-green body and are the only British damsels with all-dark wings. Extremely sensitive to pollution, their presence serves as a reliable indicator of the excellent water quality of the Ashburn, which fringes the western boundary of the LLP and eventually runs into the River Dart at nearby Buckfast. A female Broad-bodied Chaser was also recorded in the same area. With yellow spots along the rather short body, individuals of this species can look like large wasps if seen at a distance.



Bumblebee on Musk Thistle

Photo: John Howells

Project Diary ...

The very next day, on June 13th, Barbara Handley from the Hawk and Owl Trust and some friends also visited the LLP for a tour. Unfortunately the weather wasn't quite as kind; nevertheless a good time was had by all.

On the 21st we recorded the first Field Vole under the corrugate at the top of the field, and a Fox and Roe Deer hind along the back path on a solstice evening walk. A day later on the 22nd, a neatly timed butterfly transect walk between thunderstorms and torrential rain revealed 47 Marbled White, 37 Meadow Brown, 8 Small Skipper and 1 Small Copper.

All in all there were 20 days with rain in June totalling 138.4 mm!

July 2007

The annual Bracken Bash was held on the 7th. Mercifully the weather was absolutely beautiful and in between bouts of 'bashing' Sparrowhawk and Hobby were seen.

The grass seed heads have started ripening and the field has turned a rich golden brown although much of the grass has now been beaten down by the rain. Despite the weather the Mallow and Hedge Bedstraw are flourishing in the Pennsland Lane hedgerow and the Bedstraw smells wonderful as you walk past it.

On the 11th 95 Marbled White were counted, an LLP record, along with 71 Meadow Brown, 30 Small Skipper and 26 Ringlet. The 24th was dry enough for members of the conservation team to get out and pull some Docks and the odd stand

of Himalayan Balsam from various parts of the field, as well as the worst patches of Creeping Thistle. On the 31st members of DEFRA visited for a rewarding day pulling Creeping Thistle. The ten volunteers from DEFRA and BOT staff managed to remove 3 heaped trailer loads from Lurge!

August 2007

We discovered why our visiting male Barn Owl had gone quiet in June. When checking a neighbouring barn we were absolutely delighted to find a female hatching a clutch of eggs in one of our nestboxes. On the 6th 2 Tree Pipit, 2 Meadow Pipit and a Peregrine were recorded. More Creeping Thistle control took place on the 9th in various areas including three patches topped by tractor in North Park and the strips either side of the remnant hedge bordering Kiln Close were topped. There were also patches done in the House Park/Hayes Close area.

The second and third records of Wall butterfly were recorded during the weekly butterfly transect on the 21st. Barn Owls have been seen for most of the month foraging and perch hunting over the LLP field, making full use of the supply of small mammals in the rough grassland habitat. The area around the 'Flo' and 'Oakley' ponds in Forde Orchard is beginning to green up nicely, there are froglets in the grass everywhere, butterflies flitting between the wild flowers and dragonflies patrolling air space.

September 2007

Looks like we lost a Barn Owl overnight, as feathers were found along the fence line

behind the barn on the 2nd. The way the shafts of the primary feathers are cleanly bitten through is diagnostic of a fox kill. It's sad, but this is probably a regular event wherever Barn Owls perch-hunt.

A juvenile Wheatear was observed on the North Park hedgebank briefly on the 3rd and the annual grazing regime started, with 10 cows, 10 calves and a bull coming into the field. This will promote new growth in the spring and increase floristic diversity whilst preserving that all-important litter layer so essential for small mammals, and therefore Barn Owls.

The first Conservation Team work party set out on the 13th to try to tackle the scrub in Forde Orchard. Much of the smaller scrub was tackled with the help of the tractor but the more mature gorse and bramble needed a lopper, handsaw or chainsaw. After several hours of strenuous activity we all felt we had made a start. The volunteer work party on the 24th continued in the same vein and a couple more days should see the worst of it done.

On the 17th the first contractor paid us a site visit to quote for works on the planned North Park and Forde Orchard hedgebanks. On the 19th a young badger visited during the day giving some lovely views; it spent part of the time under the Trust's freezer room. A slowworm and family of field voles were found under the corrugated sheets in the field.

On the 20th we ringed a brood of 3 extremely well fed female owlets and their mother in boxes in the neighbouring barn and on the 26th a visit from Orchard Link gave invaluable advice on re-creating 'Forde Orchard', an orchard with traditional varieties of fruit.

October 2007

Grazing continued into October and should hopefully be all done by the end of the month.

About 50 House Martins moved through, over the woods and field, on the 2nd. These migrants are one of the latest to move back southwards with some pairs still currently feeding young in the nest. Long-tailed Field Mice have been found for the first time under the corrugated sheet.

The second Conservation Team work party took place on the 10th. Another volunteer work party is due to take place with students from Plymouth University on the 31st. We hope to continue the work in Forde Orchard then.



Marbled White

Photo: David Ramsden

Team Talk

When after six years working as receptionist at the Trust Lesley retired in July it was great to see some ex-BOT staff at her leaving 'do'; ExACO Amy Oliver is now qualified and working as a plumber. ACO Lisa had her baby, Harry, in April, she brought him to meet us when we had a leaving 'do' for Paul in September. Ex-ACO Chis Richards and his wife Jay also brought their new son Elijah for a visit in September and we have heard that Sonia Seldon and Mark Green (both ex-BOT staff) are expecting their first baby in November.

Hollie, our volunteer aviary cleaner, finished her placement with us in the summer and we had Milan Ruzic from Cacak (Central Serbia) here for a 6-week volunteer placement with the Trust's conservation team at the beginning of July 2007. He is currently a Veterinary Medicine student at the Faculty of Agriculture in the University of Novi Sad. Since 2002 he has been birding all over Serbia and works with several NGO's that deal with wildlife, habitat research and conservation. He has organised and participated in numerous student research camps and trips in Serbia

and has recently become very interested in research and conservation of owls in his country. In 2004 he began working as a professional guide for bird watching holidays in Serbia. Milan will use the skills and knowledge he gathered at the Trust to help owl conservation and research in Serbia. We'll be meeting up again at the World Owl Conference in November. **q**

Paul Winney began a 12 month placement at the Trust in September 2006. He has now returned to the University of Plymouth to complete his BSc (Hons) Wildlife Conservation degree. He writes...

From webcams to Westmoor surveys my year at the Barn Owl Trust has been fantastic. With expectations exceeded, I have now completed my year in a remarkable placement. The work has been so varied and before I started it was difficult to comprehend just how diverse the job was going to be and how much there was to do. This year I have worked with the website, webcams, slideshows, butterfly surveys, ringing checks, ladders, Barn Owl surveys, digital imagery, email enquiries from as far



Photo: Frances Ramsden
Farewell Paul

away as Texas, fallen owlets, county shows, green Santa suits, Pennywell Farm mask making, chainsaws, brush-cutters, ecology courses, participating in the interviews for new Assistant Conservation Officers, water power micro-hydro project, casualty owls and of course everyone at the Barn Owl Trust who welcomed me and who have made my time here that little bit extra special. And of course, not forgetting the stars of the show...the Barn Owls.

Thank you to everyone. Over, but not out!

Paul Winney

... LLP Diary continued...

(...continued from page 9)

Volunteering Date

Saturday 8th December - a Winter Work Day - scrub clearance task or similar. Please contact the office if you are interested in joining us for the day.

The future

The Lennon Legacy Project has proved an inspiration to staff, volunteers and visitors. It has provided a secure home for an increasing range of species and the

constant monitoring since its purchase in 2001 has allowed us to quantify the effects of its management. In future years we hope to be able to invite more groups to visit the project, either for a talk and walk or to participate in a practical task.

This whole project was made possible by a legacy and is a permanent reminder of the generosity and kindness of spirit of someone who supported the Trust's dreams and aspirations. Bless you Vivien Lennon and

the other kind folk who have remembered the Barn Owl Trust in their wills. We couldn't have done it without you.

News of a legacy from Terrence Noel Hughes arrived the morning of the 5th September. This generous bequest will not only help us to recreate Forde Orchard but it will also enable a significant amount of practical work and habitat management to be carried out which will help to conserve the Barn Owl and its environment well beyond the boundaries of the field.

If you want to know more about the field our website has a huge range of pictures, slideshows and a monthly LLP diary. Visit www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Matthew Twiggs



Matt clearing scrub to enable us to build the hedgebank and stone wall

Photo: Frances Ramsden

In Memoriam

The Trust has received a legacy from the estate of the late John Ashby Lowne

and donations in memory of Winifred Campbell, Joyce Brown Brian Stephenson and Margaret Dorothy Waldron

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

Around and About

This time on Around and About we look at some news from a Barn Owl conservation group in Greater Manchester and a developing relationship with a conservation project in Cornwall.

The last 12 months has been a busy time for our small group. We were fortunate in attracting a grant of £600 from the Greater Manchester Biodiversity Project Small Grants Scheme, and, at the same time, one of the county's keenest birdwatchers changed his job. At his new place of employment, he is able to get offcuts of suitable wood and as a result has made up several boxes with an almost unlimited number to come! We have perfected a design, which seems to work well, incorporating an easily-removable front, and a passageway which leads to a main breeding area.

In the last year, we have erected 13 boxes and some of these have already been used – one within 2 days by a pair of

Kestrels, which raised 6 chicks. This was a mitigation box for a pair of Barn Owls which had formerly bred in a nearby derelict factory about to be demolished, and whose young had been stolen and sold. Luckily, the tower in which the new box was erected had room for another box, but so far it hasn't been used, despite the factory having been razed to the ground.

This year has been a very successful season, with confirmed breeding at 16 sites (one site with sterile eggs for the 4th year running), probable breeding at one site and possible breeding at 2 sites. These sites include two quarries with cave nesting. At one farm, a pair hatched and raised 7 chicks successfully (with 2 unhatched eggs!). At another farm, the female was sadly found dead, having sustained a wing injury. The three lethargic chicks, about 2-3 weeks old, were taken to the RSPCA wildlife hospital at Stapeley Grange, where the former Chairman of the South Cheshire Barn Owl Group, works. She was able to establish that

they could swallow whole mice, so they were returned to their box the next day with a supply of frozen mice (later supplemented by the Group) and with the help of the farmer, 9 defrosted mice were introduced into the box daily, and then, after the chicks all fledged, onto a specially-erected ledge nearby. At the time of writing, the number of mice supplied is gradually being reduced. We are fairly sure that the male is also bringing food in as well. This was the first time the Group had been involved in the technique of soft-rearing, and we thank Maxine for her help and advice.



We are also taking part in the BTO's Barn Owl Monitoring Project.

Judith Smith (Co-ordinator)
Mosslands Barn Owl Conservation Group
Greater Manchester

Churchtown Farm Community Nature Reserve & the BOT

What proved to be a very fruitful relationship between Churchtown Farm Community Nature Reserve and BOT started back in the depths of Winter 2006. We received a call from the volunteer Warden of the Nature Reserve, which initially seemed to be a call regarding advice on habitat management and nestbox erection, but turned into so much more. It transpired that not only would it be beneficial for Trust conservation staff to visit the Reserve to see if it was a suitable site for encouraging Barn Owls, but also that around 8 people who were committee members would like to visit BOT. They wanted to see what we had done in the LLP field and how this benefited Barn Owls and also the wider environment. In this same conversation BOT was invited to have a stand at Churchtown's own 'Awareness Day', see 'Out & About' on Page14.

So just before Christmas, Lisa who was by now 5 months pregnant and I took a trip down to Saltash to visit the Reserve, which already offers a variety of different habitats for wildlife. After a fairly brisk (as it was pretty cold) walk around the Reserve, it was concluded that there were areas that could be managed to provide Barn Owl hunting habitat. However due to overhead electricity wires across one part of the land, some areas would not be suitable as collision with overhead wires is a fairly common cause of fatality.



The Churchtown Group see the LLP at firsthand

Photo: Kelly Wakeham

After the visit Christmas came and went and it was February 2007 before I was again in touch with the Churchtown Farm. They wanted to come and visit quite soon to find out about the Barn Owl Trust, the work we do and how this benefits the environment. It was suggested that if they could delay their visit until the summer they would be able to benefit from the LLP being in full bloom. So on a gloriously sunny day in June, nine members of their committee came to BOT along with two of our own supporters. The afternoon started with David giving some background information on the work of BOT and then the tale of how the Lennon Legacy field came to be. After a quick tea break our

visitors were given the opportunity to see the LLP and the diversity of wildlife for themselves, as David, Matt and Julie gave them a guided walk around the field.

Everyone went away from the visit very happy, saying that it had completely exceeded their expectations, and hopefully they will be understanding a little more about our work and will spread the word to others. A few days later I was delighted to receive a letter from them saying what a wonderful time they'd had during their visit. After such a success I am hoping that BOT can look forward to many more days like this.

Kelly Wakeham, BOT Reception

Springwatch, Heligan ...



Photo: Ecowatch/Heligan

The brood of 2007

Lisa Phillips of Eco-watch Wildlife Surveillance and David Ramsden (BOT) report yet more strange goings on... "If it can happen to Barn Owls, it's probably going to happen at Heligan!"

BBC's Springwatch series with Bill Oddie and Kate Humble is amazingly popular, bringing a wide selection of live wildlife dramas to many thousands of TV viewers. This year nothing was more dramatic than the Barn Owl story that unfolded at the Lost Gardens of Heligan in Cornwall. The viewing public were happily watching a brood of young in the nest when suddenly, without any warning at all, one of the eldest owlets turned to look at a younger sibling and promptly swallowed it. Alive! Talk about bad PR for Barn Owls... cannibalism... live... on prime-time national TV! And that was only the beginning of a saga which continued long after the Springwatch broadcasts had finished...

The 2007 breeding season started well enough and the Heligan nest-site was typical of those across Cornwall and most of the UK. "We were so pleased to have a nesting pair again," Lisa said, "especially with 2006 being such a disappointment and all the ups and downs of previous years". [Regular readers may recall Lisa's Heligan article in FEEDBACK issue 35]. "The owls first appeared at the Heligan nestbox on 22nd March and following glorious summery weather in early April we were delighted when they laid an extra-large clutch of eggs".

The first egg appeared on Easter Saturday (7th April) and within two weeks she'd laid seven and, as it later turned out, all of the eggs were fertile. "It's very unusual for every Barn Owl egg in a clutch to develop into a fully grown owlet," said David Ramsden, the BOT's Senior Conservation Officer. "The

average number of eggs laid is 5.6 and the hatching success rate 4.8, but by the time the brood are well grown the number of young in the nest has usually gone down to three or four".

"The first egg hatched on the 9th May and within 2 ½ weeks all seven had hatched. We were working very closely with the BBC at the time," said Lisa. "This was the first year that our Heligan nest site was going to be featured on the BBC's Springwatch programme and our Eco-watch nest webcam was going to be featured on the BBC's website as well - great publicity for Eco-watch Wildlife Surveillance and the Lost Gardens of Heligan".

Suddenly, on 27th May things started going seriously wrong. The nestlings began vanishing one by one. "The very next night the new series of Springwatch went live and the BBC broadcast footage of one of our owlets eating another one! We were stunned. We'd heard of cannibalism amongst owl nestlings but never expected to see it happen to a live owlet on TV. What surprised everyone was that the larger owlet didn't wait for the younger one to die, nor did it wait for a parent owl to offer its body as food. It just gobbled it up and that was that. A few days later a second tiny nestling disappeared and we were down to five. Within a couple of days two more of the nestlings vanished and we realised that the adult male had disappeared! We think he may have been hit by a car or possibly killed by a Buzzard on 1st June". Lisa contacted the BOT for some urgent advice.

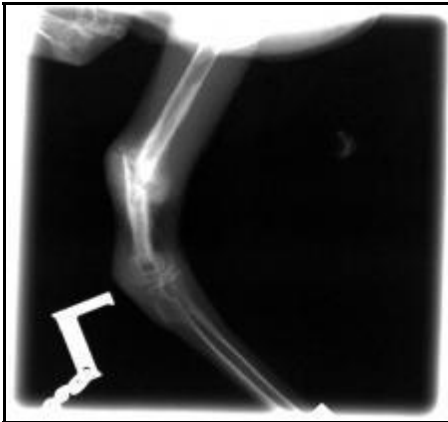
When a brood of owlets are starving it's inevitable that some of them – usually the smallest ones – won't make it and if eating them means that the bigger ones survive then that has to be a good thing. This kind of

'recycling' is a sort of natural insurance policy; helping to ensure that at least some of the owlets survive. However, when one of the parent birds die the whole brood can be lost. "It's a great shame to lose an entire brood when a little human intervention can help," said David. He advised Lisa to start supplementary feeding the remaining three nestlings immediately by placing some dead mice in the nestbox every evening. Fortunately this halted the mortality and the remaining three grew well. On 28th June the Barn Owl Trust visited to do their usual annual check and the owlets were weighed, measured, ringed, and found to be doing very well. The adult female was hunting successfully and supplementary feeding would be continued until the brood had dispersed. At this point any normal saga would have ended. But not this one! By the end of July the three young owls had all fledged successfully and were still returning to the nestbox to collect a few dead mice. It was now two months since the nestling drama and everything was finally going well. The young were teaching themselves to hunt and would soon be dispersing. Unfortunately Chapter Two was just about to start...

On 6th August a member of the public reported that one of the owlets seemed to have a problem. They'd been watching it every evening via the BBC/Eco-watch webcam and it seemed to have a problem with one of its legs or possibly one of its feet. The next day Gill from Eco-watch contacted BOT who advised watching the webcam and, if it seemed serious, catching the owl and taking it to a vet to be checked over. Unfortunately catching a fully-fledged owl is no easy task and all attempts were unsuccessful. In the days that followed more calls were received from concerned viewers confirming that the owl was definitely not alright. BOT received an urgent call for help on 13th August. Apparently the owl visited the box at the same time each evening but flew off if anyone approached. David (from the BOT) devised a plan to catch it which involved a hide, a long pole, a lump of foam, lots of sticky tape, an elaborate system of watching and signalling, patience, stealth, and luck! Fortunately it worked and by midnight the owl was at the Veterinary Hospital having an initial assessment.

X-rays showed that the leg had fractured just above the ankle and the bones had over-ridden each other and fused back together. As a result the leg was about a centimetre too short and bent forward. "Our vets advised that the bones could be re-broken and set in the correct position but this was a difficult and risky procedure," said David. "There was an experienced vet who was confident about the operation but this would

...and BOT to the Rescue



involve a long journey and considerable expense. Our local vet was prepared to have a go but had never done the procedure. Alternatively we could have decided not to operate. This would avoid the dangers of the operation but leave the owl with a permanent disability and us with the choice of releasing a less-than-perfect owl or keeping it in captivity for the rest of its life. It was hard choices all round”.

We opted for our local vet doing the operation and (thankfully) it seems to have been a great success. The young owl is currently in rehabilitation and seems to be using its leg quite well so we hope to release it this autumn. Ironically, the owl we have is the same one as ‘did the deed’ live on Springwatch. If we can release it successfully then perhaps its siblings won’t have died in vain.

Post Script – The BBC (who’ve named this owl “Big Brother”) have just asked us if they can film the owl in rehab at the Barn Owl Trust for a follow-up story for the **Autumn Watch** series. **q**



Temporary external steel pins held the bones in place

Photo: Matthew Twiggs

What a Washout!

After a reasonably pleasant day setting up the marquee and signing the route for the sponsored walk we were concerned to hear forecasts of bad weather ahead. In the event, this year, our fifteenth walk, proved to be the wettest on record. Just thirty-four people braved the elements – last year we registered around 180.

On the morning of the walk I woke-up to hear the rain drumming on the window and news on the radio that Ten Tors participants were being air-lifted off Dartmoor due to the appalling weather conditions. I’m sure you’re wondering why we didn’t cancel! We were committed to hold the event because we had raised a considerable sum of money from all of you who so kindly sponsored our dogs, from local businesses who generously supported us and also because we had no way of telling people that it would not take place. There was also the possibility that it may stop raining!

The river was so high that we had to make the decision to only allow people to do the short walk which didn’t involve the canoe crossing or the walk on the opposite bank; we didn’t want to add drowning to our list of problems. It was really heart-warming that supporters who had done the walk over many years came along just to make their donations and give their commiserations and one gentleman who has a workshop on the Flete Estate stopped one of our walkers and gave them a cheque for ‘bravery in the face of adversity’.

By lunch time the weather was beginning to take a turn for the better and, as I always



Megan the retriever had a thoroughly good time
Photo: Frances Ramsden

walk last to act as sweeper, I was able to squelch to the picnic area and back without getting too wet. The four dogs were brilliant and finally raised £1,367.50; this is the most they’ve ever raised and also the largest number of dogs being sponsored (four instead of the usual two) so I’m wondering whether we might go for a record next year and borrow a few extra dogs from somewhere!

After the last walker has returned we always have a few extra hours to spend driving round the route and collecting up all the signs and packing everything else away. This year the four-wheel drive vehicle really had to work for its living and slithered down many a slope before all the sign boards had been collected up.

During the following week we were heartened to receive donations from loads of people who would normally have done the walk and others who just felt sorry for us and now that the final totals are in we’re only around £60 down on last year. Unbelievable!

Thank-you to everyone involved and not wanting to break with tradition we’re already planning next year’s walk.

Sandra Reardon

Countryfile TV

In August the Barn Owl Trust made yet another appearance on our TV screens in the BBC’s *Countryfile Summer Diaries*. In a week of episodes focusing on Devon the Trust’s Head of Conservation, David Ramsden MBE, starred alongside a brood of three owlets in a programme all about Ashburton and the surrounding area.

The short clip demonstrated the art of ringing young Barn Owls. This included taking measurements to estimate their age and fixing BTO rings to aid in recovery data and research into bird populations. For more information on rings and ringing you can download a leaflet from our website. **q**

Out and About

Being in my first year as Publicity Officer for the Trust and participating in events for the first time I have been amazed at the loyalty and dedication of our supporters. Those who turned up for the walk to raise sponsorship money for the Trust despite the appalling weather conditions (one lady told me "I am completing this walk whatever the weather. I have so many sponsors that I cannot let them or the Barn Owl Trust down!") and those who sponsored our dogs to complete the walk or sent in kind letters and donations in support of the walk after the event. Thanks must also go to our business sponsors, many of whom we have links with throughout the year.

The sponsored walk is a unique event, allowing those taking part access to walking on the private Flete Estate taking in beautiful river, woodland and estuary views and the chance to take a river crossing in a Native American Canoe. This is definitely a sponsored walk like no other and it needs more support for next year! I am really looking forward to 2008 when, if the weather is on our side we hope to see a greater number of people participating and raising even more money for the Trust!

May found us at the Devon County Show, my last experience of this event was in 1981 aged 11, knee deep in mud at the Whipton show ground site in Exeter. Twenty-six years later how things have changed! Now at Westpoint, the ground has tarmac pathways, a well ordered layout and a real sense of a great 'Devon day out'. Our stand had a great position right near one of the entrance gates and attracted lots of visitors across the 3 days of the Show. It was wonderful to meet so many people reporting Barn Owl sightings and asking for advice from our conservation team on how to encourage Barn Owls.

In June the sun blazed down as we queued up in the long traffic jam heading towards the Royal Cornwall Show ground at Wadebridge; equally as busy as the Devon County Show but with a more rural feel about it. Our excellent website and information leaflets present a wealth of information but the County shows give us the opportunity to share our work with a wide range of people who might not have found out about it if they hadn't wandered past our stand.

Following a very successful visit to the Barn Owl Trust in June by a group of volunteers from Churchtown Farm Community Nature Reserve in Saltash, we were delighted to be asked to participate in their Awareness Day. Margaret Rhodes (one of our wonderful volunteers) and I arrived bright and early ready to set up our gazebo only to find that

part of it was missing. Everyone rallied round and we were quickly provided with another one which proved invaluable on what was turning into a beautiful sunny day. Earlier that morning the Tamar bridge had been shrouded in mist and arriving at Churchtown Farm we could see little, except what looked to be a typical farmer's field. However, as the mist lifted and the sun broke through its full beauty was revealed! The reserve is set between the Tamar and the Lynher estuaries and enjoys some magnificent views with habitat including wetland, hay meadows, arable land and hedgerows. We greatly enjoyed our day promoting the Barn Owl Trust and meeting members of Churchtown Farm Community Nature Reserve and other like-minded people. It is a real 'hidden gem' and well worth a visit if you are in the vicinity of Saltash.



Children enjoy making Barn Owl masks at Churchtown Farm Photo: Caroline Lewis

Our thanks must also go to Exmoor Zoo who support us every year by holding an appeal day on our behalf. They let us have a stand within the zoo to promote our work and also make a generous donation. Thank you so much!

Scarf Project

'Put one on your Christmas list!'

We have been overwhelmed with the response to our 'knit a scarf for the Barn Owl Trust' project. We had no idea how many of you were such keen knitters and just how supportive you would be of this project – thank you so much! Due to such a keen response, by the beginning of the summer we had run out of knitting kits and could only advise that if people wanted to knit a scarf using their own suitable Barn Owl coloured wool these scarves would also be very gratefully received. Our loyal supporters have 'turned up trumps' and brown squashy packages containing completed scarves have been steadily arriving at the office over the summer months. The next phase has been to customise, label and package the scarves ready to sell in time for Christmas.



We have around 50 scarves to sell – each one handmade, each one unique and labelled as a Barn Owl Trust limited edition. The scarves will cost £10 each plus £1.50 p&p. **This project will only be a complete success if we can sell all the scarves. Please support us by putting a Barn Owl Trust limited edition hand made scarf on your Christmas list this year!**

Please send us your beads and ribbons!

We are already thinking about a supporters' project for next year! With this in mind we are putting out a request for all your old loose beads, bead necklaces and oddments of ribbon. We all have them. Please send them to us in anticipation of next year's project to be revealed in the Spring 2008 edition of Feedback!

Everyclick.com

You may have seen the blue 'Give your mouse a heart' card promoting www.everyclick.com. Everyclick is a search engine just like Google or Yahoo but it is special in that every time you use Everyclick to search the internet you raise money for the charity of your choice at no expense to yourself. If you are an internet user please help us raise money for the Barn Owl Trust by setting Everyclick as your default search engine. Go to www.everyclick.com and register the Barn Owl Trust as your chosen charity. If you have any difficulty please ring us and we can talk you through setting up or send you an instruction page on how to do it.

As at October 2007 there are 43 people registered to the Barn Owl Trust on Everyclick and their searches have raised over £44. Just think how much money we can raise if our supporters all change their search engine to Everyclick and register the Barn Owl Trust as their chosen charity! Please, please take a few minutes to change your search engine to Everyclick and register the Barn Owl Trust as your chosen charity. It is such a small thing to do that can make such a huge difference!

Caroline Lewis

Your News



BOT webcam image

Hello there,

I wanted to say thank you for all the good information available on your website, and also for the owl webcam. I am a teacher of infant children and we have been thinking about animals this half term, but with a strong focus on owls. I teach in Norfolk, and we have a Hawk and Owl Trust centre there and we have visited the nature reserve with the children. Of course, we went during the day and there was nothing much for them to see but some nesting boxes and the odd frog! So, being able to have your owl webcam on my interactive whiteboard, full screen throughout the day has been excellent. They were provided with an owl babies story sack (tawny owls...) but they have so enjoyed having the web cam to watch the real owls. I did search on the site to see if the two owls had names, but I couldn't identify which ones they were, so the children have named them Boris and Belinda the Barn Owls.

It's a fantastic teaching tool, and even though they don't do lots during the day, the children have still seen them fly around, stretch, clean their feathers, and so on, and I've watched during the evening when they have been feeding, and we've talked a little about that too. It almost is compulsive viewing! So, keep up the good work, and good luck with the owls!

Hannah Dunn
Norfolk

Thanks for your email Hannah. Hopefully it will encourage other folk to visit our website www.barnowltrust.org.uk and see the owls for themselves. Just so you know, their names are Valentine and Hazel but they won't mind being called Boris and Belinda at all.

Eds.

Hi there,

I just wanted to pass on some positive feedback from my friend who received the enviro-gift - she was absolutely delighted with the gift, the presentation of the package and certificate, and the information on Barn Owls. You really made her birthday!

Thanks and regards

Nicola

Dear BOT

I called the BOT after finding four tawny owlets on the ground in some woods; unfortunately one was dead but the others seemed fine. I was advised to find a basket or box to fix to a tree as close to where I found them as possible and place the nestlings in it. I was told that the parents would probably feed them as long as they were near to the nest site, unlike Barn Owl parents who will ignore fallen owlets on the ground and only feed the young that are in the nest..

I couldn't find a basket so used a plastic bucket, with holes in the bottom for drainage, secured it to the tree by the handle and added a few twigs in the bottom and placed the owlets inside. I went back to check they were ok the following morning and was amazed, there plonked right in the bucket was the female owl - obviously any port in a storm will do!



Dave Bummings
Devon



Photos: Dave Bummings

If you look closely you can just see the adult female in the bucket with her head against the tree.

Eds

Dear BOT

Approximately 12 years ago I purchased a 400 year old cottage in SW France which was situated in unspoilt countryside with farms within 1-2 miles of my location. Barn Owls were in abundance and I asked for (and received from you) lots of information about our "Gliding Ghosts".

I was very privileged to have them using my spacious loft all the time I was in France and wrote many poems regarding my stay (which came to an end 5 years ago), including this one to our fine feathered friend. I thought you might like it to read and use as you wish.

Yours faithfully
W F Casson

The Beautiful Barn Owl

The darkness of night, penetrated only by stars and Moon.

You can feel the eerie stillness surrounding the Wood.

Our gliding ghost will emerge to show off her skills soon

And search for warm blood as her species always should.

Her chicks wait patiently in the safety of my loft.

Surrounded by regurgitated fur balls from mum's previous meals.

These balls are constructed of mammals' bones, black and soft.

If dissected, you have evidence of cash and carry from fields.

Barn Owls find their prey by sound as well as sight.

They have a 3 foot wing span, but only weigh ten ounces.

They display perfect vision even in very poor light.

But are more silent than a mouse, no clues given when she pounces.

Unfortunately their habitat is now constantly fading away.

Suitable territory is now only alongside road and rail.

They fly low when hunting, so this new habitat makes them pay

With their delicate lives; their chicks doomed to fail.

In Summer when feeding young they appear now before dark.

And on Winter afternoons they will hunt in cold clear weather.

They will fight on to the last to make their mark.

But they need our help so much more now, than ever.

They are not designed for cold or constant wet weather.

They have no resistance to rain, and will suffer in hard times.

Their lack of body mass soon places them at the end of their tether.

They will need help to contend with global warming signs.

So carers are now needed to supply new sanctuaries

For this beautiful creature before it's too late. So please search your hearts and properties for that perfect venue.

And help keep our Barn Owl safe, don't condone its possible fate.

q

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 de-humidifier from Graham Bamford, a shovel, yard broom, a handle and head from Rob Hamar, a guillotine and hole punch from Betty Bailey, cards, pictures and a Hilti resin gun from Avis and Alan Gardner, A3 paper from Simon Roper and a pitchfork from Mrs Parish.

We are also very grateful to all those people who donated prizes for our Grand Draw, to the Barkers at Fowlescombe and Peter H. for allowing us to make use of their buildings for our BOESS courses and also to Anthony Mildmay-White for allowing us to hold our annual walk on the Flete Estate. A very big thank-you to all those kind volunteers who gave of their time to help with knitting scarves for our Christmas 'owly' scarf project. Thanks to Woods Estate Agents & Auctioneers for help with repro and lastly to all those of you who donated empty inkjet cartridges, old mobile phones and postage stamps, both new and used.

Over the years we have been amazed and delighted to make use of things folk no longer need, (even a caravan!) so in true Barn Owl Trust tradition we have assembled

a list of 'Wants'. Please read through and see if you have any of the following surplus to your requirements or that you might have lying around doing nothing:

- ◆ Large old towels for use in bird room
- ◆ Pitch Forks – several old-style hay forks please
- ◆ Night vision binoculars or monocular
- ◆ Sheets of corrugated iron and /or roll of sturdy roofing felt for small mammal monitoring in the field
- ◆ Beads and ribbons for 2008 craft project
- ◆ Wide-angle lens for a Cannon SLR camera
- ◆ Foreign change (please enclose a note of the type of currency)
- ◆ Roll of new hardwearing office carpet, suitable for gluing to the floor
- ◆ Staple gun, both office-type and DIY type needed
- ◆ Wild bird food - mainly sacks of black sunflower seeds, also peanuts & plain canary seed
- ◆ Wood for making outdoor nestboxes - sheets of 9 or 12mm tanalised softwood ply and lengths of 25x 50mm tanalised batten
- ◆ Box trailer in good working order

- ◆ A4 and A3 recycled paper and card both coloured and white
 - ◆ A new photographic-quality colour inkjet printer
 - ◆ Hands-free telephone headset/ microphone for use on reception
 - ◆ Inkjet cartridges for HP Deskjet 3820 and HP Deskjet 930 (both black and colour)
 - ◆ Lawn rakes/garden rakes
 - ◆ 12 stackable office chairs
 - ◆ Postage stamps (both new and used commemorative)
 - ◆ Office chairs (they must meet H & S specifications)
 - ◆ Ophthalmoscope (instrument for looking into owls eyes)
 - ◆ Good quality 6ft projector screen
 - ◆ Metal detector
 - ◆ Wildlife rehab group looking for somewhere to release house sparrows (we have the perfect release site)
 - ◆ Good quality Barn Owl winter scenes either photographic or illustrative for Christmas card images
 - ◆ Empty inkjet cartridges and old mobile phones for recycling
- and if you are lucky enough to have wild Barn Owls around**
- ◆ Wild pellets (we can never have too many)

Tail Piece...



Do you ever have one of those days when you set out to do something and everything seems to conspire against it happening? The phone rings incessantly and there are constant interruptions and demands on your attention. Twenty-first century life can easily fill up with irritations, I'm sure Call Centres were designed by some mad sadist who wanted to drive people crazy! So how do we keep our sanity in our increasingly frustrating society? Well some people turn to retail therapy, others take up yoga or jogging and some of us get pleasure from the natural world.

Any of you who work in the garden or walk in the countryside will know that this is a wonderful way to shake off the trials and tribulations of modern day life. Giving yourself the opportunity to observe and appreciate the plants and wildlife that surround us is a great restorative for the human spirit.

Six years ago we made a small wildlife pond and planted a willow fence around it. Every year the area becomes really wild, providing a haven for frogs, toads, newts, dragonflies and all of the creatures that thrive in still water. Each winter we "tidy the area" and

coppice a huge quantity of willow, some 10 feet tall, which can either be used to make things or burnt to produce heat. It never ceases to amaze me how abundant and productive this small area is.

When you look at the natural world it really is amazing. Seeds lay dormant in the soil for years just waiting for the opportunity to blossom into life, unmanaged land becomes scrub and then woods, providing homes for a wide variety of insects, birds and mammals along the way. It is a huge interwoven web, with each species depending on many others to reach its full potential. The soil feeds the grass, the grass feeds the vole, the owl eats the vole, the moth grubs eat the owl pellets and so it goes on.

But things are changing; this year the seasons were confused, our summer was unusually cool and wet, there was extensive flooding in parts of the UK and here on the edge of Dartmoor we had pear blossom in September. Global warming has been talked about for years and is now recognised as a significant threat, but do the "powers that be" have the political motivation to address it and are we, the people, prepared to accept the necessary lifestyle changes needed before

too much of the fragile natural balance is damaged?

It's very easy to feel powerless when you hear tales of 3rd world growth; what is the point of washing out your cans when China is building power stations at such a rate. But it is important to remember that the seeds of change will grow if enough people share the same goal. Just look at how women got the vote or even the range of organic produce available in supermarkets these days. These things happened because enough people thought it was important and forced a change. It really is possible for each of us to make a difference, we can feed the birds, sort our rubbish, smile at people in the street and think about how we spend our money and all of these things will have positive benefits, for the planet and for our spirits.

By supporting the Barn Owl Trust you help us to help Barn Owls and their environment. As you will have seen from the LLP Diary this benefits lots of other species and of course, it's our environment too. We are really grateful for your support.

Together we can make a world of difference.

Frances Ramsden