

Issue Number 40 - Autumn 2008

FEEDBACK

Twentieth Anniversary Issue



Reg Charity: No 299 835 www.barnowltrust.org.uk

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Welcome to Feedback

Welcome to a bumper issue of Feedback. We thought we'd break with tradition and have a colour cover and extra pages to mark not only twenty years as a registered charity, but also the 40th issue of this publication.

We have a four page centre spread looking back over the last 20+ years. Browsing through the old publications and photographs has been fun but we have also been thinking about the future.

Since 2003, our expenditure has become increasingly greater than our income except in the years when we have received significant legacies. Last year fortunately was one of those, and legacies accounted for 41% of income. We now have good reserves that we can use to cover any shortfall this year; however this can be a double-edged sword as donors often don't like to support charities that have reserves, making it harder to raise funds. Anyway we are planning ahead and as you will see on page 4 our bird care facilities will be upgraded this autumn/winter.

You may remember from Feedback 37 we were so concerned about the results of the 2003 Devon Barn Owl Survey in West Devon that in 2006 we undertook another survey in the area we now refer to as Westmoor, (because it's west of Dartmoor). Staff visited about 100 recorded sites and found evidence of breeding at only 4. As a result we have been looking for funds to apply a package of conservation measures in the area, and this winter, (whatever the results of our fundraising) the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme will commence. We will be recruiting a new assistant conservation officer in the autumn. This will be a twelve month post to help our existing team deal with the additional workload.

On page 5 you can read the latest from the Lennon Legacy Project including our plans to plant an orchard this winter.

Ten years ago we did our first radio tracking project. This year we are working with the Igomango youth volunteer project on a study to track juvenile Barn Owl dispersal and

Jack Skuse, the project manager has written an article for us - see page 8.

Our wild webcam has proved incredibly popular this year attracting regular viewers from all over the world and heightening awareness of Barn Owls and their conservation. Nestcam, Barncam and the nestcam diary have generated vast quantities of emails and discussion on internet forums; one of our favourites was from the wavelit group who said, "The Barn Owl Trust deserve many accolades...", "They have set the standard for all others". Three of our conservation team have got together to tell the 'Tale of Tiny and her siblings' - page 14.

Winners of last year's Grand Draw Prize claimed their prize this year - page 4 - and were kind enough to say that, "This was the best draw prize we have ever won". Don't forget to send back your tickets - next time it could be you.

Thank you to everyone who sent in news for this issue of Feedback, we're really sorry that we couldn't manage to fit everything in this time. We really do love to hear from you and all about your current projects so please keep your contributions coming.

We hope you enjoy this special issue and that it will encourage you to keep supporting the Trust and doing your bit for conservation. Looking back, we've achieved a great deal in the last 20 years but we couldn't have done it without the support of so many wonderful, caring folk. Thank you all.

Eds. Frances & Sandra

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

*Many thanks to everyone who provided words and pictures for this issue.
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Feedback, Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU
email: feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk
website: www.barnowltrust.org.uk*

Join us for our
Winter Work Party
on
Saturday 6 December
10.00am - 4.00pm

A chance to see the LLP at first hand
and help with conservation tasks

Bring stout footwear,
waterproof clothing
and a packed lunch
and we'll provide the rest

Places are limited so please phone the office
or email us for further information and to let
us know if you are interested in coming along

tel 01364 653026
email info@barnowltrust.org.uk

BOT News

Two Broods

We are delighted to report that this year we had two pairs of wild Barn Owls breeding in our valley - within 500 metres of each other.

A hundred years ago this probably wasn't unusual but, these days when Barn Owls are relatively rare, it's quite extraordinary. See the LLP Update on page 5 for more news on the owls and the other wildlife benefiting from the Lennon Legacy Project.

These two owlets, reared in one of our poleboxes, were the centre of attention when we went to ring them at the end of July. Pictured left to right are Karen Chelsey, a Barn Owl worker and BTO ringer from Yorkshire, Helen Vogel the Trust's new Receptionist, Environmental Scientist Li-li Williams who has done some volunteer survey work for us, Pete Webb BOT Admin/ Receptionist, Conservation Officer Matthew Twiggs and Bernard Reed from Viridor Credits Environmental Co. (they are helping to fund our conservation staff this year).

Karen arranged to visit the Trust whilst she was on holiday in Devon and spent the morning on a site visit with the conservation team before having a tour of the field. Helen and Pete spend most of their time at their



Photo: David Ramsden

desks, so it was great for them to have the opportunity to see the ultimate result of the Trust's work. Bernard was tasked with checking that Viridor's support was money well spent so we invited him to join us.

The owlets, a female and a male, have since been fitted with radio transmitters so that we can track their movements when they leave their natal site. Find out more about the radio tracking project from the article on page 8. **q**

The 2008 Breeding Season

Annual monitoring of Barn Owl nest sites is one way of maintaining up-to-date information on population trends over successive years. Where nesting occurs the young are counted, weighed and measured providing information on breeding performance as well as allowing opportunities for ringing, which eventually provides even more information. At sites where no breeding takes place, comparing changes in regular or occasional roosting, or at sites that become unoccupied, can similarly provide a wealth of invaluable additional information.

The Barn Owl Trust (BOT) has been monitoring a varying number of nest sites annually since 1987. These sites, known as

AMSITES, receive at least one visit during the breeding season. Most are in Devon, with some in Cornwall and one in Somerset. In the 2008 breeding season reports were collected from some 78 sites either through checking by BOT conservation staff or trained volunteer ringers. We also occasionally receive reports from observant owners of the sites though obviously we recommend that they do not actually check the nests themselves.

These results show that in terms of Barn Owl status 2008 was a fairly typical year. However, when return visits were made to sites for the purposes of ringing, abandoned clutches of eggs at 17% of sites hinted at something less positive but we can only

speculate as to the reason, possibly unusually high rainfall? We have received reports from other areas of the South West where failed breeding has also been a feature of this year's season.

Average brood sizes for the 2008 season came in at 2.1 with an average for the period 1990-2006 of 2.9 (data before 1990 have been excluded as the sample is too small).

In conclusion therefore, the 2008 breeding season was actually fairly average in terms of the percentage of sites that had nesting but productivity was lower than average and the number of abandoned clutches was unusually high. **q**

KEY:

Barn Owl status at the monitored sites is divided into the following categories:

NES: nesting (one or more recent eggs, egg shell or chicks found)

RRE: regular roosting site (more than 10 recent pellets)

ROC: occasional roosting site (fewer than 10 recent pellets or pellets more than 6 months old)

ABSE: Barn Owl absent (no material evidence)

STATUS	NES	RRE	ROC	ABSE
2008	52.56%	19.23%	2.56%	25.64%
Mean (1987-2006)	51%	16%	4%	29%

Table: 2008 site occupancy status compared to the average for the period 1987/2006

More BOT News

Grand Draw Winners are Old Friends



Shirley and Peter Gregory with Matt in the field
Photo: Tatiana Cant

The winners of last year's Grand Draw prize, 'A day out with the conservation team', were Peter and Shirley Gregory. They have been supporters of the Trust since we released Barn Owls with them in 1988. Rather than go out for the day they preferred to visit the Trust

and have a look at the Lennon Legacy field, so we arranged their visit for June. We started with an LLP powerpoint presentation so they could see the field when we bought it and the changes that had been made. There was then a trip in a 4WD vehicle around the 26 acre site to see those changes for themselves. Fortunately the weather was good enabling a picnic lunch outside the office with all the staff. In the afternoon we went to check the polebox in the LLP and the nestboxes on an adjacent farm. More news on what we found on pages 3 & 5.

After their visit we had a great letter from Peter and Shirley. Thank you both for coming; we really enjoyed seeing you again and having the opportunity to share the LLP experience with you both. We wonder who will win this year's 'Owl Experience with the Conservation Team'.

q

Pond Problems

The Flo and Oakley ponds were created for the benefit of wildlife in the LLP along with a series of bog ponds in the autumn of 2006. They would be fed by abstraction from the nearby River Ashburn and would, it was hoped, provide a useful habitat of standing freshwater which was otherwise in short supply in the valley. We thought this would be a wonderful way of creating something lasting in recognition of the two kind souls who thought of the Trust and left legacies.

The groundworks were finished on the 3rd November 2006. However, just over a week later we had to contact the design consultant as there seemed to be problems with the flow of water from the river through the feed pipes into the bigger of the two ponds. This was then having a knock-on effect as there was insufficient water flowing through the bog ponds into the smaller clay lined pond and the water level was dropping.

This was only the start of our problems and by the end of 2006 the clay-lined bog ponds had breached because of the rain. The clay linings had been washed into the lower pond and were now virtually non-existent.

By the beginning of September 2007 the pond liner in the bigger pond had 'blown up' due to the ground water beneath it and was above the water level, exposing it to UV light. This and the stretching was likely to severely compromise its 80 year life expectancy. The



The exposed pool liner Photo: David Ramsden

Trust had contacted the design consultant a significant number of times but no acceptable resolution had been reached. Finally, this year the Trust appointed an independent expert who seemed to concur that there were inherent faults in the design. At this point the decision was made to proceed with litigation.

q

NB: Despite the problems, the ponds have provided a home for huge numbers of frogs and other wildlife including heron, dragonflies and breeding mallards.

Webcam Update

Since our last update there has been no further activity in the barn and the nextbox. As far as we know the young have all dispersed and are no longer being seen locally and the adult birds have returned to roost in a nearby barn. We have now re-activated our aviary cam so you can watch the resident birds here at Waterleat; just go to our website www.barnowltrust.org.uk and click on the live Barn Owl cam link at the top of the page, this will take you to the Web Broadcasting Corporation and then you select 'Live Barn Owl Web Cam'.

For those of you who want to see more wild Barn Owls, the Czech owls had a 2nd brood, the first egg hatched 28th August. Go to our website cam and select the Zoo Brno nestcam from the WWB page - enjoy.

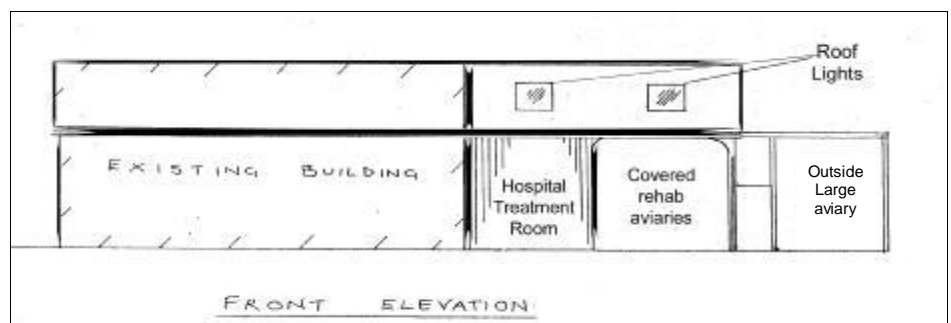
Planning Ahead

If you're a wild owl that needs a bit of intensive care followed by a few weeks of careful rehabilitation, then why not head for sunny South Devon in the New Year? Hopefully by then the new Barn Owl Trust Owl Hospital will be built, fully equipped, and ready for your arrival (if not, then you'll be really glad you took out that holiday insurance!).

Joking apart, we are indeed planning to provide even better care for the injured and starving owls that inevitably find their way here every year. Our existing Bird Room is now over ten years old so building the new hospital as an extension to our barn is a great opportunity to upgrade our facilities to provide the best possible care: a new fully-equipped treatment room with a small built-in aviary, an outdoor covered area containing three rehab aviaries of various sizes, and a large flight testing/ release aviary attached.

We have received planning permission and are currently seeking funds to pay for it all. We hope to start building this autumn so we'll keep you posted.

q



LLP Update



The stonefaced bank around Forde Orchard early August

Photos: Matthew Twiggs

Developments since the winter have included the completion of Forde Orchard and North Park hedgebanks and associated works under the Trust's Dartmoor ESA 2nd Conservation Plan. Some of the new banks in Forde Orchard were stone-faced, which it is hoped will provide habitat for invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians, and all the banks were planted up with a conservation mix of trees and shrubs to provide food and cover for a range of bird species. All hedgebanks were fenced; no barbed wire was used to avoid potential injury to Barn Owls. Some landscaping finished the job, and plans are now well underway to source funding for the planting of traditional varieties of fruit trees to recreate an orchard on the site. Evidence of a former orchard at this site was finally discovered in the 1841 Ashburton 'Tythe' map and associated schedule, showing the area as 'Fore Orchard' around the former habitation known as 'Coombe'.

Day-to-day management of the LLP included a group of volunteers from Plymouth University who visited in March to clear scrub on the proposed site of the new hospital aviary next to the barn. Other Conservation Team tasks included rock-picking in Forde Orchard to facilitate the future cutting of grass and spreading wood chip along the paths. Some Bracken-bashing and a couple of sessions pulling Creeping Thistle continued to keep the Conservation Team out of mischief.

Wildlife has been much in evidence since the winter with some notable discoveries.

A flock of Meadow Pipits were about for the whole of March before presumably disappearing onto the Moor to breed. By the end of the month, Blackcaps had started singing and the first Swallows were on their way through. House Martins were also observed in April, with the first Swifts at the beginning of May.

Two Barn Owls were seen in one of the LLP poleboxes in April raising hopes that they might be considering breeding there. Hopes were further raised in June when a Barn Owl was seen quartering the LLP then entering the polebox briefly, and foraging on the slope above the office. Finally at the end of June we checked the polebox. Two adults were ringed and a brood of 4 owlets and one egg yet to hatch were discovered; this was the first wild pair to attempt to nest here. There didn't appear to be any shortage of food, with eight Field Voles in the box too. Later the same day we also checked the barn across the road and ringed a brood of five Kestrels, three of which have subsequently been seen in August hunting over the LLP. Whilst checking the second nestbox we discovered with great joy and not a little surprise another brood of three owlets, all of which were ringed, as was the adult female. Two broods within 500 yards really is quite an extraordinary result. That evening, one of the unusual periods where

we had two consecutive dry days, we watched two adults, one from each site, hunting over the LLP field.

On the 29th July we returned to the polebox to ring the young; the adults were now roosting elsewhere. Having had 21 days with rain, some of it torrential, and lots of strong wind, we weren't too hopeful. However two owlets had survived and were a good weight, one male and one female; both were ringed. There was also food in the box.

The ponds were the centre of attention in the Spring when a pair of Mallards was seen in the area. Breeding was confirmed at the end of May when the female was watched with four ducklings, and a few days later we found the nest on the island in the pond.

For the third consecutive year a Common Lizard was recorded in April but, as previously, its appearance was very brief.

The first butterflies started appearing in April with good numbers of Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Green-veined White, Orange-tip, Holly Blue and Brimstone. A Small Copper was recorded during the butterfly transect in Kiln Close in May. Good numbers of Marbled White, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper were also recorded this summer despite the rain!

Visiting groups have included one of our long-time supporters and his local birding group from Norfolk, who spent an April morning having a guided tour around the LLP. In June, the successful BOT draw prize-winners came and spent the day with the Conservation Team on the day we found the Barn Owl and Kestrel nests. Two groups from Torquay Museum, the Ramblers and the Birdwatchers, had tours on two consecutive days in July. Also in July, the weather behaved itself for our scheduled Neighbours' Evening and Supporters' Day (see page 6).

Matthew Twiggs
Conservation Officer



By August the North Park hedge was looking as though it had been there for years. To the right you can see our new style polebox.

Celebrating Anniversaries



Neighbours' Evening tour of the LLP field

Photos: Frances Ramsden

To celebrate the Trust's 20th anniversary we held Supporters' Day in July. An article in Feedback 39 invited Friends of the Trust to visit for a presentation about the Lennon Legacy Project and a walk around the field to see for themselves the benefits of Barn Owl conservation. Neighbours' Evening, when we invited everyone living within half a mile of the Trust to come and see the field, was organised for the evening before. When we ran both events back in 2005 just half a dozen neighbours came along (we are out in the sticks!). This year we had thirty neighbours visiting and had to make a last

minute change of venue from the office to the barn to fit everyone in for the introduction to the LLP. Although the weather was damp and overcast, we did manage to see some butterflies and birds on both tours and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the LLP experience. **q**



Photo: supplied

On the left of the picture you can see the old oak tree - a home for Barn Owls.

When Martin Bloxham & Tati Dennehy got married in May they asked their guests to make donations to three charities rather than giving presents. We were delighted to be one of those charities and received £160.



We wish you many happy years together.

We were sorry to hear of the death of Marge Boucher in July. She had collected 5p pieces for us since 2003 and when counted up they totalled nearly £120. Bless you. **q**



Supporters Day - Checking out the new flora in Forde Orchard - where the ground had been disturbed there was an amazing crop of wild flowers appearing including huge numbers of Mullein

Bird News



Testing our improved outdoor nestbox design in one of the aviaries - they seem to like it! Photo: Anne Sercombe

Since the last issue of Feedback we have been kept very busy rehabilitating and releasing casualty owls - here is just a sample:

The two Tawny Owls we took in before Christmas, thought to be road traffic accidents, are still waiting for their beaks to grow back properly. They both sustained injuries to the upper mandible which needs to grow back before they can be released. We hope to release them from an aviary here at the Trust amongst the woods using a gradual release method as soon as they are 100% fit.

Last year's two nestling Barn Owls which had over-wintered at the Trust were successfully released from the mobile aviary. A third Barn Owl which had been released previously was unfortunately found dead on the A38 about 20 days later; it had succumbed to the peril of the dual carriageway as so many Barn Owls do! Two Barn Owls with wing injuries were successfully released from the mobile aviary in North Devon. Neither was able to be returned to its finding place so an alternative site was chosen. The location, not far from Bideford, had ample ideal habitat for Barn Owls (rough, tussocky grass with a healthy population of field voles - the owl's preferred food). Since release these birds are regularly seen flying into the barn and have even managed to gain access to a nearby garage through a hole intended for swallows! So they are certainly making themselves 'feel at home'.

Yet another Barn Owl, very underweight and with a fractured wing, was found by a landowner who had regularly seen two owls hunting over his fields. The bird recuperated from its injuries at the Trust for two months

during which time only one Barn Owl was being seen on the farm. When the casualty was returned to the site and still in the mobile aviary awaiting release, the landowner reported that every night he was hearing another Barn Owl screeching! The bird was released and we have heard that two Barn Owls are regularly seen together again silently gliding, flying low, listening for their prey - magical!

Sadly a Barn Owl nestling that had fallen from its nest was found soaking wet and died the same day. It was emaciated at a weight of only 218gms (it should have weighed about 390gms at that age!). Another fallen Barn Owlet from a different location was tubed and fed at the Trust and successfully fostered into a nest with nestlings of a similar age.

We are currently treating a Barn Owl which was very underweight but with no apparent injuries. It was found standing in a lane. It has spent some time in the bird room being fed and monitored and has now been placed in an aviary for observations and further 'feeding up'; it will hopefully be released soon. In the same aviary we have a fledgling that was found on the ground under a nest box. This owlet was not returned to the box as we thought it unlikely that the adults were still returning to feed it. It will undergo a supported release in a few weeks time, again using the mobile aviary in an area of ideal habitat.

Balei has been a 'star' at school talks. The children are always so enthralled when he makes an appearance after the 'Wings of Change' story. He made a particular impact on a group of school children on one visit when for no apparent reason he decided to stay quietly sitting on my hand, walk up my arm and hop on to the top of my head! I just hope he's not thinking of adding this 'party trick' to his repertoire from now on! On another occasion he sat beautifully on my hand whilst I talked about the Barn Owls' adaptations and when I came to talk about their almost silent flight he duly took off, glided around the hall a few times and then landed sedately on the curtain rail bar, lifted one foot and started to roost - wow!

On the home front: we have just had five owls returned from one of our foster homes as their carers were moving house, so space in the aviaries at the moment is at a premium. Sadly, Joy, an eleven year old captive bred female Barn Owl that came to the Trust in 2000, died a few weeks ago. Later this month we will be conducting the

annual health checks on the owls here in our sanctuary and those in our foster homes; details to follow in the next Feedback.

Julie Matthews
Conservation Officer

Hannibal Update

You may remember the story of 'Hannibal' the Barn Owl from Heligan in Cornwall featured in our last Feedback No. 39; if not visit the eco-watch website (<http://www.eco-watch.com/heligan/wildlife/project.htm>)

Lisa Philips of Eco-Watch had given Hannibal extra food to help him through the bad weather last winter. Since then he has been self-sufficient. In April of this year Lisa said, 'Hannibal has found a lady friend, little black dots down her front and a lovely dark plumage, with no ring on her leg'. After lots of mutual preening and copulation the first egg was laid on May 25th with the second following on the 27th.

Unfortunately the eggs were abandoned. It is not clear why this happened but perhaps Hannibal could not find enough food because of all the rain. Eggs are usually abandoned because the female is underweight and/or suffering extreme food shortage. This year there have been a number of sites where the eggs have been deserted.

In August we heard from Lisa again: 'Hannibal and his mate weren't seen for about 3 weeks, but then this week he has shown up again with a female. We think it's the same one but are not sure. We have no idea where they've been. There is a new camera in the barn where he has been roosting and he has just taken a vole to the nest box to have his dinner'.

q

In Memoriam

The Trust has received a legacy from the estate of the late Marjorie Mortimer and donations in memory of Frank Douglas Marchant Elizabeth Cross Anthony John Kelham Ivy Brock Una Greenhalgh Philip Mark Wilson John Lawrence White and Mary Dyer

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

Radio Tracking Project

Igomango volunteer-inspired project is based at the Sharpham Estate near Totnes and is designed for young people between the ages of 16 and 25. When we heard about the possibility of linking up with the Barn Owl Trust to fit radio transmitters to nine fledgling Barn Owls, and track them to study dispersal behaviour we were, in short, thrilled. A scheme where volunteers could really get to grips with the skill of tracking, spend time looking at maps and trying to judge what the bird was using as a roost was ideal for the Igomango project. The volunteers would need to travel across Devon searching for these roosts, using common sense and a fairly hefty aerial. It was perfect as the first real species-specific study we were to undertake in our new role as a working conservation project.

And so on the 7th July 2008 four Igomango volunteers and the Barn Owl Trust combined to fit the first four radio transmitters at two sites in South Devon. The aim of the study is to obtain information on post fledgling dispersal behaviour (timing, distance travelled, roost site selection, hazard encounters, survival/mortality etc.) in the South Devon area. The sites were chosen, the owls were readied and the games began.

The fitting was done by David Ramsden, Head of Conservation at the Trust and Brian Cresswell from Biotrack Ltd. Brian had designed the transmitters – a backpack-type device that ties to the back of the bird and fits around the wings and across the chest so as to cause as little interference with its movement as possible. The transmitter weighs between 7-9g - the same weight as a pellet - I know because I was there when we weighed the two things. Looking back on the experience I am still overwhelmed – the way the birds were handled, with utmost care and attention, causing as little disturbance as possible. The birds simply stayed still, not moving, basically playing dead; it was remarkable.



Fitting the backpack transmitter which is just 3cm long

We have considered the effect on the birds and were reassured by Brian's experience. He monitored the behaviour of a brood of Barn Owls before and after tagging (using CCTV). The owls habituated almost immediately to their backpack and harness. The study was extended to three more broods (nine birds), in Dorset, and three birds which survived now have young of their own. (75% of all Barn Owls die during their first year). This and the fact that the harness weighs no more than a pellet helps us feel the birds are not likely to be compromised by their transmitters. Also, like all research, we hope that the findings will be used by the Barn Owl Trust to make future Barn Owl conservation recommendations. We are quite keen to report on our findings too.

It was at this first fitting that Rebekah, a full time Igomango volunteer, had the chance to handle one of the owlets, an experience that will stay with her for life, and one matched by Anna and myself at the third fitting at a site close to Torquay. 'Make a ring with your forefinger and thumb,' was the advice given by Matt from the Trust, 'and fit that around the legs. Then with the other hand support the head and back. It should stay still, but if it does move cover the eyes with this cloth and it will stop.' It was with the bird in my hand that Matt explained the current understanding of Barn Owl behaviour and conservation – the fact that breeding is likely to be linked to the abundance of food, and that birds can have more than one brood of young a year if the conditions are good. He also said that last year was a good year for Barn Owls and that ongoing research such as this is really important to keep things relevant and current. We also learnt that at about 14 weeks the birds will have left their natal sites – and with it being around week 7-8 when the tags were fitted we should not expect much movement yet.

The ongoing monitoring programme has taken us to the sites daily to check if the birds are still there. We do not want to affect the behaviour of the owls, and so are unlikely to see them at close quarters again. We are careful not to get too close when checking the radio frequencies at each site, listening out for the strongest signal – the loudest 'beep'. It is the nature of the conservation industry, where the majority of effort and time is spent improving habitats, that less (if any) time is spent actually with the species. We have to live with the fact that of the nine birds we are only expecting about two to survive – a fairly sad statistic,



*Brian demonstrates how to use the receivers
Photos: Frances Ramsden*

but given the numerous hazards like the road network, water troughs, poisoning, lack of suitable habitat, etc not surprising. We have a strong attachment to the owls; by naming them we really made it personal, like our own children, wishing them well on their journey. However it's hard to know that the next time we are close to them is likely to be when they are dead. We hope that with research like this and the tireless efforts of the BOT, statistics like these may start to improve.

We have had one encounter, though. The night of the 11th August saw one of our intrepid volunteers, Matt brave the typically poor Devon elements and set up at one of the sites at 7.30pm. With the aerial receiver set to the required frequencies and a set of binoculars he found himself a site close enough to see the owls but hidden enough not to be seen. When he arrived the birds were already out on their perch, screeching, waiting for food (we think) and he stayed until 11pm, enthralled by their behaviours. They were flying, but were still returning to the site where they had been fitted with the tags. Now the magnitude of the undertaking is slowly dawning on us, not a bad realisation, but a fairly overwhelming one. Visiting the sites daily is one thing, with them being located from Ashburton to Torquay and out towards Newton Abbot, but once the owls leave home (their natal sites) it could be even further and it will certainly be quite a challenge. As I write this two of our volunteers are checking the sites, and we are still waiting for the first bird to move. We are now around week 13 and it could – for the first of the owls – be any day now. That is when the real fun begins!

If you are aged between 16-25 and want to get involved in the tracking programme, contact Jack on 07816 978609 or email jackskuse@igomango.com.

Jack Skuse
Igomango/v inspired Project Manager

Looking Back



This is where it all started Photo Muzz Murray

This year the Barn Owl Trust has reached its 20th year as a registered charity. To record this milestone we thought we would look back and see what we've been doing for the past two decades:

In **1984** volunteers began breeding and releasing Barn Owls. Carrying out surveys was a fundamental part of this and it was a survey poster that brought the first publicity, this set the snowball that was to become the BOT in motion. We began providing nestboxes (made from old teachests), giving out (handwritten) information leaflets and making site visits to people who wanted to encourage Barn Owls - the demand was huge. We started to produce Feedback annually in **1985**; the first issue was hand written and photocopied. The only funds we had were from an annual jumble sale (which became locally famous) and by **1987** it had become apparent that if the work was to continue things needed to change. In those days it was really hard to get advice about setting up voluntary organisations - (fortunately things are very different now) but eventually with help from a very nice man at the Community Council of Devon and a local solicitor, it was decided we should register a charity. With five people prepared to stand as trustees, an application for charitable trust status was made on 25th December 1987. One of the trustees donated £25 so the prospective charity could open a bank account.

1988 Ø First BBC Red Nose Day raised £15,000,000
Ø Petrol cost £1.57 a gallon

In **1988** we were invited to 'come along' to a meeting of the local group of the Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society; you can't imagine the surprise when we were introduced as the guest speakers. This was also the year when the 'Wings of Change' story fledged. Having been invited into a local primary school we wanted to do more than simply show the children a captive Barn Owl, and so, using a blackboard to illustrate, we drew a picture of a farm and showed

them how the landscape had changed over the last fifty years.

Twenty years on and the Trust has given almost 400 talks to adult groups and made 470+ school visits. At the end of July '88 we received our registered charity number from the Charity Commission and the Barn Owl Trust took flight.

1989 Ø Sir Peter Scott died
Ø Daniel Radcliffe, later to become Harry Potter, was born

During **1989** we researched, wrote and published 24 free information leaflets covering all aspects of Barn Owl conservation and we produced the first report on Barn Owl re-introduction in Britain which generated a great deal of media coverage. We opened our first office in a 22' caravan and answered the telephone (to deal with enquiries) two days a week. We started writing to grant giving charities to raise funds towards our first research project and we launched our adoption scheme to help raise funds to support the growing number of unreleasable birds in our sanctuary. Volunteers helped us to build two new aviaries outside the office.

1990 Ø Margaret Thatcher resigned
Ø Poll Tax introduced in England and Wales

In **1990** the Trust became part of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee Barn Owl Liaison Group. Keith Grant became a Trustee and we employed our first member of staff when David Ramsden was taken on as conservation officer, and began what was to become nearly a five-year project on barn conversions and their effect on Barn Owls. Following an article about the Trust in BBC Wildlife magazine we were contacted by a Spanish student, Irigo Farjardo who asked if he could come and see us when he visited the UK. He came and stayed for 10 days.

1991 Ø Hostages John McCarthy and Terry Waite freed
Ø Gulf war ended

Barn Owl release was a hot topic in the conservation world in **1991** and the Trust joined the Department of the Environment's Barn Owl Working Group. The 100th school visit with Moon (the captive bred Barn Owl) received international media coverage and a

large cake. We were commissioned by Devon County Council, on behalf of the Department of Transport, to carry out the first ever Barn Owl survey on the proposed route of a new trunk road. Our Friends scheme was launched for people wishing to support the Trust and our first car stickers were printed. We won an award for our recycling initiatives, started running training sessions for local authority planning officers and we had our first student work placement. Funding from two groups in Spain enabled us to visit Brinzal, an owl rehabilitation group in Madrid and CONCERT in Barcelona, which coordinated and supported the work of 65 wildlife rehabilitation groups in Spain.

1992 Ø Great Britain won 5 gold medals at the Summer Olympics in Barcelona

By **1992** we had two employment trainees and several regular volunteers working alongside our one staff member and the trustees. The office moved into the wooden chalet which is still our base and the old office (the caravan) became our birdroom/hospital allowing us to upgrade our specialist care facilities for injured birds. This year saw us producing a draft 'Code of Practice for Barn Owl release' for the DoE Barn Owl Working Group. We ran a Barn Owl training session for DoE staff, increased our range of free information leaflets to 29 and started producing two issues of Feedback a year instead of one. We began running two nestbox workshops a year for the general public which included a farm visit. Everyone went home with their own box. It was great



Somerset Nestbox Workshop

Photo: Frances Ramsden

fun but pretty noisy when you have 30 people all hammering at once. To end the year our Spanish friend Irigo came to live and work with us for three months.

1993 Ø Buckingham Palace opened to the public
Ø Council Tax introduced

We led the first ever Devon County Barn Owl Survey in **1993** and completed the

... at 20 years ...



Tallet with Sir David Attenborough, Paul Adams and Frances
Photo: Simon Roper

fieldwork for the Barn Conversion Research Project, just the analysis and writing up to do now. With help from volunteers we erected a new, purpose-built aviary block to accommodate up to 30 long-term residents. This was the first year that a licence from the Department of the Environment was required to release captive-bred Barn Owls into the wild. We took on a second part-time member of staff to help handle the increasing number of enquiries being received. Rave the raven, who was to become a long term resident arrived at the Trust unable to fly, and artist Paul Adams built Tallet, a giant paper maché Barn Owl for the Trust.

1994 Ø Channel Tunnel opened
Ø National Lottery launched
Ø Sunday trading became legal

In **1994** we led the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey, published the Devon Barn Owl Survey report and produced the 'Wings of Change' video for schools too far away for us to visit. We had our first legacy leaflets printed and distributed to solicitors and the analysis of Barn Conversion Research Project data began. Towards the end of the year we took on a promotions officer to help raise funds for the Trust; we then had a team of three. In August we had an outbreak of pseudo bumblefoot amongst the resident birds. This, thankfully rare, very contagious virus, was probably brought in by a young tawny owl from a rescue centre. Of our 50 or so resident birds, 8 were affected, 3 recovered, 1 died and 4 were put to sleep. It was a really traumatic period for everyone here and it was November before we were clear.

1995 Ø Hottest and driest summer since records began
Ø British forces sent to Sarajevo

The long awaited Barn Conversion Research Project report was published in

1995 and 'Barn Owls on site - a guide for developers and planners'; a 48 page booklet was written, printed and sent to every local authority in Britain. North Cornwall District Council became the first local authority to adopt the Trust's recommendations. We published the Cornwall Barn Owl Survey report and Moon the Barn Owl died (of natural causes) having made over 200 school visits. We also lost one of our trustees when Peter Morris died suddenly. Jan Ebert from Germany, working with Barn Owls in Bavaria, spent four days at the Trust. A highlight of the year for David was a two hour flight in a light aircraft taking photos of his fieldwork study sites. Rave the raven caused consternation in the office when she discovered she could imitate a telephone ringing; she had staff running around picking up phones until they discovered the source. We also started selling our delicious Christmas puds and introduced our 'Wants' list to Feedback.

1996 Ø Dunblane massacre
Ø Dolly the sheep cloned
Ø 1st GM food crops on sale in UK

Our Schools Pack and the 'Wings of Change' video were launched in **1996** and received a brilliant review in The Times Educational Supplement. Work started on the Major Road Research Project. New Moon, a Barn Owl bred here at the Trust, made her first school visit. The office was receiving 100 -200 enquiries per week by post and telephone; we now had 30 free leaflets available and 'The Flyer', our children's publication, was started. Carrick in Cornwall and Derbyshire Dales district councils both adopted the Trust's barn conversion recommendations and we fitted our 1,000th BTO Barn Owl ring. Sandra Reardon started working here and we also expanded our staff when we employed a conservation assistant for 3 days a week. It was a good year for Barn Owls; normally we find broods of 2 or 3 - this year we found twelve broods of 4, four broods of 5 and three broods of 6. We also received an unprecedented number of Tawny and Little Owl casualties.

1997 Ø Death of Princess Diana
Ø Tony Blair became PM
Ø 1st Harry Potter book published

What had once been dismissed as one of David's whacky ideas became reality in **1997** when volunteer Derrick Crocker completed the Mobile Rehabilitation and Release Aviary. This has proved to be an invaluable asset making wild owl releases more effective; the idea has since been adopted by other groups. We started an innovative new site enhancement project in South Devon in association with the local

authority – the South Hams Barn Owl Scheme targeted a range of conservation measures at all sites in the district with owls present. Our part-time conservation assistant post became full-time. We now had two full-time conservation posts supported by three part-time admin staff and volunteers and a part-time promotions officer. Iñigo our Spanish friend, now a university lecturer, arranged a trip for us to Seville to talk to groups of his students. At home wet weather was the main feature of the two county shows we attended and in Cornwall these were accompanied by gale-force winds which had us sitting on our stand to stop it blowing away. This was the year that the dog show marquee collapsed when one of the poles in the centre snapped! There were two record finds made during the ringing season: the largest clutch of Barn Owl eggs ever found in the UK (12) and one of the oldest wild Barn Owls ever found alive (8 years old).

1998 Ø Good Friday agreement signed in Northern Ireland
Ø Google launched

In **1998** the Trust celebrated its 10th birthday with a range of events including a really successful ceilidh and the publication of a limited-edition art book on owls. New posts included a part-time receptionist and secretary to the Trustees, a part-time handyman and our promotions officer became full-time. We started a scheme with Exeter City Council to encourage Barn Owls on the city fringe, a site enhancement project in Teignbridge district and we had our first publication of a scientific paper: 'The effect of barn conversions on local populations of Barn Owl *Tyto alba*' in the journal Bird Study. Mike Toms, (now with the BTO) spent 6 weeks in Devon staying in the Trust's caravan and building a database for us so we could retire all those old index cards. Biodiversity action planning was high on the political agenda and the Trust played a central role in the production of the first ever action plan for Barn Owls which are a BAP species in Devon. We began our first radio-tracking project looking at the behaviour and



The mobile aviary

Photo: staff

...as a Charity ...

habitat use of breeding Barn Owls; two Spanish students spent 6 weeks here following the movements of the birds. A 10th anniversary appeal raised over £6,000 in donations.



David with the Spanish students Photo: staff

1999 Ø Total eclipse of the sun
Ø Jill Dando murdered
Ø Prince Edward married Sophie

In **1999**, much to the delight of staff and volunteers, we had a flushing toilet installed (before this it was a 'porta loo'). We built our first polebox. Our conservation team grew to three with the appointment of a second Assistant Conservation Officer. Grant funding enabled the building of a brand new bird room for the care of casualties. A local research project and a 4x4 vehicle was funded by landfill tax money. A North Devon Barn Owl site enhancement scheme was started and after two years of trials we launched our new deep design indoor nestbox. Two more Spanish students joined us to continue the radio tracking study and we set up a camera in the Trust's hide to enable us to watch a pair of our captive owls breeding; the young were later released under licence from the DoE.

2000 Ø New millennium
Ø Worst floods in the UK since records began

In **2000** we began a three-year project to expand our information services with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which funded a full-time post. We also launched an East Devon site enhancement scheme. Friend of the Trust John Woodland filmed and produced a 24 minute video called, 'Behind the scenes at the Barn Owl Trust' for friends and supporters. Feedback carried a story about Stock Doves and Barn Owls using the same nestbox at the same time, not a great result for the Stock Dove chicks. It was a very mixed breeding season with some sites starting very early due to two weeks of summer weather in February. This was followed by snow and rain which caused other sites to be very late. In the office we undertook a mammoth task to revise all our information leaflets. Dusty the Barn Owl made her first school visit and Simon Wilson became a trustee.

2001 Ø 9/11 terrorist attack in the USA
Ø Foot and Mouth disease
Ø Labour government re-elected

Foot and Mouth disease hit the UK in **2001**; this had a dramatic impact on farming and on conservation – the Trust's fieldwork was suspended for many months during the crisis. On a brighter note, the Trust's first web-site - www.barnowltrust.org.uk - was launched. We received an amazing legacy, some of which was used to purchase 26 acres of intensively grazed sheep pasture with the aim of turning it into ideal Barn Owl habitat and this began what is now known as the LLP (Lennon Legacy Project). We were filmed for Channel Four's *Pet Rescue* series and we published the Trust's second reintroduction report reviewing releases between 1986 and 1992 when the Barn Owl Trust released captive bred Barn Owls on 56 occasions from 41 sites. This involved a total of 223 birds, mostly in the county of Devon. We held a nestbox workshop in Gloucester, started a four-year project with Imerys plc to increase the number of Barn Owls in mid Cornwall and worked with Viridor Waste Management to make their landfill site at Heathfield more attractive to Barn Owls. A miniature landscape on a nestbox was built for display when we attended the BBC Gardeners' World Show for six days at the NEC.



Miniature landscape on a nestbox at the NEC In Birmingham Photo: Frances Ramsden

2002 Ø Queen Mother died aged 101
Ø Queen's Golden Jubilee
Ø Euro launched

In **2002** we started answering the telephone five days a week (rather than two). DEFRA (formerly DoE) scrapped the release licensing scheme, effectively outlawing the release of captive bred Barn Owls. The Teignbridge Barn Owl Scheme was completed and the local authority provided 50% of the funding to extend the scheme to a further four sites and continue monitoring the original ones. We held our Spring nestbox workshop in Dorset. David, with

Dusty (the Barn Owl), took the mobile release aviary to the Blue Peter studio in London and we held an Education day for 100 children on a local farm.



Mask making on education day Photo: Frances Ramsden

This was also the year when we had our first stand at the Dorset agricultural show. In the LLP field we had begun taking our monthly monitoring photos to record the changes, carried out flora, invertebrate and small mammal surveys, had the overhead electricity cables buried and erected two poleboxes. A second edition of our 48-page booklet, 'Barn Owls on site - a guide for developers and planners', was printed by English Nature and we gave a presentation at the Hawk & Owl Trust's members' conference. We now had a conservation team of four full-time staff, a part-time handyman and four part-time admin staff. Three of our admin staff took their holidays together and raised funds whilst trekking in Nepal. Right at the end of the year we lost one of our stalwart volunteers when John Rhodes died suddenly and unexpectedly.

2003 Ø England won Rugby World Cup
Ø Concorde's last flight
Ø Saddam Hussein captured

Our three-year Heritage Lottery Fund project came to an end in **2003** and to try to raise funds the Trust recruited its first ever full-time fundraising manager. A wild Barn Owl was seen for the first time from the Trust's office. We finally published the report 'Barn Owls and Major Roads: results and recommendations from a 15-year research project' after a seven year write-up period (squeezed in between everything else we do!). We visited over 1100 sites during the Devon Barn Owl Survey and trained and involved volunteers for the first time; it was the biggest county survey ever carried out! In the LLP field a new hedge bank was created where one had been removed in the 1970's and we planted a Rowan tree in memory of volunteer John. There were now hundreds of butterflies and signs of field voles being seen for the first time in the new rough grassland and we held our first bracken bash and hedge management days to give volunteers and supporters the opportunity to

... with the Trust



Dusty the Barn Owl Photo: Melanie Lindenthal

get involved. We took on the first full-time member of the admin team and our IT man Alan Lewis developed our existing database beyond recognition allowing us to access our Barn Owl data far more efficiently.

2004 Ø *Boxing Day - Tsunami struck*
Ø *Summer Olympics in Athens*
Britain won 9 Gold medals

The Devon Barn Owl Survey report was published in **2004** and the fieldwork for the Cornwall Barn Owl survey carried out - 835 sites were checked between the River Tamar and Lands End. The Teignbridge and East Devon Barn Owl schemes were also completed during the summer. Hungarian Barn Owl worker Ákos Klein visited the Trust. We erected a barn in the Lennon Legacy Project field and by late summer found evidence that Barn Owls were visiting it. We also rebuilt a stone boundary wall. Nestbox workshops were held in Cornwall and Somerset and the Trust's soft toy cuddly owlets became part of our sales range.

2005 Ø *Prince Charles married Camilla Parker Bowles*
Ø *Michael Jackson trial began*

By **2005** the conservation team had dropped to two but a generous legacy enabled us to recruit and bring it back up to four. We began running our BOESS (Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys & Signs) training courses for ecologists and planners. For the first time we funded an 'outside' research project which focused on Barn Owl habitat requirements, and we completed the Imerys Initiative, a five-year conservation project in Cornwall. We published the Cornwall Barn Owl survey report and our first Supporters' Day gave Friends of the Trust an opportunity to visit the LLP field and see the results of our conservation management at first hand. The two aviaries outside the office were demolished and rebuilt just in time for our visitors. After 12 years at the Trust Rave the raven left us in the hope of finding true love; she moved to a bird sanctuary in Surrey to live with a captive male raven. We designed

a new outdoor nestbox and produced and published our second leaflet on owl rehabilitation. Barn Owls bred for the first time ever in a pole box on the Trust's land.

2006 Ø *Smoking ban introduced*
Ø *First case of 'bird flu' discovered in the uk*

Our new website with over 80 pages, 70 slideshows, a live streaming web cam from one of our aviaries and an on-line shop was launched in **2006**. The conservation team was down to two full-time staff again so we were delighted when an Italian volunteer arrived to work with us for 12 months helping to progress research projects. We took on (and trained) a nestbox officer for six months to clear our waiting list of 160 sites and also had a full-time student on placement with us. We designed a stone wildlife refuge, which was built and filmed for the Channel 4 television series, 'Wild thing I love you!'. Comedian and musician Bill Bailey, who presented the programme, visited the Trust and posed with Baley the Barn Owl.



The wildlife refuge

Photo: staff

Baley hatched here in a stack of bales, hence the name. Two legacies enabled us to create two large wildlife ponds in the LLP field providing a greater diversity of habitats. We also presented a paper on our road research in Hungary at the European Conference of Conservation Biology and caught up with our friend Ákos who spent five days showing us Hungarian Barn Owls and other wildlife after the conference. This was also a year of weddings, two of our staff who had moved on, Mark Green (ex-Conservation Officer) and Sonia Seldon (ex-Conservation/Admin Assistant) were married in April, yes they did meet here. In May, our then Assistant Conservation Officer Lisa Ashford married her partner Rob Hann.

2007 Ø *7th and last Harry Potter book published*
Ø *Digital switchover began*

In **2007** there was another first when we produced a full colour A3 double-sided

leaflet with the RSPB. Having been subject yet again to staff changes we recruited, bringing the conservation team up to three again. When Sandra Perry retired after more than 10 years, Chris Robinson who had been advising the Trust for many years became a trustee. We completed the Westmoor survey in West Devon, having checked every reported Barn Owl site in the area, and we started organising volunteer workdays for groups in the LLP field. We began using biofuel (recycled vegetable oil) in three of our four vehicles.



Photo: British Ceremonial Arts Ltd

David Ramsden, the Trust's head of conservation, was awarded an MBE for services to wildlife, which was presented by the Queen at Buckingham Palace in December. We gave two papers at the World Owl Conference in Holland and made lots of new international contacts. Our staff won two awards for 'green' travelling to work; one person regularly cycled a 60 mile round trip taking her 6 hours a day!

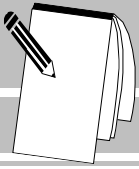
2008 Ø *Petrol costs £5.04 a gallon*
Ø *Summer Olympics in Beijing*
Britain won 19 Gold medals

Well here we are in **2008**, the Trust's 20th anniversary year. A flying visit to Hungary in the snow to advise on a volunteer Barn Owl project for UK trainees began the year and as for the rest, you can read all about it in this issue. We now have 12 staff, a conservation team of four (full-time), a part-time handy man, a part-time publicity officer, three full-time and three part-time admin staff.

We hope you have enjoyed this look back over the last 20 years. Two decades ago it was impossible to imagine almost all of this. Thank you so much to everyone (too numerous to mention) who has played a part in the Trust's achievements and to all of you who have supported us.

We have no idea what will happen over the next 20 years but will do our very best to continue to benefit both the Barn Owl and the wider environment. We really do believe that...

together we can make a world of difference.



BOT Info

... Dates for your Diary 2008/9

J Friday 24 October

Barn Owl Trust Annual General Celebration—7 for 7.30pm to be held at Paignton Zoo, Paignton in South Devon.

J Wednesday 5 & Thursday 6 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 £175). To apply for a place please email Anne Sercombe at anne@barnowltrust.org.uk, confirming your name, job title, organisation and nature of work.

J Monday 10 November

Restoring the Balance - Barn Owl Trust talk and slideshow for the Tamar section of the Cornwall Wildlife Trust. 7.30pm start.

J Saturday 6 December

Winter work party in the Trust's LLP. Please contact us closer to the time to find out specific tasks. Advance booking is essential as places are limited.

J Wednesday 4 March

The Barn Owl Trust's presentation: 'Lennon Legacy Project - transforming 26 acres of intensively grazed sheep pasture into 26 acres of Barn Owl Heaven'. Morchard Bishop Gardening Club at Morchard Bishop Memorial Hall. 7.30pm start.

J Wednesday 15 April

'Restoring the Balance' presentation for the Longdown Garden Group at the Longdown Village Hall. 8pm start.

J Wednesday 6 May

Barn Owl Trust presentation, 'Restoring the Balance' for the Moretonhampstead U3A at the Moretonhampstead Community Club. 11am start.

J Saturday 9 May

Barn Owl Trust Sponsored Dog event. Please contact the office nearer the time for further details or see next issue of Feedback.

J Thursday 21– Saturday 23 May

Devon County Show. We will have a stand, sales goods and information. Conservation staff will be on hand over

the three days of the show. We'd love to see you.

J Thursday 4–Saturday 6 June

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

J Saturday 4 July (tbc)

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 stout footwear; and also a packed lunch. Please phone to book your place (10am start).

J Thursday 17 September

'Restoring the Balance' Barn Owl Trust talk and slideshow for the Moreton WI at the Moretonhampstead Community Club. 7.30pm start.



New BTO Ringer

After years and years of trying to find someone to train him to ring birds, BOT Conservation Officer Matthew Twiggs has been taken on by our very own Chairman of Trustees, Keith Grant. Keith is a British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Trainer with many years' experience. He has previously trained other BOT ringing staff to ring Barn Owls and raptors. He also trains people to ring passerines (small birds), all of which is done on a voluntary basis. Matthew said: *'I'd always wanted to learn how to ring birds but never managed to find someone in the West Country who was available to train me. Keith very kindly agreed to take me on, not only to ring Barn Owls but also other bird species.'* Ringing requires specialist knowledge, and training usually involves a long commitment, often taking years to complete.

Ringing a bird involves fitting a specially made metal ring, designed to have no negative impact, to its leg. Each ring has its own unique code, which allows the bird to

be identified if recovered. This provides a huge amount of invaluable scientific data. Where and when the bird was ringed originally can be compared to where it is found, and the distance and direction it has travelled can be calculated. Its age, sex, weight and wing length as well as other features such as feather moult are also recorded.

For Barn Owls, ringing data collected at the nest provide an insight into nesting ecology such as occupancy rates, brood size and the date that the first egg is laid (calculated from the wing length measurement). If any ringed individuals are found, it can inform our understanding of adult site fidelity and juvenile dispersal. We would never gather this information without fitting a simple, non-invasive uniquely-coded metal ring. Far from being cruel, ringing data has been the catalyst for considerable species conservation work both nationally and internationally.



A BTO ring - each one has a unique number
Photo: Julie Matthews

More information on ringing Barn Owls can be found on our website at:
http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/content_imagespdf/1No_15_Rings_and_Ringing.pdf

The BTO is the organisation that coordinates ringing activity in the UK. More general information on ringing can be found on their website at:
<http://www.bto.org/ringing/ringinfo/index.htm>

Our Webcam is a....

Read on for the 'Tale of Tiny and her siblings.....' As you may have realised by now, the Barn Owl Trust is a staggering 20 years old and our celebrations this year included the launch of our first-ever webcam in a wild Barn Owl nest. Anyone familiar with BBC Springwatch will know that there's nothing new about cameras in nests linked to the Internet but all previous Barn Owl nest web cams were still images that automatically updated every minute or so. We had something much better in mind! A live-streaming real-time moving image! We'd also noticed that in all the nest web cams we'd seen, there were always areas of the nest that were out of shot and as result it was impossible to see everything that was happening. We set ourselves the challenge of creating the best-possible view inside the nest AND another camera would provide the best possible view of the nestbox in the barn - the concept of 'Nestcam' and 'Barncam' was born.

The Web Broadcasting Corporation kindly supplied the nest camera free of charge and we set about the task of building a nest box that would provide the best possible close-up view of the action. Our first problem was that all webcam images and all computer screens are 'landscape' format (wider rather than tall) and our nestboxes are deep (taller rather than wide). To get around this we decided to make the box 50% wider. Next task was to achieve the optimum elevation. A low-down camera would soon get a dirty lens and an owl standing in front of it would obviously spoil the view. Looking vertically down was not great either. After a couple of hours' experimentation with the camera connected to a monitor and a part-built extra-wide box we arrived at the ultimate distance and angle for the camera and this gave us the box dimensions required. By the end of the day the 'Nestcam' box was ready - complete with a slippery slope to prevent the owls getting up to the camera. We managed to identify a nest site belonging to some Friends of the Trust in Cornwall who had broadband and were happy to host a BOT computer. By Christmas we'd installed the "Nestcam" box replacing the existing nest box that Barn Owls had used most years since 1994.

But where were the owls?

On the 19th February the female spent her first day roosting in the nest box, raising hopes that this would become a regular occurrence. However this proved to be a one-off, and there was no further action for a couple of weeks. On the 3rd March she was back in the box for the second time. Again, our optimism was short lived as an absence of a fortnight followed. On the 26th however, the owners of the barn phoned to say the



19th May

female had been in the nest box for a whole week. They had also witnessed the male and female copulating. By the 7th April, there was a plentiful supply of food courtesy of the male and frequent copulation, leading to hopes that egg laying was imminent.

The first egg was laid on April 16th, the day after the nestcam went 'live' on our website! This was just one day earlier than the average date for first egg-laying based on BOT data collected in the south west between 1998 and 2006 at our Annual Monitoring Sites. Three subsequent eggs were then laid at approximately 2½ day intervals. During this time, the male was seen to present both Field Voles and Brown Rats to the female. Copulation was frequent and occurred whenever food was presented,



18th July

and sporadically at other times. By the 23rd April the clutch of four was complete. Thereafter, the male regularly roosted elsewhere, but on the occasions when the male and female roosted together, there was lots of mutual preening.

As the incubation period progressed, the female could be observed carefully turning the eggs, and 'tidying up' the pellets around the clutch. As the date for the first egg hatch approached, the clutch had been turned so often that it had moved from one side of the box to the other and back again, such was the female's attentiveness. Bang on time, on the 17th May, some 31 days after laying, the first egg hatched and by the time the second had hatched we had been treated to

fantastic views of the female ripping off small pieces of Field Vole and tenderly feeding them to the owlet. The other eggs hatched at 2½ day intervals and by the morning of the 24th the fourth and final egg was in two pieces in the nestbox but views of the young were fleeting as the female continued to brood diligently. By the 28th, and despite some particularly inclement weather overnight, all four owlets were still alive but hungry, as the female was watched begging for food from the male. However, on the evening of the 29th the owlets were being fed for 55 minutes as the male managed four food deliveries in under an hour. By the end of the month the female had started leaving the young uncovered as she left the nestbox to exercise with brief flights in and around the barn. Her arrival with a Field Vole after one of these forays was probably a delivery off camera from the male. At two weeks old the eldest owlet just swallowed it whole.

June began as May had ended with the female spending less and less time with the owlets. By the 6th she had been able to leave them for a full two hours whilst she sat at roost on the tray. By this time, the eldest owlet started spending much of its time wandering around the nestbox or, quite bizarrely, lying on its back staring at the nest box lid. As mid-June approached, only the youngest owlet, at 2½ weeks old, still needed feeding by the female, with the others seemingly able to take and eat small mammals whole. Tragedy struck on the 16th June, with our first fatality. Strangely, the 3rd owlet, not the youngest, was found dead in the nestbox. Even stranger, it seemed to have died of starvation. Despite overnight temperatures being below average there didn't appear to be any shortage of food. Indeed, during a nest inspection to ring the three remaining owlets a day later five uneaten food items were found in the box. We can only speculate, but it may be that the female stopped feeding the owlet prematurely due to inexperience on her part, or perhaps a more fundamental problem with the owlet's health. On average, Barn Owls in this area lay 5.6 eggs, 4.8 hatch, brood size is 3, and 2.6 young fledge successfully. As these figures show, mortality in the nest is common so this was perhaps more disappointing than unexpected. Two weeks later, and the three owlets were still alive, despite frequent and prolonged heavy rainfall. At 6 weeks old, the eldest owlet was fast losing its downy feathers, which seemed to float around after every wing flap. It wouldn't be long before the first attempts at trying to get out of the nestbox occurred.

The first week of July saw just that, with the eldest owlet becoming increasingly more interested in the hole, and a number of failed

....World Wide Success

attempts at jumping up at it. This finally culminated in success as it eventually



16th July

managed to get out on the 7th, at just over 7 weeks old, and took its first long-awaited look around the barn. After 5 minutes it went back into the nestbox but emerged several times during the evening much to the excitement of the second owlet, which tried jumping up at the hole itself with no success. Food was in plentiful supply, with both adult birds active and four food deliveries before it got dark. The youngest owlet even managed to steal a food item from the eldest, and swallowed it whole. More drama only a couple of days later as, moments after managing to get out of the box for the first time, the second owlet fell to the floor of the barn. After some frenzied phone calls and a couple of searches, it was eventually found and replaced in the box, seemingly none the worse for its adventures. That same evening it was back out on the nest box tray with its elder sibling, with the youngest peering longingly up at the hole. Owlet progress was swift during this period and a number of notable incidents kept the excitement going. On the 10th one of the older owlets was seen to bring a food item into the nestbox and



20th July

actually give it to the youngest. A day later and the youngest was making frequent efforts at jumping up at the hole with no success. The following night the eldest owlet took its first flight around the barn. During the day all three owlets huddled at roost in the nestbox. By the 16th, the second owlet had

taken its first flight around the barn too. That same evening the youngest owlet was brought food by one of its siblings at least twice. Three days later and it had finally managed to get out of the box at last at eight weeks old. Interestingly, the youngest was still covered in quite a lot of down at this point and didn't seem to be at the same stage of development as the eldest owlet had been at roughly the same age, causing us slight concern. On the 22nd we received reports from the barn's owners that both of the older owlets had been observed flying around the farmyard and perching on the garden wall. After more inclement weather, and due to concern about the development of the smallest owlet we carried out a nest inspection and weighed and measured all three on the 24th. The eldest and youngest owlets were sexed as definitely female and the middle one was probably female too. Whilst the eldest owlet had grown normally (full wing length by 70 days old), the younger two were both late developers. The middle one had the wing length of a 63 day-old but was actually 70 days old and the smallest had the wing length of a 54 day-old but was actually 66 days old. It was also still quite fluffy. Looking back at measurements taken at the time of ringing (17th June), we found that even at only 25 days old the smallest owlet was already nine days late in its development (ie its wing length suggested it was 16 days old). Barn Owl literature states that wing feather growth provides an accurate estimate of chick age but as this brood showed, considerable developmental variation can occur.

August commenced with reports that the youngest owlet had finally taken its first flight, from the nestbox to one of the beams at the back of the barn. All three owlets were still visible, almost exclusively sitting on the nestbox tray or on beams in the barn with little action taking place actually in the box. It wouldn't be long before the owlets disappeared as they began to disperse in search of their own home ranges.

It has been heart warming to know that viewers from across the world have been enjoying the images streamed live from Nestcam & Barncam. We have received hundreds of emails, and, although we have been unable to identify where many originated, we know for certain that we have received them from France, Denmark, USA, Canada, Holland, Mexico, Hawaii, Italy, Australia, Spain and Scotland. The overwhelming message has been 'Thank you ... thank you ... thank you.'

The viewing figures were undoubtedly boosted by discussion on various forums on the Internet. Our owls were a hot topic of discussion, often including screen shots of

the nestbox captured by viewers. Keeping an eye on the site became a daily ritual for many; one viewer emailed us to say 'I feel like they are my own babies.' On the discussion forums people gave the owlets various names to identify them, generally the youngest owlet was called Tiny by the vast majority of viewers. This seems to have



5th August

started when the third owlet died and there was concern that the youngest owlet might also not survive. One forum arranged a rota to ensure that someone was always watching the owlets and then they emailed us if anything out of the ordinary happened.

A flurry of emails were received on the 8th July when the middle owlet, which had finally managed to get out of the hole, immediately fell off the platform onto the floor of the barn. Alerted by viewers and a call to our Live Owl Emergency telephone, we organised a volunteer to visit the barn, but the owlet couldn't be found. The search revealed nothing but by watching via Barncam we could see that as soon as our volunteer left the building, the oldest owlet came out of the box onto the tray to look down at the floor, which seemed to indicate that the missing owlet had come out of hiding. Following a lot more phone calls the building was searched again but it still couldn't be found. Eventually an adult owl came into the barn carrying food, instead of delivering the food to the nestbox, it swooped down to the floor but didn't feed the owlet. Moments later the adult could be seen on the far side of the nestbox, still holding the food. It quickly vanished into the night when our volunteer and a helper came back to search for a third time. This time they were successful and the owlet was picked up and put back in the box, seemingly none the worse for its adventure. During all this excitement a lot of people from all over the world were emailing the Trust to make sure we were aware of the situation and to find out what we could do about it. The emails received the following day had exclamation marks by the score, capital and bold lettering in the title - in fact anything to attract our attention to what was happening to the owlets. Many people

continued overleaf...

More News...

Back to School

In June I received a call from a school in South Wales asking for some advice and assistance as crows were nesting above the suspended ceiling of an upper floor classroom. Barn Owls had also been observed occasionally and it was thought that one or the other was responsible for staining the ceiling tiles and producing the obnoxious odour.

An inspection revealed... absolutely nothing. On further inspection... hissing was heard coming from the ventilation system, confirming my suspicions that Barn Owls were present.

I suggested that access to the roof space should be blocked after all the birds had fledged and proposed that we install a

purpose-built Barn Owl nestbox in a more suitable position.

When all owls had left the nest we blocked off the access points and set about positioning the Barn Owl nestbox slightly higher up on the roof. It had a large platform and was under the overhang of the next roof, behind a large baffle which gave protection from the elements whilst still being easily visible to the owls but not from the ground or the classrooms.

We hoped the box might be accepted and used by next season but were very pleased to find that during August the Barn Owls were already sitting on top, investigating it and have since been seen going in and out of the box.

Ade Williams
Glamorgan



Molly on a fieldwork trip Photo: David Ramsden

Work Experience

Student Molly Hawes from South Dartmoor Community College spent a week here on work experience, "I never imagined that I would be with the Barn Owl Trust. I ended up with Julie (Matthews) and the team for a week starting on the 14th of July. After a pre-placement interview I was very excited (and looking at the nestcam, for increasing lengths of time, most nights).

On my first day I was lucky enough to go on a ringing trip around southeast Devon with David and Matt. It was really fascinating to see all the owlets being ringed, weighed and measured, and at some of the safer sites I even got to see in the boxes. I managed to hold most of the owlets too!

Tuesday and Wednesday saw me working in the admin department of the office, going on a primary school visit, putting up signs and feeding the resident Barn Owls. I also enjoyed learning more about Barn Owl lifestyles throughout my time at the Trust.

I had the opportunity to attend a BOESS course (Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys and Signs) on Thursday, where I learnt a lot about the annual life cycle of the birds, signs of Barn Owl occupation, surveying techniques and mitigation strategies. I also enjoyed the famous lunch and snacks provided by our hosts.

Writing this on Friday morning, I plan to spend the rest of the day rounding off my week: completing my logbook and diary, saying goodbye to all the resident owls and, of course, the fantastic team here in Ashburton. As well as this I will be conducting a pellet analysis (which I am looking forward to) and feeding the owls.

I would like to thank everyone involved, especially Julie, David and Matt for a really inspiring and informative week.

Molly Hawes



Ready for the road - the Trust's new exhibition trailer was designed and built in time for this year's show season



All set up and ready for the show - see the slideshow at www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Photos: Frances Ramsden

..World Wide Webcam Success continued

....(Continued from page 15)

wanted to tell us what they had seen and the following is a small sample of the many emails that we received after the incident:

Ø 'It's 1:15pm in Chicago, Illinois right now and chick No 2 backed up over the edge outside and fell

Ø 'Chick No 1 is back in the box, but there's no sign of chick No 2. Please help

Ø '...at 10.30 I saw torchlight! Some "hero" came along and well I was cheering when whoever it was came and put the third one back into the box and he seems fine!

Ø 'When I checked the web cam I found it was back in the nest. I was so relieved. It has made my day.'

It was great getting the feedback from viewers. Up until this incident we had managed to answer almost all the e-mails individually; however the amount we received from then on meant we had to answer any further questions raised on the Nestcam Diary.

Plans are already underway to repeat the exercise next year with the possible inclusion of sound. Having the live stream on our website has proved to be a great success with viewers all over the world completely addicted and enthralled by what has proved to be an enlightening experience for us all. Let's leave the final word to one email we received which ended:

'... You guys rock!'

q



Screenshots provided by Sue Lee

Team Talk



Kelly's leaving do - a fish and chip party in the barn (pity about the weather!)

Photo: Caroline Lewis

We've had a few staff changes here since the Spring. After two and a half years with the Trust, first with the conservation team and then on reception, Kelly Wakeham left us in July to go travelling.

Tatiana Cant joined the Trust in April 2008



to take on a wide range of tasks including fundraising, and to learn all of the admin processes needed to provide the Information and Advice Service.

She has a degree in Scandinavian Studies from Hull University and studied Environmental Management at Wye College. She has a varied background in administration for environmental organisations and universities. Tatiana moved to Devon in 2006 for an improved quality of life and is enjoying the special atmosphere of Totnes and spending more time outdoors. She is becoming happily settled here and her two children are thriving at the local Steiner school. Out of hours Tatiana loves to swim, walk, read, play with her cat and tries to make time for some creative writing.

Tatiana says, "It's been a busy five months and I've loved every minute. Since I started

working at the Trust, I have helped out at the Supporters' Day, Neighbours' Evening, Sponsored Walk and Devon County Show. I even attended one of our training courses for ecological consultants where I learnt loads including how to survey for Barn Owls and planning legislation. I have been lucky enough to tag along on a ringing visit and see a brood of healthy, fluffy owlets up close. It's also been fascinating to watch the Conservation Officers expertly dealing with injured owls and answering a wide range of owl queries.

I was already a converted supporter of environmental and conservation issues, but now my passion is informed and deepened by the expertise and dedication of the team here. I am really motivated to do my part by identifying resources to ensure the work can continue and to fund new projects."

Anne Sercombe came to the Trust in June



2008 to work in the dual role of Personal Assistant to David, Head of Conservation and Conservation Assistant. She supports the Conservation Team with their administration and will be the first point of contact for the Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys and Signs (BOESS) training days in the future.

Anne says, "I was fortunate that on my very first day with the Trust I was able to join Peter and Shirley, the winners of last year's draw, as they enjoyed a day with the Conservation Team. This gave me an insight into the variety of work that the team does. Since then I've been to one of David's talks, been out with Julie and Bailey to give a talk to local schoolchildren and Matt has shown me how to complete a butterfly transect and take the monitoring photos of the LLP field. All that and admin as well of course... I have had a fantastic introduction to the Trust and everyone has made me feel very welcome."

Born in Devon, Anne has lived here for most of her life and has two grown-up children. In her spare time she enjoys gardening, needlework, reading, painting, walking and local history. In 1988 after being self-employed for many years making soft furnishings, Anne was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. This eventually led to her returning to full time education as a mature student. She gained a degree in Heritage, Landscape & Design from Plymouth University, a life changing experience that she can highly recommend.

Helen Vogel began working for the Trust in July taking over from Kelly on reception.



"She was so very helpful in making me feel welcome and introducing me to all the tasks involved in working on reception and doing admin here. I have worked at Ashburton Primary School for the last 16 years and have lived in the area for the past 7 years. It is a beautiful part of the county and I am so pleased to be able to continue to work here, particularly as I will be able to walk to work. I was brought up in South Devon and know the area well, which is what makes it such a pleasure to have been able to return to live and work here. I first heard about the Barn Owl Trust when there was a school talk and a visit from a Barn Owl; the children and staff were fascinated. I am certainly looking forward to learning a lot more about Barn Owls and the work of the Trust. Several years ago I took part in the Trust's sponsored walk, which I enjoyed, never imagining that one day I would be working here".

q

Over to you ...

Pass it on!



Help us spread the word about the work of the Barn Owl Trust. Read your copy of Feedback magazine and pass it on! If every reader passes

Feedback magazine to a friend, neighbour, doctor's surgery, veterinary practice or dentist's waiting room, we will at least double our number of readers. And you never know, reading our magazine may inspire new people to become Friends of the Barn Owl Trust. At just £20 for the year, becoming a Friend of the Barn Owl Trust is very reasonable and is a great way to 'do your bit' towards conserving the Barn Owl and its environment.

If you are reading this and want to become a Friend of the Trust call 01364 653026 or go to our website www.barnowltrust.org.uk

"Read it and pass it on - Great news for the Barn Owl Trust and great news for the environment!"

Where there's a will there's a way ...

The Barn Owl Trust has teamed up with solicitors Kitson Hutchings as they launch an innovative new 'Wills for charity' scheme. Whenever Kitson Hutchings draw up a will for friends or supporters of the Barn Owl Trust, the law firm will donate 25 per cent of their fee to the Trust, irrespective of whether a legacy for the charity is left in the will or not. It is estimated that over 80 per cent of the population have not yet drawn up a will. But if someone dies without making a will then their assets may be distributed according to the law rather than the individual's wishes. A charitable legacy in a will is exempt from inheritance tax and probably the most tax-effective gift one can make. What better way to be remembered! With your legacy to the Barn Owl Trust we promise to do something really special!



Stephen Cole of Kitson Hutchings Solicitors with representatives from charities participating in the 'wills for charity' scheme Photo: Anna Rawles

If you need to make a will, please consider using Kitson Hutchings solicitors 'wills for charity' scheme. They are able to take instructions in person, by phone or by post. **Contact Stephen Cole on 01803 202020 or Stephen Craig on 01626 203366.**

Barn Owls, beads and... daleks?

Saskia talks about her week's work experience at the Trust



Saskia measuring out thread for our 'Get crafty for Christmas' project Photo Caroline Lewis

I thoroughly enjoyed my week's work experience at the Barn Owl Trust.

On my first day I accompanied Conservation Officer, Julie Matthews, on a primary school visit to South Zeal. We took Baley the Barn Owl to meet the school children and tell them all about the lives of Barn Owls. I found the talk really interesting and it gave me a good insight into the work of the Barn Owl Trust.

On my second day I spent time with Publicity Officer, Caroline Lewis. I wrote a

press release following an article in the news that more children are likely to recognise a dalek than a Barn Owl! I really enjoyed this as writing is a great interest of mine. I learned that it's really important to keep up with the latest news and use every opportunity to publicise the Barn Owl Trust! I also looked through the image library and selected some appropriate images to accompany the press release.

During my last few days I was helping prepare jewellery making packs for the 'Get crafty for Christmas' project. I made some sample necklaces and bracelets and photographed them, and worked out what we would need in each kit. I really hope the project is a success and lots of people buy Barn Owl necklaces and pendants for Christmas!

I would like to thank everyone at the Barn Owl Trust for making my week so informative and fun.

Saskia Rumbelow
Year 10 student

Late entries in the scarf department!

Remember our 'knit a scarf' project last year? Well, we had a few 'late entries' returned to us. If you missed out last year and would like a scarf, please phone the office on 01364 653026 or email info@barnowltrust.org.uk. The scarves are not part of last year's limited edition collection and so will be sold at a slightly reduced rate of £8 each + £1.50 p&p. There are 7 white fluffy scarves available and they will be sold on a 'first come first served' basis.



Photo: Frances Ramsden

Thanks and Things

Thank you so much to everyone who has supported us since the last issue of *Feedback*. Many thanks to all those who have sent in beads and ribbons for the latest fundraising craft project. Now it's time to start making them up into attractive jewellery ready for Christmas. We are also very grateful to everyone who has given us commemorative stamps, mobile phones and ink cartridges for recycling.

Thank you to Colin Meadows for his help in bringing to our screens the antics of the wild Barn Owls in Cornwall via the web cam and to Margaret Rhodes for collecting injured owls for us.

Many people have responded enthusiastically to our appeal for miscellaneous items, and we are always pleased to receive these extremely useful bits and pieces. We would like to thank Sue Lee for the ophthalmoscope, Rosemary Elsworth for contributing a woodburning stove, Kathy Pole for the offer of a cement mixer, John and Veg Truman a projector Screen, and Alex Sharratt and Mark and Jane Board of Seaflex kindly provided us with A4 and A3 colour printers. Thank you to Mr & Mrs Parish for a pitchfork. We have received 1st Day Covers from Rafael De Swarte of Covercraft. We are grateful for the stationery received from Elizabeth Graham and Laura Hill of Jackson Parton. We are very pleased with all the pellets we have

received from Nicky Pearce, Sarah Rawlins, Pat Hodges, Len Oates, Anna Milner and John Lightfoot (a very large box!). Thanks for bird seed go to Nigel Goodman from Jacobi Jayne & Co, John and Sheila Prickett, Rosemarie Saunders and Melanie White. Many thanks go as always to Pat and Jenny Ford who continue to spoil us with cakes and biscuits during their volunteer days in the office.

And last but not least we would like to thank all those supporters who make their donations on-line or by standing order. This is a great saving for us in postage and stationery costs.

Here is our current wish list. If you have any of these items which you are not using or would be prepared to contribute we would be most grateful.

- Portable CD player/radio for office use and for use in presentations if powerful enough
- Foreign change (please enclose a note of the type of currency)
- Roll of new hardwearing office carpet, suitable for gluing to the floor
- Staple guns, both office-type and DIY type needed
- Wild bird food - mainly sacks of black sunflower seeds, also peanuts and plain canary seed
- Wood for making outdoor nestboxes - sheets

of 9 or 12mm tanalised softwood ply and lengths of 25x 50mm tanalised batten

- A4 and A3 recycled paper and card both coloured and white
- Box trailer in good working order
- New Inkjet cartridges for HP Deskjets 3820 and 930 and HP colour Laserjet 2550
- Bubble wrap (ideally on a roll)
- Lawn rakes/garden rakes/hay rakes
- 2 stackable chairs
- Postage stamps (both new and commemorative used)
- Office chairs (must meet H & S specifications)
- Car interior cleaning products
- Jerry can, good condition for storing petrol
- Modern petrol trimmer
- Night vision equipment
- Thermal imaging equipment
- 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
- Wild Barn Owl pellets **URGENTLY NEEDED** (we can never have too many)
- Anyone in the Ashburton area able to provide occasional temporary lodging for a Barn Owl Trust volunteer, at a reasonable rate

Tail Piece...



Life for our predecessors in the days before the welfare state, antibiotics and equal rights was a struggle for survival. Two hundred years ago most people worked incredibly long hours, often in awful conditions, just to have a roof over their heads and food in their stomachs. Average life expectancy was about 30 with huge infant mortality mostly from infectious diseases. These days, in the Western world, most people live to see their children grow up and most children know their grandparents. We have shops full of food, technology that allows us to communicate, travel and be entertained, and opportunities our ancestors could never have dreamt of. These are the golden years, so why I wonder is there so much stress, unrest and dissatisfaction? Is it that the human animal does not have the ability to be content? Instead of counting our blessings and seeing the positive, our society encourages growth of personal wealth; we are conditioned to want more, bigger, better, newer... Even the threat of environmental catastrophe from Global Warming is overwhelmed with news of the credit crunch and lack of growth in the financial markets. The media invades our lives and constantly bombards us with bad news; how much better it would be if the messages we

received and delivered were positive, encouraging and empowering.

If current predictions are to be believed, the cheap energy that makes our current lifestyles possible will soon be a thing of the past. It is predicted that Peak Oil will be reached before 2015 and this will have a dramatic effect on all of us. Whilst we still have the opportunity to choose we need to be thinking ahead and planning for this future. We need to reduce our personal energy consumption and encourage our 'leaders' to invest in greener energy production and transportation systems. We have such incredible freedom with our car-based society that we will be reluctant to surrender it, so we need to develop viable alternatives, and quickly.

I heard with horror that the government intends to invest in nuclear power and I can see why this could be an attractive option for them given the looming situation. However after Chernobyl and the myriad of other concerns over nuclear plants as well as the undisputable fact that we will be leaving radioactive waste for our descendants and our planet to deal with, I am astounded by such a short sighted solution. The Romans left us roads; the

Victorians left us the railways and viaducts, will future generations reflect that 21st century man created a global catastrophe?

It is not just future generations that will be affected by what we do; everything else on Planet Earth will be affected by climate change. Species have already disappeared because of human activities, the seasons are changing and the weather is becoming more extreme. Unfortunately a lot of people feel that global warming is nothing to do with them, but it is to do with all of us; the cars we drive, the things we buy, the appliances we use. These **are** the golden years, and we do still have choices. Individually we can all make changes in our lives that benefit the environment, save energy and take into consideration other people and wildlife. Collectively these changes can be enough to make a difference. We all need to appreciate how lucky we are compared to our forefathers and make sure we leave our planet intact for our children. Make the most of everyday as if it was to be your last and treat the earth as if you will be here forever.

Together we can make a world of difference.

Frances Ramsden

Barn Owl Trust Christmas Cards

Four beautiful new images of Barn Owls in full colour especially for Christmas.

Pack of 24 mixed or single image
£6.60

Available singly, in packs of 12 or 24 and with Christmas greetings '*Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year*' or blank for your message, each card is printed on environmentally

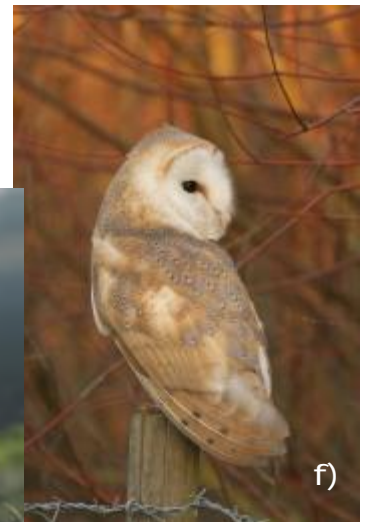


- a) Post-hunting in the snow
- b) Hushwing in the churchyard
- c) Winter at Waterleat
- d) Baley in winter
- e) In search of prey

Two new Barn Owl Trust 'any occasion' cards

Two new stunning images to add to our collection of 'any occasion' cards - left blank for your message. Please quote e or f.

Please complete the form below and return them to the Trust with your cheque to reserve



Order Form		Card type	Blank	Xmas message	No of packs	Total Price
Name _____		12 Mixed image pack @ £3.90				
Address _____		12 Single image (a-f) @ £3.90				
Postcode _____		24 Mixed image pack @ £6.90				
		24 Single image (a-f) @ £6.90				
		Single cards @ 0.50p				
		Add £1.50 p&p per order				

Please make cheques payable to the **Barn Owl Trust** and send to The Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU or visit our online shop at www.barnowltrust.org.uk