

Issue Number 41 - Spring 2009



FEEDBACK



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

Reg Charity: No 299 835



Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme, New Owl Hospital
...and loads more news



Welcome to Feedback

We hope you're not too disappointed that there isn't a colour cover for this issue. We've saved quite a lot by opting for single colour but we hope the content will more than make up for it.

So much has been happening here over the last few months, it feels that we hardly get a chance to draw breath. There have been lots of exciting projects going on that you can read about. Some have national implications like our new "Planners' Guide" (page 4) and some, like our new Owl Hospital (page 8), and the launch of our new Barn Owl Scheme (page 10), have a more regional effect. But the most important thing is that they all help conserve Barn Owls.

We were saddened to hear of the deaths of some very good Friends of the Trust since the last issue of Feedback. Nancy Budd first contacted us in 1990 and Freda Moodie in 1992; both of whom were staunch supporters; they will be really missed. We also lost another dear Friend, as did the

birds of Devon, when John Woodland sadly died in December (see page 6).

As you will see from Team Talk (page 12) there have been several staff changes. Funding for the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme has allowed us to increase the conservation team in the short-term to enable us to get the extra work done. This has meant two lots of recruitment and well over 100 applicants for a twelve month contract. After 3 days of intensive interviewing we were delighted to welcome Maxine and then Stuart to the team.

The most significant staff change will have happened by the time this reaches you. Sandra Reardon will have retired after 13 years with the Trust. She has seen huge changes over her time here and been a pivotal figure in the day-to-day running of the organisation. It will no doubt be very strange for her and for us. Fortunately for us she has promised to come back as a volunteer and although this will be her last Feedback as a

staff member we are hoping it won't be the last one she's involved with. We wish her all the luck in the world and a really happy and healthy retirement.

We have news from conservationists in Portugal (page 11) and Malaysia (page 14) and some really interesting updates on the radio tracking project we are involved with and of course the latest news from the Lennon Legacy Project.

As we reach the end of the financial year we are expecting a deficit; the Trust, like almost everyone, has been affected by the credit crunch. Despite writing vast numbers of letters to grant-giving Trusts we only raised a small proportion of the funds needed for the new Owl Hospital and to support our conservation work. Fortunately we have funds carried over from the previous year to get us through but we'll have to write even more letters this year!

For all kinds of reasons our annual Sponsored Walk is not happening this year but Megan (the golden retriever) and Hugo (the cocker spaniel) are planning a trip in May to raise funds (page 15). We would really appreciate it if you would like to sponsor them.

And to round-up: you are cordially invited to the Trust's 21st Birthday Party on 18th July. Several of our Friends, staff and volunteers have musical talents and we have recruited them to provide entertainment for the event. See the enclosed leaflet and the item on page 11 for more information. We hope to see you here.

Thank you for your support and for all your correspondence, we really do enjoy hearing your news. We hope you enjoy this issue and catching up on ours.

Eds: Frances & Sandra

In this Issue...

Welcome to Feedback	2
BOT News	3
More BOT News	4
LLP Update	5
In Memoriam	5
BOT Info	6
John Woodland	6
Bird News	7
Our New Owl Hospital	8-9
The Story in Pictures	9
Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme	10
Bits and Pieces	11
21st Birthday Invitation	11
Team News	12-13
Other Barn Owl News	14
Supporters News	15
Thanks and Things	16
Tail Piece	16

*Cover Photos: Julie Matthews and David Ramsden
Feedback is produced for the Friends of the Barn Owl Trust
by staff and volunteers.*

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

Copy date for issue No 42 is Monday 18 August

*Send your contributions - news, letters, pictures and information to:
Feedback, Barn Owl Trust, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7HU
Email: feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk
Website: www.barnowltrust.org.uk*

Join us for our annual
Bracken Bashing Day
on Saturday 4th July
10.00am - 4.00pm

This is an opportunity to see the Lennon Legacy Project field and help us to control the bracken.

We provide gloves and big sticks. You need to bring suitable clothing e.g. sunhats and a packed lunch.

It's a fun day and really helps to keep down the bracken.

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

01364 653026
info@barnowltrust.org.uk

BOT News

Westmoor Launch

Six years ago the Devon Barn Owl Survey showed a significant decline in the Barn Owl population of West Devon. In 2006-07 the Trust undertook further survey work and confirmed that the birds in the Westmoor area were indeed having problems.

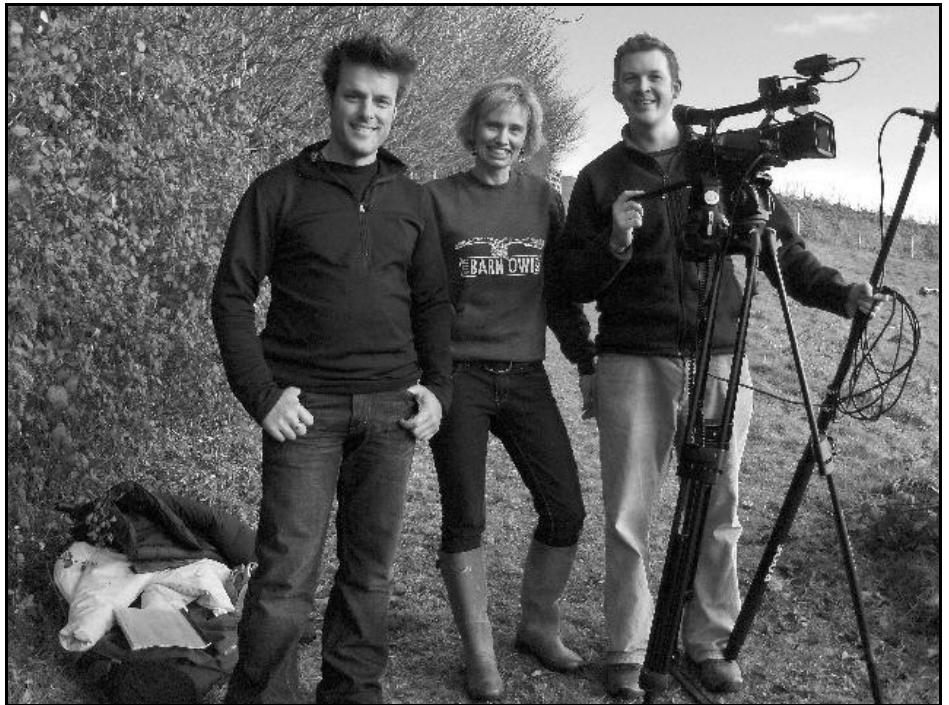
February 2009 saw the launch of a new scheme to help Barn Owls in Westmoor. This has been made possible thanks to a successful bid for a grant through the Landfill Communities Fund from Biffaward and additional funding from various sources including the Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society, Devon County Council's Biodiversity Partnership, Dartmoor National Park, West Devon District Council, Claude and Margaret Pike Woodlands Trust and others.

Press releases in local papers and also a feature on both regional news programmes – BBC Spotlight and ITV Westcountry – led to a massive response from people who have sighted Barn Owls and from farmers and landowners within the Westmoor boundary expressing their wish to be involved in the Scheme. The conservation and admin teams have been very busy responding to emails, phone calls and messages left on our answer-phone outside office hours. The publicity has also generated a large number of enquiries from people outside the Westmoor boundary, but nonetheless interested in seeing if they can do anything to assist Barn Owls in Devon and Cornwall. All of this is hugely encouraging when embarking upon a new scheme and we are determined to make it a success. See article on page 10 for more information. r

Nestcam News

After the international success of last year's wild Barn Owl nest cameras, we are hoping to be able to again broadcast the comings and goings of a pair of wild Barn Owls from a farm in Cornwall in 2009. This year however we are planning an improved service and have already visited to fit a new colour/black-and-white camera to the existing nestbox.

We are also hoping to fit a microphone and replace existing computer hardware and software so there will be an audio feed available from the website too. This will provide an opportunity to hear what a pair of wild Barn Owls get up to at a nest site. There's no guarantee of course that the birds will breed, as they did last year, as this is directly linked to prey availability but we've all got our fingers crossed that the Barn Owls will have similar success in 2009. r



Nick Baker, Caroline and Robbie Hill

Photo: Staff

Wings of Change Takes Flight

After fifteen years sterling service telling the story of the decline of the Barn Owl to children across the UK, the Wings of Change DVD was in serious need of an overhaul. So we were delighted when BBC presenter Nick Baker agreed to front our new DVD! Nick is passionate about wildlife and you may recognise him from programmes like 'Nick Baker's Weird Creatures', CBBC Springwatch and the BBC's Really Wild Show.

In late 2006 we began what was to become months of preparation to secure funding for the project, find a film production company, an animator and re-write the storyboard and script. Once all the pre-work was complete, at last a gap appeared in Nick Baker's busy filming schedule. Everything was falling into place and going according to plan ...and then it snowed! The Lennon Legacy field looked beautiful covered in a crisp white blanket of snow. Not what we needed for filming at all!

With everyone on standby, sleepless nights and regular 'inside information' from the Met Office regarding predicted sunny days, filming eventually went ahead across two days of beautiful clear weather with glorious blue skies. Although the crisp, white snow was still underfoot, it was well out of camera shot!

Thanks to the dedication of cameraman Robbie Hill of Hilltribe Productions and the professional presenting skill of Nick Baker, filming was completed well within the

schedule. With some fantastic archive footage, presenter pieces and animation work 'in the can', Hilltribe are now busy collating and editing film footage to create the new 'Wings of Change' story. It will be so exciting to see all the hard work of the previous months come together to tell this well loved story with a fresh new approach. The new DVD will be available in late Spring and will be accompanied by a new schools pack to further extend the whole Barn Owl experience! r

Eco-build Exhibition

The Barn Owl Trust was one of nine conservation organisations exhibiting at this year's event at Earls Court in London between 2nd and 5th March. Stand space was free as the Biodiversity Pavilion was sponsored by Natural England. It seemed the perfect vehicle to launch the Trust's brand new "Planners' Guide" (page 4) which includes details of how to make permanent provision in the roof spaces of dwellings/garages. Every time a rural development fails to make such provision, an opportunity is wasted, so the message is to encourage people to promote biodiversity interests within new builds and conversions.

Over 40,000 advanced bookings were received for the event, equating to approximately 30,000 visitors so let's hope that with such a huge audience, it encourages even more people to consider Barn Owls during developments. r

More BOT News

Radio Tracking Project News

Much has changed since we announced the radio-tracking project in Feedback 40. This is a collaborative volunteer project between Igomango and the Trust. Last summer we fitted transmitters to nine juvenile Barn Owls in nests at four sites in South Devon so we could study fledgling dispersal. Until recently we were still in regular contact with three of the nine birds, but have just lost touch with another one. Of the remaining two, one

seems settled in a Barn Owl Trust nest box, and we are hopeful that it will stay put. The other seems to like the noisier life, deciding to rest up in the eaves of a barn, soon to be converted, on the side of one of the busiest roads in Devon. This is remarkable considering that until recently it was based a few miles away, sitting-pretty inside another BOT nest box at a different farm. It is particularly interesting considering the imminent

danger posed by the major road and we will be checking how it interplays with the road over the night of the next full moon. From the data collected we hope to have a map showing relative dispersal up to March 2009 in the next edition of Feedback. Interestingly we have found a number of the dispersing owls have been using BOT nest boxes which shows their value.

A number of willing volunteers aged 16-25 have been involved in the project and we are very grateful for their efforts. They have spent innumerable hours searching the South Devon countryside following a blip and a prayer using a small box attached to a big aerial. We have gone up church towers, down train tracks, into woodlands and across fields, even up in a microlight. However there is still much to do.

The next stage of the radio-tracking project takes us into Europe covering three countries: Spain, Hungary and the UK simultaneously tracking three different pairs of adult owls. We will be looking at night-time foraging behaviour and relative effects of weather conditions on behaviour at close quarters for a six week period from mid May. We plan to go out nightly for anything up to eight hours and are looking for willing helpers. The project is the first of its kind, and we are all very excited about the potential for very intimate encounters with these majestic creatures. If you would like to get involved please contact Igomango on 07816 978609 or email info@igomango.com

Jack Skuse

Igomango project Manager



Brian Cresswell demonstrates how to use the receiver to find the signal and track the owls. Volunteers have been travelling around South Devon since September listening for the blip.

Photo: Frances Ramsden

Barn Owls and Rural Developments - a New Planners Guide

As a result of the numerous planning-related enquiries that the Trust receives every year, the Conservation Team has been busy preparing two guidance documents for those involved with rural developments.

We have been asked to comment on literally hundreds of planning applications over the years, and seen some appalling cases of neglect from those who should know better. As far back as 1995, the Trust's Barn Conversion Research Project identified the so-called 'knock-on' effect caused by barn conversion works. If the main roost/nest site is lost, Barn Owls are more likely to desert that part of their range entirely, including other nearby sites. However, following a simple set of guidelines can significantly reduce this risk, and ultimately lead to continuous and long-term occupation for

FEEDBACK 41 - SPRING 2009

future generations of Barn Owls.

Unfortunately, experience continues to show that there is a huge gap in the knowledge of planners, applicants and developers in how best to cater for the interests of Barn Owls throughout the development process. The documents we are creating are therefore aimed at all those involved and describe the whole process, from the pre-application stage through validation to permission. We have detailed what needs to happen, in what order, when, how and why.

For applicants and developers we have included detailed information on what exactly needs to be done. There is also a checklist based on survey evidence of what information needs to be collated and submitted as part of their application. For

planners we have included the many legal justifications and government planning policy wording for recommended mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures.

We have even included specimen conditions to be attached to planning consents in those cases where incomplete applications have been registered and validated.

Both documents are due for publication in the near future and they will be available on our website in pdf format. We hope this will be the catalyst which will ensure that all future rural planning applications give due consideration to the welfare of Barn Owls.

Matthew Twigg
Conservation Officer

LLP Update

The LLP (Lennon Legacy Project) continues to be a source of inspiration to all of us here at the Trust. It also continues to attract the volunteers who generously give their time to some of the day-to-day management tasks, essential in maintaining the area as suitable foraging habitat for our resident Barn Owls.

The annual grazing regime commenced again in August 2008 earlier than the previous year. On a walk around, David noticed that one of the cattle had an injured fetlock and so informed the grazier. Some excitement was caused when the grazier told us he thought it might be the result of a snake bite(!) could this be our first adder, but no snakes were subsequently seen. This year fewer cattle were grazed but were kept on for longer as an experiment to see what impact this would have on management of the rough grassland. Although the jury is still out on that, they did rather highlight the stands of Creeping Thistle, which they grazed around rather than on. Works since the autumn have therefore also included manual management of some of the patches of the Creeping Thistle by pulling. Our intention here is not to eradicate all stands of this plant, as it is beneficial to many species of invertebrate including several types of butterfly and moth. If left unchecked



February at the Trust - the office from the LLP

Photo: Frances Ramsden

however, this aggressive species would soon take over. Similarly, various stands of nettle have also had to be managed mechanically to stop them spreading. Other tasks have included some hedge work along the field boundaries and a bit of strimming in Forde Orchard. In December 30 apple, plum and cherry trees of traditional local varieties were ordered for collection and planting next winter. This will be funded by Natural England as part of a 3rd Conservation Plan. A tree blown down across the river in November will need to be removed and the wood chipped for use on the orchard tracks.

and a rather tatty looking Red Admiral flitting amongst our regular Plymouth University volunteers on probably the only mild (dare I say warm?) day in January, on the 28th.

The original polebox, in the part of the field known as Lurge, was replaced with the new design box in November in the hope that the Barn Owls from last year will be back to breed again this year. There is a new slideshow on our website that shows the box going up: <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/infopage.html?id=193>

This year's Bracken Bash is scheduled for the 4th July and is a perfect opportunity to experience the LLP and help out with a practical task. No experience necessary you just need to wield a big stick. See page 2 for more details and hopefully see you there.

Matthew Twiggs
Conservation Officer

Latest on the Pond

As you may remember from Feedback 40, we have been experiencing a number of on-going problems with the ponds, which were originally created for the benefit of wildlife in the autumn/winter of 2006. In particular, the abstraction system from the River Ashburn has been more or less blocked since its creation, the pond liner has ballooned due to ground water levels and has now developed a hole and the bog ponds were washed away soon after they were finished.

Frustratingly, the design consultant was not prepared to enter into dialogue about these apparent design faults so as a last resort the Trust had no other option but to commence proceedings against him in the spring of last year.

Some 9 months later, in December, the design company's insurers engaged a loss adjustor to visit and assess the ponds on their behalf. By the end of January 2009, the results of this visit indicated a partial admission of culpability but did not result in an acceptable resolution being reached. After additional exchanges of paperwork we still await an acceptable resolution. **r**

Our new Owl Hospital was started in the autumn and is due to be completed this March. It will replace the old bird room, which had frankly seen better days. A release aviary attached to the hospital will allow for supported releases in the LLP and free up the mobile aviary for releases elsewhere in the South West. The stone excavated from the site, once sorted, is to be used for a retaining wall and access.

Notable bird species recorded over the autumn and winter period included a juvenile Stonechat in the North Park/Forde Orchard area for a couple of weeks early autumn. Several large mixed flocks of Swallows and House Martins continued through southwards until early October, with an attendant Peregrine following on one lunchtime. The first Redwings appeared briefly at the end of October with a significant fall of thrush species early-November, followed by movements of Siskin and Woodpigeon by mid-month.

Other species of wildlife included a Slow Worm in Kiln Close in September, evidence of an increasing rabbit population along Pennsland Lane over the winter months,

In Memoriam

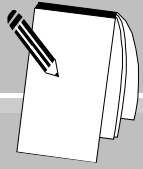
The Trust has received legacies from the estates of the late

Marjorie Mortimer,
May Bocking,
Roy Mills
and Joan Masters

and donations in memory of

Hugh Kerr
Michael Tregear,
and Keith Johnson
Ivy Brock

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



BOT Info

... Dates for your Diary 2009

J Wednesday 15 April

Barn Owl Trust presentation, 'Restoring the Balance' 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 Sunday 17 May

Barn Owl Trust Sponsored Dog event. This is a 'Round-Robin' trip of South Devon by boat, open-topped bus and steam train, all on four legs. Find out more on page 15.

J Thurs 21- Sat 23 May

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

J Tuesday 2nd June

The Barn Owl Trust's presentation, 'Lennon Legacy Project - transforming 26 acres of intensively grazed sheep pasture into 26 acres of Barn Owl Heaven' for Kingskerswell Natural History Society, at Kingskerswell Leisure Centre. 7.30pm start.

J Thurs 4 - Sat 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

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 (01364 653026). 10am start.

J Saturday 18 July

HAPPY BIRTHDAY BARN OWL TRUST! Come and join us for a party in the LLP field to celebrate our coming of age. See page 10 for further details.

J Wednesday 26 August

Join the Trust for a fun fundraising day at Exmoor Zoo, Bratton Fleming, near Barnstaple. We will have a lucky-dip, sales items and our usual information leaflets.

J Sat 5 - Sun 6 September

Dorset County Show. Dorchester Show. Come along and meet members of our conservation team.

J Thursday 17 September

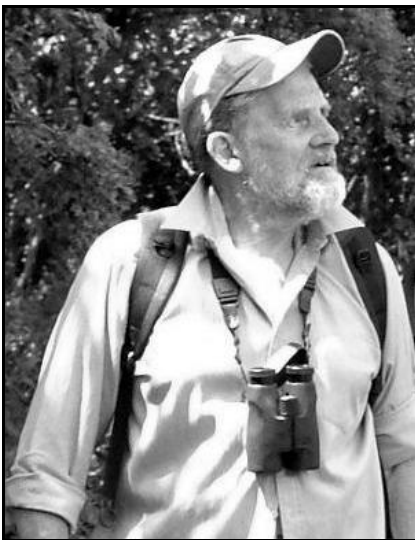
'Restoring the Balance', a Barn Owl Trust talk and slideshow for the Moreton Women's Institute at the Moretonhampstead Community Club. 7.30pm start.

J Friday 16 October

Barn Owl Trust Annual General Celebration at Paignton Zoo. 7.30pm.

John Woodland 1929 - 2008

John 2004 Photo: Frances Ramsden



John was passionate about wildlife and birds in particular. When he retired in 1990 he had the time to indulge this passion and became an active member of the Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society (DBWPS) and was the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) Regional Representative for Devon. He shared his passion with enthusiasm and is responsible for encouraging many of the amateur and professional conservationists and bird recorders around today.

He first contacted the Trust back in 1992 and was a staunch supporter, using his

roles with BTO and DBWPS to promote the Barn Owl Trust with both farmers and birders. In 1999 he encouraged DBWPS to financially support our North Devon Barn Owl Scheme and our East Devon Scheme in 2000. He also spent hours trailing our conservation staff and filmed and produced the classic movie 'Behind the scenes at the Barn Owl Trust' in 2000. Between 2005-2008 John and Jen ran an annual moth trap in the Trust's LLP field and they were the feature of our Focus on Friends article in Feedback 37, Spring 2007.

Born in Battle in Sussex John was evacuated to Teignmouth in 1940. After school he began farming and in 1949 went to the Sudan to grow cotton. In 1956 he returned to the UK and using the money he saved bought a farm in Sussex. In 1961 he married Jen and they had 3 children: Jackie, Jim and Joanna. In 1967 they sold the farm, bought a caravan and a Land Rover and spent the next two years travelling overland to India. On their return, they spent two years in Looe running a coffee shop and then sold up and bought a yacht. After a year of living on the water at Dartmouth they sailed off to the Mediterranean for a couple of years. 1974 saw the family living in Dorset.

Before long however John took a job with Oxfam that had him travelling the World again. Over the next nine years he went to Uganda, Turkey, Bangladesh, Somalia and Indonesia as a 'disaster trouble-shooter'. He then returned to Dorset and spent two years working from home as a self employed woodworker, making amongst other things custom furniture. In 1985 they moved to Dunsford in Devon where they bought the local shop and post office, running it until retirement in 1990. They became part of the local community and to celebrate the millennium John recorded a year in the life of the village on video.

After being diagnosed with cancer in 2004 and receiving treatment John stayed relatively healthy until August last year. He was working on the Devon Bird Atlas and co-ordinating volunteers almost until he died on December 18th. He was buried with a small private ceremony at a woodland site. John would have been 80 on 7th April and had planned to have a big birthday party. On 5th April his family held the party to celebrate John's life and to allow his friends and neighbours to share their memories of this much loved man and his incredible life. John was, of course, there in spirit.

q

Bird News

Owl casualties

Following an LOE (Live Owl Emergency) call from a member of the public, I went to a house where the owners had found a Tawny Owl in their garden being 'mobbed' by crows. They had been able to catch the bird quite easily – always an indication that there is something wrong with a wild animal – and had it suitably contained. The bird was extremely emaciated and unfortunately died before any treatment could be given.

Another LOE call was received about a young Barn Owl found on the floor of a barn, that may have been there for a few days. We collected the bird, which was underweight and at the same time we checked the nestbox to make sure that there were no other youngsters in trouble. On approaching the box two fledglings flew out, they were fully feathered and flying well, indicating that they would be dispersing shortly. This meant that by the time the youngster gained weight the other two would have dispersed from the nest and the adults would have stopped taking food to the nest.

So the search was on for an area with abundant ideal Barn Owl habitat - rough, tussocky grassland, nestbox provision, no other Barn Owls about and not near any major roads. There should be someone willing to provide food for up to and even maybe more than five weeks and who has enough freezer space for that amount of food! We found a possible location and went along to have a look – it really was the perfect place for a Barn Owl release. There were 100 acres of ideal habitat, a suitable barn near which the mobile aviary could be sited and where a nestbox could be provided. There was a lovely family including a rather over-excited Labrador puppy - eager to help! The release was successful and it's great to think of that lucky juvenile flying free, hunting over all that 'vole rich' long grass!

Two Barn Owls were brought to the Trust from the RSPCA before Christmas. We have been monitoring their progress and had hoped to release them together as a pair. Unfortunately one of them is not sufficiently recovered from a wing injury to be released yet. We will be going ahead with a supported release from the mobile aviary for the other owl in the next few weeks and have found a great site with a willing volunteer.

An adult Barn Owl was brought to the Trust by a member of the public. This bird was underweight and spent a few weeks here until it regained a healthy weight. It was soon 'fit enough' to be returned to the wild

and as it hadn't been in captivity for very long it was 'cold' released where it had been found (no need to use the mobile aviary).

A Barn Owlet came to the Trust from the veterinary hospital. It was very emaciated and although it started to eat well, it went downhill rapidly and unfortunately died at a weight of only 200gms; we would expect a healthy bird of this age to weigh over 300gms.

A Tawny Owl was passed onto the Barn Owl Trust with suspected trauma to the right hand side of its head and it had one eye closed. It also had some superficial wounds to its talons. Although initially we thought this bird might have some long-term problems it made a remarkable recovery and was able to be returned to the wild. It was taken back to where it had been found by the person who originally picked it up. Wherever possible Tawny Owls should be returned to where they were found as they are highly territorial and build up extensive knowledge of the area of woodland that they inhabit.

The two Tawny Owls, reported on in the last edition of Feedback, have at last been released. They had spent some considerable time here waiting for their beaks to grow back properly. We released them here at Waterleat, amidst the lovely woods, from our Tawny Owl Release Aviary. This aviary is a static aviary with an opening roof. After having carefully checked them over, the birds were BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) ringed and weighed. As they had already been in the release aviary they knew where to find the food and, as soon as we had a good weather forecast, we lifted the top of the aviary at night and left it propped open. The birds were eager to get back out into the wild but returned for food for a while after release. They have been seen several times since in the trees near to the office and even on the top of the aviaries here!

A juvenile Barn Owl was brought to the Barn Owl Trust from an organisation in Cornwall. As this bird was deemed fit enough to be returned to the wild and did not have an established 'home range'; we released it from the mobile aviary here on the Lennon Legacy Project land. If the Barn Owl had been an adult we would have



Photo: David Ramsden

arranged for it to be released where it was found, as adult Barn Owls are highly faithful to their home ranges. They also use the same roost and nest sites throughout their lives. Interestingly, not only are these individual birds loyal to their sites but other Barn Owls coming into the area will also choose these established locations. So these sites seem to have a universal appeal to Barn Owls; people may think that they have had the same Barn Owls for twenty years when in fact it would have been a succession of birds.

Sadly we had a report from a member of the public who had found a dead Barn Owl that had a BTO ring on its leg. From the ringing information we knew that this bird was one of two that had been successfully released from the mobile aviary in North Devon. This bird had originally come to the Trust from the RSPCA who had received it from a veterinary practice where the bird had been for some months but they had no finding details. After its release the Barn Owl had survived in the wild for four months and so initially it must have been hunting successfully, but the actual cause of death is unknown.

These beautiful birds are faced with so many hazards, all of which are man made, including: being unable to find sufficient areas of good hunting ground (rough, tussocky grassland), being killed on major roads, drowning in water troughs, flying into overhead wires and poisoning. Starvation is thought to be the main cause of mortality.

Sanctuary health checks

All the birds here and in our foster homes have had their annual health checks, which they all passed with flying colours!

Julie Matthews
Conservation Officer

Our New Owl Hospital...

As regular readers will know, we've been dealing with owl casualties for over 20 years and last autumn we started building our first 'Owl Hospital' to replace our Bird Room (built in 1997) and our old hospital aviary. Well, after six months hard work we're very pleased to say it's almost finished and by the time you read this it should be fully functioning. I'd also like to say a really big THANK YOU to you – yes you, our supporters – because it's your financial support that has paid the bulk of the cost and thank you also to the three grant-giving charities that have supported the project.



The new owl hospital will be officially opened on Thursday 26th March

Photos: Pete Webb, Jasmin Ramsden, Julie Matthews, Anne Særcombe and Frances Ramsden

Construction started in October 2008 when local company TT Buildings arrived to extend our timber-framed barn by 24 feet – 12 feet of which would become our new Bird Room and a further 12 feet to house a range of small 'hospital' aviaries. They also laid the foundations for a large flight/release aviary. We were amazed how fast the building was erected and before you could say, "live owl emergency" the contractors were off-site and the shell of our hospital-to-be was complete. We now needed time to actually create the hospital itself – the trouble is, TIME, the one thing we never have enough of. What with real live owls to look after, our training courses to run, 85 job applications to read, the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme to plan, farms to visit, boxes to erect, a phone that hardly ever stops ringing, and a million and one other things, spare TIME was non-existent. We needed help. "HELP!" Help came in the form of Jasmin, a twenty year-old with a real flair for woodwork (and a lot cheaper than an experienced carpenter!). As it turned out, with minimal instruction, Jasmin could turn her hand to pretty much anything – plumbing, wiring, painting, laminating, and joinery, as well as aviary building. Multi-tasking and adaptability are

just what BOT staff need! (one of the things about working here is that you can NEVER tell what's going to happen next).

By the end of November Jasmin had almost finished the three small hospital aviaries - built within the open bay of the new barn-extension. These will house birds in rehab, a kind of 'half way house' between living in a box and going into a big aviary.

By Xmas the big flight/release aviary was close to being finished and at 24 feet by 12 feet and over 11 feet high, this was by far the biggest thing Jasmin had ever built! Once the aviaries were built she turned her attention to the interior of what was to become our new Bird Room. This would be where birds were assessed and treated and where birds would recuperate following surgery at the Veterinary Hospital in Plymouth. The key to a good bird room is in the design detail and eleven years use of our old Bird Room had given us lots of ideas: plenty of space, plenty of clear easy-wipe surfaces, plenty of sockets, plenty of cupboard space, really good lighting, and a

treatment table that we could stand either side of. Rather like a vet's consultation room but MUCH bigger.

At the end of February local contractor Keiran Fitzgerald from Bushwackers (who did such a great job for us last year building hedges and walls in Forde Orchard and North Park) returned to create a natural stone-faced bank in front of the hospital. As I write, the Bird Room is receiving its finishing touches. We still have to create perches, roosting boxes, and feeding places in the aviaries. Also, we still need to do the outside plumbing and set up the outside lights, but WE'RE NEARLY THERE! A hospital dedicated to the treatment of owls. What a luxury! Let's hope the owls appreciate all the effort that's gone into it! Of course they won't, BUT at least we can give them the very best in state-of-the-art owl housing. And good housing is an extremely important element of good treatment.

And now for our next project... Two new MOBILE RELEASE AVIARIES. I wonder who we could get to build them for us?



This end of the barn was where the extension would go. Before construction could start the site had to be cleared .

â



It wasn't long before they hit bedrock and had to bring a rock breaker in. This was really noisy but fortunately didn't go on for too long. â



The rock was moved, sorted by staff and volunteers and stored for later use. Once the site was cleared the building went up really fast. æ

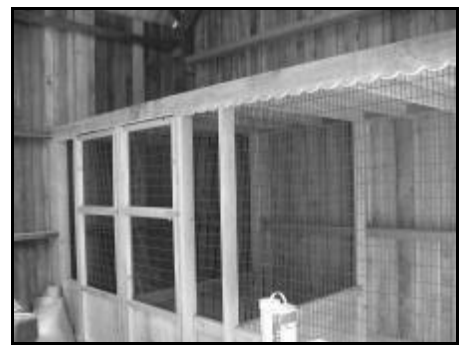
...the Story in Pictures



In two weeks we had the shell of what was to become the new hospital with a concrete floor that extended into the area for the release aviary. â



Next came the hospital aviaries in the open section of the barn. There are three to house birds once they leave the treatment room. â



In the open section of the barn, these aviaries provided a sheltered space for the birds to start to move around before they are ready for a larger flight. ç



The release aviary framework was designed to provide a sheltered space for recovering birds. â



The back was covered with corrugated sheet and then lined with FSC ply. The back was also roofed. â



All of the materials had to be carried up the uneven slope. By December the wire



The hospital was a dark ply lined room that needed to become a bright, light and easy to clean space. â



We insulated the floor and bought new freezers to make the new facility as energy efficient as possible. â



Handyman Tim and Jasmin - once the electrics were done they could see the light at the end of the Project ! ç



Kieran arrived on the 25th February to start the wall and the access path to the new hospital, This was where we would use all the stone that had been sorted. â



By the 3rd March the wall was well underway and then it rained.... Actually it poured. However we were still on schedule for completion. â



5th March - almost there now just the access path, fence and a few other finishing touches to do before the birds can move in. ç

Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme

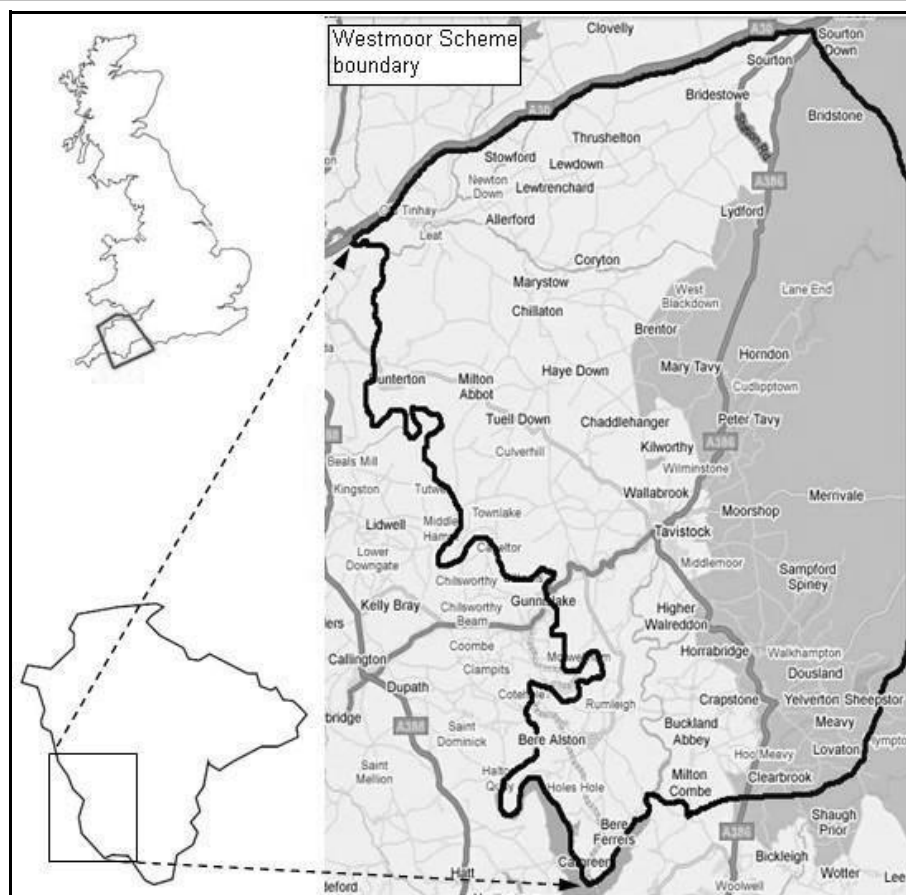
In 1993 and 2003 the Barn Owl Trust along with the Devon Bird Watching & Preservation Society carried out county Barn Owl surveys in Devon and the Trust produced Devon Barn Owl Survey Reports. Although the 2003 survey estimated the county population to be 350-470 pairs (an increase of 42% since the 1993 Devon Barn Owl Survey Report), West Devon was a noticeable exception. The 2003 survey flagged up an 87.5% decline of Barn Owls in the West Devon area since the previous survey. This prompted the Trust to carry out a further survey of the West Devon area; the Westmoor Barn Owl Survey, which was done by Paul Winney and Chiara Bettaga in 2006-7.

The number of nest records between West Dartmoor and the Tamar fell from 16 in 1993 to only 2 in 2003. The Westmoor Survey carried out in 2006-7 recorded 4 nest sites. Whilst this does show a slight increase between the 2003 Devon Barn Owl Survey and the 2006-7 Westmoor Survey, it was by no means a significant rise in Barn Owl numbers and therefore highlighted the need for a practical conservation scheme in the area. The Barn Owl Trust has carried out similar schemes in the South Hams (1997), Teignbridge (1998), North Devon (1999) and East Devon (2000). These areas have all seen an increase in Barn Owl numbers since these schemes were implemented and evidence suggests that the schemes were largely responsible for the observed increases.

The South Hams was the first district to have what was then an innovative Barn Owl Scheme. It consisted of carrying out practical and advisory work at all known nest sites (current and historical) in a Local Authority district and then monitoring the outcome. Each scheme lasted for 2 ½ to 3 ½ years.



Hopefully the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme will make Barn Owls a far more common sight for the residents of West Devon
Photo: Guy Walters



The boundary of the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme is in black

The boundary for the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme is the A30 to the north, the River Tamar to the west, the northern outskirts of Plymouth to the south and the uplands of West Dartmoor to the west [see map above].

Reasons for the decline

The low Barn Owl population in the Westmoor area of Devon is thought to be mainly due to lack of good Barn Owl habitat and lack of nest sites. A significant part of the Westmoor area covers the lower slopes of West Dartmoor where historically the Barn Owl population has been low due to lack of suitable foraging areas for the birds. This is due to the topography of Dartmoor as the land lends itself to fairly intensive grazing. The Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme aims to secure and increase existing breeding sites by delivering a package of measures at 23 sites. This will include advising landowners on habitat management and safer rodenticide use, installing floats in water troughs to reduce incidence of Barn Owls drowning and erecting deep nestboxes to either provide a potential nest site or to act as alternative provision where a nest site already exists. Habitat advisory work and/or nestbox erection will also be

implemented at up to 100 other sites where a full package of measures is appropriate.

There is a major challenge to increasing Barn Owl numbers in the Westmoor area; this area is sandwiched between two major roads – the A30 to the north and the A38 to the south – which together offer a significant threat to the Barn Owl population. A study into the effects of major roads on Barn Owl numbers was carried out by the Barn Owl Trust and the results were produced in *Barn Owls and Major Roads: results and recommendations from a 15-year research project*.

In Devon, Barn Owls used to inhabit traditional farm buildings such as linhays, shippens, corn barns and root houses. Alternatives (derelict houses, hollow trees etc.) are very few and modern farm buildings without the provision of a nestbox are unsuitable. Research has highlighted the ongoing loss of old farm buildings (through demolition, decay, and conversion) and the extremely negative effect of the loss of occupied sites on the remaining Barn Owl population.

Hopes for the future

The UK target for the species is “to maintain present range and numbers and seek a

Bits & Pieces

Rehab Upgrade



The old mobile aviary has done great service but it has seen better days
Photo: Staff

It was 12 years ago in 1997 when our innovative mobile aviary first hit the road. It was designed to enable gradual release of rehabilitated casualties in their home area. A Barn Owl's knowledge of its home range has a lot of 'survival value', therefore releasing where it was found is usually the best option. The aviary has been used extensively all over Devon and Cornwall, been borrowed by other wildlife rehabilitators and even made a guest appearance in the Blue Peter studio; we got some strange looks driving it through London!. Built by long-term volunteer Derrick Crocker the aviary is based on an old caravan chassis which is now very rusty.

extremely fortunate to receive funding from the William and Patricia Venton Charitable Trust to cover all the costs to enable us to build a brand new aviary on a new chassis which should last many years. What could be better than a new mobile aviary? Well the answer is two; at busy times of year we often find owls queuing to use this unique facility. A grant from the Marjorie Coote Animal Charity Fund has allowed us to buy a 2nd chassis and build two aviaries simultaneously. We expect to have both new aviaries in service by the summer. r

Tyto Tagus News

In October 2008 The Portuguese TytoTagus Project (Feedback 39), organised an Owl Nestbox Day which was featured on the national Portuguese TV Station "SIC". The Barn Owl Trust supported the event by providing information on the construction and erection of nestboxes.

Farmers and land owners from the Tagus floodplains were the target of the event. They heard David Johnson, Director of the Global Owl Project talking about the benefits for landowners of having Barn Owls on their farmland and encouraging efforts towards species conservation. Several Tyto Tagus volunteers helped build four nestboxes, two of which were installed on the same day in rural buildings located in Northern Lezíria.

It was a busy time for the Project as they also arranged a Seminar, 'Owls in Science, Culture and Conservation' which took place at the University of Evora. They were joined by participants from northern to southern Portugal and from the island of Madeira. An afternoon session allowed the opportunity for a discussion on a strategy for the conservation of nocturnal birds of prey in Portugal. r

...Westmoor Continued

continued from page 10

substantial population increase by at least one half by the year 2015'. The Devon Biodiversity Action Plan denotes the Barn Owl as a high priority and it has its own species action plan. If we are to hope to achieve the national UK target and meet the Devon county targets, effective action is needed at a local level.

The funding we have secured will cover the cost of running the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme for almost two years and by the time the Scheme is completed 23 sites will have received the full package of Barn Owl conservation measures, 50 sites will have received habitat advice and 50 sites will have had one or more Barn Owl nestboxes erected. Best of all, thanks to the funding, all this can be done for farmers and landowners free of charge – although donations are always welcomed!

The Barn Owl Trust is asking the public to let them know of any sightings of Barn Owls within the boundary of the Westmoor Scheme. We would particularly like to hear from any farmers and landowners who have seen Barn Owls or who have historically had Barn Owls nesting or roosting but have not seen them in recent years and we also want to know if they would be interested in having a nestbox erected and/or habitat advice.

Keep an eye out for further reports on the progress of the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme in future issues of Feedback.

With a lot of hard work and enough landowner support the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme will have a really positive effect on Barn Owl numbers in this area of West Devon. r

When something like this needs replacing the Trust applies to grant giving charitable trusts for financial support. We have been

Meeting Room

After many years of coping in six small rooms, we're now hoping to increase our office space with the addition of our first-ever 'meeting room'. Believe it or not, the Barn Owl Trust now has a grand total of fourteen staff (yes 14!) and by modern day standards many would say our work environment is decidedly 'cramped'. It's actually rather cosy and as long as we all stay firmly seated at our desks it's just about adequate. The problem arises when we have visitors or all try to fit into one room for a meeting – suddenly it's a real squash – hence the idea for a dedicated meeting room.

With generous FOC help from local architects 'A-tech Design' we've produced drawings of the proposed extension and are just about to apply for planning consent. Once over that hurdle we'll start looking for the funds to build it. Anyone feeling generous? Watch this space! r

Your 21st Birthday Invitation

Come and join us on Saturday 18th July from 11am – 4pm for a party in the LLP field to celebrate our coming of age. The event is for Friends and supporters of the Trust and you are invited to bring a picnic lunch and share the day with past and present trustees, staff and volunteers. Forde Orchard will provide a beautiful setting for a series of musicians to perform using our mobile exhibition unit as a stage. Hopefully the sun will shine on us but rest assured we will have a contingency plan in place if not!

As well as the opportunity to enjoy the LLP field, a picnic and some music, there will be guided walks taking place around the field to enable guests to see first hand the changes eight years of management for conservation have brought to the land. It would be great if people taking the guided walk would collect sponsorship to support the Trust- every little helps! Just use the sponsor form on the back of your enclosed Party leaflet. To assist us with planning, admission to the party is by invitation only, so if you would like to come along please contact the office by telephone, email or complete the form on the enclosed leaflet to request your invitation and get more details. We really hope to see you in July so we can celebrate 21 years of Barn Owl conservation together. r

Team News

Goodbyes...

Once again there are staff changes here at the Trust to tell you about. After 7 months with the conservation team Anne Sercombe left us in February and Tatiana Cant completed her 12 month contract with the admin team at the end of March. Two lots of interviewing in October and in February brought us new conservation staff who introduce themselves here. The biggest change for those who know the Trust and for the trustees, staff and volunteers, is the retirement, after more than a decade of working here, of Office Manager and co-editor of Feedback Sandra Reardon. She will be sorely missed...



Sandra in 2001 Photo: Frances Ramsden

After around thirteen years working for the Barn Owl Trust I have finally made the decision that it's time to retire. I have seen so many changes over the years; when I started working for just one day a week the Trust had three computers and I often had to wait for my turn to use one of them. Valerie, the other part-time admin person, and I shared a space no larger than a cupboard and the office was open for just two days a week. We all had to turn our hands to a bit of everything, aided by a very faithful and long-suffering band of volunteers wherever possible. I remember reading the sign on the wall in the loo, which housed a portable chemical 'porta-loo' on my first day – it read as follows: 'If you use this toilet you may be asked to empty it'. Fortunately I never was - or maybe I wouldn't have stayed for thirteen years.

To bring you up to date: we now have two flushing loos and a shower, 12 employees and enough computers so that no-one needs to share. We also have a beautiful field full of rough grass, lots of brilliant wildlife, nesting Barn Owls and a very attractive barn full of innumerable boxes and nooks and crannies to house pretty much every bird and insect that happens to pass by.

Before becoming Office Manager I ran our adoption scheme for quite a few

years and really enjoyed corresponding with so many of our supporters and it's great to see that many of them are still taking an interest in what we do and giving us their support.

Jackie has been working alongside me for around six weeks and I'm absolutely sure that she'll be an excellent replacement for me and she might even spend less time swearing at her computer.

I have been privileged to meet a lot of lovely people over the years and quite a lot of lovely owls too! Although I will no longer be an employee after the end of March you can rest assured that I will still be stuffing your Feedback into its envelope and generally making a nuisance of myself from time to time at Waterleat. After all, it's become part of my life.

Sandra Reardon
Office Manager

...and hellos...

The reigns of Office Manager will be taken up by Jackie Atkinson:

I started work with the Trust at the beginning of February as a part-time Admin Officer, under the watchful eye of Sandra Reardon who hopes to retire very soon, at which time I will take on the role of Office Manager. Initially my aim is to get a basic insight into how all the various processes work within the office so that I can help out if and when the need arises. Over the next few weeks I will be accompanying staff to talks, school visits and a BOESS training day so that I can get a holistic view of the Trust's work. I have experience in office management and a good knowledge of office work; I look forward to being able to put this to good use in my work here.

I have lived in South Devon all my life but until now have not had any experience of working with birds or animals so this position is opening up a whole new interest for me. Having worked in built-up areas before it is



Jackie Atkinson Photo: Pete Webb

great to come to work and be able to see all the wildlife going on around me, especially all the birds (not seagulls or pigeons) feeding on the bird table right outside my window. I look forward to getting to know more about them and the environment needed to enable Owls to prosper and how I can help to make this happen.

So far I have found the Trust a nice friendly place to work and look forward to a long and happy stay. I will remember my first day working for the Trust, as it was accompanied by the worst snow our area has seen in 18 years, (according to the weather man) making my trip to and from the office interesting.

Jackie Atkinson
'Office Manager in waiting'



Maxine Chavner Photo: Julie Matthews

Hi, I'm Maxine and started at the Trust as an Assistant Conservation Officer in early November. I live in Torbay with my partner and our 4 cats and I completed my BSc (Hons) Wildlife Conservation at Plymouth University in May 2008. Whilst studying at university, and prior to starting this job, I volunteered with the Field Conservation and Research Department at Paignton Zoo. I set up two research projects of my own - a meadow restoration project using Yellow Rattle and an investigation into the effects of water temperature and pH on the freshwater invertebrates in Slapton Ley.

I initially heard about the Trust when a friend of mine, Paul Winney, completed his placement year here. He had a fantastic year and so when I saw the ACO position advertised at the Trust, I jumped at the chance to apply. Since starting I have been out to various locations in Devon to erect nest boxes, been involved in Barn Owl welfare and rehabilitation, carried out practical conservation work, taken on the role of Health & Safety Officer, worked on the website content, dealt with a variety of enquires both by email and telephone, done a First Aid course and 4x4 driver training course. Most of my time currently is spent working on our new Barn Owl scheme (see full article on page 10). I am also lined up to do a trailer-training

More Team News

course so I can take the Mobile Release Aviary to wherever it may need to go!

I am originally from Coventry but have lived in several different places including Perth in Western Australia. On returning to the UK, I made the decision to return to university (after having originally gone in 1994!) to do the degree that has allowed me to have a career in conservation. My partner and I also made the decision to move to the South-West - somewhere I have visited hundreds of times and have family - to be near the sea and a plentiful supply of fresh air! Since moving here in 2004 I have taken up surfing and love to get in the sea regardless of the season. I also enjoy yoga, kayaking, skiing, walking, gardening, listening to loads of music and reading all the natural history literature I can get my hands on! At the weekend I can either be found where there is surf or wandering along the South West Coast Path or somewhere estuarine with my 'bins' in hand, ogling the wildlife. I am immensely passionate about and endlessly fascinated by the natural world and am relishing 'doing my bit' for Barn Owl conservation and meeting lots of interesting folk along the way!

Maxine Chavner
Assistant Conservation Officer



Stuart Baker Photo: Pete Webb

I'm Stuart and I started with the Trust at the beginning of March. I grew up in Northampton and moved to Aberystwyth in Mid Wales in 1996. After eight years there I spent the last four years in Cambridge. I've only lived in Plymouth since August 2008 and I already feel completely at home in Devon. Being between the sea and the moors is fantastic. I graduated from Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge last year with a zoology degree, and I've spent most of my time since then working at Living Coasts Zoo in Torquay as a presenter and penguin patroller. I was sad to leave, but swapping penguins for owls doesn't sound like a bad deal. I can't wait to get involved in everything with the Barn Owl Trust, and I'm particularly looking forward to carrying out more hands-on conservation work. I have always had a keen interest in

animals of all types and I share my home with two lizards, ten snakes of various species, and assorted invertebrates including a scorpion, a giant centipede and about thirty tarantulas. I'm currently busy trying to establish a trio of cockroach colonies. By the time you read this there may well be more! I'm looking forward to exploring the West Country, and can't wait to get started in my new job.

Stuart Baker
Assistant Conservation Officer

Jasmin Ramsden joined the team in October on a short-term contract to build the Owl Hospital facilities and aviaries. With that now completed she is back for another short-term contract to build our new mobile aviaries.



Jasmin Photo: Frances Ramsden

I started working for the Trust in October 2008. As well as my building work I also join the conservation team for practical workdays in the Lennon Legacy Project field. I was previously working as a chef, but decided on a career change after developing my DIY skills at home and through helping out my parents and friends.

I've really enjoyed seeing the Owl Hospital come together and I am looking forward to the new challenges posed by building the mobile aviaries. In my free time I like to write and play music, spend time outside in the garden, and play computer games. I have two cats, Manny and Bernard.

Jasmin Ramsden
Construction

...and now Part-time

I have had two marvellous years working full-time here at the Barn Owl Trust and have recently decided to go part-time. I hope to eventually be able to work from home engaged in an animal related project. I will be forever grateful to the Barn Owl Trust for giving me the wonderful opportunity of working with such amazingly beautiful creatures, and amongst such a dedicated and committed team. I will still be giving the 'Wings of Change' school talks and I will certainly miss the privilege of spending so much time in this rare bird's mysterious world.

Julie Matthews
Conservation Officer

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle



Payments for cartridge and mobile phone recycling are now very slow as so many other charities are running similar schemes but the total raised since 2003 is now over £1,671. Anyone wanting to recycle ink cartridges and phones to raise funds for the Trust can do it directly with Redeem plc or EAH Recycling, details are available on the Green Links page on our website, or by sending them to us. Please ensure you select us as the recipient/beneficiary if you do it directly. We still send out envelopes for recycling these items in all our new Friends and Adoption packs. Please ask if you'd like us to send you some.

A number of supporters now send used stamps directly to Robert Murray Stamp Shop on our behalf, PLEASE trim them with a small border of 5-8mm. If Foreign and British Commemorative are separated out they're worth 8 to 10 times more but please mark clearly on the outside 'Foreign and/or Commemorative Stamps enclosed'. There is a link with more details from our Green

pages on the web site. We are still recycling used foreign and commemorative stamps from here; please keep sending them.

We continue to source recycled supplies of stationery and sales goods with continued success. Our biggest recycling scheme is the fuel for our vehicles, which uses waste cooking oil. This is much better than using vegetable oil made from plants grown by cutting down forests. Three of our vehicles have now been successfully using Bio-fuel for 2 years. We are still adding links and recycling information to our web site under 'Green Links' and for any supporters who are interested in recycling it is well worth a look.

Thank you all for your continued support and for helping in a small way to preserve our planet's dwindling resources. Remember the 3 R's - **Reduce, Reuse and Recycle**

Pete Webb
Recycling Admin

Other Barn Owl News

Urban owls in Malaysia

Chong Leong Puan from Malaysia writes to tell us about the influx of urban Barn Owls in his area:

'It was just after dinner, a series of harsh and familiar calls in my neighbourhood had gotten my attention. Recently, the call is being uttered so often that I have heard it every single night over the last twelve months and even several times throughout the night before people have nodded off in their dreams. The familiar call is the unmistakable sound of a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba javanica*).

I live in the border of Kuala Lumpur, a typical residential area near the city that is congregated with brick houses, although some wooden ones still remain. Can it be possible that the Barn Owl has chosen to live in my area? Well, considering the consistent calling at night, it is most likely the bird is living somewhere close by or at least this area is part of his hunting range. This is further confirmed with increasing sightings. In one occasion just after dusk, five birds were seen perched on top of a five storey building. So, why this area is being selected?

Looking back, the Malaysian Barn Owl was believed to have originated from Java or Sumatra and moved into Peninsular Malaysia in the late 1800s and was later introduced to northern Borneo. Unlike their temperate counterparts, which encounter seasonal disparity in food supply, Barn Owls in the tropics may produce two to three clutches in a year with a higher survival rate than that of temperate regions. The expanse of agricultural lands created a boom in the rodent population and hence the Barn Owl rapidly multiplied despite

being first considered as a vagrant. Barn Owls are widely distributed in many parts of the world and they are often associated with open country, cultivation and sometimes urban habitats. They live in old chimneys, spire of churches, garret, loft and ledge within buildings and as their name implies, in barns surrounded by farmlands that support prey populations for them to feed on. In Malaysia, provided that nest boxes are available for them to roost and breed they are found mostly in paddy fields and oil palm plantations where rodents that they prey on are abundant. They also roost in well-concealed tree stands, hollow trees and limestone caves, if available.

With the high breeding and surviving rate, one question arises: where do all the new recruited individuals go? Well, some may choose to stay in the plantations depending on carrying capacity of an area. As studies have shown that Barn Owls are less territorial with overlapping hunting ranges, while others may search for new homes. Do they also perform well in urban areas?

In urban areas it is very hard to find natural structures such as big holes in trees and rock faces. However, finding suitable roosting and nesting sites where the birds can hide away such as derelict buildings and towers or even ones in use with access for the birds (windows or ventilation slits) is not impossible. It seems that getting food is not a problem for the nocturnal birds, the heaps of garbage discarded daily, local drain systems and underground tunnels with



An adult Malaysian Barn Owl in the hand, it looks quite different from our own *Tyto alba alba*
Photo: Chong Leong Puan

food debris constantly being washed into the channels have provided a perfect environment for rats to thrive. Thus, Barn Owls may impose certain pressure on the rodents in urban areas if they are able to build up sufficient numbers.

Although many questions remain unanswered, one thing is certain - Tonight the Barn Owl takes over the gloomy night and practises its magnificent hunting skill again.' **q**

Wealthy Waterloo

Waterloo (a captive bred Barn Owl) originally came to the Trust in June 2006 when his keeper was diagnosed as terminally ill. Due to a head injury he cannot fly properly and spends all of his time either on the floor or on a low perch. First placed in one of our foster homes Waterloo returned here in May 2007 when his foster mother became concerned about the amount of time he spent on the ground. He now lives in our disabled owl aviary and in excessively wet weather if he chooses to sit out in the rain he can get rather soggy and looks a bedraggled and sorry sight! During the last spell of very damp weather in mid-January we had to put him in our Bird Room under the heat lamp for 2 nights and took the opportunity to weigh him and give him a quick once-over; he weighed in at a very healthy 330g.

We recently received a donation specifically for Waterloo from the Waterloo Foundation and he briefly became our wealthiest Barn Owl ever, our very first Owl to receive a specific donation from a Charitable Trust. With his consent and that of the Waterloo Foundation the funds have been put towards the construction cost of our new Owl Hospital (see Page 8), Waterloo can benefit from this every time it rains heavily!! **q**

Hannibal from Heligan Update

We have recently had an update on Hannibal (the Barn Owl) from Eco-Watch based at Heligan in Cornwall. This Barn Owl was the infamous BBC Springwatch chick hatched in 2007 who ate its sibling, broke its leg, recuperated here at the Barn Owl Trust and was successfully released back at Heligan. He was joined by a female in April 2008 who laid eggs but unfortunately these were abandoned. He has been seen regularly throughout the winter and in November a mystery Barn Owl appeared causing quite a stir; this bird is thought to be a male and was using the nest box as a frequent roost site. They managed to avoid

each other for a while but then an encounter resulted in a huge fight with the 'new' owl being the victor! They have come across each other since with Hannibal being in the nest box and the other owl standing guard outside. Again conflict ensued with Hannibal being chased by the other owl. To make it even more tense, a female turned up at the box on 11th January and she and Hannibal have been seen inside the box preening each other in the last week or so. The 'new' Barn Owl is still in the area.... We look forward to following their progress and will include an update in our next edition of Feedback.. **q**

Supporters News

Supermarket Sweep!

We were delighted to receive a cheque from the Sidmouth branch of Waitrose supermarket as part of their 'Community Matters' regular giving initiative. Customers nominate organisations to be supported and put tokens, given each time they shop, into collecting boxes. At the end of the month the money, donated by Waitrose is shared out proportionally between the three nominated organisations for that month.

Caroline Lewis, Publicity Officer for the Trust said, "It's fantastic that Waitrose and their customers decided to support the Barn Owl Trust. As well as receiving a donation towards our work, the scheme also helps to generate awareness which is so important for a relatively small charity like us."

Initiatives like 'Community Matters' are a great way of supporting the Trust. **If you know of a similar scheme near you, please nominate us. You really can make a difference!** r



Caroline Lewis and store deputy manager John Pike.

Photo: Margaret EdwardsHughes

Sponsored Dog Challenge 17th May

To celebrate 21 years of Barn Owl conservation, this year our four legged friends have really 'upped the ante!'. Not content with simply walking, this year our faithful companions will be challenging themselves by taking a steam train, a boat trip and an open top bus ride as well as walking! Megan the golden retriever and Hugo the cocker spaniel will be undertaking a 'Round Robin' trip of South Devon to raise money for Barn Owl conservation.

Please support our dogs as they undertake this challenge by filling in and returning the sponsor form enclosed.

Details of the challenge and an on-line donation page can also be found on our website www.barnowltrust.org.uk. We really hope to have a fantastic day publicising the Barn Owl Trust and raising record sponsorship at the same time! We are really grateful to the Paignton and Dartmouth Steam Railway for supporting this event. Check out www.paignton-steamrailway.co.uk to find out more about the journey our dogs will be taking. There will be some great pictures of our dogs' adventure on our website after the event too! Please, please sponsor our dogs and make this a really worthwhile event. r

The perfect Easter gift ...

Cuddly owlet complete with its own nestbox for personalising with name, owner and birthday. Plus a hidden chocolate Easter surprise inside!

Visit our on-line shop, gift ideas for ordering

Calling all knitters!

Knit these fingerless mittens and help to raise funds for the Barn Owl Trust. Use any wool you have and be as simple or as creative as you dare! Return to us once completed for us to sell in our on-line shop and via the next edition of Feedback at Christmas.

Use plain stocking stitch or put in any sort of pattern you wish. Use your imagination with colours and patterns!

Requirements: 1 pair 3.5 mm Needles, 4 Ply – Approx 1 Ball (50gm) of Wool . (Double knit wool could be used but take into account adjusting for size of needles and number of stitches).

The mittens are made of oblongs which should measure:

Child version - 16cms (6") by 22cms (8½")
Adult version - 18cms (7") by 22cms (8½")

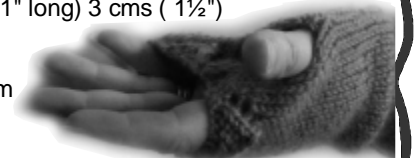
Instructions: Child version: Cast on 45 sts
 Work in Stocking stitch to required length.

Adults version: Cast on 55 sts. Work in stocking stitch to required length.

To make up: Sew up long edge leaving a hole for thumb.
Child version: 2.5cms (1" long) 3 cms (1½") from cast on edge.

Adult version: 3cms (1½" long) 5 cms(2") from Cast on edge

Thank you!



Thanks and Things

A big thank you to everyone who has supported us over the past six months by means of donations, standing orders and adopting owls. Your help really helps us to carry out our conservation work.

Thanks also for all the help given for our Christmas Jewellery project, by the provision of beads etc and the skills of our many volunteers in making the raw materials into something special.

Your efforts (there are just too many to name) in recycling stamps and cartridges, which have been sent either direct to Robert Murry Stamps; EAH Recycling (Cartridges) and Reedeem PLC (Cartridges) or to us, are greatly appreciated. Thanks also to Steven Leworthy and Richard Cranfield and many more who have sent in mobile phones for recycling.

So far as our "wish list" is concerned, thank you for: staple guns provided by Karen Chelsey and Stephen & Helen Scarisbrick; display units from Philip Webb; a colour printer donated by John & Veg Truman; two telegraph pole from Western Power; wild bird food from John and Sheila Prickett; pellets received from Mike Barrett, Anna Milner, Pat Webb, Rosina, Barbara, John & Veg Truman, Steve Leworthy, Christine

Havers, Nigel Morley, Nicky Pearce and many more too numerous to name.

Colin Meadows of the Web Broadcasting Company supplied a new webcam which will produce better picture quality for those of you who like to keep a watch on the wild owls featured on our website. Thanks very much Colin.

Last but not least, thanks go to Pat and Jenny Ford for the CD Radio Cassette player, their continued help in the office and for all the Christmas 'goodies' given to the staff.

Apologies if we have missed anyone but you can rest assured that all your contributions are very much appreciated - a very big thank you from us all.

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.

- Foreign change (please enclose a note of the type of currency)
- Roll of new hardwearing office carpet, suitable for gluing to a wooden floor
- 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 25 x 50mm tanalised batten
- A4 and A3 recycled paper and card both coloured and white
- Box trailer in good condition
- New inkjet cartridges for HP Deskjets 3820 and 930 and HP colour Laserjet 2550
- Bubble wrap (ideally on a roll)
- More garden rakes
- Stackable chairs (office use and outside use)
- Postage stamps (both new and commemorative used)
- Car interior cleaning products
- Modern petrol strimmer
- Night vision equipment
- Thermal imaging equipment
- Good quality Barn Owl scenes either photographic or illustrative for card images
- Empty inkjet cartridges and old mobile phones for recycling
- Wild Barn Owl pellets
- Padded envelopes
- Draw Prizes (ones which can easily and cheaply be forwarded to winners)

Tail piece...



It is a beautiful evening, completely still and clear with a full moon casting gentle shadows on the land and the sound of frogs and toads croaking away right outside my window. How lucky am I to be able to get such pleasure from something so simple, and priceless.

The news is full of economic recession and the credit crunch. Everyone has been affected to some extent by the state of our economy. For most people in our society, the standard of living is much higher now than it was thirty years ago but inflation has meant that we have had to earn more to keep it constant. The media and advertising have encouraged us to surround ourselves with the latest gadgets and we are constantly striving for bigger and better possessions. Manufacturers have moved from creating products with a life expectancy to providing goods that are disposable to keep the market "moving". These days electronic equipment is out-dated when it's a year or two old and no one would expect to buy a sofa that would last a lifetime. Call me crazy but I think it's insane for it to be cheaper to buy a new product than to have an old one fixed. What a weird world we have created and one with so much stuff..... How much of it do we need or even really want?

When you hear politicians talking about a

slow-down in the growth of the economy do you ever wonder, is an economy based on endless growth really sustainable? Can we, the human race, really expect to keep having more; is it reasonable for companies to expect a continual increase in profits? These are rhetorical questions but as any gardener knows you can't keep taking a crop from a garden without feeding the soil and tending the plants, and no matter how well you nurture your plot there is a limit to how much it can sustainably produce.

We all know that the natural world is suffering from the effects of human expansion and consumerism; television has brought tales of these disasters right into our homes. Unfortunately most of the time these tales are disempowering for the viewer, what can an individual do when faced with extinction of a species, deforestation or pollution on such a massive scale?

The message should be that we can all do our bit and together that adds up to something significant. The response of the public to household recycling and to the dolphin friendly tuna campaign shows that there are really significant numbers of people who care about the environment and will make changes in their lives when they know there is something they can do. Maybe

the oil price increases of last year will shake manufacturers and industry into making serious investment into alternative energy sources; certainly there has been something of a shift towards smaller more efficient cars. Many big stores are now encouraging shoppers to use their own bags. Hopefully before too long they will offer a recycling service for all of the packaging that comes with our goods.

Most people have really busy lives; despite all our labour-saving devices there is far too much to do. We have too many choices and decisions and are always looking forward. I propose we all stop and take a moment to appreciate the here and now; to think about what we have rather than what we have to get and what we need to do. It is not something that most of us tend to do very often in this helter-skelter society. But if we can appreciate what we have maybe that will help us to deal with the doom and gloom that bombard us daily from the news services.

Take a walk in the country, hug a tree, whatever it takes to make contact with the natural world and appreciate how lucky we are to be able to share this amazing planet. Remember that it is your world too and...

together we can make a world of difference.

Frances Ramsden