

feedback

Issue 61 / Spring 2019



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

Waterleat, Ashburton
Devon TQ13 7HU

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Cover Photo: Hamish Paterson

Feedback is produced for supporters of the Barn Owl Trust by staff and volunteers.

A big thank you to everyone who provided words and pictures for this issue.

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Copy date for issue No 62 - 26th July 2019
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Diary Dates 2019

May - Fri 3rd - 5:30am - Dawn Chorus Walk

June - Thurs 20th - 2.00pm - Midsummer Walk & Cream Tea

Sat 29th - 19.30pm - Concert - Ashburton Arts

July - Tues 2nd - 2.30pm - Butterfly Walk

Tues 16th - Thurs 18th - BOESS & ABOSM Courses

August - Fri 9th - 7.30pm - Bat Walk led by local expert

Join us for practical work with the Conservation Team:

April - Tues 30th / **June** - Tues 4th / **July** - Weds 3rd

August - Tues 6th / **September** Tues 3rd - **All 10am - 4pm**

Contact the office for more details or to book a place at an event - booking is essential as places are strictly limited.

Welcome to issue 61 of Feedback. It's been a hive of activity here since our last issue. You will see from the article on page 3 that our 7 minute slot on BBC Countryfile in February has had quite an effect. The demand for our handmade nestboxes has never been so high. It's great to see so many members of the public actively engaging with our work by purchasing one of our boxes. As we go to print, the nestbox team are busily cutting wood for our next batch. Many of you have also been in touch to tell us all about your home-made nestboxes. Head to page 14 to read nestbox success stories from here in the UK and the USA.

If you have a Barn Owl related story you'd like to share with us please get in touch. We'd love to hear from you. Drop us an email on feedback@barnowltrust.org.uk or write to us at our normal address.

The Conservation Team have been busy, as always, with enquires, training courses and site visits. So busy, in fact, that we have just held interviews for a new Administrative Assistant to Conservation. Their duties will include looking after our talk and school visit bookings, organising our training courses and giving dedicated support to the Conservation Team. This means our current P.A. to Head of Conservation, Mateo, who has a background in avian ecology and research, will become Assistant Conservation and Science Officer. Look out for our next issue where you'll get to meet the new team member!

Speaking of new team members... a big welcome to Gill and Lisa who have joined the BOT admin team and to Natasha who is now part of the nestbox building team. You can read all about them in 'Team Talk' on page 15.

On a more serious note, the Barn Owl Trust recognises that global warming and climate change affects not only Barn Owl habitats, but the planet itself. As a conservation charity we are committed to doing what we can to live and work more sustainably and to reduce our own ecological footprint as part of the effort to help the Earth survive and recover from the negative impact of humans. We try to re-use, recycle and reduce wherever we can and we encourage members of our team to look at positive things they can do to help the planet. This very magazine is printed on FSC approved, recycled paper.

We can each have an impact by making careful choices about what we buy to eat and wear, for example. Recycling, reusing and reducing waste are really important whether at work or at home. We are all encouraged to recycle by local councils but in reality we need to do more than sort our rubbish for the bin men to take away. Perhaps we can work towards using less paper and plastics, rather than just recycling what we use? Perhaps you'd like to receive future copies of Feedback by email?

Current eco-advice is that we should buy more food that is produced sustainably, and as locally as possible, thus reducing the air miles involved whilst at the same time supporting local farmers and growers. The more we demand environmentally friendly produce and packaging, the more impact we can have on decisions made by food suppliers. Public demand does influence what ends up on our supermarket shelves.

We may want to look at buying fewer new clothes, wearing the ones we have for longer and refashioning out-dated items into something more wearable. If buying new, look out for organic cottons, and clothes produced ethically, wherever they are from. A t-shirt costing £1 is likely to be costing the planet!

The time to make changes is now, and we at the Barn Owl Trust are hoping you will join us to make better choices to reduce the impact we are having on the planet. Good luck!

Aaron Kitts, Gill Gant & Jackie Atkinson

BOT News

News Bites

BOT Charity Concert

Are you local to Ashburton or visiting the area on Saturday 29th June? We'd love you to join us for an evening of entertainment at Ashburton Arts Centre.

The concert starts at 7:30pm and features music from some very talented acts including Barron Brady, Harpingmad, Kathryn Collings and Owly Dave. Tickets from Rafikis Café, Ashburton or from WeGotTickets.com.

Congrats Midge & Judith

BOT Team members Judith and Midge (the dog) completed their challenge to walk 1,500 miles in 2018 all whilst fundraising for BOT and the Honiton Admiral Nurse. They'd like to thank everyone who joined them on their many walks and to all who kindly sponsored them helping them raise over £950 for the Trust.

New Workshop Shutters

Roller shutters were fitted to our previously open-sided barn, where we build our nestboxes. They now provide much needed protection from the elements to the hard working nestbox building team. They also allow us to store the stock more securely. With the very strong winds over the last few weeks the shutters have already proved their worth. Just keeping the end shutter down has meant that the biting wind has been kept at bay. A very big thank you goes to the Laura Kinsella Foundation, The Mitchell Trust, the Jack Patston Charitable Trust and the Hobson Charity who all kindly donated funds to complete this project.

Silver Bars

A big thank you to Bleyer Bullion of North Devon for their kind donation. They donated £5 from every sale of their Hand Poured 2oz Silver Barn Owl Bars. Each hallmarked bar has been stamped with a simple but beautiful Barn Owl design. They also adopted the lovely Baley the Barn Owl. Visit our website to learn more about adopting a Barn Owl or to learn more about how the silver bars were created head to bleyerbullion.co.uk.

Shows & Events

Come visit us at the following shows:

Devon County Show - 16th-18th May
Royal Cornwall Show - 6th-8th June
Totnes & District Show - 28th July
Honiton Show - 1st Aug
Holsworthy Show - 22nd Aug
Kingsbridge Show - 17th Sep
Widcombe Fair - 10th Sept

BBC iPlayer



The 'Countryfile Effect'

We often receive calls from TV researchers who want to feature Barn Owls, in fact, that's how our Barn Owl work really took off back in '84 - but that's another story. Most TV related calls these days are from independent production companies but it is quite often still the dear old 'Beeb'. Indeed, *Springwatch* alone have called us near twenty times over the years! Usually it's just a quick fact-check but there's always an element of "who knows what this might lead to"... And that's how I felt on 10th December when *Countryfile* called.

Stage one of 'The Countryfile Effect' is *time consumption*. Gone are the days of "Can we film it today?" and by 4pm it's all over. The seven minute Barn Owl item featured on the *Countryfile* Winter Special, on Feb 10th, took many emails to organise and over ten hours to film.

Fortunately the crew, led by BBC producer Michelle Pascal, was great to work with. A very long, cold and damp day of filming was greatly facilitated by *Countryfile* presenter Steve Brown and the owners of both filming locations who share a genuine love of Barn Owls. Just in case you missed it, you might still be able to watch online by searching for 'BBC *Countryfile* Winter Special 2019'.

Stage two of 'The Countryfile Effect' is *inundation*. The piece ended with a shot of a beautiful Barn Owl, standing on a Barn Owl Trust nestbox, and the presenter saying those immortal words "if you build it they will come". Well. That really did it. The phone wasn't literally 'red hot' but the handset was certainly a lot warmer than usual.

We lost count of how many enquiries we received from viewers but there were certainly well over a hundred. In February 2019 we sold 114 nestboxes compared to 52 in February 2018.

On the day of the broadcast, our website received almost 10,000 page views compared to the more usual 2,000, leading our webmaster, Alan, to comment "David's enthusiasm is so infectious, it just leads you right in there, and makes you want to get your own nestbox. It's not surprising that sales are going through the roof!" It's true. I do rather like Barn Owls!

David Ramsden
Head of Conservation

PS. I'd like to express the enormous gratitude I feel for everyone who bore the brunt of the outcome of our *Countryfile* appearance, especially Rick who took most of the phone calls, and our nestbox building team, Joel, Natasha, and Jasmin who was still building nestboxes the day she went into labour - but that's yet another story.

LLP Update

Practical Work

With the help of a group of trainees from Ambios, the now annual summer Blackthorn cut for the benefit of Brown Hairstreak butterflies was undertaken in early August. The resultant brash was later burnt up by the regular group of volunteers from the University of Plymouth Students' Union, who also tackled saplings on the Bluebell slope in Corner Wood. Additional Blackthorn management in areas considered less suitable for Brown Hairstreaks was also undertaken along the LLP's eastern boundary in November.

Some light summer pruning was carried out in the orchard on a handful of trees which are not quite as straight as they ought to be. Summer pruning on the side of the lean serves to inhibit growth, thereby reducing weight on that side, whilst a heavier winter cut on the opposite side promotes growth, thereby adding weight. It shouldn't take too long to get them straight again. Winter pruning started in January and will be finished by March.

The orchard and the slope by Corner Wood got their annual bramble cut in September, whilst the pond side rushes got trimmed. In October, the old fence posts ripped out during re-fencing works were burnt up. The new concrete drinking trough for livestock was set up in North Park and the water feed pipe from a property nearby was trenched in by a contractor. This was essential to give grazing animals another source of water since restricting their access down to the Ashburn to improve water quality. Since their removal briefly in August for TB testing, the small herd of Limousin cattle were back by September and stayed until early November.

A small area immediately around the orchid in Kiln Close was trimmed short and the arisings raked off in an attempt to create more favourable conditions for orchids by reducing competition by grasses. This will be carried out again before the spring. In the orchard the saplings on the pond island were coppiced, and the reed mace in the upper pond pulled out. These measures are necessary to protect the integrity of the bentonite and the open water nature of the ponds.

In December our contractor arrived to do some remedial work to the stream between the two ponds, particularly where the water leaves the upper pond. This appeared to be successful with no leaks noted in this area subsequently, although there will be some repointing to be done at some point further down the stream bed. Hedge-laying of the North Park hedgebank continued in December, with further sessions in January and February.

Events

The Bat Walk was attended by 12 people in August and led by local expert Louise Woolley. Common and Soprano Pipistrelle, and a Myotis species were all recorded by the bat detectors. Interestingly, two Brown Long-eared Bats were also found behind the hessian sacking in one of the wildlife tower voids during the Advanced Barn Owl Surveying and Mitigation course last year. There were also two Winter Bird Walks, the first in November which was sadly only sparsely attended, and the much more popular second walk in December. Everyone got good views of the Linnets and Reed Buntings at the winter bird crop, as well as a good selection of other more typical LLP species. Full details of the birds recorded in the crop can be found in a special article on pages 6-7.



*August Bat Walk
Photo: David Ramsden*

Wildlife

The first Kingfisher of the autumn involved a very vocal bird on the Ashburn in mid-September. This or another bird was seen at close range flying away from the upper pond in November, heard again in December and then seen again fishing from overhead branches in January.

Further Dormouse box checks in August revealed another two incomplete nests, increasing the number of built, albeit unused, nests to a staggering 8! We are optimistic that at least some of these will result in nesting Dormice in the future. During box clearance in December a Woodcock was accidentally flushed from a clearing in Corner Wood, the second time one has been seen in this area. Summer butterflies recorded included a Clouded Yellow, a migrant from the continent, two Wall Browns (an LLP rarity) and good numbers of Small Copper which peaked at 10 individuals in early October during Week 28 of the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme.

The first autumn record of Tree Pipit involved a typically vocal individual at the end of August, whilst Meadow Pipit numbers started building for the winter about a month later when Swallows and House Martins were on their way south. The latter species peaked on the 28th September with 60 over the top of the field. A Yellow-browed Warbler was heard calling in the roadside hedge in mid-October; it can only be a matter of time before we actually get to see this ever increasing Siberian 'sprite'.



*Frogs and frogspawn in the LLP Pond
Photo: Matthew Twiggs*

Barn Owls recorded over the field in September probably relate to released rehabilitated birds. Nevertheless, seeing birds at dusk exiting the roadside polebox and flying over the field is always a delight. The first clumps of frogspawn were recorded on the 20th January, the second earliest date since the ponds were created. By February both ponds were bubbling with activity and there were patches of spawn all around the edge of the pond.

Matthew Twiggs
Senior Conservation Officer

140-Acre Transformation

We want to tell you a story – one with a very happy ending. Once upon a time (in 1999) a farmer called Charles Pugh contacted the Barn Owl Trust. Charles had phoned to enquire about setting up a nest box on his farm. The resulting conversation and advice was, as Charles admits, truly 'transformative'. This is the tale in Charles' own words....

'At that time my 140 acre farm was following the money of Arable Payments and was almost all under the plough and growing linseed and flax - partly as I loved the blue colour, and partly as it paid more than cereals and there was virtually no need to get an economic return from the crop. The agronomy required the use of very powerful herbicides with long persistence in the soil: a matter of a few grams kept a whole hectare free of weeds of every sort.

My call to your centre resulted in what I can only refer to as a rebuke! I was told that I had effectively removed any hope for a Barn Owl presence - and that I would not be supplied with a nest box for that reason. That I remember the call speaks for the effect it had on me. From that point on I completely changed my outlook on farming and the environment, and decided to steer the farm towards a more sustainable form of agriculture. (I should add that I also suffered from the effects of exposure to the many other chemicals we had relied on hitherto - we had grown soft fruit and field scale vegetables for years before the flax and linseed).

Anyway, from that date, I renounced all chemical inputs and entered the conversion process for Organic certification, as well as applying for entry to Countryside Stewardship (CSS). This continues to this day. CSS became Higher Level Stewardship after a period of 10 years, and the Organic status remains. No chemical fertiliser or spray has been used since, indeed we are a zero input farm as no manures are used either.

The transformation in the farm (and in me) has been remarkable. The pastures have reverted to species rich meadows - and they now cover the whole farm, all the arable land is now long term pasture, apart from 5 acres of winter birdfeed grown organically. Under the Stewardship scheme I have undertaken a whole series of environmental projects - a large pond, an orchard restored, preserved unkempt hedgerows, areas of heath maintained, and even our waterside structures preserved. Wildlife of every sort has burgeoned, including regular (though intermittent) sightings of Barn Owls, but as many as 60 bird species noted, including ospreys. The pastures, though not highly productive, still support grazed cattle, and transform into most beautiful places as the late cut grass goes to seed in July and August. Though we have innumerable badgers resident, we remain clear of bovine TB, though an epidemic rages all around us - we are surrounded by infected farms.

The farm is now something of a beacon, as we have extended public access, and is much used as an educational resource, as well as an exemplar of environmentally sensitive agriculture. All this has delighted me, and I am intensely satisfied with what we have become. It has always been a beautiful piece of landscape, but now it is in harmony with its environment and its surroundings. All this was certainly influenced by my contact with your office all those years ago.

A recent development was precipitated by the Beast from the East a year ago. The wind completely destroyed the old barn (actually my father's old aircraft hangar) in which I had seen the Barn Owls over the years.



Charles and his father's Auster aircraft

Although you were rightly not willing to let me have an owl box in 1999, I did make one myself and it had lived in the hangar for the years in between - with no evidence of nesting, but some sightings. In the wreckage of the hangar, which was lifted bodily into the next field about 50m away, my box was a complete write-off. I have spent the last year building a replica of the hangar (but much more solidly constructed) and there was therefore a need for a new owl box. Hence my call to your office a month or so ago. I am hopeful that a restored barn plus a new, custom made box, will lure the owl back - perhaps now to nest here. I will certainly report any sightings.'



*The 'aircraft hanger' today
Photos Provided*

We feel rather honoured for our tiny Trust to be associated with such an amazing transformation! This is the kind of thing we have always hoped was happening but we so rarely get to hear about it, especially at the scale of 140 acres.

Charles Pugh

In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies
from the estates of

Michael Dodds, Joyce Lund and Michael M Mann

and donations in memory of

**John Webber, Jenny Allen, Mervyn Slade,
Carole Willis, Godfrey Cory-Wright, Donald Gloyens,
Nigel Murray Smedley, Elone Albert, Pat Windeatt,
Alexandra Ross and June Ann Boyce**

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

They all now have a leaf on our Memory Tree

LLP Wild Bird Crop



Roe Deer in the crop
Photo: Matthew Twiggs

As promised in Feedback 60, this is Part 2 of the article outlining an LLP project primarily to increase farmland bird abundance and diversity. Part 1 focussed on the invertebrates attracted to the nectar strip sown around two sides of the crop whereas the focus here will be on what farmland bird species we have recorded, what we've learnt from the whole experience and plans for the future.

As a very brief reminder, in April of last year we sowed a 1Ha area of the LLP with two slightly different mixes of wild bird seed designed to provide food for farmland birds from autumn through to late winter. These mixes included Barley, Wheat, Triticale, Linseed, Dwarf Sorghum, Mustard, White Millet, Japanese Reed Millet, Forage Rape, Red Millet and Gold of Pleasure. The field was ploughed, harrowed, sown and harrowed again in April, and the first shoots of the crop had appeared by May, along with some Fat Hen that must have been in the seed bank.

By mid-June the first flowers had appeared on the Mustard, Linseed and Gold of Pleasure and by July the area was looking decidedly 'croppy'.

After initially attracting small numbers of birds to feed on the bare ground, there seemed to be something of a hiatus in activity around mid-summer as the crop grew and matured. However, by late July the first large flock of birds was noted when nearly 70 Linnets were counted. This grew very quickly to approximately 200 individuals, with a couple of Goldfinches adding a bit of sparkle! Numbers remained steady throughout August when a lone House Sparrow joined the party briefly. Then, suddenly, around early September the flock almost disappeared with only a handful of birds reported around the 10th, and not one bird a week later. Linnets are a red-listed species of conservation concern (Easton et al, 2017) as a result of recent breeding and winter population declines. Although they breed in the UK, many spend the winter months in the Iberian Peninsula. It's possible therefore that the big numbers seen in August were part of a post-breeding flock of local birds that had simply migrated south. By the end of September things were beginning to pick up, with Linnets again being reported in small numbers. These gradually increased so that by the end of November on the first Winter Bird Walk event, we were conservatively estimating the flock to have grown to over 300 individuals!



A Reed Bunting enjoying the sunshine
Photo: Matthew Twiggs

Just as impressive was the small flock of Reed Bunting that appeared in the North Park hedge. After only ever recording two previously in the LLP's 17 year lifetime, the flock of four that greeted us as we arrived at the crop that morning was both a surprise and a delight. Little did we know that this was just the beginning. By mid-December at least a dozen were present, but with so many birds flying in and out of the crop there were thought to be far more out of sight. Confirmation came in early January when a flock of eighteen behaved impeccably by sitting together in trees in North Park hedgerow.

Although breeding locally on Dartmoor, Reed Bunting is an amber-listed species of conservation concern due to recent breeding and winter range declines (1981-2010). The peak in numbers occurred on the 15th February when very conveniently 21 individuals flew singly, one after the other, into North Park hedgerow.

However, it was the overnight snow and sub-zero temperatures on 1st February that resulted in what will probably turn out to be the bird of the winter. At about 3.30pm a raptor was seen briefly over the top corner of the crop. Some 15 minutes later it showed beautifully, chasing small bird flocks from the tops of the Fat Hen – a male Hen Harrier! Clearly displaced from the higher moor by the snow, it didn't hang around for very long, and had gone within about 20 minutes. Despite this, it was a most memorable experience for those lucky enough to witness it.



*A male Hen Harrier visits the LLP
Photo: David Ramsden*

In addition to these successes, we've recorded flocks of over 25 Goldfinch and Chaffinch, a single Yellowhammer (another red-listed species) and numerous other species utilising the crop, including, Blue and Great Tit, Song Thrush, Blackbird and Redwing, Wren, Dunnock and Robin, Siskin and Stonechat. And these were the ones we managed to see! More obviously, Roe Deer have been frequent visitors, as have Red Foxes; a peak count of 5 were seen engaged in territorial dispute one cold morning in early February.



*A Stonechat
Photo: Matthew Twiggs*

So what has the experience taught us? Well, here's a little insight into what we've taken from the project so far.

- 1) Preparation is key. A fine tilth prepared in warm, dry weather followed closely by some precipitation is ideal. Sufficient access to the site for a tractor and seed drill would have also made things much easier, although broadcasting seed by hand was a very enjoyable and grounding experience.
- 2) A farmer's lot is a stressful one! It's amazing how concerning it can be when there's no rain in the longer-range forecast right after sowing!
- 3) Hedges immediately adjacent to the crop are essential. All the small birds listed above used the North Park and Pennsland Lane hedges as cover, regularly leaving the crop to sit in the hedgerow trees. If there's nothing for them to fly into for safety then their use of the crop may be limited.
- 4) Mixed habitats, at whatever scale, are likely to attract a wider range of species than homogeneous landscapes.
- 5) There's never enough time for monitoring. Despite our best intentions we never managed more than an hour a week, and in some weeks never managed to get any monitoring done at all.

6) Be patient. The crop can look completely devoid of life at times but that doesn't mean there aren't good numbers of birds in there out of sight.

7) The bird species that the crop brings in, and the numbers that it supports, needs to be viewed in relation to what was there previously, rather than in comparison with other farmland bird crop sites.

8) The wild flower strip was an equally successful aspect of the project, not only in attracting invertebrates in the summer, but it also looked absolutely stunning, not just for a week or two but for months.

9) The environment is generally in such a terrible state and the challenges that wildlife currently faces are so immense that even the smallest effort is worthwhile.

10) The Fat Hen that appeared in the crop from the seed bank was just as popular with the finches as some of the plants deliberately sown! Still, having a good mix of plants in what you sow reduces the chances of whole-crop failure, results in seeds becoming ripe at different times of the year, and offers the greatest variety of seed for the greatest number of species.

In summary then, we think that the project has been an out-and-out success. So what plans for the future? Well, the Trustees have decided that the project should continue. This will mean re-establishing another crop in the same plot in April, perhaps tweaking the mix we use, and possibly under-sowing with a nitrate-fixer like Red Clover. Further observations will be included in the LLP Update so keep an eye on future editions of Feedback for more bird crop news.

Matthew Twiggs
Senior Conservation Officer

Prize Draw Winners

My Granddad, who is a jammy so-and-so, was lucky enough to be the Barn Owl Trust's top prize winner in their annual 2017 draw.

The prize – to spend a day with the Barn Owl Trust, exploring their beautiful nature reserve and visiting some boxes in the surrounding area.

Unfortunately Granddad was unable to make the chosen date so, sharing his passion for birds, particularly Barn Owls of course, my girlfriend and I stood in for him.

We were greeted by a warm and welcoming team and were quickly whisked away for a tour of the wonderful nature reserve they have proudly pieced together over the years.

David, Head of Conservation, then packed us into the Owl-mobile and we were off on a short drive to a couple of nearby sites to check on some boxes. We were promised nothing, yet we saw everything! In total across the two sites we encountered 7 Barn Owlets, 3 noisy Kestrel chicks, 3 adult Barn Owls, 2 adult Kestrels and 1 adult Tawny. I said my Granddad is a jammy so-in-so – I think he passed some of his luck onto us that day!

If I were to describe just how much we enjoyed our day I think I would run out of superlatives. David and the team provided us with a special experience which we will never forget and we cannot thank them enough!

Elliot Smith

Bird News

Sanctuary News

We have a new resident in the Sanctuary. A female Barn Owl we have named 'Silver'. This bird was found wandering around a car park at Horsebridge in the Tamar Valley on New Year's Day. When Silver arrived here she was weak and exhausted, weighing next to nothing. We also discovered she had a limp and was reluctant to fly, which remained the case throughout her rehabilitation. She also has a severely damaged eye which healed well but sadly she was in no condition to be released back to nature and was re-homed in the Sanctuary on the 4th March.

We have recently lost two Tawny Owls and one Barn Owl to old age, and all three birds had lived over 15 years in captivity, which is considerable when compared to wild birds that face many threats and whose average life expectancy is 3-6 years. There are now a total of 25 Tawny Owls and 16 Barn Owls in our Sanctuary.

Rehab & Release News

We have been busy since the last issue of Feedback with several birds brought to us for rehab and release.

A 'presumed dead' male Tawny Owl was picked up near Mary Tavy from the middle of the road but quickly revived once in the foot well of the finder's car, much to the alarm of the person driving! He was taken to a vet in Tavistock, and collected by us the following day. He was thoroughly checked over and flight-tested. Being deemed 'fit for release' he was released that same evening by the finder close to where he was initially found.



A female Tawny Owl was rescued on 18th December after becoming tangled in branches on the water's edge of Trenchford Reservoir. She was brought to BOT and once the thoroughly water-logged bird had dried out she was found to be otherwise okay so was cold-released at the finding site on the evening of the same day.

An adult female Barn Owl was found very close to a known nest site at Cheriton Fitzpaine on the 2nd November and brought to BOT. It was at starvation weight. She was looked after here and was deemed fit for release by mid-December. A mobile aviary was set up on site and she was eventually given a soft release on Christmas Eve. She was noted to be coming back for food for the next 2-3 nights.

A successful release, we thought, until we received a phone call on the 16th Jan from someone who had found her 2.4km away from the release site, again moribund and starving. This time she could not be brought back from the brink, and unfortunately died on the 19th January.

Which brings us nicely to GV72137, a male Barn Owl found by a local naturalist at Chudleigh Knighton Heath on 22nd November 2018. This bird was also weak and at starvation weight. When the ring number was cross referenced we were surprised to find out he'd travelled 355km in 157 days since being ringed near Bury, Greater Manchester as a pullus. A very long journey for a Barn Owl.



He was brought back to full health and released from the static release aviary at BOT (the finding site deemed too close to A38 for release there) on the 2nd January. He was still coming back for food up to at least the 19th January.

Rick Lockwood
Conservation Officer

Owl Mail

To Barn Owl Staff,

A photo is enclosed of my first owl box (1965). Since then I have installed 25 owl boxes in the last 20 years. I am now 83 in Feb and still doing my bit for all other birds. 100 boxes to date.

Best wishes,

Mr Partridge, Devon



Are Tawny Owls in Trouble?

Last autumn, members of the Conservation Team took part in the Tawny Owl Point Survey, organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). Despite being widespread, little is known about our Tawny Owl population. The BTO's annual Breeding Bird Survey highlighted the possibility of a recent decline with a drop of 27% over the 21 years from 1995 – 2016. However, these daytime surveys could not provide a full picture of what was happening with Tawny Owls and highlighted the needs for more in-depth surveys.

The Tawny Owl Point Survey was therefore organized by the BTO to be carried out in the autumns of 2018 and 2019. It involved volunteers visiting random preselected tetrads (2x2km squares). In total there were over 6,000 tetrads available at the start of the survey, of which approximately 2650 were surveyed previously in 1989 and/or 2005. Over 3000 of these tetrads were surveyed during autumn 2018 making it the largest and most in-depth survey of Tawny Owls ever.



*Honeybag Tor
Photo: Adrian Colston*

Provisional results from this research do seem to confirm a decline with the estimated percentage of squares occupied, which was around 63–64% in 1989 and 2005, appearing to have dropped to 54%. The tetrad I chose to survey was centred on Honeybag Tor, which is on Dartmoor in an area dominated by Bracken-covered hillsides interspersed with tracts of conifer and broad-leaved woodland nearby.

And so on a calm and clear night in November I found myself stumbling in the dark up a steep hillside heading towards the silhouetted outline of the Tor above me. When I had reached the Tor, and my breathing had slowed after the exertion, I settled down to listen out for the distinctive calls of the Tawny Owl for two ten minute time periods. I managed to hear at least three calling males and a couple of females replying that gave an indication of at least three territories in my recording area. When I returned two weeks later for a second recording session I was delighted to hear the presence of three calling males from different parts of the tetrad which led me to the conclusion that at least here there were the number of territories I would have expected.



*Rick takes part in the survey
Photo: Michael Park*

In addition to the Tetrad Survey, BTO have also been asking members of the public to take part in the Tawny Owl Calling Survey over the course of this winter which ran until the end of March 2019. They asked the public to put aside 20 minutes a week for for six months to listen for Tawny Owls in gardens, woodlands and local parks. They hope this will help track if, and where, the owls are in decline. Tawny Owl conservation status was recently changed from green to amber, prompting concerns for the species' future.

Rick Lockwood
Conservation Officer

Tawny Fact File



Photo: BOT Staff

The Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*) nests early in the year and territorial activity peaks in the early winter period when their familiar 'tuwit-tuwoo' is regularly heard as resident owls declare their territories. They live in wooded or partially wooded areas and are rather sedentary in habit. An established pair is likely to remain together on the same territory over several seasons.

The pair responds to the arrival of dispersing youngsters by hooting at or, in some cases, attacking the intruders. Tawny Owls will nest in a variety of places, including tree cavities, old crows' nests, forks of tree trunks and even rabbit holes. They nest early in the year, with eggs appearing about March, hatching in April and owlets leaving the nest in May.

The owls can recognise the calls of their established neighbours and so respond less aggressively to these than they do to unfamiliar birds, the latter likely to be considered a greater threat to the pair. Calling activity will continue through into the New Year, the birds more active on clear, moonlit nights than on cloudy, wet or windy ones – presumably because poor weather reduces the distance over which their calls may carry.

If you find a Tawny owlet, in almost all cases, by far the best thing is to leave it where it was found (Or take it back there – It is very important to remember or find out exactly where the owlet was picked up). Unless there is something definitely wrong with the owlet, it is far better off remaining 'in the wild'. Adult Tawny Owls will feed their young wherever they are – even on the ground.

See our website for more information on what to do if you find a young Tawny Owl.

All Things Owl

Owls On Wheels!

Ruby and Dan run Seatoller Farm and Holiday Accommodation in the Borrowdale valley in Cumbria. They got in touch with us via Twitter (@SeaTollerF) to tell us about their recent Barn Owl encounters...

We took over the farm in December 2017, and during this year's lambing season, whilst out late in the fields, we had a couple of sightings of what we thought were Barn Owls, but hadn't heard of any in Borrowdale.



One night we were blessed seeing the owl fly into a hole, in the side of a converted barn, and from then on we have been seeing them fly out and come back with the odd mouse or two. One morning in early August we looked out of our bedroom window to find the two youngsters sat on the roof opposite, and have been spotting them in various places around the farm ever since... even perched on the pickup tyre!



Photos provided

We have always planned to farm in a way which helps the surrounding wildlife; we hope to put up a couple of owl boxes in the next few weeks to support these two owlets in their future years. We are also fencing off an area which includes rough grassland in the hope to provide a more constant habitat for these beautiful birds.

Ruby Cappleman and Daniel Simpson - seatollerfarm.co.uk

You can follow BOT on Twitter using @BarnOwlTrust. We currently have 34,800 followers. Help us get to 35,000!

A Blast from the Past

We are very lucky to have a small team of dedicated volunteers here at the Trust. Harry started volunteering with us after completing his work experience placement back in 2016. He's always keen to muck in and, among other tasks, has helped clean aviaries, installed fence posts and accompanied us on site visits.

Harry wrote a piece about his work experience back in Feedback Issue 56. In it he recalls the Barn Owl Trust visiting his Primary School when he was about three years old. It turns out that Harry's mum took a photo of our visit and recently came across it when flicking through some old albums. He has very kindly given his permission for us to use it in this issue of Feedback.



Photo: Laura Hingston

Harry is on the far left (in the snail jumper) with Dusty the Barn Owl and our Head of Conservation, David, on the right.

A big thank you goes to Harry and to all of our volunteers, for their continued hard work and support.

Owl in Chimney

Hello Barn Owl Trust,

I am writing to you to thank you for your help in saving a Barn Owl here in France. Just before Christmas we found an owl which had fallen down one of our chimneys - unused thankfully - which we rescued.

We had no experience of dealing with an owl like this which could have been trapped for a while. We saw your video online on how to feed an owl and followed this exactly - it was excellent.

We managed to keep the owl alive and then handed it over to a bird refuge here in France. The owl was very dehydrated but after a week of care and a short stay in their aviary it flew off. Thank you once again for the very helpful advice on your website.

Best wishes,

Marilyn Barton

The Lady of the Marsh

Below are extracts from a wonderful blog written by Gareth Craddock about his experiences on the Kent Marshes.

The confessions of a Kentish wilder, idler, angler, birder and rambler....

The farmer spoke first. Loudly.

'Are you the fella that just wandered through yonder field?'

I was speechless at this, chiefly because I hadn't heard the word 'yonder' in real life before. Presently, I replied 'Yes'. To which I received a (well deserved) lecture on disturbing the sheep etc. As we got talking, I was able to communicate that I was out for a bit of pike fishing. Gradually, the old man relented and grew less pink. I apologised for walking on the wrong side of the sheep field and by the time the conversation ended he even told me of the best pike mark locally. It turned out to be the exact hole to which I was heading. Then before he went, he muttered something very strange:

'Watch out for the ghost...'

Or did he say 'goats'. I called after him: 'Goats or ghost?' but he didn't hear. Or just didn't respond. To be fair he was very old, and I'm assuming he was the father of the current farmer. But his final words sent a chill down my spine... I'm okay with ghosts, but I'm terrified of goats. I've had to climb trees before now to get away from them.

I saw nobody else all afternoon. By the time I got to an area I've named 'Three Dyke Hole', I'd seen no goats of any kind. I did see some lovely Redwings though, enjoying the last of the sun and filling up on berries. Well deserved after their long journeys to get to this marsh.



The Redwings arrived on the marsh in September

As it got darker, I began to remember the farmer's final, misheard threat.

'Watch out for the goats/ghost!'

Well, I hadn't seen any goats. So now my mind started to think about the second possibility. Back when he said this, it was broad daylight so I didn't much care about 'ghosts' nor particularly believe in them. But now it was almost nightfall I was becoming more open-minded... And curious, too. The same ancient curiosity that drives a man to pike fish, was now activating whatever ghost-hunting gene remained within me.

I determined there and then to walk back up past 'Three Dyke Hole' and around the bend on its southern side. I could make it there and back before it was pitch black and it would give me a vast view of the north-western flank of the marshes. Not to mention any ghosts that happened to be abroad.

It was then that I saw what the farmer had warned me about. White as the moon and flickering away like a phantom in an old silent movie. This was no goat. The country term for the Barn Owl has always been quite simply - 'ghost'. And with good reason. I might as well have seen one - for I was utterly transfixed. The owl circled the hole like a moth does a flame, unable to pull itself away from whatever had caught its eye. It was seemingly oblivious to me. Partially hidden as I was by the undergrowth, I took out my camera, focused it and took a few shots. I then stayed on for as long as the owl hovered over the copse. It was probably no more than three minutes but it felt like longer. At last she dove, coming up with some dark matter in her claws. An ex-vole no doubt.

After a while, I pawed my way out of the thicket. I then lay in the long grass for some time, paralysed by a mixture of excitement and fear. Walking back to the car in total darkness, I suddenly became aware of the various night-noises of the marsh.



The Lady of the Marsh

A fox called out twice. The trees creaked in the now-distant copse. But then, as I got back past the Three Dyke Hole, everything turned dead silent. This can happen on the marsh. Personally, I find it infinitely scarier than the sounds of the darkness. I began to wonder if the farmer had definitely been referring to the owl when he'd said 'ghost'. I hoped he had.

Nothing could have prepared me for the Lady. After that first beautiful haunting, I was to experience a series of séances with her, usually at twilight but sometimes during dusk. Over the course of the past fortnight, her visitations have grown earlier still. As I'm writing this, the solstice beckons. Today is the twenty-first day of December. A creature as lunar as she knows this better than all the other spirits of the marsh. Her hunts have intensified and I have seen her more often and for longer. Two days ago, she landed on a well-used kingfisher perch, just yards from where I was fishing, and stared right at me. It's safe to say I'm enchanted, at the least. At the worst, infatuated. And that's the worst situation for any chap to get himself into...

You can read Part Two of Gareth's blog by heading to - postcardsfromtheenglishoutback.com

All Photos Gareth Craddock

Yates Farm - A Success Story



The wet and windy open Pennine moorlands are not the first place that would spring to mind when considering tracking down nesting Barn Owls. The fact that wind and rain are two of the biggest obstacles they face makes it all the more impressive that they do so well at this farm.

Yates Farm is situated on the East Pennine Moorlands at a height of 285 metres above sea level close to the Greater Manchester/Lancashire Border. The Landowner, Dennis Dale, has been very helpful and enthusiastic over the years with regards to protecting any birds and wildlife on his land. It's no longer a working farm, more a collection of derelict buildings that are halfway through renovation. In their present state they are perfect for a pair of Barn Owls to reside in. The majority of old stone moorland barns are now converted into luxury homes leaving Barn Owls at a loss regarding nesting and roosting spaces. Yates Farm is all the more suitable for Barn Owls in that it is surrounded by perfect hunting terrain for them (and other species) to hunt on.

Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Little Owl and Tawny Owl all nest nearby. Merlin pass through annually in autumn following the Meadow Pipits off the moors and Short-eared Owl and Peregrine are occasional visitors. A Hen Harrier passed through in September 2018 and in recent years a Long-eared Owl has also found a suitable roost through the winter. Lapwings and Oystercatcher also breed annually and Dennis does his level best to avoid disturbing them when he is moving his vehicles over his land. For the last two years Kestrel have nested in a purpose built recess by his bedroom window and 10 young have fledged .



Kestrel chick at Dennis' house

In February 2011 I began to start looking for Barn Owls in my local area. I looked in all the right places at the right time but continually drew blanks. On speaking to Craig Bell, a friend and local BTO Schedule 1 bird ringer, he mentioned he only knew of one local pair. This was in a working quarry with other birds of prey present which meant the owls were a purely nocturnal pair. As they did not chance flying during day, they were rarely seen.

In March 2012, by pure chance, a friend and another local birder were walking past the track in front of Yates Farm and saw a Barn Owl fly out onto the moors hunting, swiftly followed by another. They made contact with Judith Smith (the County recorder at the time) who got in touch with me. I then put my first Barn Owl box up in the derelict end of Yates. Dennis was very enthusiastic about the prospect of Barn Owls breeding on his land and regularly saw them out hunting when driving in and out of the farm. On checking the box on 23rd June a single chick was present, which Craig ringed. It fledged successfully the following month.

After the success at Yates I began to consider which other local barns, farms and outbuildings may be suitable for placing a box in. After locating another farm, with an enthusiastic farmer, a box was made and erected.



Second successful nestbox

In late spring 2013, after checking this box with Craig, 3 chicks were present. The Yates birds had not bred that year. It was a particularly wet spring which affected many Barn Owl populations nationwide.

In 2014 the Yates birds were again successful. 4 chicks were ringed but that was the total for 2014. I had installed another 2 boxes in local farms but no birds had bred in them that year. It was becoming apparent that the pair of owls at Yates were sometimes able to hunt successfully without actually leaving the buildings. There is enough space within the 3 sections of the farm to supply sufficient food for them to hunt if the weather locked them in.

Brown rats are abundant within the ruin and must provide them with a suitable supply when the weather dictates. A short video was taken via a remote camera of a young Barn Owl taking and swallowing a whole Brown Rat in another of my local boxes proving that they can take prey as large as a rat.

In 2015 local Barn Owl numbers took a huge step forward with 5 breeding pairs located in boxes. During the summer 18 chicks were ringed at 5 separate sites which included 4 more chicks at Yates. I was always on the lookout for suitable sites to install Barn Owl boxes and with the help of local birder, Brian Kirkwood (who constructed several boxes), we were building up a network of sites for the owls.

The birds at Yates did not breed again in 2016 but there was success at 5 other sites with 17 chicks ringed. 2017 was an even better year for Barn Owls in our area with 7 sites with successful breeding birds and 31 chicks ringed!

Another friend, Peter Johnson, had erected Barn Owl boxes in 3 sites and had also found them to be occupied by Barn Owls for the first time since installing them. On checking suitable sites in a wider area than the Yates environs, another 3 breeding pairs were found but were not ringed. It was really encouraging to see the spread of successful breeding birds in my area. Having initially thought that the higher moorlands were unsuitable for Barn Owls it was becoming apparent they were just as comfortable high up as on the lower moss lands in Greater Manchester/Lancashire.

This year I also erected 2 new free standing Barn Owl boxes in local areas in sections of suitable land that had always looked ideal for owls. Kestrels nested in one of them this year but no Barn Owl as yet. It never ceases to surprise me now just how quickly birds find these man-made sites. It makes you realise just how important they are when birds are inside using them so quickly.

2018 was another successful year with new sites occupied for the first time. 29 chicks were ringed at 8 different sites including 5 at Yates. The Yates birds did not use the box this year (after finding small rocks that had been thrown onto the top of the box this was obviously due to human disturbance) and nested in the old original metal disused water tank in the Farm building. The tank is a huge, deep-sided rusted metal container which is actually a fine place for the owls to use. Plenty of room inside for them to move and grow and the deep sides mean that there would never be a danger of them falling out of the box prior to being at the right age to fledge successfully. Climbing inside to retrieve the birds for Craig to ring the 5 chicks was another matter though.

After 7 years of erecting boxes, ringing chicks and trying as best as possible to watch for suitable Barn Owl sites we now know of 22 separate locations in our area where Barn Owl are present or breeding.



2018 water tank nest site

Only this week a new box was found to be occupied by a pair of Barn Owls after being installed by the landowner 5 years ago. We can confidently say that the areas surrounding Yates Farm (all bar one building) that has a suitable environment for Barn Owls is occupied by them and on a September evening this year I counted 9 Barn Owls out hunting during a walk around the sites.

Some people have the opinion that bird ringing is an unnecessary disturbance to young birds at a sensitive time whilst nesting but the following short series of events justifies the practice. Barn Owls are not known to move great distances after fledging. They are also a non-territorial bird and can happily hunt around other breeding birds, using the same ground without dispute. So a bird could quite happily settle as close to its original nest site as possible.

Craig has been a Schedule 1 ringer for many years and the furthest he had ever recorded a Barn Owl moving was from Lancashire to Hornsea in Yorkshire at a distance of about 100 miles. This was a dead bird recovery, which is often the case with Barn Owl ringing recoveries as the vast majority are juvenile birds who have been hit by moving vehicles. So when a local artist and keen wildlife enthusiast Mr John Walters was out walking in Chudleigh Knighton, South Devon, and came across one of our birds alive from Yates Farm on the Moors near Rochdale, it really bucked the trend!

On finding the bird alive (but obviously in a bad way, looking exhausted and undernourished) on 22nd November 2018 he immediately saw it was ringed (GV72137). Fortunately he knew the right course of action and contacted the Barn Owl Trust, who immediately came to collect the bird. Its initial weight was 205g but this quickly dropped to 195g and the staff really did not expect the bird to survive. The staff force fed it over a period of 3 days, as administering a glucose solution into the bird 3 times a day. On the 4th day it began to eat again and over the following 3 days it put on 42g.

The bird had made a fantastic recovery thanks to the quick thinking from Mr Walters and the staff at the Barn Owl Trust. They also then went through the ringing recovery system at the British Trust for Ornithology and passed over the ring details, who in turn informed Craig of the bird's recovery and location.

This bird has travelled over 250 miles from its nest site to South Devon, which is a remarkable distance for a Barn Owl, which are classed as a sedentary species. To travel such a distance during a period of good weather perhaps suggests it could not find a suitable unoccupied site. That also may suggest that either Barn Owls are doing amazingly well in England or that there are just not sufficient places left to accommodate them?

Either way, this bird has survived and is set to be released into a suitable habitat nearby on 21st December, I hope it survives the winter and goes on to breed successfully.

In the scheme of things it is only a small success telling the story of a single bird, but at least it is a success and not a failure. It's flown a long way from the Moors near Rochdale and goes to show how valuable the practice of bird ringing can be.

Many Thanks to Craig Bell, Peter Johnson, Brian Kirkwood, Judith Smith, Mr John Walters and Mateo Ruiz from the Barn Owl Trust. Also, a special thanks go to the land owner Dennis Dale for his enthusiasm and cooperation in allowing us to use his land and property for the good of the birds.

Rob Archer
BTO Ringer

All Photos Provided

Nestbox Success

Barn Owls in the USA

We were thrilled to receive the charming letter below in September 2018 from Mr Walter of Sand Hills, Nebraska, USA. He'd been searching the internet for Barn Owl nestbox plans and fortunately came across our website...

Dear Sir,

I'm writing to you from our farm in northwestern Nebraska in the U.S. Our farm is on the edge of the Sand Hills. Last year two barn owls took residence in our barn haymow which has always had a window open to let bats come and go. The Barn Owls did not nest in 2017 but were there from May to mid-August.

Last winter I went on line and found that your web site had the only nest box plans that I liked, so I built it. Luckily my son-in-law came with very large friends to hoist it up. This summer the owls were back. We can peek up the hay mow stairs to observe.



From the first (in May) all we would see was one owl at the east end of the barn by the entry. The nesting box was high in the west. It was so hot, we opened doors for ventilation. In early August, both adults perched in various places and we decided there couldn't be any babies. Shortly thereafter, just the top of a head peered over the shelf on the nest, with both adults in plain sight. That went on for maybe a week.



August 21, we saw a baby perched by the male near the nesting box. The next day there were two young perched. It's difficult to take pictures because it's dark, except by the windows/doors where the birds seem to want to perch. The babies seem to be the size of the male, but without the bright white face and breast. As the days went by, more birds were seen. On several different occasions, we saw six individuals at the same time. We can't even be sure which are the parents. We now see three to four daily.

Thank you so much. It's been a fascinating experience for my wife and me.

Mr. Walter

Preswylfa Farm

I was watching your section on Barn Owls on CountryFile last night and thought you may like to see photos of a Barn Owl box I recently made and erected.

We live on a farm on the outskirts of Neath in West Glamorgan, South Wales. The farm borders the Gnoll Country Park which dates back to the 18th century and covers in excess of 100 acres. We are fortunate to have a wide range of birds on our farm from Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Cuckoos, Red Kites, Buzzards and Barn Owls. Barn Owls were once widespread in Wales but in the last 50 years their numbers have dropped dramatically.

There are only about 400 breeding pairs in Wales – this number has stabilised and is on the increase. Barn Owls are most active during the night and they have a ghostly appearance when flying which has earned them the Welsh folk name of 'aderyn corff' or corpse bird.

To encourage nesting on our land, I decided to construct a Barn Owl box. I gathered information on the physical sizes recommended, methods of construction and materials to be used. Careful consideration was also given to the location. The end result is a box constructed from 10mm marine ply with a pitched roof clad in Welsh slate.



All of the joints of the ply are sealed with silicone to prevent water ingress and the exterior of the box is painted with a water-based paint. The box is positioned on an old oak tree in a hedgerow bordering 2 fields, approx 4 metres off the ground and north facing (our prevailing wind is south westerly). We have no main roads close by and the only access is a single lane road of approx 0.25 mile long. The box was erected early February 2019 together with a trail camera. To date we have not witnessed any activity but we wait in anticipation.

Best wishes,

Ian Williams

Team Talk

New BOT Staff

Gill started working part-time with the Barn Owl Trust at the end of November 2018 and has joined the team who look after the charity's administration. She lives on the outskirts of Ashburton, in a house buried deep in the countryside.

She retired from the NHS after a varied 20 year career as a podiatrist, a senior manager and latterly, a director of Quality and Patient Safety, working in Clinical Commissioning. Since retiring, she's re-trained as an independent Civil Celebrant, gaining a Diploma in Funeral Celebrancy. She has spent her time post-NHS enjoying the opportunities that retirement brings – including learning the art of cloth weaving, tapestry weaving and spinning. She enjoys most things to do with wool and is also a keen knitter. Gill is also learning to carve in stone and wood, paints in watercolour and grows vegetables and flowers.

Gill hasn't had much to do with owls until now although has always felt truly privileged when spotting one in the countryside. Having the chance to work for them, and hopefully with them, is very exciting and Gill is pleased to have been given the opportunity to join the team in Ashburton.



Gill and Lisa pose for the camera

Lisa started working part time for the trust in November 2018 and looks after legacy support, along with a little design work from time to time.

Having spent all her working life in the world of publishing as a graphic designer, she has worked full time and freelance for a number of publishing houses and design studios.

Lisa has found working for the Barn Owl Trust a refreshing change and something new and challenging. Joining this committed team to look after these beautiful birds along with the natural environment she regards as a privilege.

Enjoying semi retirement she lives in Newton Abbot along with her husband Pete and her two cats, one of which was rescued by her son when he was working in Cyprus.

She loves drawing & painting, swimming & surfing, running, gardening, films & music and sewing her own designs that she makes for family and friends.

One of her favourite things is walking with her husband in the countryside and especially along the Devon and Cornwall coasts when the sun is shining.

Natasha has been working at the BOT since October 2018, joining the nestbox building team. She enjoys woodworking and is happy to be supporting a wildlife conservation organisation through her work.

She's lived in Devon for twelve years, three of them on Dartmoor and loves the landscape and history of the area spending much of her free time walking and exploring, learning about the flora and fauna of her home patch. Natasha also loves crafts, especially knitting even designing her own nature inspired knitting patterns and making some of her own clothes. She is also a bit of a book worm, especially history, natural history and classic literature.



Natasha hard at work

Baby Lumin

We are very pleased to announce that BOT Team members Jasmin and Marianne have welcomed a baby girl into the world, Lumin Orly Sophie Ramsden, weighing 6lb 4oz.

Jasmin went into labour at 9.30pm on 28th February (lucky it wasn't a leap year!) and baby Lumin arrived safe and well about 6 hours later at 3.15am on 1st March. A visit to the midwife the day before lead them to believe she wasn't due for a week, so Jasmin carried on making nestboxes on the day she ended up going into labour! It also meant Lumin was born at home as there was not quite enough time to get to the hospital.

Congratulations to Jasmin, Marianne and big brother Nate from all at the Barn Owl Trust. We wish them every happiness for the future.



Baby Lumin

Thanks and Things

We are so grateful to all of you who have sent us bits for recycling, prizes for our annual draw, donated goods to sell on ebay or items from our Wants List.

Thank you for all your support:

Crewe Hall Hotel, Dilnot Smith & Son, Heather Collins, Myfanwy Ford, Jackie Golding, Ann Green, Rachel Hall, Rob Hamar, Anne Harding, JF Lavelle, John Rae, Annie Rhodes, Janet Rutter, Marian Sanders, Pauline Sharp, Mr L Southcott, Elaine Underhill, Trudy Turrell & Alan White, Melanie White, Shelly Wright and Tracey Morris.

Thank you to all our volunteers who kindly give up their time to help at the Trust:

Diana Baker, Kim Baker, Diane Hawkings, Harry Hingston, Tony Hulatt, Bill MacDonald, Ollie Hornbeam, Sylvia Marshall, Michael Parks, Cathy & Geoff Pitt, Margaret Rhodes, Jaz Rivers, Alan Sloman, Ambios Volunteers, the Orchard Volunteers and Plymouth University Students.

It has been a delight to hear your inspiring fundraising stories. Thank you to Bleyer Bullion, Dover Christchurch Academy, Hankelow Parish Council, Jasper & Rose, Judith Read, Midge and Sharan James Stained Glass.

A big thank you to City Vets (Exeter), Estover Vets (Plymouth) and Penbode Vets (Holsworthy) for treating injured Barn Owls.

Can you help with:

- Postcards and pre1970 envelopes with stamps on
- Used stamps, including any foreign stamps & currency
- Mobile phones for recycling/sale
- Wild Barn Owl pellets (we can never have too many)
- Wild bird food - mainly sacks of black sunflower seeds, also peanuts & plain canary seed
- Wood for making outdoor nestboxes - sheets of 9 / 12mm tanalised ply and lengths of 25 x 50mm tanalised batten
- Green Oak rough-sawn planks for making bat boxes
- Anabat detector
- A4/A3 recycled paper/card both coloured and white
- Padded envelopes (new or used)
- Socket set (48 pc 1/2 inch drive)
- Extra long drill bits (3,4 & 5mm)
- Empty 35mm Film Cannisters
- Wire cutters
- Drill-driver bits (for screwing)
- Quick grip clamps
- Fiskars/Felco loppers & shears
- Garden forks & spades
- Caravan levelling ramps (for our new trailer)
- Box Trailer (minimum 2.4m x 1.5m x 1.8m high)
- Small plate compactor
- Wintery Barn Owl images for Christmas cards
- Prizes for our Grand Draw (postable i.e. not heavy or bulky)

Thank you for your help.

Tail Piece ...



It's no wonder that we British talk so much about the weather. We just recorded the hottest February on record, the mean temperature for the month was almost 4°C hotter than last year when we were visited by the 'Beast from the East'! We've had Marsh Marigold flowering in December and Primroses in February. March has been unusually windy here and by the middle of the month our average daily wind speed was 1.2mph higher than normal (3.2mph - 4.4mph).

We shouldn't be surprised, climate scientists have been warning us for years about the threat and last year the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) announced we have less than 12 years left to keep warming below 1.5°C and avoid a major tipping point. After this even half a degree will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people and the destruction of the World's remaining coral reefs. They say 'urgent and unprecedented changes are needed to reach the target'. Last year the naturalist Sir David Attenborough told the UN that climate change is humanity's greatest threat in thousands of years. The broadcaster said it could lead to the collapse of civilisations and the extinction of "much of the natural world".

As someone who has been 'banging on' about a greener environment for over 40 years, I am really distressed by the current situation. I want my grandchildren to grow up, and to experience the wonder and diversity of the natural world. Since the end of the Second World War we in the 'developed world' have in the main, lived in the lap of luxury, in a consumer society that is based on never ending economic growth and the unsustainable consumption of natural resources.

You could be forgiven for thinking that our politicians, big business and most of the media are even now not taking the threat to life on Earth seriously.

Brexit and economic growth occupy the news, most companies are only interested in profits and none of our 'leaders' seem to want to tackle the important issues of reducing carbon emissions significantly and building a sustainable society.

However grass roots protests can have an amazing effect. Last year Greta Thunberg, a sixteen year old Swedish girl began a solo protest outside the Swedish parliament to persuade her government to reduce carbon emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement. Since then the 'Youth Strike for Climate' movement, has inspired thousands of people, many of them children, all over the World to stand up for the future of the planet. Greta has just been nominated for a Nobel peace prize "because if we do nothing to halt climate change it will be the cause of wars, conflict and refugees."

Human beings have the potential, if we work together, to solve all the World's problems. Instead we have greed, wars, famines and now climate change. We need to realise that we cannot eat money before the last tree has died, the last river has been poisoned and the last fish has been caught.

Change has to come from us, the people. We have to persuade our politicians, and companies that we buy from, that we are taking the threat seriously and they need to too. We each need to do our best to live more sustainably, change our electricity supplier to 100% renewable, install solar panels, eat less meat, shop ethically, recycle, persuade our local authorities to declare a Climate Emergency and take steps to act locally and most importantly to explain to other people why we are doing it.

If we work together we can make a World of difference.

Frances Ramsden