

Issue Number 43 - Spring 2010

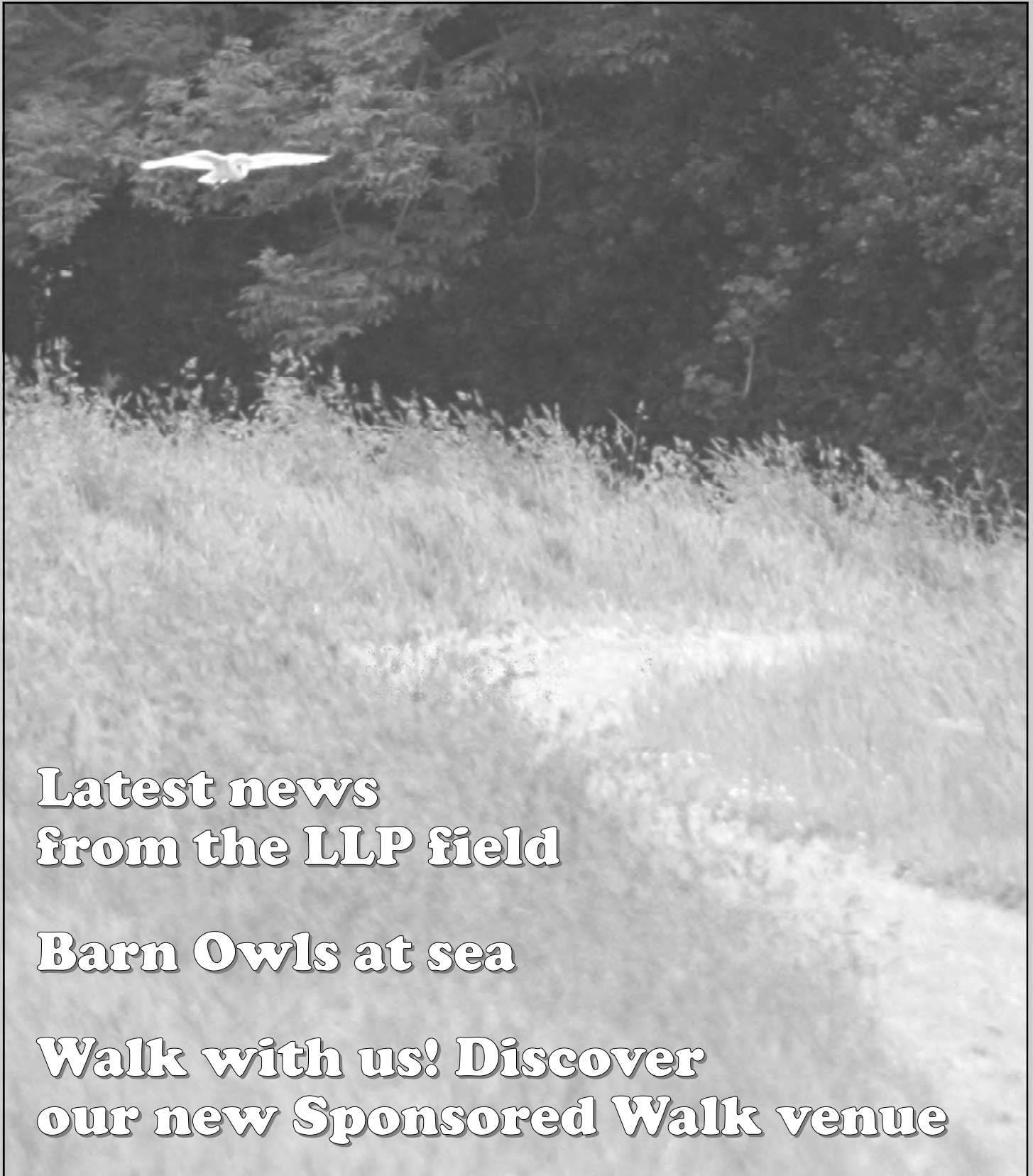


FEEDBACK



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

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**Latest news
from the LLP field**

Barn Owls at sea

**Walk with us! Discover
our new Sponsored Walk venue**

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Cover Photo:

*'My kind of heaven' - Barn Owl over LLP field
- 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.*

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Caroline Lewis*

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information to:*

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Devon TQ13 7HU*

Email: feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk

Website: www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Join us for our annual
Bracken Bash
on
Saturday 3rd July 2010
10.00am - 4.00pm

This is an opportunity to see the
Lennon Legacy Project field and help us
to manage the land.

You need to bring suitable clothing
and a packed lunch.

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

01364 - 653026
info@barnowltrust.org.uk

Welcome to the 43rd issue of Feedback. We've packed it with news and stories and some remarkable photographs on page 10, taken by wildlife photographer Mark Hancox, of a Kestrel stealing food from a Barn Owl. Our cover photo of an adult Barn Owl hunting in early evening was taken here in the Lennon Legacy Project (LLP) field last year and the rough grassland has provided a steady stream of voles to help the owls get through the winter. It's been really exciting finding the odd Barn Owl pellet in the grass under one of the telegraph poles we left for the birds to perch on. Almost every time we walk through the field we are seeing a Buzzard or Kestrel on the poles.

We're delighted to tell you we have a great team of staff and volunteers here at the moment – see page 12 for an introduction to the new faces - and lots of work going on. Later this month we have a Hungarian film crew visiting with our old friend Akós Klein from the Hungarian Barn Owl Foundation. Plans are afoot for more UK volunteers to radio track Barn Owls with the Foundation in Hungary again this year. Meanwhile we have Balazs Mate from Hungary here for 3 months to improve his English and equip him to deal with the volunteers. There are lots more exciting things planned for this year and you can read about some of them on page 3.

For those of you involved in education our new updated schools pack, based on the *Wings of Change* story, is now available as a free download on our website to accompany our new *Wings of Change* DVD.

What a winter; as we write this on a sunny day in mid March the nights are still frosty and the grass hasn't started to grow yet. There were surprisingly few calls to our Live Owl emergency line between December and February; maybe because the weather was so bad people just weren't out and about and finding birds, or maybe because there were fewer to find. We should have a better idea after our annual monitoring visits to breeding sites in the summer.

This year our Annual Sponsored Walk is back. We are using a new venue with pre-signed routes suitable for all walkers and their dogs. A car park, toilets and tearoom already on-site make it a lot less work for us to organise. Unfortunately we lost Megan (the golden retriever) in December, she walked to raise funds for the Trust for nine years and is greatly missed. Hugo the cocker spaniel is planning to do the walk in Megan's memory and if you would like to sponsor him or find out how to join us on May 8th see page 15.

We bring you updates on the LLP, the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme and Bird News and the latest craft project for our volunteer knitters – page 14. There is also an article about Barn Owls at sea (page 5) and one about the effect of radio tracking on the birds (page 8).

We also have a small item on volunteering; it's good for you. Sandra has now been retired for almost a year but fortunately for us she still helps with Feedback, these days as a volunteer. This mailing will also have been put together by volunteers. Have a read – page 7 – and think about whether volunteering could change your life!

Remember that despite the bad news that besieges us every time we turn on the TV and radio or pick up a newspaper it really is a wonderful world out there and there are lots of people who care. Do your bit for the natural world and it really will help to make a difference.

A big thank you to everyone who has supported the Trust since the last issue of Feedback. We hope that you enjoy this one and that it will inspire you to keep supporting us – we couldn't do it without you - Thank you

Eds: Frances, Sandra and Caroline

Please feedback your news and comments to us, as we are always pleased to hear from you.

Barn Owl Trust News

It's official, the Barn Owl Trust is going to build its very own stone wildlife refuge in the LLP field. Planning permission has been granted for an updated version of the 'Owl Tower' designed by the Trust for the 'Wild thing I Love You' TV programme in 2006 (see the News & forthcoming events section of our website for more information and pictures of the 2006 project).

The refuge will be built of stone from the field and will provide provision for bats, mammals, insects, small birds, kestrels and of course owls. Positioned just outside Forde Orchard, where 30 young fruit trees were planted in February, the refuge will stand in rough grassland and look over the stone wall towards the ponds. Funded by a donation in memory of our dear friend John Woodland this will be a lasting reminder of his love of wildlife and a long-term home for lots of different species in wonderful habitat. We are currently waiting for building quotes and hope to have the refuge completed before next winter. A big thank you to Michael Defriez who produced the architects drawings for this project free of charge.

Another exciting building in the pipeline is the addition of an extension to our office to provide a meeting room. We now have planning consent for this timber clad energy efficient room which has been designed by architect Darren Thomas from A-Tec Design. We are very grateful to Darren who has given up lots of Saturdays to come up and talk to us about what we want from the building and to create the plans and building specifications. The meeting room will be a space big enough ⇨



Planning ahead

The 2006 Owl Tower Photo: BOT library

to get our staff and volunteers together and provide a dry indoor space for groups visiting the LLP and volunteers working there. It will also provide a home for the Trust's Memory Tree which will be a physical reminder of all of those kind folks who remembered the Trust in their wills or whose friends and families provided donations in memoriam. ★



Nestcam On-line

2009 BOT Nestcam screenshot

Last years nestcam project was a great success even with a small clutch of three eggs - way below the average of five to six. Despite the awful weather all three of the eggs hatched, and even better, all three owlets were seen to fledge. A one hundred percent success rate is not common, so we were all delighted.

All of us here at the Barn Owl Trust, and judging by the responses we had, many of you, thoroughly enjoyed watching the proceedings from the early courtship behaviour, right up to watching the youngsters flying. This year we're hoping that the project is going to be even better. We were told in the middle of February that the owls had been seen copulating, so we have had the images streaming a whole month earlier than last year's start date of March the 24th. It was starting to look promising, with the female taking up residence in the box and the male standing guard on a nearby roof beam. Would the action start early this year? Unfortunately it was not to be. The weather took a turn for the worse, which would have restricted the male's hunting opportunities. ⇨

Aviary News

One of the two new mobile aviaries built last year was damaged in November when it blew over in high winds. Fortunately there were no birds in it at the time. It had just returned from a release site and had been parked in the LLP field awaiting its next outing when it was hit by a gust of wind and fell on its side. Repairs have now been completed.

As reported in the last issue both new aviaries were pressed into service immediately after they were finished and with birds queuing up to be released we weren't able to retire the old one as planned. Fortunately a grant from the Belsize Trust has enabled us to buy another new chassis and new mobile aviary. Aviary number 3 will be constructed during this spring.

This autumn we also plan to replace our Tawny Owl release aviaries originally built in 1991, with help from Western Power Apprentices when they spend a week here in the autumn. ★

Once a female Barn Owl starts to spend all of her time at the nest site, she will be relying on the male to bring her food. This allows her to conserve her energy, and get into breeding condition. It also acts as a kind of fail-safe. If there is not enough food available to keep the female in breeding condition, then there will not be enough to keep a hungry brood of owlets fed.

The bad weather it seems forced the female to leave the box and hunt for herself, and she was not seen in the box for several days. As I am writing this, she is back, so hopefully things have suffered only a temporary delay. We are still ahead of last year, and we should be able to see the whole of the breeding cycle, from the female first taking up residence in the nestbox, through to (hopefully) seeing owlets fledge in August or September. We should not only see them, but also hear them, as this year we have installed a microphone in the box. Check out our nestcam: www.barnowltrust.org.uk ★

Freezing filming



On two freezing cold days in January BOT Head of Conservation David Ramsden was out in the field with a team from Hilltribe Productions. The last time Hilltribe were here at the Trust was to deliver our new Wings of Change DVD and the short promotional film that appears on our website. This time their task was to film a series of educational film clips for Ambios Ltd. as part of their 'Nature at Sundown' project, which is funded by the adult education Transformation Fund.

'Nature at Sundown' provides opportunities for adults to experience wildlife at dusk, through a programme of free

events. It aims to encourage people to begin their own personal learning journey, providing a chance to investigate in more detail what they have seen and experienced, whether watching otters, badgers, bats and Barn Owls or exploring rivers and the seashore at sunset. The project has a website (www.natureatsundown.com) which has links to a range of species including of course Barn Owls.

The two-minute films will ultimately be available via the Nature at Sundown site and the BOT and Ambios Ltd websites. They are field guides and cover topics including an introduction to the Barn Owl, field signs, where Barn Owls feed, and investigating owl pellets. Ambios will be working closely with the Trust so that the films are not just 'video clips' but what Ambios describes as "learning experiences". The idea is that the viewer watches the video in the context of additional information that is available on screen.

There will also be a translation of the spoken word into Hungarian and possibly Polish. It was great to work with the Hilltribe team: Robbie Hill, Suzie Bostel and Jamie Ryan and the first edit of the films is looking really good. More in the next issue.... *

Above: It's not easy sitting on the ground when it's a freezing cold day and you're trying to remember what to say with two cameras pointing at you. David did a great job. Left to right – Robbie, David, Jamie and Suzie.

Left: After erecting the nestbox on film ACO Stuart climbs the ladder for the 10th time with Jamie lying prone on top of the bales to get a 'good shot'- he was not keen to climb up there but needs must and he was very brave.



Photos: Frances Ramsden

Barn Owls all at Sea!

However strange this might first seem for a species so intrinsically linked to the countryside, there have actually been a number of recoveries of ringed birds having made sea crossings, and indeed a few observations of Barn Owls actually at sea.

Most Barn Owl records of this nature are assumed to be dispersing juvenile birds, perhaps involving individuals with a stronger dispersive instinct than most. In the UK dispersal typically starts a few weeks after fledging, averages about 12km from the natal site and is generally over by mid-winter with the establishment of the home range. Individuals then usually stay within this home range for the rest of their lives, which makes the species highly sedentary. There appears to be no evidence of migratory behaviour in British Barn Owls.

Almost all records of Barn Owls making sea crossings had been in the autumn, which is when dispersal generally takes place. Up to 2008 only 20 UK-ringed individuals had been recovered abroad, mostly from Germany, Belgium and France; a bird from the Isle of Wight was recovered on the north coast of France and another ringed in Humberside found dead on an oil rig in the North Sea. A UK-ringed Barn Owl was recovered dead in Spain in November 2008 in excess of 1000km from the ringing site, but this is highly unusual and it is suspected that transport to the site may have been involved. A UK-ringed Barn Owl found dead at an RAF base in Afghanistan had been ringed near an RAF base in Oxfordshire so had presumably made a bad choice of roost site!

At-sea observations received over the years by the Trust have included assumed dispersing birds, all in the autumn/winter period:

- * English Channel, 30 miles south of Plymouth in flight then perched on a boat on 30th January 1994.
- * English Channel, 25 miles south of Brixham, a Barn Owl flew into the galley of a trawler after being mobbed by gulls on 26th October 1999. This was later rehabilitated and released by the Trust in the spring of 2000.
- * Western Approaches, 24 miles south of the Isles of Scilly, a Barn Owl landed on a fishing boat in a weak condition on September 13th 2000 but subsequently died on arrival at Mousehole Bird Hospital.

Most commonly found in Europe 'Dark-breasted' Barn Owls of the race *Tyto alba guttata* have occasionally been recorded in the UK, mostly on the east coast but also from Ireland. In fact, the term '*Wanderjahren*' is used to describe months of peak Barn Owl dispersal, which usually occurs from late-summer to about mid-November and is thought to be linked to changes in food availability; fluctuations in Common Vole populations and/or climatic events.

One '*guttata*' individual, a female originally ringed as an owl at a nest in Holland on 4th June 2007, was found incubating three eggs at a site in Norfolk the following summer. Tragically, this same bird was recovered dead some weeks later on 12th July along the A10 at Southery, Norfolk; no doubt the victim of a road traffic accident.

More intriguingly however, the Trust received a couple of extremely interesting observations of Barn Owls at sea during the spring of 2009.

- * Irish Sea, 50-60 miles west north-west of St. Ives, Cornwall on 24th April. The accompanying photo was taken on board HMS Severn, a River Class Offshore Patrol Vessel. It clearly shows a Barn Owl having a rest on an upper deck

section. It was apparently present for only 24 hours before disappearing so its eventual fate or destination will no doubt remain a mystery.

- * English Channel, 1-2 miles north of north-west France on May 3rd - an avid birdwatching couple contacted the Trust after seeing what they were sure was a Barn Owl from a cross-channel ferry about a mile from Roscoff. Visibility was poor and winds were light at the time though mainland France was in sight. Apparently the bird flew past the ferry and then seemed to go up high as if landing on the bridge and was subsequently lost to view. Despite brief views the observers were absolutely sure it was a Barn Owl that they had seen.

What these birds were doing at sea at this time of year will probably never be known. They may simply have been dispersing birds from extremely early broods; Barn Owls have been recorded as having eggs or dependent young in every month of the year. On the other hand, it is plausible that recently escaped captive birds with an extant dispersive instinct are involved, though this is probably more unlikely. Whatever the explanation, it adds another dimension to what is already the most enigmatic of bird species.

Footnote: It goes without saying that we would of course be extremely interested in receiving details of any at-sea observations of Barn Owls from anyone lucky enough to witness this spectacle at any time, but particularly outside the main dispersal period of August to December. Many thanks. ★

Matthew Twiggs
Conservation Officer



April 2009 Photo: Ian Feasey

LLP Update



Orchard planting in frozen February - Matthew with volunteers from Plymouth University in the freezing rain and snow Photo: Mark Lockett

Our Barn Owls are still around despite the awful weather, probably because of the huge number of voles in the field. A Barn Owl pellet was found underneath the cut-off telegraph pole by Kiln Close hedgebank in mid-January and a Barn Owl was seen briefly hunting over the snow in daylight.

Other bird highlights since the summer included a mixed flock of about 50 hirundines, mostly Swallows but with some House Martins feeding over the field in mid-August. By the month's end House Martin numbers had increased to over 100 but this was the last large-scale movement of the year. A Hobby also went through with one of the Swallow flocks in August, no doubt looking for a quick meal (literally!). Other birds of prey seen included 3 Peregrines over the valley at the end of August (probably a family party from a nest site nearby), plus a Kestrel and Buzzard hunting over the field the same day.

In early September, 3 Meadow Pipits and a Tree Pipit came up from feeding in the rough grass, the Tree Pipit greatly facilitating identification by calling frequently in flight, and 3-4 juvenile Goldfinches were seen along North Park. By mid-month this had increased to 2 Tree and 6 Meadow Pipits. At the same time, 2 juvenile Wheatear were taking advantage of the mown nettles by the old dung heap at the top of the field.

A bunting that flew up from the ground at the top of Kiln Close evaded specific identification but was most probably a Yellowhammer. Another juvenile Wheatear made an appearance at the start of October in the top field by Pennsland Lane gate. The cold weather in December and January saw more Meadow Pipits, a few Song Thrush, Redwing and Fieldfare. A Woodcock also made an unusual addition to the LLP bird list when it was flushed from underneath the remnant hedge in Kiln Close.

Notable butterflies included a Wall Brown, the LLP's fourth record on a clump of Cocksfoot in mid-September, and an extremely untimely Red Admiral over the barn in warm sunshine in mid-December just before the cold weather arrived.

The annual grazing regime started a bit later than usual at the beginning of September due to TB testing requirements at our grazier's farm, which subsequently proved clear. However, the livestock did a thoroughly good job in the 8 weeks they were on site, taking off much of the summer's growth and keeping scrub down in the more open areas, whilst still retaining that all important litter layer.

Practical conservation work has involved the usual monthly Plymouth University volunteer group who, as always, have worked extremely hard. Scrub was cleared along the River Ashburn, from the slope above Kiln Close and along the entrance track. The Winter Work Party was well attended with volunteers from the 'Nature at Sundown' project and Plymouth BTCV, who finally tackled the remnant hedge in Kiln Close. Diana Smurthwaite (she rebuilt the stone wall opposite the office in 2004) returned to the field to lay part of the hedge bank adjoining the green lane.

The BTCV had previously visited in September and made good progress pulling some late Creeping Thistle along the roadside boundary. The Conservation Team was productive too, moving the boulders from the Ashburn riverbank. In addition, the Forde Orchard restoration project took a major step closer when the

Sycamores were felled, cut up and the brush chipped ready for use as a mulch around the fruit trees. The fruit trees were subsequently planted in two tranches in mid-February. The first session involved a group of orchard enthusiasts from Orchard Link, during which half the trees went in with expert guidance from a small but diligent band. The second involved a Plymouth University group a few days later, who managed to plant the remainder of the trees in absolutely appalling conditions including torrential rain and snow as you can see in the picture above. The LLP had its fair share of the extreme weather, with several weeks of constant snow cover, and a minimum temperature of -6.1°C . over the Christmas period.

In the autumn, two independent contractors visited to look at the big pond in order to provide quotes for the remedial works it needed. One was finally appointed after a second visit, and work started immediately in mid-February. Much to our surprise we found Brown Trout in the pond.

A planning application for a Stone Wildlife Tower to be built in the field just outside the orchard was made to Dartmoor National Park Authority. Officers from DNPA visited to look at the site and finally gave consent in November. It is hoped the tower will provide a permanent nest site for Barn Owls, as well as Kestrels, Little Owls, bats, invertebrates and herptiles. It will also serve as a memorial to our good friend John Woodland who died in 2009, a firm supporter of the Trust for many years, whose contribution to ornithology in Devon was simply enormous. ★

Matthew Twiggs
Conservation Officer



One of the Brown Trout found in the pond - it was released into the river Photo; Matthew Twiggs

Mud glorious mud



As Matthew reported in the LLP Update, contractors from Land and Waterscapes Ltd. moved in to fix the 'Flo' pond in February and of course the moment they arrived it began to rain. Their first task was to pump out the water and remove the old liner. The conservation team sprang into action to remove the first frogspawn which had been laid about a week earlier. This was carefully removed and re-located out of harms way. The discovery of about half a dozen small Brown Trout which had naturally stocked the ponds, presumably via the abstraction from the River Ashburn, delayed the works until they had also been carefully relocated.

Once the liner was out of the way the contractors dug a cut-off trench around the pond and using the digger as a giant spoon mixed the bentonite (a clay-based powder) into slurry with soil and water. The mud was tremendous but despite this and the weather the work progressed quickly with the three failed pools that originally joined the two ponds being replaced with a lined stream faced with natural rocks. They also repaired the

*The lower part of Forde Orchard became a sea of mud
Photo: Frances Ramsden*

overflow from the smaller 'Oakley' pond which was seething with spawning frogs throughout the operation.

They then mixed the mud base of the pond with more bentonite, but not before the last few remaining frogs were relocated. They also built an outlet from the natural stone on site to carry the water from the River Ashburn abstraction pipe down into the pond rather than have it coming up from below. Finally they tidied up and landscaped as they left. It is now down to us to maintain a constant through-flow of water.

Despite the devastated appearance of the area, we know from experience that nature will reassert herself and given some good weather the area will recover again and we should have a pond that will provide a wonderful wildlife habitat. ★

The value of volunteering

Volunteering is defined as 'choosing to offer your services free of charge' and is the lifeblood of most charitable organisations. Without volunteers most of the charities in the UK wouldn't have even started and would struggle to exist today. But what do the volunteers get from giving their time and services away for free? Well there is the satisfaction of knowing that you are giving a gift that makes a difference, being part of something worthwhile, the camaraderie and team spirit and the opportunity to use your skills for something meaningful or even the chance to learn new skills and of course you are appreciated. Volunteering is good for you and for the organisation you choose to help.

For people wanting to work in conservation practical experience is almost essential and without it you often can't get a job. Volunteering can provide that experience and sometimes even lead to a paid position with the organisation. It happened here to Maz (page 12). For those who already have jobs or are retired it can provide opportunities to do something completely different and meet new people. Most of the people who join us for our practical tasks in the field find bracken bashing and scrub clearance a real change from their normal work. The folk who come in regularly help with aviary cleaning, nestboxing and all the 101 admin tasks that make the BOT run smoothly. Pat and Jenny Ford are part of the BOT family and have been

coming into the office regularly for many years. They've had an enforced break since Xmas and we wish them both a speedy recovery and look forward to having them back. Our oldest volunteer at the moment, Beryl who is 83, has been making up the Friends and Adoption packs for us. We have other volunteers that come weekly or monthly to do specific tasks like Friends Admin, to edit and produce Feedback and others who come in several times a year to put together our mailings. Some folk who are too far away to make volunteering here practical get involved by joining in with our craft projects – see page 14, or hold a coffee morning or other events to raise funds. There are also professionals who volunteer their services like the architects who produced the drawings for our recent planning applications – page 3, our solicitor and of course our Trustees who all volunteer their time for this role. Because of our wonderful volunteers the Trust is able to keep its governance costs to just 3% of expenditure.

Wherever you live and whatever your age, interests or skills, consider volunteering. If you'd like to help the Trust that would be great but there are lots of other groups and organisations that are looking for volunteers too. Check out your local CVS (Community Service Volunteers) and open a whole new window on your world. ★

Radio Tracking - the effect?

Regular readers will recall that last summer we (BOT and Ambios) radio tagged two breeding pairs – one in England and one in Hungary (with the Hungarian Barn Owl Foundation) and the last issue (FEEDBACK 42) carried a full two-page article explaining how and why. Fortunately the radio tracking of all four adults went really well with teams of UK volunteers staying up all night, night after night, in both countries. The Barn Owl pair in Hungary, originally tagged and ringed whilst their eggs were hatching, went on to fledge five young showing that the tagging had no effect on their nesting success. The potential impact of these slightly invasive marking techniques is always a concern so we were really delighted that they did so well. The tiny radio transmitters only work for about ten weeks before the battery goes flat but this is plenty long enough to do the actual radio tracking and find out where they forage. A thin leather strap attaches the 4-gram tag to the bird's ankle and the idea is that eventually the leather will biodegrade and the tag will drop off. Hopefully the Hungarian birds lost their tags by the end of last year.

Here in the UK the outcome was slightly different but we were equally delighted. The adult pair were radio tagged on 27th May whilst they had a brood of three small young. The weather was near perfect right through to the end of June, the radio tracking went well, and all three owlets grew apace. Then (as you may recall) our brief 'English summer' came to an abrupt end and it rained virtually every day and night through July resulting in high levels of mortality in most of the nests we monitor.

Average brood size typically dropped from 2.9 to 1.5. But in spite of the wet weather, and wearing their radio tags, the radio-tracked pair successfully reared all three of their young – remarkable! Once the tracking was complete, we checked the nestboxes, easily caught both of the adults and removed their tiny radio tags. They were both in great condition (the owls that is, not the tags!). The male's weight had dropped by 2% and the female's had increased by 5% which is typical. We were delighted to see that the birds' ankles suffered no ill effect from wearing the tag (see photo below).



Spot the radio tag - this Barn Owl was regularly seen hunting in daylight
Photo: David Ramsden

months (rather than the ten weeks of an ankle tag). Nineteen days later we accidentally caught one of the three just after it had fledged and were able to weigh and examine it. Again, it was in great condition.

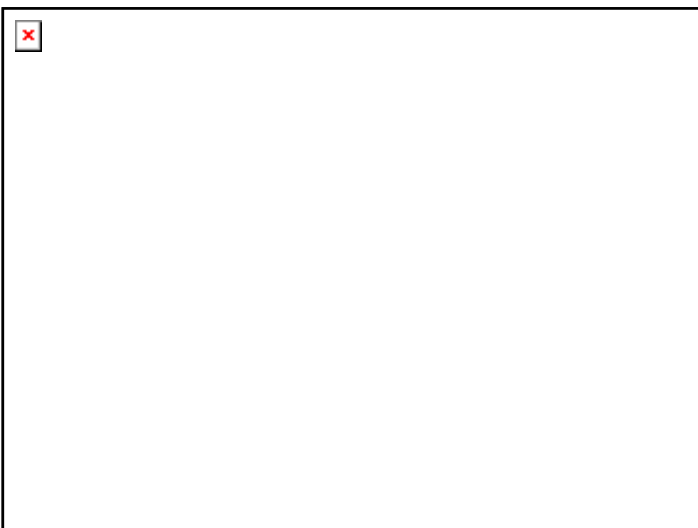
Tracking juveniles in dispersal is completely different from tracking adults. Rather than two teams working at night taking a fix (recording the owls' position) every ten minutes, it's just one team working in daylight. They check that the owl is still in the same place, or drive to various hilltops listening for a signal from a building or tree and getting just close enough to determine what the owl is roosting in.

By mid August all three young had made their first move away from the parental home range. Bird three, a nice heavily-spotted female initially moved 4km and roosted in a grain store, then moved to a hazel hedge, then moved another 4km and roosted every day in a hollow oak tree through to December. Bird two, a really beautiful dark-breasted female, moved 14km to an oak tree dangerously close to a dual carriageway and was still there in December. Bird one, a typical white-breasted male, moved up onto the edge of Dartmoor and managed to find a BOT nestbox in a barn close to Widecombe-in-the-Moor alternating occasionally with another BOT box over 6km south. We have been surprised at how mobile the birds are and have recorded birds flying over 6km in just ten minutes.

We are sad to report that during January's snow cover we found the remains of two of the three juveniles. One was found in a field long-dead with a broken wing but not particularly underweight, and the other was just a mass of feathers and looked as if it had been predated by a fox. The third one is missing but we haven't given up hope yet. See the article on page 9 for more info on the impact of the coldest winter since 1981. The good news is that there's plenty of fresh Barn Owl pellets at the natal site which suggests that their parents (the adult pair we tracked) are probably still with us.

Let's hope 2010 is a really great breeding season! ★

David J Ramsden
Head of Conservation



An ankle-mounted radio tag being removed
Photo: David Ramsden

Before the brood of three were ready to fledge we radio tagged them as well (in order to monitor their dispersal). This may have been the first time ever that an entire family of Barn Owls (both the adults and all the young) had been radio tagged. Unlike the adults with their ankle-tags, juveniles are fitted with little backpacks that weigh a mere 8 grams – about the same weight as a fresh Barn Owl pellet – and transmit a signal for ten

Barn Owls and Snow



Barn Owl in Snow Photo: Mike Read

Unless you have spent the last two winters out of the country, you will be aware that they've been rather chilly! This winter particularly has been quoted as 'the coldest since 1981/82', nearly 30 years ago.

Barn Owls originally evolved in a warmer, drier climate than we have in the UK so it is perhaps unsurprising that Barn Owl mortality peaks from December to March. During very extreme winters, such as 1947 and 1962/63, it is likely that more than half the Barn Owl population of Britain was wiped out and it would have taken several years for numbers to recover. Compared to most birds that spend the winter in Britain, Barn Owls are poorly insulated and need extra food during cold weather. Hunting on the wing can be very inefficient in cold weather as heat is lost from the body. If a Barn Owl can hunt from a fence post or other suitable perch it can reduce the energy it uses and also retain its body heat by keeping its wings close to the body.

Winter weather can also present other problems for foraging Barn Owls as they rely heavily on being able to see and more importantly hear, their prey moving around in the grass. Snow cover can deaden the sounds of a Field Vole, making it more difficult for a Barn Owl to pinpoint its prey and make a successful catch. When the weather is as it has been these last two winters, we have had many emails from the general public saying they have seen 'their' Barn Owl out hunting during the day and not appearing to be making kills. People are understandably concerned and wish to help.

Although we would not unreservedly endorse the feeding of wild Barn Owls, it is possible to supplementary feed during bad weather but it is important to cease feeding as soon as conditions improve. If feeding continues it will create a false sense of food availability and encourage Barn Owls to breed when in reality there is not enough food to support a pair with a brood. It is also important to feed them the right food. We would only recommend feeding dead day-old chicks and/or small mammals - that have not been poisoned. These can usually be sourced from a local pet shop or a butcher. However, as Barn Owls rely on sound and movement to detect their prey items, they may not initially recognise an inanimate chick or mammal as food! Two chicks or four small mammals a night per Barn Owl is sufficient. As to where to leave them, a post where the owl regularly perches on would be best or anywhere you know it visits regularly, such as on bales in a barn where it roosts for

example. Be careful that you don't flush the birds from their shelter when providing food as in bad weather this causes them additional problems. Remember to remove any uneaten food so you don't encourage rats.

Through looking at weather data and nest monitoring data, Colin Shawyer suggested that a period of prolonged snow cover, 20 days or more, was followed in the spring by a reduction in Barn Owl breeding success. Between 1975 and 1989 Dr Iain Taylor carried out a study in SW Scotland on the significance of snow cover on Barn Owls and their main prey item, the Field Vole. It demonstrated that Barn Owl survival was much more closely linked to vole numbers than it was to winter weather. Winters with moderate weather and low vole abundance produced more Barn Owl mortality than severe winters with high vole abundance. Predictions indicate that 2010 should be a bumper Field Vole year so Barn Owl populations that suffered during this snow-covered winter should hopefully bounce back.

Interestingly, the Barn Owl's sister species in Eastern Europe, the dark-breasted Barn Owl, appears to cope with far colder winters than those our white-breasted Barn Owl has to endure. The reasons behind this are not fully understood but it could be due to higher availability of prey items during the breeding season than we have here; continental Europe has more species of small mammal than the UK. It may be that the winter mortality is similar to ours but their populations recover more rapidly due to more food.

Ultimately, the best thing you can do to help the Barn Owl is provide as much of its optimum foraging habitat as possible. And the best thing about that is, if you have half an acre or several hectares, all you have to do is.... nothing! Leave the grass to grow, then collapse, then grow the following year and collapse again. Maybe after a few years you might need to cut back some scrub and brambles but that's about it. Un-intensive gardening! There are other bonuses too - more birds, butterflies and wildflowers, which may also help our declining Honey Bee. *References for this article are available on request. **

Maxine Chavner
Assistant Conservation Officer

In Memoriam

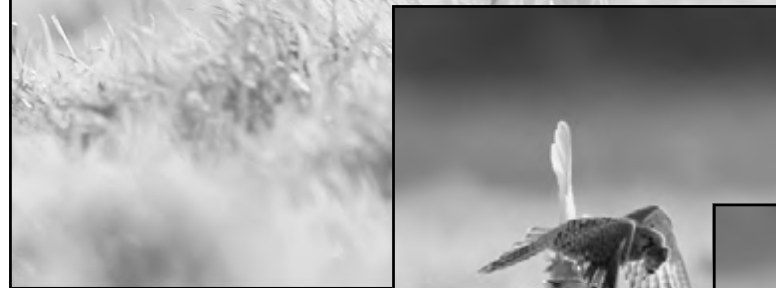
The Trust has received legacies from the estates of the late Kenneth Raymond Mann and Norman Edward Bolton Alderson

and donations in memory of

Mrs Kathleen Lavis,
Robert (Barn Owl Bob) Smith,
John Free, Frances Cook
Sarah Elizabeth Potts
Pam Fullman and Keith Johnson

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

Kleptoparasitism - What?



Wildlife photographer, Mark Hancox was fortunate to have his camera at the ready when a Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) decided to rob a Barn Owl of its prey in mid air. The impressive images perfectly capture a phenomenon known as kleptoparasitism (literally meaning 'parasitism by theft').



Kleptoparasitism is relatively common amongst bird species and even more so in Falconiformes, the group to which Kestrels belong. It is a form of feeding in which an animal, in this case the Kestrel, takes prey that has been caught by another, the Barn Owl. It can occur between individuals of different species (interspecific) or between individuals of the same species (intraspecific). Some species such as Kestrels become opportunistic food thieves during times of hardship. However, there are species, particularly seabirds such as Skuas, that are masters of food piracy.

Kestrels prey on small mammals in open habitats but because they hunt by sight they are restricted to daylight hours and so don't normally compete with Barn Owls. However, the recent cold snap has forced many Barn Owls to hunt in daylight as field voles are less active at night and more active during the day when temperatures are higher. In order to catch them, and to minimise loss of body heat, the owls too become more diurnal exposing themselves to food piracy.

Kestrels also change their foraging behaviour during cold spells. The method of flight-hunting normally adopted by Kestrels is inefficient in cold weather as the energetic demands are extremely high. Unlike Barn Owls, Kestrels cannot meet their energy demands by perch hunting and so turn to more underhand methods. For a Kestrel, stealing food is an effort saving and time saving exercise crucial to surviving food shortages and bad weather conditions (Fritz, 1998).



An almost identical scene to the one captured by Mark Hancox was reported this time last year near Blackpool. A hungry Barn Owl was driven by the cold weather to hunt during the day and this time two Kestrels repeatedly mugged it of its prey until they had had enough to eat. A study of Kestrel kleptoparasitism on Short Eared Owls in France showed that Kestrels working in pairs were more successful at stealing food and that the female always initiated the attacks (Fritz, 1998).

For Barn Owls, starvation is the main cause of death associated with winter mortality and obviously food theft can unfortunately accelerate the process. However, provided the Barn Owl was in good condition prior to being robbed, there's a good chance that it would live to hunt another day. And as for the Kestrel, let's not forget that they too join Barn Owls on the *Birds of Conservation Concern Amber List*.

Thanks to Mark Hancox for providing us with his wonderful photographs. www.markhancoxbirdphotography.co.uk ★

Sarah Nelms
PA to Head of Conservation

Bird News



Two Barn Owls brought in as fallen owlets in July have been successfully released from our hospital release aviary. The roof of the aviary was lifted on a clear December night during a short (but very welcome) spell of good weather. We are providing supplementary food and the owls are still coming back to take the food we are putting out. There is also evidence that they are roosting in the aviary as we are finding pellets containing small mammal bones, which would indicate that they are also hunting for (and catching) wild prey. One was actually seen in the aviary on the 28th February. We are now hoping to obtain a motion sensor camera to monitor the owl's comings and goings.

Sadly one of the Barn Owls in the disabled aviary was found dead just after Christmas. Perry was originally brought to the Trust in 2005 with a damaged wing and as a result was unable to be released. Since then he has lived with four other Barn Owls in our specially designed aviary for disabled birds. The cause of death is unknown but it was possibly caused by the cold weather. Unfortunately the Little Owl which sustained an eye injury back in August 2009 also failed to survive the cold

snap. After recovering well from its injury, the one-eyed Little Owl was given lodgings in one of our aviaries and seemed to be in good health. Sadly it seems as though the cold weather over the Christmas period took its toll and the Little Owl passed away.

At the beginning of January a Barn Owl was brought in by a member of the public with wing injuries likely to be related to a road accident. It was taken straight to the vets in Estover where, due to the extent of its injuries, it had to be put down. Thanks to the quick thinking member of the public that spared the owl further distress. The wonderful contribution made by the Veterinary Hospitals Group in Plymouth cannot be overlooked. Virtually all of the owls that needed a vet's attention over the past twenty three years were treated there – including the infamous Hannibal of BBC Springwatch fame. Many thanks to the whole team at Estover vets past and present and all the veterinary nurses too!

We have recently heard that two of the three Barn Owls radio tagged at Rushlade last summer have been found dead. The third Barn Owl is currently missing but the iGoMango volunteers will keep searching for as long as it takes to track it down.

Although Britain has experienced the coldest winter since 1981/82, we have not received any reports of emaciated Barn Owls being found. The BTO have received reports of dead Barn Owls from elsewhere in the country which suggests an increase in overall winter mortality. However, our recent nest boxing trips have revealed a good number of fresh pellets indicating that at least some Barn Owls in Devon and Cornwall are doing surprisingly well. Perhaps this is due to the southwest escaping the worst of the bad weather and the beginning of the predicted good vole year.

We have had a good number of enquiries regarding the possibility of supplementary feeding Barn Owls. It's great to know that so many people are concerned about their welfare. For more information on how the recent snow has affected Barn Owls, please see the article on page 9. ★

Sarah Nelms

Westmoor Update

The Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme has been up and running now for a whole year and we have plenty of progress to report. The response from landowners and others has been fantastic, and almost everyone who we have approached has been more than happy to participate in the scheme. To date we have carried out more than 150 identification visits looking for suitable sites, with plenty more planned for the coming months. When the scheme started we had originally planned for just 92 such visits, so the response really has been overwhelming.

Most of our visits are to farms where we are looking for signs of Barn Owls in all sorts of places. We have surveyed barns of all types, including old stone ones, modern steel ones and wooden ones; barns in farmyards and isolated barns, but it is not just about barns - stables, field shelters and even an old cider press have also been checked and provide homes for our nestboxes. Aside from farms, we have also been to some weird and wonderful locations. We have visited attics in houses, old mines, garages, stately homes, chapels, historic monuments, fisheries and caravan sites. If there are no suitable buildings at a site where there is good habitat or potential for Barn Owls, then we have sometimes erected nestboxes in trees, whether they are isolated trees, or even trees at the bottom of people's gardens. The strangest place we have visited as part of the Westmoor scheme is probably an old quarry face.

In some of our nestbox locations the Barn Owls have some interesting neighbours. We have installed boxes in barns used by nesting Great Tits and nesting Swallows. We even have one box in an old stone building which is also home to a colony of Lesser Horseshoe Bats. So far we have had no reports of any

problems caused by the different species living so close to one another.

As well as surveying locations and putting up nestboxes, part of the Westmoor scheme involves ongoing monitoring. When we have checked boxes, it's not just Barn Owls that we have come across. We have found Jackdaws, Stock Doves, and feral pigeons, which are not unusual residents of Barn Owl Trust boxes. We have also found Tawny owls, squirrels, hibernating butterflies and moths, and even wasps in some of our Westmoor boxes. More importantly we've even found some Barn Owls. At one site there appears to have been some confusion, as we found a dove's nest in the Barn Owl box, and Barn Owls nesting in the Dovecote.

Progress to date

Since the start of the Westmoor Scheme in February 2009 we have carried out:
160 identification visits
23 Stage 1 visits at 56 locations
16 Stage 2 visits at 31 locations
10 Stage 3 visits at 27 locations
29 Habitat advisory visits and 30 Nestboxing visits
Altogether we have erected 70 indoor boxes and 14 tree boxes, a grand total of 84, and we haven't finished yet.

The scheme will be running until July, so if you live in the Westmoor area and would like to get involved, we would very much like to hear from you. ★

Stuart Baker

Assistant Conservation Officer

Team Talk

Since the last issue of Feedback we have had some notable staff happenings. Before Xmas we had three new staff join us and they introduce themselves below; we now have 14 staff, 7 full and 7 part-time. In January Roger Jones began volunteering one day a week and is helping build nestboxes and do other practical tasks around the place and in February we were joined by Balazs from Hungary on a three-month volunteer placement.

We are really sad to lose Julie after three years as part of the conservation team. She started fulltime here in January 2007 and has talked to numerous children about Barn Owls over the years as well as being involved in caring for casualty and resident birds, health and safety and practical conservation. She has gradually been reducing her hours since January 2009 and leaves us at the end of March. We will all miss her greatly.

Liza (who spends one day a week sending out our legacy leaflets to solicitors) fell over twice and broke her arm twice, the same one! Despite this she has still been coming into work between her hospital visits.

Our staff were brilliant during the period of really bad weather when our lane was un-drivable for well over a week. Congratulations to our fabulous team who drove as far as they could and then walked in, almost two miles each way over snow and ice. We only had one day where we couldn't open the office. Well done everyone.



Maz Photo: Chris Bryan

Hi, my name's Marianne (or Maz for short!) and I started volunteering at the Barn Owl Trust for a few hours a week in October 2009 to clean the aviaries. Luckily I was in the right place at the right time and when an admin team vacancy came up I was recruited as full time Receptionist and Admin Assistant in November.

Since joining the Trust I've been getting to grips with the admin for the Trust's Friends and Adoption schemes as well as gaining an overview of how the Trust works. I answer the telephone, email and postal queries. I have also been helping out with other admin processes when needed and I do still try to get out to clean the aviaries when the office is quiet as well!

I spent my childhood in Devon before moving up north to study Philosophy at York University in 2003. After graduating I worked as an Admin Assistant in the buying department of a large fair-trade wholesaler and retailer (Shared Earth) for three years until the fresh West Country air pulled me back home in September 2009.

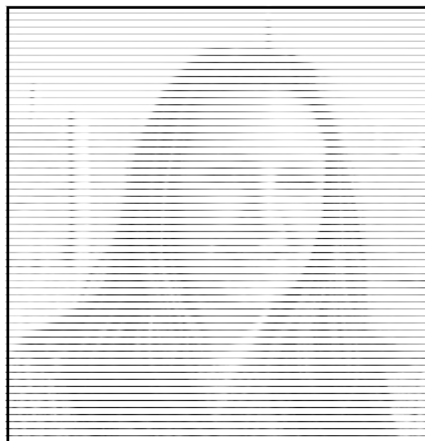
I have always been passionate about animals and wildlife and in April 2008 I spent 10 weeks volunteering with a conservation organisation in Nicaragua monitoring bats, butterflies and birds, as well as attempting to climb volcanoes!

I have always had a soft spot for Owls so I feel very privileged to be working here. I am enjoying learning more about them and how we can help to conserve these beautiful birds and their environment.

It is great to be back in Devon, with beautiful countryside and

the sea at my doorstep. I have been really enjoying the chance to get out for a walk at the weekend as well as challenging myself with a few new hobbies, like Morris dancing! When the weather is less appealing you are likely to find me with my head in a book, watching a film, listening to music or knitting.

Marianne (Maz) Bryan
Receptionist and Admin Assistant



Sarah Photo: Maz Bryan

Hi! I'm Sarah and I started working for the Trust in November 2009. My role as PA is primarily to provide support for the Head of Conservation as well as other members of the conservation team. It's a diverse role and can involve a range of activities from general admin to practical conservation work. I am also responsible

for organising courses for ecological consultants and dealing with enquiries.

I originally applied for the ACO position back in spring 2009 but was unsuccessful and so went to work as an Education Ranger for Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust on a six month contract. When my contract with TCCT came to an end I went back to looking for another conservation job and was facing Christmas in retail. Luckily for me, the Barn Owl Trust were having difficulties finding a new PA and so looked back through previous job applications and found mine. David called and asked if I would come for an interview. My answer to which, of course was yes.

During my first two days at the Barn Owl Trust I attended the Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys and Signs course that I would later be responsible for organising. Since then I have been out on nest boxing trips with Matt and Stuart, done some practical work in the LLP and organised my very first BOESS course, which went off without a hitch. I have also had some First Aid training and am due to receive Photoshop training (I said my role was diverse!). I have also nominated myself to give the *Wings of Change* talk at schools and youth groups and am due to give my first solo talk in mid-March.

I grew up in rural Somerset but moved across the border to Devon in 2004 to study BSc Environmental Biology at the University of Plymouth. After finishing my degree in 2007 I decided to stay in Plymouth where I now live with my partner. I am passionate about conservation and have been involved in various volunteer projects including BTCV, Moor Trees, Marine Conservation Society and Loggerhead Turtle conservation in Kefalonia, Greece. I have done my fair share of travelling and have been lucky enough to visit Mexico, Iceland, Morocco, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Thailand and Cambodia. In my spare time I enjoy working on my allotment, walking the moor and coast and taking photos of wildlife.

As a newcomer to the Trust I have felt very welcome and thoroughly enjoy working as part of the Conservation Team and the Trust as a whole.

Sarah Nelms
PA to Head of Conservation



Vanessa Photo: Alan Lewis

Hello I'm Vanessa and I started working for the Trust one day a week in November 2009, helping with publicity, educational resources and general admin. In particular I have been involved with expanding The Barn Owl Trust's on-line presence, helping to build and manage pages on Facebook and Twitter. We now have several hundred followers and fans, who receive regular news and updates. I'm

pleased that there is now a link to The Barn Owl Trust's website from the 'Barn Owl' page on Wikipedia – which is probably now the most used encyclopaedia in the world.

I moved down to Devon last autumn, from the West Midlands, where I taught Art in schools and to teenagers excluded from school. I now build and manage online presence and Wordpress websites for local small businesses, as well as my own two websites: ArtyNess.com and Zen Moments.org - a joint project with my partner, Alan Lewis. I have two sons, both at university. I love walking in nature, drawing, being creative, choral singing and yoga.

Vanessa Owen
Admin Assistant



Balazs Photo: Sarah Nelms

My name is Balazs Mate and I am from Hungary. I arrived in England on 1st February and am going to be here for 3 months. During this time I will be living near Totnes. I work Tuesdays to Thursdays at the Barn Owl Trust and spend the other days with the IgoMango Project volunteers at Ambios. I do a variety of jobs including woodwork, nestbox erecting, practical conservation

work and bird watching. This allows me to travel around and see the beautiful English countryside.

I graduated in BSc Conservation Management at the University of Pannonia, Keszthely in December 2009. I also have a carpenter qualification. In Hungary I am involved in researching and monitoring bats which requires ringing and takes place in caves and in buildings. I have been interested in nature conservation since my childhood and have been doing practical conservation work for about ten years.

I started as a keen birdwatcher and then in 2005 my attention turned to bat conservation. In Hungary, Barn Owl and bat conservation is carried out simultaneously as these species share the same nest and roost sites in old buildings.

When I go back to Hungary I am going to work for the Barn Owl Foundation in Hungary and hope that my time in England will help when English volunteers spend time there in 2010. I am very excited to be able to take part in such an outstanding opportunity. In my spare time I like cycling and hiking. I am also learning

horseback archery and traditional Japanese and Hungarian martial arts.

I am really enjoying being in England and the people I have met are very friendly and kind. Everyone is helping me to get to know the English way of life and learn how to speak the English language.

Balazs Mate
Hungarian Barn Owl Foundation

Recycling Update

Our big news on the recycling front is 'Stamps N All'. Since sending out the flyer with our last Feedback we have received almost £1,000 from them. Thank you to everyone who sent us things, it was brilliant. Just to remind you all again we've included another flyer with this issue. We can now recycle – stamps, envelopes & cards (postmarked pre 1970), old (pre 1940s) birthday cards, coins, banknotes, precious metals (including broken jewellery, watches, trophies), keys & medals. It all helps to raise much-needed funds to support our work.

We have set up collection points in a couple of offices in the South West. If you are able to set up a recycling point at work (or somewhere else) do contact us. We can provide special boxes for this purpose.

Payments for cartridge and mobile phone recycling have continued to slow as so many other charities are running similar schemes but they are still generating some income for us.

We continue to add 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. If you don't have access to the internet and would like to know more please contact me at the Trust.

We continue to use recycled waste cooking oil as the fuel for three of our vehicles. This is much better for the environment than using vegetable oil made from plants grown by cutting down forests, or fossil fuels. We have recently replaced our fourth vehicle with a new one which we will be able to convert when it is out of warranty; in the meantime it's much more economical and energy efficient than the old one.

Supporters also regularly send us padded envelopes & bubble wrap, which we use for our sales packaging and we continue to source recycled supplies of stationery and sales goods. 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

and from our postbag ...

Dear BOT,

I just thought that I'd write to you to thank you so much for sending me my recent order, which I received this morning. I had only placed the order via the internet on Monday evening, and was surprised and delighted to receive it so quickly. I am most impressed by your quick and efficient operation and am absolutely delighted with the products that have been sent to me: so much so that I plan to order more in the future, and will encourage friends to do so. I am incidentally a member of The Wirral Barn Owl Trust, and I commend you all for the wonderful work that you do in helping to preserve these wonderful birds.

Thank you once more, very best wishes,

Steven White.

Supporters News

From Marvellous Mittens...

Thank you to everyone who knitted mittens for us to sell at Christmas. We received lots of 'squishy' envelopes throughout the year. Mittens arrived in all different patterns, colours and sizes and your efforts raised £100 towards Barn Owl conservation.



This year we thought it would be fun to make leg warmers for our knitting project. If you have enjoyed knitting scarves and mittens for the Trust in the past, or are keen to give knitting a try, then have a go! A fashion item from the 1980's, leg warmers have made a great revival. Great for slouching around in at home, wearing over jeans on a chilly day or to keep leg muscles warm when exercising. A stripy design is most popular, and bright colours seem to sell much better than pastels. Go on, have a go! We will be very grateful! ★



...To Lovely Leg Warmers!



twitter

Facebook and Twitter are fast-growing social networking websites, with millions of users worldwide. Become a fan of the Barn Owl Trust and keep up to date with our latest news via the internet. If you have a Facebook or Twitter profile you can send us messages, read our updates and share information, anecdotes or anything else that may be useful or fun for anyone interested in the work of the Barn Owl Trust. If you don't have a profile you can still see the pages – you just won't be able to add to them.

The Barn Owl Trust on Facebook and Twitter allows us to reach a whole new internet audience right across the world! We are able to share information about Barn Owls and conserving their habitat with huge numbers of people. Please check out our pages and recommend them to your followers, friends and family and help us spread the word about the work of the Barn Owl Trust!

We're Flying on Facebook! - Find the Barn Owl Trust on Facebook! Discover and share the very latest news and pictures from the Barn Owl Trust. We post Barn Owl information, news, chat and links to website pages that we hope will be interesting to everyone who loves Barn Owls. To become a fan of the Barn Owl Trust on Facebook you will need to set up your own personal profile. Facebook guides you through this and it is quite simple. If you already have a Facebook profile just search for 'Barn Owl Trust' and you will find us. www.facebook.com.

Twitter is a social networking site where you can share and discover what's happening right now anywhere in the world by making and leaving short comments. You can follow people, groups or organisations you are interested in, and they can follow you too! We follow lots of interesting people who 'Tweet' mainly about owls, birds or wildlife. We also have links to our website pages. Search for @barnowltrust on Twitter and follow us. www.twitter.com.

The serious bit: Please note we do all we can to protect your privacy. Please ensure **your** privacy settings are just as you want them to be on Facebook (i.e. Make sure people you don't know can't see your profile page), and remember that anything you post on our Facebook or Twitter pages will be visible to the general public and should be directly related to Barn Owls or the work of the Barn Owl Trust. If you become a fan of the The Barn Owl Trust on Facebook, the privacy or your profile page remains intact, subject to your privacy settings. ★

Both photos: Caroline Lewis

Knitting Pattern

Materials: One pair 3.25 mm (10) needles
One pair 4.00mm (8) needles
Double Knitting Wool (3 balls?)
Size Child age approx 7-11
For Adult size use figures in brackets ()

Method:
Using 3.25 mm needles cast on 50 (66) stitches.
Work 10 rows in K1 P1 Rib.

Next Row increase 6 stitches evenly across the row.
Change to 4.00 mm needles and work in stocking stitch until work measures 10" (12") (25cms/30cms approx.)
Change to 3.25mm needles working in rib (K1 P1).
Decrease 6 stitches evenly across the row.
Work 9 rows in rib and cast off.

To Make up: Fold in half lengthways and sew up seam.

Abbreviations: K1 = Knit one, P1 = Purl one,
Stocking stitch = Knit one row Purl one row.

Thanks and Things

Thanks to all of the following folk for providing items for recycling: Steve & others at 1 Stop Sealing, Bethan Lloyd, Vanessa Owen, Liliias Wall (& Worlington WI), Derrick & Margaret Crocker, Ann Northway, Mrs Owen, Melanie White, Nell Braithwaite, Plymouth University Students, Fred Towers, L Dongar (Australia), Ruth Westall, Mrs Lyn Whittaker, Mike & Margaret Clark, Val Robinson, Gwyneth Parish, Sir Jeremy & Lady Sullivan, Heather Jansch, Alan Lewis, Louise Anquetil, Peter Mander & Julia Fox, Wendy & Francis, the Ramsdens and everyone else who has helped us raise £915.85 since the last issue of Feedback. Well done everybody.

A big thank-you to everyone who sent in Barn Owl pellets too, there are so many schools requesting them these days we can never get enough, please keep them coming.

Thank you to everyone who responded to our Wants List since the last issue, we received Digital/Tape Voice Recorders from Diane Rowland, Jan Broderick, Kim & Ed Mcneil and Pat & Jenny Ford. We also had a CD player from Kim & Ed and various tools and other bits and pieces from Pat & Jenny. John & Shelagh Prickett gave us bird food and we had a microwave and lots of other items from Richard and Leigh-Anne Boucher, Caroline and Andrew Lewis gave us a microwave and Western Power Distribution donated office furniture and telegraph poles. George Kent sent us £225 in donations from a Charity Golf Day and Margaret and Derrick Crocker raised £100 from the sale of plants and jams by their garden gate. Well done and thank you everybody we really appreciate your support. Thank you for thinking of us.

Please have a look at our latest Wants List and see if you have any of the following items lying around that you would like to donate to a good home:

- * Copy of 'A Manual for Wildlife Radio Tagging' by Kenward & Walls (2001) ISBN 10: 0124042422
- * Empty film canisters to hold a single owl pellet
- * Foreign change and notes (please enclose a note of the type of currency)
- * Wild bird food - mainly sacks of black sunflower seeds, also peanuts & plain canary seed
- * Wood for making outdoor nestboxes - sheets of 9 or 12mm tanalised softwood ply and lengths of 25x 50mm tanalised batten
- * A4 and A3 recycled paper and card any colour
- * Box trailer in good working order
- * Inkjet cartridges for HP Deskjet 3820 and HP Deskjet 930
- * More lawn rakes/garden rakes
- * 12 stackable office chairs
- * Postage stamps (both new and used - especially commemorative and foreign)
- * Metal detector
- * Wildlife rehab group looking for somewhere to release house sparrows (we have the perfect release site)
- * Good quality Barn Owl winter scenes either photographic or illustrative for Christmas card images
- * Empty inkjet cartridges and old mobile phones for recycling
- * Wild Barn Owl pellets (we can never have too many)
- * Anyone in the Ashburton area who could occasionally provide temporary lodging for a Barn Owl Trust volunteer, at a reasonable rate
- * Small Plate Compactor
- * Roller suitable for towing with a tractor
- * Emulsion Paint (pale colour) sufficient to paint an office ★

Tailpiece...



When we had the two ponds created in Forde Orchard back in the winter of 2006/7 we were we believed, creating a new low maintenance habitat for wildlife. Well the new habitat was right but the low maintenance wasn't. Now 3 years and a legal battle later we have at last got all the problems sorted out. In the meantime even though the ponds didn't work the way they were supposed to and a lot of the liner spent more time in the air than under the water, the wildlife moved in. As you will have read in the LLP Update there were loads of frogs and spawn in the ponds when the work was carried out and we even found trout. All of these creatures had discovered the habitat we had created and moved in – amazing. What a wonderful thing the natural world is and how privileged are we to be able share in its beauty.

We are looking forward to seeing Forde Orchard recover after the disruption of the landscaping for the tree planting and the pond works. What is now a muddy and desolate wilderness will no doubt become green and splendid again. The new fruit trees will in years to come produce blossom for the bees and fruit for the birds and other wildlife. We are so lucky to have been able to create something as special as the LLP. Thank you Vivien Lennon and all the other thoughtful people who left a legacy to the Trust and made it all possible.

Every time we walk around the field we see something fantastic, a Buzzard soaring overhead, a Kestrel perched on the top of one of the poles left standing, an over-wintering butterfly, a flower poking its head out between the stems of grass. Every day is an adventure when you look at the Mother Nature bounty.

In January Matt led a walk around the field for the 'Nature at Sundown' project and having too much to do I missed the start. As I walked up the hill looking for the group I came face to face with the full moon – the Old Moon or the Wolf Moon, as the January full moon is known. It was incredible, low in the sky and

so huge – wow, what an experience. By the time I reached the others it had risen, casting its slightly bluish light over the valley and shading out the nearest stars in the cloudless sky.

Those of you who have had a chance to visit and share the LLP experience will know what a beautiful magical place it is. From time to time we organise guided walks and we have volunteer days when folk can come and help us manage the land. If you would like to know more about these events let us know; it would be great to share the LLP with you. For those of you too far away or not able to manage the steep terrain our website has a monthly LLP diary with photographs and slideshows.

Wherever you live you can revitalise your spirit by spending some time appreciating nature's beauty. Even in a city there are parks with trees and flowers that attract wildlife. Our bird tables not only help our feathered friend survive, they allow us to share the lives and see the character of the creatures that we feed. When we take the time to notice how wonder-filled and diverse our planet is we know we have been blessed no matter how hectic our day-to-day existence is.

We humans need to walk the Earth lightly and remember that we should treasure its diversity. These days we are bombarded with messages about environmental disaster and we all know we should buy ethically, recycle and reduce our carbon footprint. Our society and our lifestyles are not geared to make this easy with growth and profit being promoted as the goals we should strive for. But take a deep breath of fresh air or walk in the country or watch the birds on your feeders or the leaves on the trees and remember that we are blessed. Enjoy your life, live every day as if it were your last and treat the Earth as if you will live forever.

Together we can make a world of difference.

Frances Ramsden