

feedback

Issue 63 / Spring 2020



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

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Diary Dates 2020

May - Tues 12th - 10:30am - LLP Nature Walk

Thurs 21st - Sat 23rd - Devon County Show

June - Thurs 4th - Sat 6th - Royal Cornwall Show

Tues 16th - 2.30pm - Mid-Summer Walk

July - Weds 8th - 2.30pm - Butterfly Walk

Tues 14th - Thurs 16th - BOESS & ABOSM Courses

Sun 26th - Totnes Show

Aug - Fri 7th August - Bat Walk

COVID 19 - Events may be cancelled. See our website.

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

2 - Feedback 63 - Spring 2020

Welcome to the 63rd edition of our bi-annual magazine 'Feedback'. It has been a very busy few months here at the Barn Owl Trust with the Conservation Team working hard answering enquiries, dealing with injured owls (see Bird News page 6), holding Barn Owl training courses for ecologists, managing our nature reserve and holding guided walks (see LLP Update page 4), erecting and monitoring nestboxes as well as giving out habitat advice to landowners. Rick, our Conservation Officer, explains what our nestboxing work entails in the article 'Winter Nestboxing' on page 5.

In addition to the day-to-day tasks the team has also been involved in various other projects including gathering together data for the newest State of the UK Barn Owl Population report due to be published soon, further research on Barn Owl road mortality, and preparing for Rick and Mateo's upcoming visit to the Ulster Wildlife Trust (see News Bites page 3). More news on these events to follow in issue 64.

It is always a pleasure to welcome visitors working in Barn Owl conservation across the globe and in November Shakinah from the Barn Owl and Rodent Research Group in Malaysia visited us for a couple of weeks hoping to gather knowledge and information to take back home. Sadly, secondary poisoning of Barn Owls is also a major issue in Malaysia and you can read about the valuable work her group undertakes in her article 'Barn Owls in Malaysia' on page 9.

We also have an interesting piece kindly submitted by Dr Peter Ward on Barn Owl conservation in Canada and his group's long term project to help increase the Barn Owl population in the area South and East of Vancouver. Head to page 11 to hear all about his project and the challenges faced by Barn Owls in Canada.

It's not just Barn Owls we love here at the Trust, bird watching is a fond pastime for many of our team. We have 4 licensed bird ringers at BOT including Judith Read from our Admin Team and on page 22 we have the second instalment of 'Judith's Journal'. Following on from her 'introduction to ringing' in issue 62 she explains a few of the different methods used for trapping birds in order to ring them.

We love to hear your Barn Owl stories. Many of our supporters get in touch to tell us of their owl experiences. Take a look at the 'Owly Inbox' on Page 10. If you'd like to share your avian encounters, why not write to us. You never know, you could feature in the next issue of Feedback.

We were thrilled to hear about the fundraising efforts of primary school pupils Esther and Molly. Read all about it on page 13. Not only did they raise money they also taught their fellow pupils about the hazards that owls face. We are so grateful to our supporters and love to hear all about your kind fundraising efforts. Every little helps.

This issue of Feedback also sees the publication of the winning entry from our 6th Poetry Competition on the theme of 'Protecting Life on Earth'. The theme really struck a chord and we are pleased to say it was a great success with almost 100 entries received! Turn to page 13 to find out who won, read the winning poem and find out how to purchase a copy of our 6th poetry anthology containing 20 of the fantastic entries. We will be running a 2020 competition which should officially launch in September. This is when we will announce the theme and details of how to enter.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Feedback. Whether you adopt an owl, are a Friend of the Trust or give donations when you can, your support is greatly appreciated. Thank you for helping us to help Barn Owls.

Marianne Bryan & Aaron Kitts

BOT News



*Linnet on winter bird food crop
Photo: Matthew Twiggs*

'Me Old Cock Linnet'

Despite knowing they might be there, nothing quite prepares you for the "woosh!" of a thousand tiny birds' wings as they take off. And what a sight to behold! Five hundred LBJs (little brown jobs) all moving as one. How on Earth do they do that? How do they know which way to go? There's no Squadron Leader calling "listen up flock nine, on my mark, ninety degree turn to starboard, ready... go" yet they manage perfectly coordinated turns every time, not a mid-air collision in sight.

I stand there amazed and wonder what species these highly coordinated 'little brown jobs' actually are. Usually they are Linnets, or mainly Linnets. I can't usually tell until they settle in a nearby tree where their constant musical chatter gives away their identity. I've never actually heard one sing, at least not a proper breeding male's song. Like most of us, I first heard mention of this wonderful species in that old-time music hall song My Old Man – "Off went the van wiv me 'ome packed in it, I walked behind wiv me old cock linnet". As a popular caged bird, famed for its song, I assumed it to be something akin to a canary. But standing here watching them fly and listening to their winter chatter, I know that Linnets in the wild are so much more than any caged bird could ever be.

Why are they here? Food of course. Thanks to a legacy back in 2001 from Ms Vivien Lennon, the Barn Owl Trust has a nature reserve with enough space to plant over two acres of 'winter bird food crop'. We can only guess how much seed we've grown this winter, maybe a ton(?), maybe more.

It's March now, this is 'the hungry gap'. This is the hardest time of year for seed-eating birds to survive. All of our Dwarf Sunflower seeds, Quinoa, and Millet, have gone - eaten by Linnets, Goldfinches, Chaffinches, Reed Buntings, mice(!), and the odd Yellowhammer. All that's left now is the last of the Fodder Radish seed. Late-winter foods make all the difference and as a nation, we spend over 200 million pounds on wild bird food which helps sustain many millions of birds.

Like you, I love to watch my bird table visitors. Yet nothing, nothing, is quite like watching birds doing what birds do best – fly. To watch them fly en masse, and to have the privilege of knowing that they are only there, and only surviving, because of something you've done, that is truly amazing.

Our thanks as ever go to Vivien Lennon.

David Ramsden
Head of Conservation

News Bites

Volunteers Wanted

Would you be free to help out on our stand at some of the local and county shows this year? We need volunteers to help at the following shows:-

Devon County Show - 21st-23rd May
Royal Cornwall Show - 4th-6th June
Totnes Show - 26th July
Kingsbridge Show - 5th Sept

We provide you with an entrance ticket and would like your help between 10.30am and 4pm. You'll be helping to run our kids Lucky Dip stall and may also be called upon to hand out leaflets and take money for sales items. Please contact the office for more details.

BOT visit Northern Ireland

Conservation Officers Rick and Mateo are travelling up to Belfast this March to visit Ulster Wildlife Trust! They are travelling by train and ferry to minimise emissions. Rick and Mateo are going to visit sites with the Conservation Officers from Ulster and exchange ideas about how to increase the number of Barn Owls in Northern Ireland as part of the Ulster Wildlife Trust's Barn Owl Project! It is a wonderful opportunity for our two organisations to work together! Find out how the meeting went in the next issue of Feedback!

Birdfair

The Barn Owl Trust will be at The Bird Fair again this year. The British Birdwatching Fair or Birdfair is an annual event for birdwatchers, held every August at Rutland Water in England, run by staff and volunteers from the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. It has been described as "the birder's Glastonbury". This year's event is from Friday 21st to Sunday 23rd August 2020. If you're there, please pop in and say hello!

800 Miles to Go

BOT Team member Judith, along with dogs Midge and Fizz, are off walking 1,000 miles again this year! They're about to hit 200 miles. This also means lots of birding and they heard their first Chiffchaff of the year above Chagford on Wednesday, 11th March.

HS2 Legal Challenge

BOT supporter, TV presenter and naturalist Chris Packham has launched a legal challenge to HS2.

He said: "In regard to the HS2 rail project I believe our government has failed" and that the review into the project's spiralling costs and delays was "compromised, incomplete and flawed". We sincerely hope his appeal is successful.

LLP Update

Wildlife

At the very end of July 3 Sparrowhawk were seen flying over nearby woodland, presumably the result of a successful second brood.

The first Kingfisher of the autumn was calling on the Ashburn at the end of July. It was heard several times thereafter until mid-October when it was last heard.

The 2nd year of the bird crop had started attracting small birds by the first week of August, with up to 40 Linnets drawing attention from the local Sparrowhawk. A month later the flock had increased to 90 birds. About the same time, a Grey Heron was by the ponds and a Hobby was over the top of the field. By the middle of the month the Linnet flock had increased to in excess of 500 birds and this number remained constant until mid-January, when numbers dropped back down to about 300 individuals. They had been joined by about 100 Chaffinch, over 30 Greenfinch, 20 Blackbird, 10 Goldfinch and probably about 5 Reed Bunting, as well as good numbers of Dunnock, Robin, Wren and Blue Tit, and a single Stonechat. When most of the birds were in the air at the same time it was quite a sight.

Local bat consultant Helen Calver of Phase 1 Ecology visited over the summer months to conduct emergence surveys on the wildlife tower. This was the first time actual emergence studies have been done so we really didn't know what to expect. Visits were conducted for at least two hours, each starting an hour before dusk, in May, June, August and September. Common Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared Owl and Lesser Horseshoe were all recorded using the tower, with Greater Horseshoe, Daubenton's, Barbastelle and Noctule nearby. In addition, to provide data for the Devon Greater Horseshoe Project an Anabat detector was left out by the tower for 3 nights in July. In addition to the above both Serotine and Soprano Pipistrelle were recorded bringing the total in and around the wildlife tower to 9 species.



*Bat emergence survey
Photo: David Ramsden*

The first frogspawn was recorded on the 9th January, some 19 days earlier than the long-term average.

After only one year of dedicated hay meadow management in a small area of Kiln Close, conducted specifically to increase our orchid spike count, we were encouraged to find 4 flower spikes in the Spring of 2019. On March 6th 2020, a survey was conducted in the short sward area to look for any emerging orchid plants. To our utter astonishment we counted at least 35 rosettes! Not all of these may actually flower of course but it's a massive increase on the single flower spike that has come up every year since 2009.



*Only the 3rd Yellowhammer spotted on the LLP
Photo: Matthew Twiggs*

On March 6th whilst conducting a bird survey at the winter bird crop a bunting was accidentally flushed from close to the path just below the crop. It flew only a short distance before dropping down again, and then proceeded to show quite well albeit somewhat shyly for some minutes. Once the photographs had been taken it was left to feed in peace. It was thought to be a first winter male due to the amount of yellow on the underparts and the vivid chestnut in the rump. This is only the 3rd record of Yellowhammer for the LLP, with this and the previous one last winter associated with the bird crop.

Practical Work

The orchard was brush mowed in mid-September when some of the apple and soft fruit trees got a formative prune to improve their shape. The orchid patch was also cut and raked off in the hope that orchid numbers continue to increase.

In October a small group came from the University of Plymouth and helped clear scrub from around the solar arrays. A month later they moved the resulting brash to the dead hedge in the orchard, and then pulled the invasive Reed mace from the Flo Pond. They came again in February and burnt up the brash from the hedge-laying session.

Events

A group of conservation trainees from Ambios visited in December and cut the bramble out of North Park hedge in preparation for the winter's hedge-laying. Unfortunately by the beginning of March and due to the incessantly wet autumn and winter weather only 1 session of hedge-laying was possible totalling only 7m. laid so there's still 70m. of hedge still to go!

Two Winter Bird Walks were conducted on the LLP, primarily to survey the flocks of birds using the bird crop. The first walk was conducted in November in less than ideal, wet and windy conditions. Unsurprisingly, only 6 hardy souls ventured out but were rewarded with good views of over 500 birds. The 16 visitors that attended the second walk in December however were blessed with perfect weather; a sunny, dry, still day after a cold night. On this occasion over 600 birds were seen, with Mistle and Song Thrush, Nuthatch, and Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker heard, and Redwing and Starling overhead.

Matthew Twiggs
Senior Conservation Officer

Winter Nestboxing

Winter time provides us with a window in the Barn Owl life cycle where we can visit nesting and roosting sites without causing too much disturbance or interference in their daily lives. There is always work to do, most of which we learn about through our meetings with farmers and landowners at the agricultural shows we attend over the summer months. This is when we hear about old or unsafe nestboxes that need replacing, accounts of fallen owlets, nestboxes that haven't been cleared out for many years, and all sorts of stories that lead to winter visits.

As I write this at the end of February we have visited over fifty sites this winter, put up nineteen indoor and nine outdoor boxes, and cleared out twenty-two boxes, as well as providing on-site habitat advice wherever we can.



*A Treebox ready for installation
Photo: Sue Macpherson*

We came across some interesting sites over the period. One site on Exmoor illustrated perfectly how Barn Owls can adapt to regular disturbance. We were shown a nestbox directly above a kindling splitting machine which was so loud we couldn't hear each other speak, plus this box had a large halogen light only a metre to the side, and yet Barn Owls have bred successfully here for the past couple of years.

We also came across the lowest box we have ever seen only 1.5 metres above the upper floor level. This place however was undisturbed and this pair of Barn Owls felt safe enough to raise their young here.



*Volunteer Andrea hoists the nestbox into place
Photo: Sue Macpherson*

We had a great day out meeting local ecologist Elliot Fairs in Doddiscombeigh where we came across more fields of rough grassland than we had seen for a long time. Here we erected a couple of nestboxes and discussed the possibility of a few more in different locations. As it is primarily prey-rich habitat that affects Barn Owl numbers we are hopeful that more sightings will now come from this area. Several landowners contacted us requesting a free nestbox after reading through our newly published criteria.

This helps us target those sites where we can have the greatest conservation benefit using our limited resources. These are often places that have had fallen owlets and where providing a new deep nestbox can increase the number of owlets fledging in the future. One of the more difficult aspects of our work is convincing landowners to leave areas to become rough grassland or managing parts of their land-holding for small mammals. Barn Owls are attracted to rough grassland as it is a prey rich foraging habitat. In some cases we can incentivise habitat management for Barn Owls by offering to supply a free nestbox.



*Volunteer Tony lending a hand
Photo: Mateo Ruiz*

This has been the first opportunity for Mateo Ruiz, our Assistant Conservation and Science Officer to get involved with the practical nestboxing work and he has learnt a lot in a short space of time. We could not do this without the amazing support we get from our volunteers. I would like to take this opportunity to thank each one for their time and commitment and for putting up with the sometimes harsh winter weather, the endless back lanes and narrow muddy roads we have to travel down to reach some of our work sites, for the early morning starts, and their great company whilst out on the road. This winter we have been ably assisted by Kate Downes, Andrea Kuhn, Kim Baker, Tony Hulatt, and Michael Park. Everyone who takes part in the nestboxing work also has to go through Working at Height training and be familiar with our rope and rescue equipment which helps us to work safely in remote, and sometimes challenging, environments. It's now the time to put our feet up (only joking) and send off our safety equipment for its regular 'fit for purpose' checks before gearing up again for the annual monitoring of breeding sites.

Rick Lockwood
Conservation Officer

In Memoriam

The Trust has received legacies
from the estates of

Vanessa Farbrother, Margaret Mason & John Webber
and donations in memory of

**Richard Boucher, Joyce Cox, Mike Fello,
Clifford Harding, Margaret Leahy, Dorothy Mellersh,
Joy Mills, Janet Anne Pring, Jean Street & Barry White**

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

They all now have a leaf on our Memory Tree

Bird News

This autumn/winter period has seen a number of both Barn Owls and Tawny Owls arrive here for treatment, rehabilitation, and release. At this time it is common to receive young or inexperienced birds that get into trouble as they naturally disperse or are displaced by their parents from the areas where they were fledged.

We headed to Shebbear in north Devon in mid-August after stormy weather felled an Ash tree with a brood of Barn Owls. We were able to rescue one young from the grounded box and brought her back to base until she was ready for release back into the wild. A month later we returned to the nesting site with the bird and a mobile aviary where we were assisted by the landowner Maureen in feeding the bird and releasing her on the 13th September.

Maureen came to our assistance again in late October after we were contacted by RSPCA West Hatch who asked us to help with the release of another Barn Owl that they had cared for after she had been found as an owlet in a field near Ilton, Somerset on the 29th September. We collected the bird and housed her in the mobile aviary where she was released by Maureen on the 4th November. She was fed for a number of weeks after her release and is still being seen as I write this at the end of February.

We also assisted in the supported release of another Barn Owl that had been cared for by RSPCA West Hatch by taking a mobile aviary to a Barn Owl site in Somerset where we had successfully released a Barn Owl the previous year. She was released in good weather on 20th October and did not return thereafter for food left out. I guess some birds value their freedom and just keep flying.



Our mobile release aviary assisting RSPCA West Hatch

During the autumn period we had a number of Tawny Owls brought to us; one that had impaled itself on a barbed wire fence, a couple of birds that had been in road traffic accidents and one that was badly infected with Trichomoniasis. Sadly, despite our best efforts, we were unable to save any of these.

Another road casualty, this time a juvenile Barn Owl found at the side of the A38 Plympton was taken to Estover Vets on 13th November and then arrived with us on the 15th. The condition of the bird deteriorated and we had to decide to put him to sleep.

On a happier note an adult female Barn Owl that was found in a wood pile at one of our annual monitoring sites made a swift recovery.

The bird spent only a few days in care before being returned to its nestbox twelve days later. We then supported her recovery by supplementary feeding from an adjacent nestbox and hopefully we shall see her again when it comes to monitoring during the breeding season.

Finally, a late fallen owlet was picked up wet and bedraggled close to a known nest site in a village on Exmoor on the 31st October. She had already been returned to the nest and fallen on a couple of occasions before being brought to us to care for.

She was eventually returned to the site and spent two weeks in a mobile aviary before being released on the 20th December when she promptly disappeared.

We returned to clear out the nestbox here later in the winter, which was crammed full of sticks and other debris brought in by nesting Jackdaws, hopefully making it a safer place for Barn Owls to nest should they return to breed this year.

Sanctuary News



*Kaye helps with the annual health checks
Photo: BOT Staff*

Repairs were made to the Field Aviary on the 12th September giving us the opportunity to undertake the annual health check on the owls residing here.

The rest of the owls had their annual health checks later in October when we also took the opportunity to take photos of all the owls in our Adoption Scheme.

A couple of the older Tawny Owls sadly passed away over the winter so we are now caring for sixteen Barn Owls and twenty-two Tawny Owls.

Rick Lockwood
Conservation Officer

Barn Owls in Malaysia

Back in November 2019, Shakinah, a member of the Barn Owl and Rodent Research Group from Malaysia, made a visit to the Barn Owl Trust. She spent two weeks here, with the intention of learning more about Barn Owl conservation and hoping to be able to apply useful new information back in Malaysia. She has this to say about her trip; "It was a short trip and I managed to learn so much. But what has really left an impression on me is the community engagement: from the dedication of members of the Trust to the passion of the community to create and provide a safe space for owls! Volunteers and non-volunteers alike go out of their way to assist the Trust in caring for these birds. I hope to be able to inspire this level of community engagement here in Malaysia to keep our Barn Owl population in good health."

The Barn Owl and Rodent Research Group (BORG) of Malaysia (www.borg.usm.my) was formed in 2014 with the main aim of conserving the barn owl in Malaysia, mainly by emphasizing its role as a biological control agent against rat pest populations. Made up of Universiti Sains Malaysia researchers of various backgrounds, such as pest management, animal science, veterinary, and genetics, the group actively conducts research related to Barn Owls and rats. Barn Owls in the UK prefer open grassland and woodland, Barn Owls in Malaysia are mostly found in agricultural areas such as rice fields and oil palm plantations where their primary food source, rats, are found in abundance.



*Inspecting the health of a Barn Owl
Photo provided*

Following this, BORG actively collaborates with key players from the oil palm industry, government authorities such as the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), NGOs, private sectors and multinational companies to promote and conduct research on Barn Owls. BORG has conducted research on the introduction of Barn Owls in urban areas and small tropical islands. On a larger scale, we were involved in the introduction of Barn Owls to oil palm plantations in Sabah, a northern state in the large island of Borneo. This effort, a collaboration between various bodies, has spanned several Barn Owl generations in Sabah and after several years, has reported good barn owl breeding and fledgling success. BORG also regularly monitors the populations of barn owls in northern Peninsular Malaysia throughout the year, especially during their breeding season. BORG also conduct research on several behavioural traits of Barn Owl in captivity.

A large part of BORG is carrying out education programs in schools and participating in exhibitions to create public awareness on the importance of Barn Owl in our ecosystem and what steps can be taken to lessen the detrimental impact of rodenticides and other practices to Barn Owls. Several members of BORG have also conducted research on rodenticides and secondary-poisoning of Barn Owls. Though there is a lack of data on Barn Owl mortality in Peninsular Malaysia, one of the main factors is secondary poisoning following wide rodenticide use. Uncontrolled rodenticide use has been proven to lead to Barn Owl adult and young mortality and deformities; which is why, though it seems an odd fit, BORG conducts studies to tackle rat pest problems. This includes testing chemical rodenticides and searching for more sustainable and environment-friendly rat control solutions.

BORG coordinator, Hasber Salim, says; "The key to conserving the species lies in igniting the passion for protecting Barn Owls in the younger generation. BORG aims to carry out more awareness campaigns and educational exhibitions. We are also hoping to work more closely with oil palm plantations in hopes of emphasizing the message of safer rodent control."

Shakinah Ravindran and Hasber Salim

Nestbox Workshop



*The completed nestboxes
Photo: Rick Lockwood*

We ran our first nest-boxing workshop for a good few years at the invitation of Jonathan Thomson and the Underhill Wood Nature Reserve in Wiltshire. I had spoken to Jonathan on many occasions over the past three years as he has a large nestbox on the reserve that has a resident pair of Barn Owls. A large part of the reserve is rough grassland and we have spoken about how to manage this primarily for Barn Owls.

He now tops this at height and cuts different areas on a three year rotation which promotes a bountiful population of Field Voles. In addition, perching posts have been put out to help the birds perch feed and conserve their energy over the winter months.

We first talked about running a nestbox workshop for some of his neighbouring landowners and for people that regularly help out at the reserve about a year ago and on the 16th November ten participants gathered to make a total of eight boxes. It was a good opportunity to share some information about the species' ecology and habitat requirements and eat a very tasty shared lunch.

We finished the day having a look around the new open-ended barn that has just been built and stocked with straw bales that will give the owls somewhere to find food in periods of bad weather. We found a good number of fresh pellets that indicate the birds are already utilising this additional resource.

My lasting impression that I take away from the day is of a fantastic nature reserve that is going the extra mile to help Barn Owls and a host of other species. You can read more about the reserve here - www.underhillwoodnaturereserve.com

A Place for Grasslands



*Domesticated species including cattle and goats grazing in the LLP
Photo: David Ramsden*

Imagine a squirrel moving from tree to tree on a journey right across Britain, without once touching the ground. This feat of agility has been used to evoke the previous extent of post-glacial tree cover in temperate Europe, when closed canopy, broad-leaved forest might once have covered all places where trees can grow. A well-connected mosaic of 'wildwood' may have enjoyed a stable period of almost 3,000 years prior to human disturbance and this perspective is known as the Classical Forest Theory. Under those circumstances, the open countryside that Barn Owls require would certainly have been restricted to a very limited area and their population would presumably have been smaller than when low-intensity agriculture provided extensive unimproved grasslands and a high diversity of land-use.

At present, three-quarters of the land surface of Britain is cultivated or grazed. Although agricultural intensification has brought drastic costs for wildlife, the flora and fauna of open countryside is still a wonderful complement to the diversity found in mature deciduous forests in Britain. In addition to Barn Owls, species such as Kestrel, Brown Hare, Grey Partridge, and Harvest Mouse all depend on grassland and use woodlands little, if at all. Over 110 British birds regularly obtain food from lowland pasture. If the Classical Forest Theory is accurate, these species would have had less habitat available to them during several millennia when mature forests flourished. However, theories evolve and new ideas portray a different picture of how Barn Owls and other farmland wildlife species may have fitted into our pre-historic landscape.

Rather than British grassland being restricted to river margins, inland sea cliffs, coastal dunes, areas above the treeline, and forest gaps formed by tree-fall, it has been suggested that temporary and more permanent glades may have formed a half-open landscape. These grassland glades would have been maintained by the grazing of Aurochs (extinct ancestors of domestic cattle), Tarpan (extinct wild horse), European bison, and Elk, which colonized Western Europe before the trees that crept northward after the last ice-age. The activity of Wild Boar and European Beaver would have further added to the dynamic between disturbance by animals and the natural succession of plant communities. Under these conditions, many of the wildlife species we associate with farmland would have had adequate habitats and their population would have been larger than in the landscape depicted by the Classic Forest Theory.



*A Roe Deer wild grazing on the LLP
Photo: Mateo Ruiz*

The influence of wild mammal species on prehistoric British landscapes is eloquently expounded in "Wilding", by Isabela Tree, who draws on extensive experience and research to discuss how grazing domestic breeds and wild species can create biodiverse ecosystems in modern times. One refreshing aspect of this approach is that it is intrinsically forward-looking, advocating process led experiments instead of trying to recreate specific wild systems from our uncertain past.

Preserving and creating rough grassland is an essential aspect of our work at the Trust, not just for the Barn Owl but for a myriad of farmland flora and fauna. We enlist the help of cattle and goats to keep scrub in check on the edge of Dartmoor, and the grassland also benefits from the browsing of Roe Deer. Because each grazing species has its particular preferences when it comes to choosing which plants to eat, a diversity of grazing species should create a greater variety in the resulting grassland. In this light, perhaps ponies, sheep or other grazers could have a future role in maintaining the natural grasslands on our Nature Reserve?

You can read more about wild grazing and conservation here:

<https://bit.ly/2TWrwkb>

Dr. Mateo Ruiz
Assistant Conservation and Science Officer

Feeling Blue or Going Green?

Are you suffering from winter blues or perhaps you are full of the joys of spring? Here in the beautiful county of Devon, despite the incessant wind and rain, you can see spring emerging from the hedgerows and seeking to delight us once more. Snowdrops, primroses, and tiny daffodils are peppering the lanes and woodlands and make us aware, yet again, of the wonders of nature. But poor old nature is taking a bashing from the Climate and Ecological Crisis, and we are taking a bit of a winter weather bashing too... it's enough to make you feel 'blue'. However, you can feel lots better if you can take time to seek out the wonders of our natural world and enjoy those little signs of nature surviving despite everything else, and feel a little 'green'.

Talking of feeling Green – how are you doing at home? Is everything Green in your home? There's no place like home, whether you live in the town or countryside, and for all of us, the Earth is our home and needs a lot of love and support at the moment. At BOT we believe that what we do in our homes and offices has the potential to help to save our overall home and we are working together to ensure we are as Green as can be.

How Green are you? Have you been persuaded to make some changes in your home and garden? There are many things that need to be done that are the concern of our governments and industry, and these agencies are being lobbied and persuaded by scientists and laymen alike. There are things that individuals can do to make positive changes for a greener future. We believe, where there is green life, there is hope and we hope you do too!

Take our light hearted Green quiz to find out how eco-friendly you are. No points or prizes!

1. What is the lighting situation in your home?
 - a. Natural light, compact fluorescent lights (CFL) and LEDs
 - b. A mix of energy-efficient lighting and incandescent lights
 - c. Mostly traditional incandescent lighting
 - d. I dunno – whatever came with the house

2. How do you recycle stuff?
 - a. I don't recycle
 - b. I have separate bins indoors for paper, glass, plastic etc
 - c. I have a compost bin for kitchen scraps
 - d. I don't buy stuff that needs recycling – I'm Uber Green!
3. When you shop, do you:
 - a. Buy local and organic
 - b. Buy whatever is on sale at the supermarket
 - c. Only buy what I need, and never get distracted by 'offers'
 - d. Shop online and get it delivered to my door
4. What Greens do you have in your home?
 - a. I grow veggies, fruit and herbs in my garden
 - b. I have an allotment and feed the street with veg!
 - c. I have plants in my house but they are mostly cacti!
 - d. I've got plastic flowers in a vase – does that count?
5. Seriously though, have you done any of these Greener things?
 - a. Switched to a renewable energy supplier
 - b. Started using a cool wash cycle for all the laundry
 - c. Adjusted the thermostat down a few degrees
 - d. Switched to an electric or hybrid car
 - e. Taken up running or cycling (or even the bus?)
 - f. Focused on re-using things instead of throwing them away
 - g. Switched to eco-friendly products for your home
 - h. Installed solar panels
 - i. Worn warm clothes instead of turning up the heating
 - j. Tried eating less meat, having more plant based meals

It's all a bit of fun, but we hope that some of these choices appeal to you, and show that we are all thinking about better choices for a healthier planet and a sustainable future for all.

Gill Gant
Climate Crisis Co-Ordinator

New Ethical Clothing Range

We are delighted to announce that our Teemill clothing store is now live! Please head over to www.barnowltrust.teemill.com to view our new range of t-shirts, vest tops, hoodies and bags. We have some fantastic designs created especially for us by the talented Norwegian illustrator, Thea Jacobsen. It was an honour to work with her and we're so pleased with her beautiful artwork.

Teemill produce high quality organic clothing using renewable energy throughout their supply chain. Your order will come in a paper bag (or a cardboard box for bigger orders) and every product is designed to be sent back to them to be recycled.

New designs will be coming soon and be sure to keep an eye out for the regular 'Free Post' weekends. April 17th is the first day of the 'Buy One Get One Tree!' weekend where for every order placed Teemill will plant a tree!

We really love Teemill's ethics and sustainability and we hope you love the clothing!

We are keen to have a large variety of designs, so if you have a flair for design and would like to offer your help please get in touch on info@barnowltrust.org.uk.



The Owly Inbox

New Nestbox Success!

The Barn Owl Trust was contacted in August 2018 by Ann-Marie following the discovery of fallen owlets from an old tea chest style nestbox. The couple had recently moved in and were very keen to help and protect their resident Barn Owls! Our Head of Conservation advised the couple about nestbox design and here is an email we received from them in July 2019:

“Good morning David, I just wanted to thank you for your info regarding the loss of the baby Barn Owl last year, I think my boyfriend also spoke to you on the telephone at the time. Well we took your advice, blocked off the tea chest, bought a Barn Owl box from the Trust, I even subscribed as a present for his birthday to The Barn Owl Trust. We have some exciting news, there are at least 4 owls currently in our barn, they have used the box this year. I took some photos through a gap at one end of the old barn. I thought you might like to see them. Many thanks again for your advice.”

We then received this update in November 2019:

“Here’s an update on our owls. Thriving & beautiful. Two seem not to mind our presence at all & watch us from the pines in the garden in the dark as we go about our business.”



*Two of the four Barn Owls
Photo: Ann-Marie Matthews*

Unwanted Guest

About 6 or 7 years ago we saw a Barn Owl in the garden so decided to put up a nestbox. We first saw owls using the box in June 2018 as we could see them bringing food in. We were able to sit at the bottom of the garden and watch without disturbing them. Shortly after, owlets could be heard in the box. Their screeches would raise the roof when the parents were nearby. The parents would land on our house roof clutching a vole in its talons, look around to check the coast was clear, and then transfer the vole to its beak and fly the last 10 feet dropping the vole in to the nestbox.



*Nestbox success
Photo: Adrian Langdon*

The following year I kept a close diary of the activity. We contacted our local licensed BTO bird ringer. He came on 13th June 2019, entered the box and discovered we had three owlets, 2 believed females and one male. I estimated, using the BOT guide, that the owlets were 5-6 weeks old. All successfully fledged and we haven’t had any reports of any ring being found which we take as a good sign.



*Squirrel and owl face off
Photo Provided*

This Christmas I was given an Owlcam... It’s been amazing! It was carefully installed when the box was empty to avoid any disturbance. One evening, whilst our pair were absent, a squirrel took up residence and curled into a ball falling asleep. He was woken by a returning Owl who was clearly shocked. The owl went into an attack type stance. They both remained perfectly still staring each other out. They remained like this for a while until the owl flew off as fast as they could go. The squirrel promptly curled up again and returned to his sleep. Thankfully the squirrel eventually left and has never returned!

Joanne Wilson
Cornwall

Owl Inspired Art



*A beautiful hand embroidered cushion
Photo Provided*

I recently came across your website and learnt a lot. Thank you. Inspired by what I’d read I did some textile art and thought you might like to see it!

Lydia Fernandez-Arias

Barn Owls in Canada

Dr. Peter R B Ward kindly shares his experiences of working with Barn Owls in North America...

We are in the eighth year of a long-term project to encourage breeding of Barn Owls in our nearby farmlands and river delta. This is an area south and east of Vancouver, British Columbia, hemmed in by mountains, constituting the Fraser river valley and delta. The 70-mile long and 15-mile wide triangular area has become good habitat for Barn Owls in the last 100 years, since forests were cut down, floodplains drained and farms established. Several hundred Barn Owls inhabit the valley. This and the nearby habitat on Vancouver Island, with relatively mild winters, are the furthest north regions (latitude 49 to 49.5 degrees) for Barn Owls in North America. The lower Fraser River valley discharges into the Salish Sea. The majority of the surrounding area is mountainous and forested, unsuitable for Barn Owls. Vancouver Island is to the west. The Canada/United States border, on the 49th parallel, divides the area.

The decade long trend in the population has been down-wards, because of impacts from road kill, rodenticide use, loss of farm habitat, and collapse of old barns. A recent overview of the threats to Fraser delta resident and migratory birds was provided by James Casey, "A Delta in Danger", BirdLife Magazine, April-June 2019, pp. 54-55.

Barn Owls in North America were recognized about a decade ago as a separate species, *Tyto furcata* from Barn Owls elsewhere in the world. They are about 15% larger in body dimensions, and approximately 50% heavier than Old World Barn Owls, *Tyto alba*. The favourite prey item in our area is Townsend's vole, *Microtus townsendii*. This large vole weighs about 50-70 grams, and is periodically extremely common in rough grass habitat, such as abandoned fields, in golf courses that are managed with long grass at the edge of fairways, and in blueberry farms. Predation of fledgling Barn Owls, especially those in boxes on trees and in pole boxes, is a risk, because of the presence of raccoons. Wooden poles that support owl boxes have metal shrouding installed, to prevent climbing by mammals.



Work party constructing and finishing new boxes

Our informal volunteer group, known as the Cascade Bird Box Team, came together in 2016. It started in a small way in 2011 by three of us, with ongoing encouragement from our Biologist, Sofi Hindmarch. We are affiliated with two natural history societies in our area. During our construction season, often during the autumn and winter, we get together weekly. The published material available from the Barn Owl Trust has been invaluable, including plans for boxes and field arrangements for installation. We have built about 60 pole boxes, and about the same number of boxes for barns, totalling about 120.



Pole box ready for installation

The cost and effort of building boxes is modest, given access by our group to workshops that are well set up for basic woodworking. We have built many boxes following the BOT pole box design, and in the last 2 years have adopted our own "Cascade" design with a wrap around deck for owlets to exercise prior to fledging.

Installation of boxes at good sites is one of the main issues we face. We frequently suggest the use of pole boxes in the absence of suitable barns because of the ease of installing poles. On golf courses for example, the course manager may or may not leave sufficient rough grass to provide habitat for Barn Owls. Some excellent sites are close to high-speed roads, providing a high risk of vehicle collision. Some good sites are a long way from vehicle access, providing no possibility of moving in materials for installation of boxes.



Erection of all new pole boxes

We have found tremendous satisfaction in carrying out the work, and for many of us the day we get together and do construction is the high point of the week. The majority of our boxes are occupied, and the number of these producing successful broods is high.

Support for materials has come from many sources, including BC Naturalists Foundation, Metro Vancouver Regional Parks, Delta Naturalists, Nature Vancouver, City of Delta, and several private and public golf courses.

Dr. Peter R B Ward

All Photos Provided

More BOT News

Workshop & ATV

With the increase in sales of our nestboxes over the last 3 years our workshop needed a little upgrade. To this end we managed to raise sufficient funds to enable a Mezzlift to be installed in our workshop in September. This means the nestbox components and completed boxes can be easily and safely moved to the upper floor of our barn, therefore allowing more working space on the ground floor.

In January of this year we took delivery of our electric All Terrain Vehicle (ATV). The vehicle has already been put to good use in our 26 acre reserve (known as the Lennon Legacy Project or LLP). Its uses include transporting equipment for hedge laying, fence repairs, general up-keep of the LLP, feeding and mucking out the goats, who are helping to keep the bramble at bay, and checking the occupancy of our wildlife tower and pole box.



The Mezzlift and ATV were funded by grants very kindly provided by: The Marjorie Coote Animal Charitable Trust, The Banister Charitable Trust, D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, Ratcliff Foundation, The Waterloo Foundation, The Oakdale Trust, The Hatcher Animal Welfare Trust, The Cecil Pilkington Trust, The Carron Charitable Settlement, The William Dean Trust, The Walter Guinness Charitable Trust, The Really Useful Group Ltd, The P.F. Charitable Trust and The Holbecke Corfield Charitable Settlement. Without the generosity of these charities and others we would not be able to continue with our work so a very big Thank You to them.



As part of our aim to become as environmentally friendly as possible, the ATV we purchased is 100% electric! We also offset our carbon emissions by 200% with the Environmental Transport Association. We are hoping that we will be able to raise enough money for an electric road vehicle within the next year which we can use for talks, events and educational work.

Jackie Atkinson
Office Manager

A Gift to Barn Owls

As you know, the Barn Owl Trust works very hard to support and conserve these beautiful birds and their environment. We rely on the generosity of our supporters to fund the work we do.

What you may not know is that we are heavily dependent on the heartfelt generosity of people who remember us in their Wills. A gift in your Will can make a very big difference to us, and the projects we are able to undertake. It's a little known fact that many charities wouldn't survive without gifts in Wills. And by remembering us in this way, you are ensuring that our good work carries on.

By its very nature, leaving a gift in your Will to a charity close to your heart is a private and very personal decision, and is never reached lightly. Donating to the causes you care about not only benefits the charities themselves, it can be deeply rewarding to you too, according to the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF).

Choosing to leave a gift to a charity you really care about can be both a way of saying thank you, and also ensuring that their work can continue into the future. As supporters of the Barn Owl Trust you will already know how good it feels to make regular donations to our conservation work and to know that your support really helps us continue our vital projects and services.

We sincerely hope that some of you will decide to remember us in your Wills when you come to write them, and leave a lasting legacy to the work of the Trust. We have a truly beautiful Memory Tree up on the wall of our Meeting Room, which was built with monies generously left to us in the Will of Norman Alderson.

The Memory Tree bears wooden leaves engraved with the names of every one of the people who have left the Barn Owl Trust a gift in their Will, or in whose memory we have received donations. We are truly grateful to have been remembered by these generous supporters, and we love to commemorate their gifts in this way.

According to the Institute of Fundraising, leaving a gift to a charity in a Will is likely to be the largest donation an individual ever gives to charity. The donation can be as small or large as you like – the reality is that even a small legacy can make a big difference, and every gift in a Will helps us immensely. There are various types of bequests or legacies that can be written into a Will which cover a gift to a charity and should you decide to leave us a gift in your Will, your Solicitor will be able to help you decide which type most suits your wishes. If you already have a Will, you can add a Codicil, which is a document used to make changes to an existing Will – again, your Solicitor will be happy to advise you. You may not know, but all legacies to charities are free from Inheritance Tax and can therefore be of benefit to your relatives if you are estate planning.

If you would like to know more about leaving us a gift in your Will, please do not hesitate to contact us, or speak with your legal advisor.

We couldn't do what we do without the generosity of the wonderful people who leave us a legacy in their Will.

Lisa Fordham
Legacy Officer

Fundraising News

Star Pupils!



*Esther & Molly
Photo Provided*

Esther, a 7 year old pupil from St John's Primary School in Wallingford, was studying owls during a class topic about 'light and dark'. Inspired to learn more about Barn Owls she checked out the information pages on our website where she came across this shocking photo below of a Tawny Owl tangled in barbed wire.

She took this photo into school for 'show and tell' and decided, together with her school friend Molly (age 6), that they wanted to raise money to help owls.



*Injured Tawny with barbed wire in wing
Photo: David Ramsden*

They raised funds through the school and Esther also drew some fantastic owl pictures which she sold for £1 each.

Every penny of what they raised will go towards the work of the Trust and we are so proud of them. Well done Esther and Molly! You are both stars!

Poetry Competition

Our 6th Poetry competition which ran between September 2019 and 3rd January 2020 proved to be very popular with 95 entries. Philip Burton judged the poems which were all based around the theme of 'Protecting Life on Earth'. He commented that "The judging was a very rewarding experience". Our grateful thanks to Philip for all the time taken reading and selecting the poems.

The winners are:

1st Place - Landlords and lodgers
by Sarah Leavesley.
Read our winning entry below.

2nd Place - The things I won't tell my Granddaughter
by Virginia Griem

3rd Place - Bird Ringing
by Jack Warren

Congratulations to Sarah for her winning poem 'Landlords and lodgers' which can be read below. Our 6th poetry Anthology is now available to buy at the price of £5 plus £1.50 P&P. Please go to our website for a complete list of included poems and to order. Thank you to all those who entered for supporting our charity.

Landlords and lodgers

by Sarah Leavesley

Living in a converted barn is sharing a skin
and voice with all those that lived here first.

Field mice and shrews needle from tossed bales
to rustling straw shadows. Grandad's collie barks.

Cows, sheep and horses stomp, clomp or trot
towards the trough-still, full-trough landrover.

Chomping on a blade of grass while sniffing the air
for weather becomes the family expression.

The mash-and-cud of generations echoes
in the stone walls, along with the shushed rush

of Rookery Barn's two remaining occupants:
a little owl, snug in the garage nesting box,

and a barn owl in the loft. Its heart-shaped moon face
is the winged secret that turns rafters to night sky.

As good lodgers, my parents swap the kitchen calendar
for a lunar chart, hung beside my gran's corn dollies.
They plant new trees, leave the meadow unmown,

place bowls of fresh water on the windowsills.
As landlords, the owls maintain a presence

that's mostly felt, but not seen – the odd screech,
or morning gifts of feathers, bones and pellets.

My mom weaves and beads their small offerings
into dreamcatchers for each room. Soon we'll shrill,
woop and kiew, kiew even in our sleep.

Judith's Journal

In the last Feedback we briefly considered the rings for different species of birds. However, before you fit a ring you have to catch the bird. Below are just a few of the catching methods that can be used. Two facts must be borne in mind. Firstly, and most importantly, the safety of the bird comes first. Secondly the ringer is trained to undertake each method of catching birds and, if the ringer has no experience of a particular method then the permit will be restricted to reflect this.

The most common method of catching is a mist net. This is a very fine mesh net which is set between two tensioned poles. Each net has three or four loose 'pockets' or shelves created by horizontal strings (trammels) running the length of the net. When the bird flies into the net it drops into the pocket and is caught. What happens next depends on the species. If it is a finch or a house sparrow it will probably just lie in the pocket and accept the situation. Blue and great tits, on the other hand, object to this restraint and start 'knitting'. They can become quite entangled (this is one reason why training to become ringer is so important). Extracting them can also be quite painful as they nip your fingers.

Different behaviour is demonstrated by blackbirds and slightly bigger birds that will 'run' along the pocket so you need to prevent them from reaching the end of the net and escaping. This can be done by holding the net above them closed and carefully extracting them. In the extreme, birds such as sparrowhawk and magpie have the strength to flip the net open and escape.

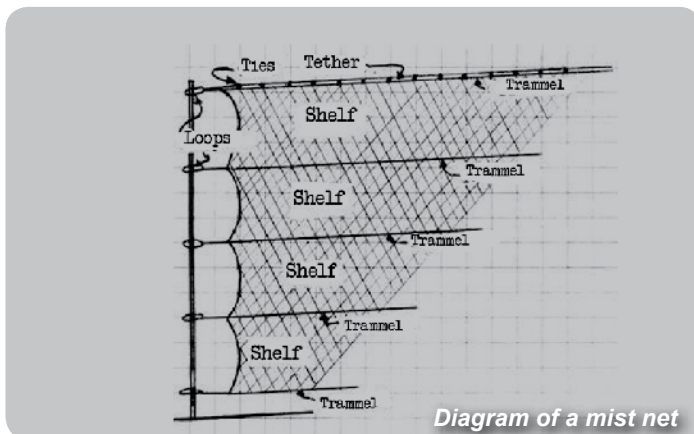


Diagram of a mist net

Another method is to use a Potter trap. This is a solid mesh box. The front is raised and there is a trigger system activated by the bird to lower the front of the box. The box can be baited with meal worms or seed to encourage the birds to enter. It is a much easier way to catch birds such as starlings which, in a mist net, can become quite entangled. It also has its amusing moments. The starlings will walk round the trap and watch any bird caught inside.

Juvenile rooks very quickly learn not to get caught. Generally I catch a couple and then the birds learn that if they sit on top and bounce a bit they can make the front close without being caught. The robin can get in and out without triggering the trap at all!

Catching flocks of birds feeding or roosting on the ground can be done by using a whoosh net or a canon net. Specific training and licences are required for this type of catching. The whoosh net is manually operated, pulling a pin out on bungees to send the net up and over the birds (that is a very simplified explanation). Canon netting works in the same way but the net is taken out on projectiles fired out by canons. In each case a safe area is carefully marked out and if there are birds outside this area the net will not be fired.

As with any ringing the safety of the birds is of paramount importance. So, why do it in the first place? The data collected can indicate movements of birds, whether within the United Kingdom or on migration. In some cases details such as the wing length can show a continental bird as opposed to a local bird. It can also indicate longevity of a bird's life productivity. This information can also be used in assessing the impact of developments on bird populations.

One of the first methods used to catch birds, which is still used today, is a Heligoland trap. This is generally a much bigger set-up and stays in place all the time. The opening will be wide and probably six plus feet tall. The initial area may be planted up with shrubs and vegetation to attract the birds into the area. Gradually the structure narrows down in both height and width funnelling the birds into a catching box from which they can be safely extracted. The catching box itself is opened using a string so that when the Heligoland is not in use the box is kept shut and inaccessible to the birds.

A critical factor in any ringing operation is the weather. Rain and wind make it impossible. Under no circumstances do you want soaking wet birds. If there is a mist, you need to consider how far away the nets are from your ringing base or can you see the nets and get to the birds quickly when they go in. Wind can create two issues. Firstly, the birds become more entangled in the net as it is moving around and they struggle.



A set Potter trap
Photo: Judith Read

Secondly, birds are not stupid. They can see the net blowing around and will tend to avoid it. Wind direction makes a difference as your site may be sheltered. Heat, or lack of it, is another issue. If it is very cold you certainly do not want small birds in the net for any length of time. Also when in the net and being processed they cannot feed. Conversely if it is very hot you need to be careful, remembering that heat will be radiated up from the ground towards birds in the bottom pocket of the net. So, there is more to ringing than you might think.

The value of bird ringing was illustrated when I caught a blue tit wearing a ring in the garden during a ringing session in December. We recorded the ring number, reading it forwards and backwards to check, processed the bird and then let it go. On looking back at the records we found that the bird had originally been ringed in June 2011 as an adult making it at least 10 years old! What is even more surprising is the fact that it had not been trapped during the intervening period. We will never know where it had been, or whether it was just very adept at avoiding the net! This is not the oldest blue tit though. One has been recorded as being 21 years old!

Judith Read
Adoption and Friends Administrator & BTO Ringer

Team Talk

Owls on the Increase?

Our Conservation Officer, Rick Lockwood, recently replied to a letter in The Telegraph newspaper as there were many replies where people agreed with query which read 'I have never seen or heard so many Tawny and Barn Owls. Long may it continue'. Rick's response was published in the paper on 9th March...

According to research conducted by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), there has been a decline both in the population and range of Tawny Owls (Letters, March 7) in Britain since the Seventies.

This resulted in the species being moved from green to amber in BTO's birds of conservation concern lists, 2015, indicating a moderate decline in the breeding population over the previous 25 years. As the causes of this decline are not fully understood, BTO carried out new surveys in 2018 and 2019 to investigate population trends.

The Barn Owl was a far more common species at the beginning of the 20th century than it is today, but numbers have recovered from a low point in the Seventies and Eighties, and the most recent population estimate is somewhere between 4,000 and 14,000 breeding pairs.

The last national survey, carried out between 1994 and 1997, put the population at around 4,000 breeding pairs.

Both species may seem to be more evident at this time of year, but for different reasons. Tawny Owls, being highly territorial, are more vocal during the winter months as they re-establish their territories prior to nesting in late March and early April. Barn Owls, which are mostly nocturnal, are often forced to hunt during the day between periods of adverse weather because their feathers are not as water-repellent as other species, meaning they cannot hunt during periods of rain, of which we have had rather a lot recently.

Rick Lockwood
Conservation Officer

Bells for Barn Owls



Sometimes we do really silly things to raise money!

Following a visit to the Whitestone village pantomime, in which I played Pippin the Pied Piper, the Tedburn Church Bell Ringers dared me to wear my rather colourful costume whilst ringing a church bell.

My answer... a very firm 'No'.

'Oh, go on', they said, 'we will sponsor a bird charity if you do'. So, I did! For a whole evening! A huge thanks to the Tedburn Bell Ringers who chose the Barn Owl Trust as the charity and donated £40 to help the owls.

Judith Read
Adoption and Friends Administrator

Pete Retires...Again!

After 17 years Pete Webb has now officially retired. He started as a full time member of Admin staff in 2003 and partially retired back in February 2014 at the age of 65, going down to 3 days a week.

Affectionately known in the office as 'Pellet Pete' he was in charge of sorting our Barn Owl pellets for sale to schools and introduced our very popular "Pellet Pack" for sale to the general public.

Pete was also a regular on our stand at the various shows, went out and about emptying our donation boxes, ran our charity Ebay page and spent many hours packing up our nestboxes, as well as carrying out Admin duties within the office.

Back in 2017 Pete also completed the Salcombe Coastal Marathon, raising over £1,200 for the Trust.

Pete will be sorely missed, there are still things happening within the office that only Pete knew the origin of. We won't be losing touch as he has said should we need him he's only a phone call away.

Best wishes for your retirement Pete, from all your friends at the Barn Owl Trust!



Thanks and Things

A huge thank you goes to all our wonderful supporters who have sent us items from our Wants List over the last 6 months including various bits and bobs for recycling and fantastic prizes for our annual draw:

Leigh-Anne Boucher, Cornish Tipi Holidays, Heather Cowper, Ecclesiastical Charity, J.Dilnot Smith & Son Ltd, Mrs S Maadani, Naturetrek, Becky O'Malley, Jacob Ramsden, Nigel Reid, Annie Rhodes, Janet Rutter, Theatre Royal Plymouth, Karen Turner, Jake Webb, Melanie White, Liz Woollard, Judy Wotton & WWT Slimbridge Wetlands.

We are so thankful to have some amazing volunteers who kindly give up their time to help at the Trust:

Ambios Volunteers, Kim Baker, Ian Burt, Katie Downes, Tony Hulatt, Andrea Kuhn, Michael Parks, Shakinah Ravindran, Margaret Rhodes, Naomi Stolow, and Plymouth Uni Students.

Special thanks must go to our inspirational fundraisers:

Esther & Molly from St Johns Primary School, Noahs Ark Zoo Farm, Tracey Morris & Shelley Wright, Elisabeth Tivonenko & Judith Read.

Laura Wilson donated her old unwanted car through the Giveacar scheme with the proceeds coming direct to the Trust - Thank You!

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

All support really is greatly appreciated - please take a look at our current Wants List opposite - Thank You.

Can you help with:

- Postcards and pre1970 envelopes with stamps on
- Used stamps, including any foreign stamps & currency
- 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
- 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)
- Wire cutters
- Drill-driver bits (for screwing)
- Quick grip clamps
- Caravan levelling ramps (for our new trailer)
- Wheel Clamp suitable for use on our Display Trailer (13-17 inch wheel)
- Box Trailer (minimum 2.4m x 1.5m x 1.8m high)
- Small plate compactor
- Flora Britannica (Richard Mabey) book.
- Barn Owls: Evolution & Ecology (Alexandre Roulin) book.
- Wildlife Conservation on Farmland Vol 1 (David MacDonald & Ruth Feber) book.
- 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 ...



On one of the few days recently that it hasn't been raining, it has been a joy to walk outside and see the signs of Spring emerging. The hazel catkins, the brilliant yellows of daffodils, dandelions and celandines. Last night, a mild damp one, I counted 23 toads on my patio. The natural world is amazing.

As most people know the February weather once again broke records. Here at Waterleat we had rain on 26 of the 29 days. We had 308mm of rain during the month compared to an average of 98mm over the last thirteen years! The ground hasn't dried out here since September and many Devon farmers haven't been able to sow their winter cereals, which is likely to have 'knock on' effects later in the year. Weather records are constantly being broken and the fires in Australia, which made the international news earlier in the year, were described in the journal *Nature Climate Change* as "vastly exceeding previous wildfires".

Our World is changing; the lack of insects visiting the Spring flowers is another indication of just how much. Last summer, Wasps and Hornets were noticeable here by their absence. Because all things are connected, the lack of these small but vital creatures, has an effect on our eco-system. Wildlife has evolved over millennium and only the most adaptable can keep paces with the changes that humans are making to their environment. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) told us in no uncertain terms in May last year that "Biodiversity – the essential variety of life forms on Earth – continues to decline in every region of the world." "1,000,000 species are threatened with extinction". They also said; "Loss of species and habitats poses as much danger to Life on Earth as climate change. Current global response is insufficient. 'Transformative changes' are needed to restore and protect nature"

So there is definitely a Climate & Ecological Emergency! This threatens everything! Why then are our leaders not acting as though it is an Emergency?

In Paris in 2015, at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) conference, 197 world leaders did sign up to the 'Paris Agreement' with the declared intention of limiting global warming to 2°C. In 2018 the IPCC agreed that "limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C could go hand in hand with ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society". The bad news is that even if all of those countries did what they had agreed to do, warming will exceed 2°C. Unfortunately, they are not even on track to meet their current targets and some, like America, are backing out. Environmental changes are also happening much faster than the IPCC predicted. So the outlook is pretty bleak.

What can we do? Well we need to keep reducing our own carbon footprints. Continue to reduce, recycle and reuse everything we can. Buy only what we need and think before we buy, this sends a strong message to businesses and manufacturers. Switch to a green energy supplier and make sure your bank and pension company are investing ethically. Eat locally sourced food or grow your own to cut down on emissions. However, this won't save the World, as the IPBES said we need 'Transformative changes'. Unfortunately politicians are invested in short-term policies - what will get them elected again. But nevertheless we must write to them again and again and demand they act. We must be prepared to accept changes to our affluent lifestyle if we want future generations to have a chance of life - **change** is coming. People all over the world are working towards adapting to those changes and trying to preserve the wildlife and natural habitats that remain.

Build resilient communities, support each other, and become as sustainable as you can.

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

Frances Ramsden