



Vale Barn Owl Conservation

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NEST BOXES ARE A BIG SUCCESS!



Two young barn owls about to be returned to a nest box fitted inside a barn after having rings fitted.

In the two years since the local nest box scheme started the results so far have been fantastic. 80 boxes have been fitted by the group and 32 other boxes have been identified for including in the monitoring programme. In 2009 there were 12 proven pairs of barn owls breeding in the area with an estimated 28 young fledging. In 2010 there were 18 pairs breeding, 4 were in the Lincolnshire part of the Vale. 2010 was a difficult breeding year for barn owls and it is thought less than 20 young may have survived. 16 of the 18 pairs bred in the boxes provided. 55% of the boxes fitted up to the 31st of December 2009 have been used for barn owl breeding or roosting and for nesting by kestrels, little and tawny owls. 6 pairs of kestrels bred in boxes in 2010 so the boxes are also making a positive contribution to the local kestrel numbers.

Three pairs of barn owls bred close to one small village in the Vale and raised three young each. As a minimum these birds would have eaten at least 2,000 small mammals during the breeding cycle, probably more! A tree used for breeding in 2009 fell, the owls moved to a nearby box to breed in 2010. Following the harsh winter of 2009/10 a high number of barn owls breeding in 2010 were first year birds, rather than more experienced birds. A stock dove was sitting on eggs one side of a box while parent barn owls were regularly visiting the box to feed four well grown young settled in the other side of the box. Unusually, kestrels nested in a box on top of a pole whilst tawny owls nested in a box fitted to the pole 3 metres below!

Because of the success so far in the area mainly north of Melton Mowbray the Group have secured funding for a five year monitoring and maintenance plan, extended the nest box scheme to cover other parts of the Melton Borough and have widened the potential scope of conservation work to include other birds species, bats, plants etc. The Group has already been involved in a tree sparrow nest box project and has been awarded a grant for local swift conservation to be led by a local enthusiast. We would be pleased to welcome volunteers wanting to undertake conservation work within their local area.

Finding a ringed bird?

If you find a dead barn owl or other bird of prey with a ring locally then we would like to know the ring number. Tel 01949 844319. Also please report these and other types of birds found with rings to www.ring.ac. Information from the recovery of ringed birds is important for monitoring the dispersal and age of birds.





Barn Owls and the law

Barn owls are protected by Schedules 1 and 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as such it is unlawful to kill a barn owl, disturb or interfere with nesting barn owls without a licence. This includes making observations or photography that could affect the breeding birds. Barn owls (and kestrels) are particularly sensitive to disturbance during the early stages of breeding. Boxes are fitted on private land, many next to the grass borders of arable fields. These grass borders are not foot-paths unless marked. Please obtain the permission of the landowner before walking these borders and please avoid the area near an owl box if possible.

Little Owls

Little owls suffer from a shortage of natural tree cavities. We now have nest boxes available for little owls. Little owls eat mainly beetles, worms and small mammals. They do well near cattle and horse grazing with hedges nearby. They have small territories and can often be seen in the immediate area of their roost and generations of little owls may use the same site. Two styles of boxes are available, one at £16 and one at £23.

Telephone 01949 844319 or email valebarnowls@hotmail.co.uk



Long Eared Owls (LEOs)

Rarely seen in the open as pictured the LEO is a secretive nocturnal hunting bird preferring to roost in clumps of trees or tall hawthorn thickets or hedges. Slimmer and not as heavy as a tawny owl, LEOs will sometimes roost in family groups. They prefer open land for hunting and nest in old birds nests. Numbers are thought to be in decline with localised extinction in parts of the UK. LEOs are more likely to be seen in winter when the leaves have fallen from hawthorn and other deciduous trees. Often they will be reluctant to fly, will remain perched upright and sometimes will adjust their body shape to appear thinner and taller. The ears can only be seen when the bird is alarmed. Sometimes the birds seen in winter are migrants from Scandinavia or Russia. The provision of wicker or hanging baskets as artificial nests works well.

There is currently a national survey to establish the status of long eared owls. Please report sightings, all information will be treated in confidence. Tel 01949 844319 or valebarnowls@hotmail.co.uk



Funding Partners

Without the financial support of the following organisations our conservation work would not be possible:

Mars in the Community Grants Scheme

Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society

East Midlands Airport Community Fund

10th Duke of Rutland Memorial Conservation Trust

Ragdale Hall

The Waterways Trust

Leicestershire Investment Fund for the Environment (LIFE)

Lafarge

Also donations from local companies, members of the public and landowners

Governance

Membership of the group is open to anyone. The group has one winter meeting, an Annual General Meeting (AGM), maintains a community bank account and produces annual audited accounts. Copies of the audited 2008-09 and 2009-10 accounts can be obtained by emailing valebarnowls@hotmail.co.uk



Photo Gallery



Ringling young barn owls in the Vale



Young kestrels in a box in the Vale of Belvoir



Out hunting



New home for sale!



3 young Little Owls

Landowners

Nest boxes compliment the habitat provided by landowners and we thank landowners for their enthusiastic support for the nest box project. During visits to fit and monitor boxes we have seen a number of conservation initiatives such as stewardship scheme grass field strips, areas voluntarily left as rough grass or set aside, pond creation, tree planting and extensive supplementary bird feeding. Rough grass and mixed planting for game conservancy is particularly beneficial to barn owls and other species. Some landowners, gamekeepers and others have fitted their own owl boxes and we are pleased to include these in our annual monitoring of barn owl numbers and breeding.

Missed newsletter number one? If you want a copy of newsletter number one that included information on the life cycle of the barn owl and habitat advice email valebarnowls@hotmail.co.uk

