

Issue Number 45 - Spring 2011



FEEDBACK

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**Lots more Tawnies at the BOT
New Projects
Come and Meet Us
Walk a Woof for Wildlife Week**

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

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*Cover Photo: Frances Ramsden
The Tawny Owls have settled in well - page 3*

*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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Welcome to Feedback. As you can see from this issue it has been busy here over the autumn and winter with several new projects underway and some, like the Wildlife Tower - page 7 and the Community Project - pages 8 & 9, completed.

As regular supporters will know, the Trust's expenditure exceeds its income almost every year. The only years when this hasn't happened are when we have received significant legacies. Last year it was a combination of generous grants from charitable trusts, an insurance payout and a significant legacy which prevented the predicted deficit.

This year the general UK economic situation has influenced individual giving and the fact that we didn't make a 'loss' last year has affected our donations from charitable trusts. As the end of the financial year looms, we are once again on course for a significant deficit and the budget predictions for next year are even worse.

With this in mind the Trustees decided it would be prudent to reduce our expenditure and the most effective way to do this is to cut staff posts. These account for over 65% of our expenditure and are extremely difficult to fund with grant support. The result is that in June the conservation team will drop from five full-time staff to four when Stuart Baker leaves us. Stuart came to the Trust in 2009 on a twelve month contract to help with the Westmoor Barn Owl Scheme and stayed on to help with the general conservation team workload. We wish him all the very best for the future and thank him for all his hard work, he will be missed, particularly by the team who will have to fill the gap!

We would be delighted to hear from anyone who has any ideas about funding core staff posts as keeping experienced staff is vital to ensure the continued work of any organisation.

On a more cheerful note, the training course we run - Barn Owl Ecology, Surveys and Signs - goes from strength to strength with an advanced course planned for this July. The Trust is going to publish a Barn Owl Conservation Handbook later this year and we are planning two Lennon Legacy Project visits for the summer - page 3, by which time the new Meeting Room - page 4, should be finished.

Whilst we've been putting this issue together we have noticed that there are more photographs of Tawny Owls in it than Barn Owls. This reflects the fact that our sanctuary currently homes more Tawnies, in fact more than we've ever had before. There are of course more Tawny Owls than Barn Owls in the wild in the UK with their populations estimated at 19,000 and 4,000 pairs respectively.

We are hoping that as many of you as possible will take part in our Walk A Woof for Wildlife Week between 28th May and 4th June this year. It doesn't matter where you live or how far you walk, we'd just really like you to support the Trust and be part of this nationwide fund-raising event, see page 15 for more details.

A big thank you to everyone who has supported the Trust since the last issue of Feedback, we couldn't do it without you. We hope you enjoy reading our news and feel inspired to help us continue conserving the *Barn Owl and its Environment*. *

Eds: Frances & Marianne

**Support the Barn Owl Trust's
Walk a Woof for Wildlife Week
28th May - 4th June 2011**

See page 15 to find out how you can join in.

Barn Owl Trust News

A Fine Read

Last year, the Barn Owl Trust embarked upon a truly epic project; the creation of the first-ever Barn Owl Conservation Handbook. With a projected size of around 180,000 words this is by far the biggest writing project we've ever undertaken. We first had the idea of writing a handbook years ago, but pressure of other work put it firmly on the back burner. Then, out of the blue, a publisher who had exactly the same idea contacted us asking if we'd like to write it. Suddenly the idea shot up our priorities list!

The book will have nine chapters and every aspect of Barn Owl conservation will be covered in detail, including first-aid and advice for dealing with injured birds. Our target audience includes owl conservation workers, ecologists, ornithologists, owl surveyors, farmers, landowners, planners, developers, bird watchers, road designers, rodenticide users and nestbox builders - basically anyone with a professional or general interest in these wonderful birds.

The book, already more than half-written, will be published by Exeter-based company Pelagic Publishing and should appear in the second half of 2011. We are hoping it will contain over two hundred photographs with one or two full colour sections. Once the cover has been designed and price finalised, we will set up a pre-order section in our on-line shop at barnowltrust.org.uk and announce this on our news page. Non-internet users may like to phone for more news in the summer. The citation will be:

Barn Owl Trust (2011). *Barn Owl Conservation Handbook: a comprehensive guide for ecologists, surveyors, land managers and ornithologists*. Exeter, Pelagic Publishing. *



Three of the 43 Tawny Owls Photo: Frances Ramsden

Parliament of Owls!

October 2010 will always be remembered as the month we welcomed 45 new feathered friends: 43 Tawny Owls and 2 Barn Owls. These new residents arrived here from the Three Owls Bird Sanctuary in Rochdale, which had been forced to close.

Nigel Fowler, a Trustee of the Three Owls sanctuary, was keen to keep the owls together as many of them had lived in the same social group for over 30 years. This coincided well with the Western Power Distribution (WPD) Project which was scheduled for September, so as well as various other projects we asked the WPD apprentices to build a huge aviary in preparation for their arrival (see full article pages 8 & 9).

The owls, ranging in age from 19 to an amazing 35 years old, arrived at BOT on the 8th October and it was all hands on deck to get them moved into their new home as quickly as possible. Each bird received a health check before being released into the aviary and any owl with a disability was fitted with a coloured ring to help with identification. Roosting boxes from their aviary back in Rochdale had been fitted into their new home and the owls seemed to relax quickly into their new surroundings. To help us to care for these birds the Three Owls Bird Sanctuary gave us a donation towards their upkeep as well as two large chest freezers to store their food. They also gave us 21 pet carriers and 10 stackable chairs.

The birds have now been with us for 5 months and we just love having them here. Being watched by forty five pairs of eyes is really amazing! *

BOT on BBC2

Coming soon! In September Chris Packham visited the Barn Owl Trust whilst filming for a new BBC2 series; *Animals Guide to Britain*. It explores various ecosystems throughout Britain from the animals' point of view. The second episode, due to air on Thursday 21st April, looks at grasslands and the species that live there - cue the Barn Owl!

Our Head of Conservation, David Ramsden, talks to Chris about why rough grassland is so important for Barn Owls using the LLP and local farmland to demonstrate this. Filming included Baley the Barn Owl and one of our mobile aviaries.

'The Grasslands' episode of *Animals Guide to Britain* is airing at **8pm on Thursday 21st April, BBC2.** *

Visit the LLP

In almost every issue of Feedback we tell you about the Lennon Legacy Project. For those of you who are really interested in the benefits of conservation management and the wildlife we see here, we produce the LLP on-line diary. This year we are planning to give you the opportunity to come and see it for yourself.

There are two chances for YOU to visit the Lennon Legacy Project this summer and see Barn Owl heaven first hand.

The two guided walks open to everyone will take in the grassland, woodland, the new footpath by the river, the ponds, the orchard and the wildlife tower. Refreshments (tea, coffee or soft drinks) will be provided. The dates are:

June 22nd Wednesday evening - a Midsummer Evening Walk from 7pm - 9pm, the grasses should be spectacular and there ought to be butterflies about.

August 10th Wednesday - LLP Talk and Butterfly Walk 10am - 1pm. Why not bring a picnic lunch to have afterwards.

Both events involve walking on uneven terrain. Dogs on leads are welcome. Please note; we do NOT display owls.

Places and parking are limited so please book early if you'd like to come along. Call 01364-653026. There is a suggested £5 donation for all non-supporters.

You could also book a date for your own group to visit, or join us for a practical conservation task - please contact us for more information. *

A New Place to Meet and Greet

Over the years, the Barn Owl Trust's staff has grown and as a result, the existing office has become increasingly cramped. Staff and Trustees meetings prove particularly difficult as people have to squeeze into our tiny kitchen or corridor for hours at a time or perch on desks to get everyone in the same room. When we have groups of visitors or volunteers who come and work on the LLP, they have to eat their lunch outside due to lack of space – great if it's sunny, not so good when it's cold and raining!

Eco builders Jo Goodey and Joe Oram, of Futureproof Building, were entrusted with the task of constructing the timber extension. They are a local company, based in Exeter, who specialise in sustainable buildings using locally sourced timber wherever possible. The new meeting room is being built using a sustainable soft-wood timber frame making it low carbon and so reducing its environmental impact. The walls and roof will be well insulated making it much more energy efficient and cheaper to heat than the rest of the office.

By the end of the first week the footprint of the building was clearly visible. The weather at the start of the project was ideal, cold but dry, so it was all systems go and the floor joists and walls went up at an astonishing pace. The weather became wetter in the first few weeks of February, but the rain didn't seem to hamper progress and in no time at all the main roof trusses were on.

Four weeks later the building was weatherproof, with all the



The all important concrete pilings Photo: Pete Webb

Back in 2007 the Trustees decided that when finances allowed a meeting room extension should be built onto the office. Darren Thomas from A -Tec Design donated his time to produce the architects' drawings and planning consent was applied for in 2009 and then things stopped. The Trust is heavily dependent on legacies and donations, which are generally sporadic in nature. This can make it difficult to plan for the future as there are often long periods when our outgoings way exceed our income.



Jo and Joe have the timber frame up in no time at all Photo: Pete Webb

doors and windows installed. Overall the project is expected to take approximately 10-12 weeks to complete so it should be finished by the Trustees meeting in mid April and be available for general use after Easter. We're really looking forward to having the space and have decided to call it the Alderson Meeting Room in memory of Norman Alderson and his wonderful legacy. *

Sarah Nelms

Conservation Assistant



The floor framework is in place Photo: Sarah Nelms

In March 2010 we received a significant legacy from a gentleman called Norman Alderson. This was a wonderful opportunity to use a legacy towards something that would benefit the Trust, its staff, volunteers and visitors for years to come. We decided that the time was right to build our meeting room.

The groundworks for our new meeting room were prepared in the summer of 2010. The construction began when the builders turned up on Monday the 17th January this year.



By March the roof is on and the doors and windows fitted Photo: Marianne Bryan

Bird News

It has been well over 20 years since the Barn Owl Trust started taking in injured or sick birds, and it's not just Barn Owls that we've seen. Other species have included Robin, Sparrow, Blackbird, Swift, Black-headed Gull, Jackdaw, Rook, Crow, Raven, Wood Pigeon, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Short-eared Owl, Long-eared Owl, Little Owl and Tawny Owl. In the early days, we even took in the occasional hedgehog!

2010 proved to be a busy year for the Barn Owl Trust Owl Hospital, with 28 birds passing through. This is the third highest number of birds we have received since 1990. In the last six months, we have received ten Tawny Owl casualties and three Barn Owls. During September we had five Tawny Owls brought into the Trust, two of which had been caught in netting. The first was found on an allotment, and the second was found hanging by its left wing in netting on a farm. Neither sustained any injuries, but both were underweight and weakened by their ordeal. They each spent a fortnight here, recuperating and gaining weight, before being released. The next two Tawnies that came to us were not so fortunate. One was found with multiple fractures to its right humerus (equivalent to the human upper arm), probably caused by a collision with a vehicle. It was worryingly underweight and despite treatment it died after just four days. As it was so underweight when it arrived, the cause of death was probably organ failure brought on by dehydration. The next Tawny had been caught on a barbed wire fence and suffered injuries to its right wing and both legs and feet, causing loss of skin and blood. Its injuries were so serious that the vets made the decision to put it to sleep.

The outcome of the last of the September Tawnies was a happy one, but it was touch and go for a while. In late September, Jenny, a supporter of our rehab and conservation work, found him in the road with an eye injury. She took him to Chris Warren at Westmoor Vets in Tavistock, who discovered he had a ripped conjunctiva on his left eye. Jenny decided to care for him until he had finished the course of medication prescribed. His eye seriously deteriorated before it started to recover and it was debateable whether he would ever recover for release. He came to the Trust for rehabilitation and the eye appeared to have little vision. We took him back to Chris at Westmoor Vets for inspection with an ophthalmoscope and the examination showed that he had 90%+ vision in the injured eye. As Tawnies can survive in the wild with only one eye, he was finally released from one of our mobile aviaries in mid-December.

October was nearly as busy as September, with three Barn Owls and one Tawny Owl being brought in. The first Barn Owl was found in the road on the northern outskirts of Plymouth, weak and underweight but without injury. She was brought back up to a healthy weight and released after a few weeks. The second was severely underweight when it arrived here and sadly died the following day. A vet had already seen the third Barn Owl that came to us, and said there were no injuries despite the bird not being able to perch upright. It was underweight and listless, and spent all of its time lying on its front. After several days of intensive care, monitoring and careful hand-feeding there was still no improvement. We suspected the possibility of spinal injury, so we took the bird to Estover Vets who found the legs were paralysed due to a dislocated and fractured spine. This case really highlights the importance of taking wild birds to vets that are experienced in the diagnosis of birds. The Tawny Owl was found wet and underweight in the middle of a lane in the South Hams. He had no injuries but did have lots of flat flies that we removed. He was kept here until he reached a good weight and was released after ten days.

November was a little quieter than the previous two months with just one Tawny Owl brought in. He had been stuck in a chimney for at least 24 hours and had quite a lot of soot in his eyes and feathers, so we bathed his eyes and ruffled his feathers a bit! He stayed at the Trust for ten days before being collected by the finders to be released.



A recuperating Tawny Owl Photo: Maxine Chavner

The last two birds received in 2010 came to us over the festive season. Both Tawny Owls - a male and a female - both road casualties. The first came in on Christmas Eve with a fracture to the metacarpals (equivalent to the human hand) of the right wing. The wing was bandaged, immobilised and the bird was put on antibiotics. She took 2½ weeks to start feeding herself, but then went from strength to strength and was released where she was found on 28th January 2011.

The second Tawny came in on New Year's Eve and was in a more serious condition than the first. He was taken to Estover Vets in Plymouth to have his right humerus permanently pinned and he too was put on antibiotics for a week. Thanks to the vets who operated very quickly and our volunteer Margaret Rhodes, who continually ferries birds around for us, the owl was back at the Trust within a couple of hours. He is currently residing in one of our Owl Hospital aviaries and it looks as though he is permanently disabled so will spend the rest of his days in sanctuary here (see photo).

Our first casualty of 2011, yet another Tawny Owl had also become tangled in netting, this time some pond netting. He had no injuries and just needed a little time to recover from the incident and was released within a few days.

Many thanks to everyone at the Veterinary Hospital, Estover, Plymouth and Westmoor Veterinary Centre, Tavistock and all the other vets that treat injured wild birds free of charge. Also many thanks to the volunteers who generously give their time to collect owls for the Trust, particularly Margaret who knows the route between the Trust and the Veterinary Hospital very well.

If you would like to help with our on-going rehabilitation work, please consider adopting one of our sanctuary owls, making a one-off donation or if you're not already a Friend of the Trust, becoming one. *

Maxine Chavner
Assistant Conservation Officer

LLP Update



First frogspawn of 2011 Photo: Sarah Nelms

At the end of August, a Kingfisher, presumed to be a dispersing youngster, was seen and heard around the ponds. A sighting of what was thought to be the same bird was reported again a month later, raising the question of whether we should try to provide an artificial nestbox site in one of the pond banks, another item to add on to the long list of things to do when we've got the time and funds. An unidentified fish fry that swam upstream in November may explain where the Trout that we found during the remedial pond works in the spring came from. The Flo pond (named after Florence Parsons), has naturalised after major works last year and looks splendid, (see page 10) with no leakage and no ugly pond liner!

The whirl-wind Western Power Distribution Apprentice Project started on the 27th September, and within the week all the planned work had been completed (see article pages 8 & 9).

The Wildlife Tower was eventually finished towards the end of October (see article page 7). Despite being completed later than scheduled, this impressive and rather beautiful structure had already attracted a Wren by the beginning of December, and by February lots of evidence of small bird activity could be seen on almost all the exposed timbers.

The remaining length of Pennsland Lane hedge was laid in October, whilst an inspection of the section laid last winter revealed an impressive amount of clean new growth, underlining the benefit of adopting traditional hedge management. Other conservation tasks in and around the field included several visits from Plymouth University volunteers. They tackled some rock-picking and scrub control in Forde Orchard, and further scrub control in various areas around the field. On one visit, the challenge of moving some of the largest stones from our rock pile to the base of the Wildlife Tower was taken up (wo)manfully without dissent; we hope our resident



One of our Dipper boxes Photo: Sarah Nelms

amphibians and reptiles appreciate the sterling effort that these remarkable volunteers made! The annual grazing regime of eight heifers and a cow came in at the end of July but had gone by the end of September to coincide with the start of the WPD Apprentice Project.

The LLP continued to attract various species of wildlife during the autumn, and throughout the winter. Two or three passage Tree Pipits and a couple of Wheatears were making the most of the rough grassland at the beginning of September for a few days, before continuing south to warmer climes. Our resident male Dipper was in song along the Ashburn in mid-November whilst a Treecreeper was foraging on the mature Oaks just outside the office. A couple of weeks later two male Bullfinches could be seen eating Ash seeds by the top bridge and good numbers of Blackbirds and Redwings were spotted along the LLP hedgerows, newly arrived for the winter no doubt. By December, large flocks of Fieldfares were noticeable as they flew around the field, uttering their distinctive 'chack-chack-chack' calls. Meadow Pipit numbers had started to build by mid-January and had reached in excess of thirty individuals by mid-February.

The new year started with a female Sparrowhawk patrolling up the roadside hedge. At the end of January, the remains of a male Goldcrest were found underneath a plucking post in the field; perhaps the Sparrowhawk got lucky. Also in January, a Siskin started visiting one of our bird feeders, and the now resident male House Sparrow was seen checking out the nestboxes around the office and LLP barn. He had returned with a female by the beginning of February, raising hopes of our first confirmed breeding on site this year.

Evidence of Field Vole activity throughout the LLP was first noticed in mid-December, and by mid-February some areas were riddled with nice new vole holes. Is this going to be a good vole year, and breeding season for Barn Owls? Watch this space.

The first frogspawn was recorded on the 4th February, five days earlier than last year but a month later than is usual here. We're keeping our fingers crossed that we've seen the last of the cold weather for this year.

Two nestboxes for Dippers were erected underneath the new bridges at the beginning of February in the hope that one of them would prove attractive to the species. The River Ashburn has had a pair of resident Dippers for some years. This is a riparian species, which requires clean, swift-running watercourses, often located in upland areas but also on lowland rivers in the South West. Their diet consists chiefly of invertebrates, including Caddis and May Fly larvae, beetles, molluscs and small crustaceans. It feeds by swimming underneath the water, often fully submerged, picking its prey from rocks and stones.

Nests are usually a dome of moss and leaves near to water and may be used for up to three broods per year. In fact, some sites once adopted may be used over many years by successive generations of individuals. Clutch size averages 4-5 eggs, typically laid between March and May, although clutches may be smaller and later at more elevated or poorer quality sites. Any suitable site may be used, including holes under overhangs in riverbanks or crevices in man-made structures. Nestboxes can be adopted in the absence of natural sites. There's no guarantee of course that the boxes will be used by Dippers, we'll just have to wait and see. Even if we don't get a Dipper this year, the nestbox design may prove attractive to Grey Wagtails, another species of freshwater rivers and streams that are occasionally seen here. *

Matthew Twiggs
Conservation Officer

Our Very Own Wildlife Tower...



...Complete!

The tower with the owl hole in the apex and a view of North Park Photo: Marianne Bryan

You may remember that back in September 2010 we were in the process of building our own Wildlife Tower in the LLP in memory of our Friend the late John Woodland. By the time the last issue of Feedback went to print the main structure of the tower was complete but the roof, nestboxes and doors were all yet to be done.



Photo: Matthew Twiggs

As summer slipped into autumn, the race was on to get the tower finished before the second anniversary of John's death in December. The roofers arrived at the beginning of October and within a day or two the tower was crowned with beautiful Welsh slate.

Meanwhile Jasmin worked on creating the doors and the Barn Owl, Kestrel, Little Owl and bat provision that would later be installed into the upper storey of the tower.

Once the roofers had gone she and David set to work on installing the two oak doors that would allow access to the upper and lower storeys. At the beginning of December Matt and some volunteers from Plymouth University added the finishing touches by moving some rocks from one of our rock piles to the base of the tower, creating a habitat for reptiles and amphibians.

A small ceremony was held on the 12th December to declare the tower open to local wildlife. It was attended by John's family, three of the Barn Owl Trust Trustees and our Head of Conservation, David Ramsden. Now with the wildlife tower complete there's just one final thing to do. That is to ensure the bat provision in the tower is as good

as it can be. As none of us are bat specialists, we invited Dr David Fee from Ambios Ecology to come and take a look. He was really excited by the tower and has agreed to help us find out which species of bat we have visiting the LLP. That way we can fulfil their very specific living requirements.

The tower fits into the landscape perfectly, it is situated in a beautiful and peaceful spot in North Park looking down over the wildlife ponds, the orchard and the River Ashburn. It has already been visited by Wrens and used by the local Buzzards as a perch. We hope that it will be, as John wanted, a lasting home for local fauna. *

Sarah Nelms
Conservation Assistant



John's family at the ceremony Photo: Frances Ramsden

WPD Community Project



Official Group Photo: Apex Photo Agency

The last week of September was a frantic bustle of activity here at the Trust when 31 apprentices and their trainers from Western Power Distribution (WPD) descended on us for 4 days. Every year the new apprentices take part in a community project either in the South West of England or Wales as part of their team building and this year the Barn Owl Trust was the beneficiary.

Preparation and planning had been underway since the spring with visits from WPD Training Centre staff. There were also lots of emails and phone calls to work out exactly what the apprentices would do once they were here. Two main projects were agreed, one to build a footpath to provide access to an area of the Trust's LLP (Lennon Legacy Project) land, previously only accessible by wading the stream, and the other to build accommodation for the 45 owls we had arriving in October (see the news article on page 3).

Throughout the summer materials for the projects were ordered and paid for by WPD - thank you folks. As materials arrived: the timber, gravel and wire mesh, we moved them to the areas where they would be needed. Meanwhile, our staff demolished the two old Tawny Owl release aviaries (built by volunteers in 1990) to make space for the new one. Rock from the site of the new meeting room was used to level the area.

With so many extra bodies about, portaloos were ordered and moved up to Forde Orchard and the Trust's marquee was erected to provide a base for the apprentices whilst they were here.

The arrival of the WPD team was quite something: a minibus, a people carrier, 2 landrovers, trailers, a 4WD utility vehicle and vans full of tools. The 31 apprentices along with 7 staff from the training centre and 2 from the local depot at Kingsbridge made quite a crowd! Our barn became a kit store for the duration of the project. Jasmin, our handyperson, acted as the main

contact with the aviary building team and conservation officer Matt liaised and worked with the footpath team.

Day One was dry and started with the required Health and Safety chat and a tour of the project areas. After lunch it was all hands on deck and progress was good. At 5.30 they all piled back into vehicles and set off for the Youth Hostel in Exeter where they were spending the night. By midday on Day Two the rain had set in and tarpaulins were attached to the marquee



The team gather at the site of the new aviary for briefing

to provide a dry space for lunch. Things started to slow down and by the end of the day it was a group of damp and muddy lads who headed off for the evening. They arrived on Day Three in rain which fortunately stopped by lunchtime when the 'official photo' was taken. At this point it



Work begins on the top bridge
 looked like they would be hard pressed to complete everything
 and a length of path by the ponds might not get done. ↓
 But a huge push in the afternoon and a dry Day Four meant
 that we were back on track. BOT Trustee Simon Wilson and



The Tawny Owl aviary starts to take shape
 inspection of the new aviary and a walk along the new
 woodland footpath as daylight was beginning to fade. ↓
 We are very grateful to Western Power Distribution for their
 support and to their apprentices and staff who worked so hard



Matt & WPD Apprentice erecting the gate into Forde Orchard

Treasurer Mark Poutney arrived at 5pm to a scene of manic
 activity. There were apprentices sawing the last bits of wood,
 hammering the last pieces of batten, angle grinding the
 corrugated roof panels to size and using wheelbarrows to
 move 5 tonnes of gravel and 4 cubic meters of wood bark to
 complete the aviary - wow! With a huge effort and a long day
 they completed everything they planned. ↗
 When it was all done there was just time for the two groups of
 apprentices to see each others' work. We finished with an



The roof goes on the Tawny Owl aviary

and made this Community Project such a success.

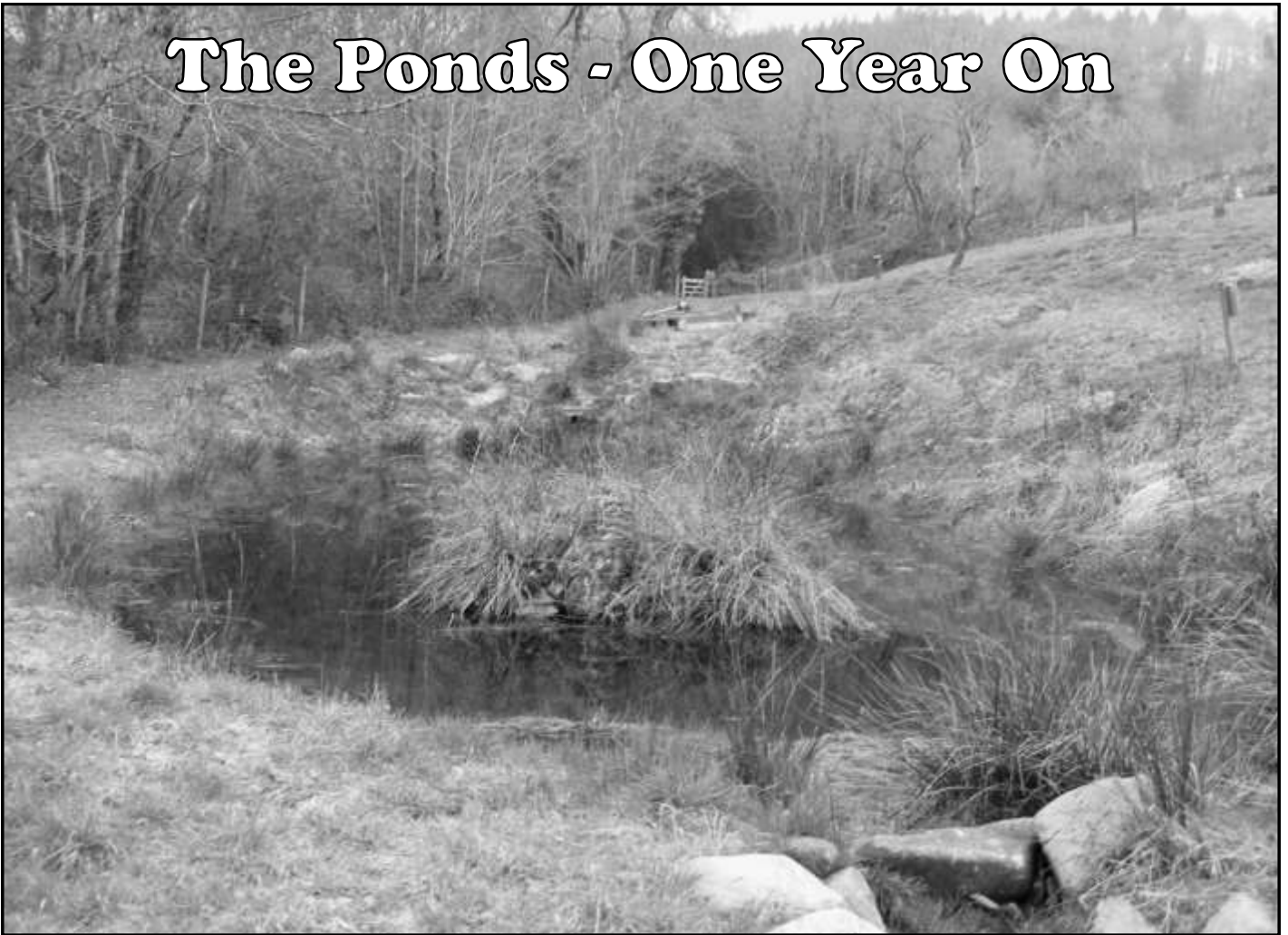
We hope the apprentices will be back this summer for a full
 tour of the LLP and to see the fruits of their labours. Well done
 lads. *

Frances Ramsden

*Completed! - (Left) - The footpath through the woodland
 (Below) - The top bridge Photos: Frances Ramsden*



The Ponds - One Year On



Looking at the ponds now, it's hard to believe that only a year ago the whole area looked like a muddy battlefield. Work to repair them began in late February 2010 when the water was drained, the old liner was removed and a new bentonite (a clay-based powder) layer laid down.

The conservation team spent hours paddling around in the sludge to catch frogs and the unexpected Brown Trout, which were relocated to safety before the digger moved in. It was only a matter of months before the vegetation around



2010 - Balazs and the mud Photo: Matthew Twiggs

the ponds looked as though nothing had ever happened. By May pond fauna had started to move back in and Pond Skaters, Water Measurers and Water Boatman nymphs were all spotted – a really good sign.

As the weather got warmer the water level in the ponds

The Flo Pond March 2011 Photo: Marianne Bryan

dropped. But by making adjustments to the pipes in the river feeding the abstraction system we managed to maintain adequate water levels in the ponds. In September the Western Power Distribution (WPD) apprentices built a lovely new boardwalk over the stream that joins the two ponds, a perfect viewing platform.

This winter the ponds were frozen for six weeks, but by February 2011 there was a tremendous amount of frog spawn and the pond edges are now black with tadpoles. It just goes to show how quickly nature can recover when given the opportunity. *

Sarah Nelms

Conservation Assistant

Thank you

Following a breakdown and what turned out to be a cracked head gasket, the Trust's old workhorse, our Ford Ranger had to go in October. Fortunately we managed to get several grants which enabled us to buy a five year old replacement and this one even has a double cab which makes it more versatile. With a conversion to bio-fuel, its BOT logos in place, a new hardtop and ladder racks it was pressed into service enabling us to get out into the field and do the practical conservation work the Trust is known for.

We'd like to say thank you to those grant giving trusts that enabled us to keep on moving and to all the charities, organisations and individuals who have assisted our work. We know that times are hard and we do appreciate your help. Your support really does make a difference to us and we couldn't achieve everything we do without it - thank you from the bottom of our hearts. *

Cold Comfort for Barn Owls



the day is far more vulnerable to predators than a flying Barn Owl at night.

How we can help

Food availability is the major problem facing Barn Owls in the winter. When there is an abundance of prey, foraging birds spend less time out in the cold. By far the best way to supply wild Barn Owls with food is to create areas of high quality foraging habitat. The Field Vole (*Microtus agrestis*) is the most important prey species for British Barn Owls and when we talk about creating optimum habitat for Barn Owls, what we really mean is creating habitat for Field Voles. Where grass is allowed to grow long over the summer, and then die back during the winter, the following year's growth will come up through this dead layer. The dead material forms what is called a litter layer, and it is this litter layer that provides cover for Field Voles allowing them to build up their numbers.

Barn Owls don't have an easy life here in Britain. Although they are native to the British Isles, they originally evolved in a much warmer and drier climate. A quick look at the current worldwide distribution of Barn Owls tells us that they can be found mainly across tropical and subtropical areas. Australia, South-East Asia, India, the Middle East, Madagascar, Africa, and South and Central America are all home to Barn Owl populations of various subspecies. Britain represents the extreme northern edge of the species range, and they are not found anywhere in the world further north than Scotland. As a consequence of evolving in a warmer climate Barn Owls have some adaptations that cause them problems in cold and wet weather.

Physical adaptations

Firstly, Barn Owls are less able to store body fat than other, similarly sized owls, and this has several effects on their energy requirements. Being unable to utilise body fat as insulation means that they lose more energy into their surroundings in the form of heat. Additionally, they are less able to take advantage of any surplus food they may encounter, as they cannot 'fatten themselves up' in preparation for a lean period. As a result they are forced to hunt more frequently, which is a further drain on their energy reserves. The second adaptation that hinders cold weather survival involves their feathers. Barn Owl feathers are very soft, an adaptation for near silent flight. For a species that relies almost totally on its hearing to detect its prey in the dark, this is essential. The unavoidable trade-off is that these feathers have inferior insulation and waterproofing properties to those displayed by other native owl species such as Tawny Owls.

Another problem caused by severe winters that is not limited to Barn Owls is snow cover. Like many other birds of prey, Barn Owls rely heavily on small mammals such as voles, mice and shrews for their food. These mammals will often move about beneath the snow, making them difficult to detect. The upshot of all this is that even in an average winter, many Barn Owls struggle to survive. With two harsh winters in a row things are not looking too good.

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), which runs the national bird ringing scheme, received over 100 reports of dead Barn Owls in December of last year, about three times the usual number.

Behavioural adaptations

While this all sounds very depressing, there is some good news. Barn Owls do employ strategies to minimise the effects of cold weather in winter periods. Firstly, they can avoid the coldest periods by hunting during the day, and daylight owl sightings are much more common in the winter than they are in the summer. Generally Barn Owls hunt on the wing, flying low over fields in search of prey. In the winter they will often hunt in static fashion from a fence post or other low perch. Not only do they save energy by not flying, but by keeping their wings folded they lose less heat. However a Barn Owl perch-hunting during

Mice, small rats and especially day old chicks are all suitable food items for supplementary feeding Barn Owls. These can be bought frozen from pet shops and online suppliers that cater for the reptile trade, but they should be defrosted thoroughly before use. Placing them off the ground, out of reach of foxes and other scavengers is essential, and it is best to put them on a beam or other indoor perch that the owls use, in order to maximise the chances of them being found. When providing food it is really important not to disturb the bird by flushing them from the building into bad weather. White mice and yellow chicks may not be recognised as food by owls that are used to live, wild prey and it can take several days before the birds can be persuaded to feed.

Barn Owls are not very well adapted to the cold British winters, but they have lived here quite successfully for millions of years. If we all do our bit, be it erecting nestboxes to provide shelter, leaving rough grass field margins for foraging habitat, or by avoiding the use of highly toxic rat poisons, then we can hopefully continue to enjoy the presence of these birds for many years to come. *

Stuart Baker

Assistant Conservation Officer

In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies
from the estates of the late

Valerie Brenda Roberts,
Penelope Hazel Dyer
and

donations in memory of

Shirley Champion, S.Osborn, Joyce Gibbs.

Steven Wheeler, Christopher Pringle,
Stuart Westaway, Tony Blanche,

Patricia Billington, Martha Aspden,
Kenneth William Cartwright, Mrs Smith
Betty Collins and Alma Lillian Dewis

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

Team News

Since the last edition of Feedback we have said a few fond farewells. Our Publicity Officer, Caroline Lewis, left us at the end of September to embark upon a degree in Typography & Design. Also, Admin Assistant Liza Gunning who was responsible for our legacy leaflet distribution project, left the Trust at the beginning of January to enrol in a carpet restoration apprenticeship. They had both been with the Trust for over four years. We wish them the best of luck and will miss them both dearly, not to mention their four legged friends: Hugo, Jessie and Bridie!

We welcomed two new members of staff to the Admin team earlier this year: Karen Smerdon and Teresa Patmore. We also have a new Volunteer Aviary Cleaner, Stephanie Kent, who has been helping out since November, come rain or shine! Stephanie not only volunteers for the Barn Owl Trust but she has also offered her time to BTCV and is currently volunteering with Natural England.

After placing an advert on our website for a Volunteer Nestboxing Assistant we held a morning of interviews and Nicole Dunn was offered a three month placement from the end of November 2010. She has been a real asset to the Trust in this time. Her placement has now finished and she will soon be embarking on an exciting six month volunteer placement for the National Trust in Glencoe, Scotland. *

Hello, my name is Karen. I started with the Trust in January 2011 and have taken over the legacy leaflet distribution project from Liza. My previous



Karen Photo: Marianne Bryan

experience has been mainly in retail, working in either cash offices or customer services for several of the major supermarkets. I worked for Barclays Bank for eight years and latterly for two years in a shop selling fruit and veg. I love to travel and have been to some beautiful places including Dubai, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Tunisia, Cyprus and most of Europe.

This is the first time I have worked for a charity and I have been made very welcome. I am

Karen Smerdon

Admin Assistant

Hello my name is Teresa and I joined the Trust in February. Last summer I volunteered at an awareness day to promote the Barn Owl Trust working alongside Publicity Officer, Caroline



Teresa Photo: Marianne Bryan

and Jasmin, the Trust's Handywoman. I took along my partner Simon and my 12 year old son, Connor Luke and we had a fun day selling Barn Owl related goodies, talking to people, and I even got roped into doing face painting! As I enjoyed myself so much, when the PR assistant position came up I jumped at the chance to work for the Trust. As the poor office staff now know, I'm no shrinking violet, and therefore ideally suited to organising fund raising events. ➔

I've lived in Ashburton for four years and I love the town, community and countryside. Working for a local conservation charity makes me feel even more connected; an added bonus

is the beautiful location and the best view from an office desk I've ever had! I previously managed a charity shop in Ashburton for two years. I have also organised fundraising events including a weekly craft fair in Ashburton and a D-Day celebration fancy dress party for the British Legion and the Poppy Appeal.

I am very excited to be working for the Barn Owl Trust. I have a great team to work with and have lots of ideas, which I am hoping to put into practice over the next few months, starting with an Easter Eggstravaganza at the Edgemoor Hotel. Watch our website, Facebook and Twitter pages for details of the events. *

Teresa Patmore
PR Assistant

Balazs Mate was a volunteer for the Hungarian Barn Owl Foundation (HBOF) when he first came over from Hungary and volunteered for the Trust in February 2010. He stayed for three months, helping out with nestbox erections, woodwork and

Balazs Came Back!

many other practical tasks with the conservation team. When he returned to Hungary it was to become the Foundation's first employee. This year he came back!



Balazs erecting a Tree Creeper nestbox Photo: Matthew Twiggs

Last year our Trustees decided to make a grant to support the Foundation and their Barn Owl training and the upshot was that Balazs returned to the UK this year. This time he arrived mid January and left at the end of March. Since arriving he worked like a trojan, not only did he build a huge number of outdoor nestboxes and 4 poleboxes, but he also attended a ladder safety training course, accompanied conservation staff on fieldwork and helped with practical tasks in the LLP.

Balazs has now returned to Hungary where he will be welcoming UK volunteers working with the Foundation over the summer. If you are interested in volunteering/training abroad you can find out more by visiting EcoTrain at www.ambios.net. The Foundation is currently applying for European funding to allow more Hungarian volunteers to visit Britain. *

Barn Owl Trust

Easter Sunday Eggstravaganza

24th April 2011

Edgemoor Hotel Bovey Tracey

12 - 4 pm Easter events for children and adults

Admission: Children £3.50 - Adults Free

7.30 pm - Evening Event

Live music with Noel Harrison and others

Tickets £8.50

Visit www.barnowltrust.org.uk

Or call 01364-653026 for more information

Other Barn Owl Trust News

New Trustee



It was 2007 when we last had a new Trustee but in November 2010 the Trust welcomed a new member to the ranks.

Kevin Keatley has been a Friend and supporter of the Trust since 1993 when he began taking photographs for us. Born and brought up in Sussex he moved to Devon in 1989. He has been a commercial diver, went to agricultural college, worked on a farm and started a rope business.

Photo: Supplied by Kevin Through his varied careers Kevin always had a camera with him and has always been passionate about wildlife and wildlife photography. In 1992 he set up Wildlife Watching Supplies to provide better equipment for wildlife photographers. Kevin is married with 2 daughters. *

Retiring Trustee

After more than 22 years in the role, one of our founding Trustees retired in February. Heather Buswell was instrumental in the creation of the Trust, providing the land used for both the aviaries and the offices and initially even the phone line before there was the money to have our own.

Her prevailing interest in the Trust was the birds and their welfare and despite Heathers dislike of bureaucracy, she rarely missed the quarterly management meetings and was responsible for a round-up of Bird News appearing at the top of the Trustees agenda.

Her hands-on roles included feeding the owls when there was no-one else available and doing all the Trusts laundry. She was also a regular visitor to the office with her dogs and of course came to know all of the staff.

The Trustees, staff, volunteers and of course the owls, are very, very grateful for all of Heather's support over the years. Although we hope she will continue to be involved in some way she will be greatly missed as a Trustee. Thank you Heather. *



Stuart demonstrates the new kit Photo: David Ramsden

Look No Hands!

Going up a ladder and then letting go with both hands sounds really dangerous but, as part of our conservation work, we've been doing this for well over twenty years and not had a single accident. We've carried heavy nestboxes up ladders one-handed, got them into position with both hands, and then fixed them over 1,500 times without as much as a scratch on our personal injury records. Over the years, our Health and Safety Policy, Risk Assessments, and working practices have been checked over by our local Environmental Health Department and found to be acceptable – mainly due to our fantastic track record. How, you might ask, have we managed to do so much dangerous work without an accident? The answer is simple: we've used 'Common Sense'.

Whilst working practices at the Barn Owl Trust have remained pretty much the same since 1988, the outside world has changed. Falling from ladders has been identified as a major cause of deaths and serious injuries, common sense has declined, and self-responsibility has given way to a culture of litigation. European Regulations and UK Law now require all employers to comply with highly detailed legislation that controls a huge range of activities including the use of ladders. Being trained by someone who has used ladders for thirty years is not acceptable. Trainers must be 'HSE approved'. Using a homemade wooden wedge to stabilise a ladder on uneven ground is not allowed. Instead, a 'proprietary device' must be used. Expensive harnesses must be bought and replaced after five years, even if they are still in perfect condition.

On the positive side, Barn Owl Trust staff can undertake ladder work confident in the knowledge that they have been officially trained, have all the right Personal Protective Equipment and that they are, at least in theory, safer than they were before and our Trustees are confident that we are meeting all our legal obligations. *



Winter at Waterleat

Virgin Snow - Pete was the first to arrive at work on the 20th December 2010 after a two mile walk. Photo: Pete Webb

Supporters News

Sword-swallowing



Occasionally we receive reports of unusual prey items found in Barn Owl pellets, so unusual in fact, it makes the mind boggle!

These pictures (left) of a pellet and its contents were taken by Dr. Barrie Watson. The pellet was from the Adur Valley in West Sussex.



He told us, *"I was collecting some pellets for a school project, I came across a large Barn Owl pellet with the beak of a wader sticking out. It seems to be the skull and bill of a Woodcock, with just the end of the lower mandible broken off. A sword swallowing act!! I found no*

other bird parts in the pellet but a couple of Field vole skulls".

As we all know, Barn Owls eat small mammals. In fact, we know exactly what the average UK Barn Owl eats through the study of pellet contents. Barn Owls regurgitate the indigestible parts of their diet that their relatively weak stomach acid does not dissolve. These mucus-wrapped pellets consist almost exclusively of small mammal fur and the major bones, such as skulls and jawbones, of their small mammal prey. For example, the identification of over 182,000 individual prey items, analysed from more than 50,000 Barn Owl pellets from over 380 sites has shown that over 80.9% of the pellets analysed comprised of only three species, Field Voles, Common Shrews and Wood Mice. Field Voles making twice the contribution of Common Shrew and Wood Mouse combined. Moreover, a



further four small mammal species account for another 16.7%. On occasion, the Trust has also found some interesting prey remains at Barn Owl sites, including this wader skull, which was found underneath a nestbox with lots of small mammal remains, but it was unclear whether it had originally been in a pellet or had been discarded before consumption. Having said that, the importance of small mammal prey must not be underestimated. The Mammal Society found that, of 694 batches of 25 pellets or more, Field Vole remains were found in 693 batches. The message clearly is *"Rough grassland for Field Voles is best"*. *



Towering Success

The BOT has been creating provision for Barn Owls since the mid 1980's but the first wildlife tower we were involved with in 2006 was something completely different. The resulting TV coverage and information on our website have encouraged several people to think about building their own.

Whilst planning the construction of our very own wildlife tower here in the LLP, we were approached by a landowner from North Yorkshire who was interested in building a tower on his own land. The plans and elevations were sent to him and some initial queries were answered, then all went quiet until we received this photo of the finished article.

Although it has been built in a less traditional style than both the towers we have been involved with, this one will no doubt be just as attractive to the resident wildlife, will last indefinitely and is a mere snip at about £3,000. For more information on having your own wildlife tower please visit our website at: <http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk/infopage.html?id=202>

With more than a dozen people requesting plans over the last year, wildlife towers could soon be springing up and providing homes for wildlife anywhere. *

Come and meet us :

24th April - Easter Eggstravaganza - Bovey Tracey, Devon

28th April - 'Lennon Legacy Project' talk - West Somerset

19th, 20th and 21st May - Devon County Show - Exeter, Devon

9th, 10th and 11th June - Royal Cornwall Show - Wadebridge, Cornwall

22nd June - Midsummer Evening Walk - Lennon Legacy Project, Waterleat, Devon

10th August - Butterfly Walk - Lennon Legacy Project, Waterleat, Devon

3rd and 4th September - Dorset Show - Dorchester, Dorset

8th September - 'Restoring the Balance' talk - Liverton, Devon

21st October - BOT Annual General Celebration - Waterleat, Devon

22nd November - 'Restoring the Balance' talk - Dorset

We hope to see you there

Whisky the Westie

...

...Walks for Wildlife!

This year we'd like you and your faithful four-legged friends to join us and make this a nationwide dog walking event!

This is our 11th annual sponsored dog event. Megan the Golden Retriever started us off in 2001, Hugo the Cocker Spaniel took over last year and this year we welcome Whisky the West Highland Terrier. Due to its continued success and thanks to your generosity we would now like to invite you, your pooches and your family to get involved too.

Our friend Whisky will be walking for the Barn Owl Trust here in glorious Devon on one day between the 28th May and the 4th June. Whisky can be sponsored by sending back the completed flyer enclosed in this "Feedback" magazine, or on line via the donations page by putting 'Whisky' in the 'reason for donation' box. Whisky will be walking 7 miles and only has little legs, bless him! So please be as generous as you can.

What we're aiming for is to link you and your best friend with Whisky's walk. Take your dog, or a friend's, on your favourite walk on any day that week and raise funds for the Trust. Choose your route, we recommend about 5 miles, get your four-legged friend sponsored by everyone you know and just go for it!

To have your own doggy day out, contact us for a sponsor form; it even has a space provided for a photo of your dog! Take a picnic, binoculars, your partner, friends and kids, if you have them and make it an event.

Please be mindful of where you are walking, ask permission if required and always follow the countryside code. There are many good websites if you'd like to find somewhere new to explore with your four-legged friend. Try looking at www.dogfriendlybritain.co.uk for some really good ideas. We would love to see your pictures and hear the stories from your

walk. Plan an adventure and raise money for the Barn Owl Trust too! Thank you and enjoy your walk(ies!) *

Teresa Patmore
PR Assistant

**Sponsored Dog
Walk Week**
28th May - 4th June 2011

**WE NEED YOU
AND YOUR PETS
WHEREVER YOU LIVE!**

Sponsor
"Whisky the Westie"
Or walk your own
four-legged friend!

See the enclosed leaflet

Thanks and things

A huge thank you to all our friends and supporters who have sent us items for recycling and from our Wants List over the past six months. We have received padded envelopes, bubble wrap, stamps, envelopes, 1st day covers, postcards/old greetings cards, foreign coins/notes, watches, silver/gold jewellery, toner/ink cartridges, cameras, mobile phones and film canisters all of which have been recycled and raised funds for the Trust or saved us money.

We have also received items for our Ladies Lucky Dip, wild bird food, knitted mobile phone covers, tools/drills, stuffed toys to sell on ebay and wild Barn Owl pellets which we send to schools; we can't collect enough to meet the demand so please keep them coming! A huge thank you to all of the following folk:

Louise Anquetil, Pauline Sharp, Hazel Baldwin, Cheryl Crichton, Tony Volante, Mrs Perriss, Heather Buswell, Ann Green, Gwyneth Parish, Simon Roper, Rachael Park, Vanessa & Alan Lewis, Reg and Beryl Welsh, Colin Morris, Karen Barton, Mark Pountney, Kelly Messom, Fred Towers, Tessa Mills, Elizabeth Mercer, Paul Rendell, Ann Long, Jan George, Sir Ian & Lady Johnson-Ferguson, Mr M Fieldhouse, Carol Langstone, Lynne Green, Richard Cranfield, Samantha Reeve, John & Sheila Prickett, Ada & Dennis Birbeck, Sarah Tadd, Tim & Debbie Gove, Melanie White, Audrey Fox, L Dongar, Jan George, Audrey Saunders, Elizabeth Wilson, Graham & Marie-Anne Martin, Dawn & Linda Gerrard, Carol Langstone, Gro Company - Ashburton, Clayden Associates, John Seear, Sarah Dimmock, Sandra & Paddy Reardon, Richard Cranfield, John & Veg Truman, Nina Coombes, Elizabeth Graham, Samantha Reeve and the anonymous senders - we really do appreciate your donations. Thank you all.

Thank you to Graham & Helen Lawes for donating a new phone line for the meeting room and Tony Volante who visited the Trust with his metal detector. We are especially grateful for funds raised by: Margaret and Derrick Crocker - selling plants, Lochfield Primary School who were reading "The owl who was afraid of the dark", Hannah Sturges and her friend Hannah Young held a bric a brac stall and Liam Ashford raised money by holding a homemade cake sale. Thank you!

We would be delighted to receive any of the following items still on our **Wants List**:

- * A roll of Bubble wrap (or odd sheets), padded envelopes
- * 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 25x50mm tanalised batten
- * A4 and A3 recycled paper and card both coloured and white
- * Box trailer in good working order
- * Inkjet cartridges for HP Deskjet 3820
- * More lawn/garden rakes
- * Postage stamps, both new for BOT use and used - especially commemorative and foreign
- * Metal detector
- * 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
- * Large Microwave
- * and for our new meeting room: Folding tables, Comfortable stacking chairs and an Electric Catering Urn

Thank you for thinking of us. *

Tail piece...



We don't watch television in our house, but even so we haven't been able to escape the terrible toll of devastation caused by the natural disasters recently - first in New Zealand and then Japan. Our hearts go out to all those affected by the horrific consequences of both of these events.

Of course there have always been earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, floods and fires but over the last few years the media has been dominated by them. Is this our planet's way of warning us that our 21st Century way of life is not sustainable? We all know of the predictions for climate change, population explosion and the end of fossil fuels, but on a day-to-day basis does it affect the way we live, or the decisions we make?

Maybe the terrible problems in Japan, caused by the nuclear plant, will make our government think again about investing vast quantities of our money and the future of our country in escalating the UK's nuclear energy programme. I know we need the power, but at what cost? Surely expanding something so potentially harmful to all living beings is a crazy thing to do. Who knows where the next hurricane, flood or earth quake will strike.

I would much rather live next door to a huge wind farm or a bank of solar panels than a nuclear power plant. Can you imagine what it must be like for the people of Japan to be told there is radiation in their water? The Chernobyl nuclear disaster occurred in Russia on 26 April 1986. Its effects were felt around the world, even causing a ban on the movement of sheep in Britain. Sixteen years later in 2002 the Ukrainian government agency Chernobyl Interinform reported that 84% of the three million people in Ukraine who had been exposed to radiation were registered as sick - this included one million children.

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Hundreds of Welsh sheep farms were still blighted by the effects of radioactive fall-out in 2006, twenty years after the disaster.

What has all of this got to do with Barn Owls I hear you ask. Well, all things are connected and if we poison our planet then it is not just humans who will suffer. The birds, animals and plants that share this wonderful world are affected by the decisions we make. Unfortunately these days sustainability, conservation and environmental issues hold little sway when measured against power, politics and economics. Surely with all the knowledge and technological advantages we now have, we should be able to leave our grandchildren the legacy of a healthy natural environment. Let's not wait until "*the last tree has died and the last river been poisoned before we realise that we cannot eat money*".

Each of us can play our part, we can recycle, shop ethically, lift-share, support environmental projects and maybe even get involved in practical conservation. Hopefully if enough of us express concern about policies that will affect our world, the politicians that want to be re-elected will have to take notice.

Let us all do everything we can to protect the Earth, for wildlife, for future generations and for the health of our own spirits.

*Together we can make a world of difference. **

Frances Ramsden

