



Suffolk Owl Sanctuary News

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General Manager Maz Robinson welcomes you to the new Suffolk Owl Sanctuary newsletter:

"Hello! I hope you enjoy our latest newsletter, bringing you up to date with some of the raptor conservation and rescue projects Suffolk Owl Sanctuary has been involved in over the last few months. Our work is largely funded by the generous donations made by **you** and all the other adopters, donors and volunteers who support our cause either directly to S.O.S. or when you have placed an order with the Owl Barn Catalogue. On behalf of my colleagues and the birds in our charge, I would like to take this opportunity to express how VERY grateful we are for your contributions. Thank you.

Maz Robinson, General Manager, Suffolk Owl Sanctuary

Let's Go Fly A Kite



A recent ecological coup for S.O.S. took the form of the successful rearing of three red kite chicks.

The majestic red kite was once plentiful and popular throughout Britain; during the Middle Ages its scavenging

behaviour was appreciated for keeping habitations clear of rubbish and disease. But by the 17th century it was considered to be "vermin" and a threat to game; a bounty was placed on its head and many years of persecution followed - eggs were stolen from nests and dead birds supplied to taxidermists. In 1871 the species was declared extinct in England.



1) Just hatched! 2) Three weeks old and looking confident!
3) Feathers appearing at about 6 weeks. 4) (top) After about 10 weeks, the adolescent red kites start to resemble their elegant parents!

However, in 1989 the RSPB started a re-introduction initiative and the first red kite was recorded in London in 2006. The UK population is currently estimated at around 2,000.

The sanctuary's own breeding success story materialised when our red kites Elfin and Bronwyn hatched three viable chicks. Removed from the aviaries into the protective custody of the falconers and with frequent regular feeds of their high protein diet, the babies grew rapidly!

After 6 weeks their plumage had transformed from fluffy white down to recognisable feathers and by 10 weeks the clumsy, helpless babies had metamorphosed into handsome adolescent birds. The future of one of the young, Hakin, (pictured above) remains with the sanctuary, and we look forward to him playing a central role in our wide ranging conservation activities for many years to come, whilst his siblings have been re-homed at another centre similar to our own.

Doors Open on New S.O.S. Hospital



1) Entrance to the new hospital. 2) One of the new treatment rooms. 3) A quiet, secluded rehabilitation aviary.

S.O.S. started raising funds to build a new raptor hospital and suite of recuperation aviaries to meet the demands of rising admission numbers and larger casualties. Thanks to the generosity of supporters, other charitable organisations and local businesses, we are delighted to declare the new facilities "open for business".

The services of our bird of prey hospital services are in most demand during the spring months when many baby owls fall from their nest sites. A new incubator room now provides increased brooder space and nursery accommodation for the less robust baby patients, ensuring a higher proportion of successful outcomes.

Regular hospital admissions

of adult birds due to road traffic accidents, chimney falls, hypothermia, starvation, poisoning and even shooting continue throughout the year. Buzzard populations are now on the increase locally and it is with these birds and the returning native red kites in mind that the new hospital facilities have been scaled up in size. Treatment rooms are more spacious, enabling free movement around larger birds and rehabilitation aviaries are provided to more capacious specifications.

We'd like to say a big THANK YOU to all those supporters who funded the project with donations and hope they will take the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the new hospital facilities when they next visit.

STOP PRESS!

As we were preparing to send this newsletter to our printer, the spread of Coronavirus escalated to the extent that 'staying at home' has become the mantra for most of us.

S.O.S. has sadly closed its doors to the visiting public but we are maintaining a skeleton staff to care for all the birds in our charge and any rescues and receptions to the raptor hospital. We do need financial support at this difficult time - please read the enclosed leaflet which outlines our predicament or follow us on [f](https://www.facebook.com/SuffolkOwlSanctuary) at SuffolkOwlSanctuary for further updates and news of developments.

Finally, all at S.O.S. wish you and yours continued good health and safety, and a speedy recovery if you have been affected.

The Sign of a Good Day Out!



Natalie in action!

The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary always endeavours to welcome a wide diversity of visitors. One of our favourite events of the year is our annual 'BSL Signing Day For The Deaf', which takes place at the end of the summer flying season and offers free admission for all deaf and hearing impaired visitors.

The day is made possible by the presence of our dedicated and experienced BSL signing interpreter, Natalie. The flying displays are vividly brought to life by her dramatic interpretations, ensuring that the falconers' interesting commentary enhances the thrilling free flying demonstrations for everyone. She also assists us by reaching out to organisations, clubs and groups attended by the families of deaf and hearing impaired individuals and encouraging them to take part.

Around 200 deaf visitors and their families enjoyed our 2019 event. In preparation for activities the falconry team met with Natalie and discussed relevant details of the lifestyles, diet, habitat and conservation status of all the birds to be flown. She was then well equipped to enhance the aerial performances of the birds with her engaging interpretation.

During the course of the day, three flying displays took place and provided a unique opportunity for our guests to experience close, fast, exhilarating flights which we hope have provided the nucleus of some remarkable memories.

Buzzard Blues

As the wild buzzard population increases, so admissions of injured buzzards to the S.O.S. raptor hospital have risen exponentially. Having suffered a sharp decline during the early 20th century due to pesticide poisoning and myxomatosis in the wild rabbit population, the last 20 years has seen the species enjoy a slow but marked recovery.

Sadly, some still perceive the species to be a threat to pheasant stocks and of the three buzzard casualties which have been received recently, the first had suffered a gunshot wound. A trip to our specialist vet revealed a series of small fractures in the wing, but after a few weeks in our rehabilitation aviaries, this particular victim was able to return to the wild fit and well.

The second case was a very unusual one of "hitching a ride", when an unfortunate bird became firmly wedged within the radiator grill of a van. In cases like these we expect to find significant injuries but on close examination in our treatment room



Amazingly, this buzzard suffered only bruising and temporary disorientation after its free ride on a vehicle!

the only apparent injury appeared to be one broken feather! After two weeks enjoying some quiet time with a regular supply of food and protection from predators, this casualty was strong and agile enough to be returned to the wild, having had a VERY lucky escape!

In rather less dramatic circumstances, our third recent buzzard patient arrived at the hospital having been roughed up by some rather aggressive crows! Crows are quick to pick on solitary birds, dive bombing, pecking and even defecating on them, particularly if they are in possession of food. The poor buzzard had obviously been completely outnumbered and arrived looking shocked and partially bald as a result of the attack. An x-ray confirmed that there were no breaks to a bruised limb, so plenty of rest and physiotherapy were the order of the day.

We are pleased to report that our new, spacious hospital facilities are already proving invaluable in the care and recuperation of our majestic buzzard patients.

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This lucky buzzard suffered no more than a bald patch and dented pride after a run in with aggressive crows!

S.O.S. News Snippet!

Last year we sent out a public appeal for old towels! These are essential items in our raptor hospital; we use them to:

- Dry birds which arrive saturated and cold or covered in contaminants
- Provide warmth and comfort for baby owls nurtured in our creche
- Line hospital night boxes to provide purchase for weak or injured legs
- Hold owls gently but securely whilst administering medication
- Within 24 hours, towels of every size and colour were pouring into the sanctuary...

...from the Netherlands to the U.S.A. and from Cumbria to the Head Office of Tesco in Bath! The generosity of supporters from around the world was astounding. THANK YOU to everyone who contributed - our new raptor hospital is now replete with supplies!



Winging Our Way Across the Pond



Native American supporter Kevin uses S.O.S. feathers in his ceremonial costume.

Native Americans have a deep spiritual connection with the natural world in general and owls and other iconic birds of prey in particular. It was no surprise, then, when we were contacted by a gentleman in North Carolina in the States, asking whether we were able to send him some feathers for his religious ceremonies.

Kevin is a Lumbee Indian and Eastern Band Cherokee and he explained that "The Lumbee are descended from the Cheraw Indians from the eastern part in the United States. The feathers are used as a connection between me, the Great Spirit and the Spirit of the Bird... They are a symbol of respect and honour."

We were keen to assist and were able to gather together a small selection of feathers from our bird species which are non-native to the British Isles. These included those of the bateleur eagle, cara-cara, spotted eagle owl, Siberian eagle owl, vulture and bald eagle. Kevin was thrilled with this contribution

and has been using the feathers in his creation of authentic native costume for participation in celebrations of spiritual and religious significance.

"They are part of my Regalia which is a traditional outfit that I wear during our tribal ceremony and has two of the feathers in it which you have donated.

"I have also made a small prayer fan made of hawk feathers that I made for my granddaughter - she is 3 years old. She dances in our ceremony as a jingle dancer."

We would like to thank Kevin for his thoughtful donation in respect of this gift of feathers - it is pertinent that his contribution will be used to further the conservation and awareness of the precious birds of prey which are central to the belief system of his community.



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We would like to thank Kevin

A Very Sticky Situation



The barn owl was lucky to be discovered before more damage occurred to its plumage. The damaged wing was carefully treated over many days and though by no means back to flying condition yet, our friend is now well on the road back to full recovery.

We recently admitted a rather pitiful barn owl to our raptor hospital after it had been caught in an insidious glue trap.

Such devices are a real danger to all wildlife but particularly owls and other birds of prey which will follow their natural instinct and descend on rodents which have been caught within them.

Once entangled, birds become stuck fast and the more they struggle to release themselves, the more damage occurs to plumage and wings. The worst case scenario can result in a long, drawn out and distressing death.

Our sticky casualty was presented with one leg glued fast to one wing. This immediate problem was treated with the gentle application of olive oil, followed by washes with soapy water for a week.

Although this procedure proved

effective on the glue as it enabled free movement in both limbs again, it did impact negatively on the bird's natural oils which are essential to its healthy plumage.

As a consequence, this patient faces a lengthy period of recuperation to give it time to moult out the old damaged feathers and replace them with healthy new ones so that owl's plumage can be restored to full flight dexterity and robust waterproof condition before it is released back into the wild.

The outlook is now positive and although the birds feathers are still showing signs of damage, his mobility is good and his flight is no longer impeded.

S.O.S. News Snippet!



Falconer Rob and Darwin the Chaco Owl took young readers at a local library by surprise last December.

They met with youngsters and their parents as part of Suffolk Libraries re-launch of their pre-school Wordplay initiative.

This project encourages the involvement of families in their local library services through Baby Bounce, Tot Rock and Storytime activities.

Oona the (fictional!) Owl has been chosen as the Wordplay mascot, so Rob and Chaco enlivened proceedings by explaining the importance of owls in our world.



This dramatic image of Jack the Hooded Vulture by visitor Mike Arreff deservedly won 1st prize in a recent S.O.S. Photo Competition.

We at Suffolk Owl Sanctuary are acutely aware of the small role that the centre plays in the worldwide conservation response to the status of many threatened species - a response that is now being prioritised, as awareness of the global ecological crisis gathers momentum.

The principles of conservation, rehabilitation and education are fundamental to our objectives and our resident birds provide a tangible

connection to the condition of the natural world. To this end, the recent arrival of Jack the Hooded Vulture has further enriched our educational faculty.

Jack was initially introduced to our raptor community as a shy 20 week old. His rapid growth in both physical condition and confidence was further elevated by his introduction to Rose, a female hooded vulture, several weeks later! The meeting was a success - female hooded vultures are renowned for

their long, luxurious eyelashes!! - and the pair quickly settled into an amicable relationship, sharing an aviary and participating in the summer flying displays in tandem!

Hooded vultures are monogamous and will happily share their roost site with their mate throughout their 20 - 25 year life-span. Whether Jack and Rose will produce future progeny remains to be seen - hooded vultures are notoriously difficult to breed successfully in captivity, laying only one egg each year. Due to poisoning, hunting and habitat loss the conservation status of this fascinating bird remains "critically endangered", so we hope that one day Jack and Rose might, in some small way, contribute to the recovery of the species!

The much maligned hooded vulture is an essential element in maintaining a healthy eco system in its native Africa, cleaning up carcasses left by other predators and reducing the spread of germs and disease.

It does not predate, but scavenges - its bald legs and head having evolved to prevent the retention of decaying flesh whilst feeding.

Although populations are relatively stable in Gambia, elsewhere on the continent, numbers are estimated to be falling by a rate of 83% every 50 years. Recent surveys estimate around 197,00 hooded vultures currently survive.

A Slightly Bigger Little Owl



Sadly, little owls are amongst the steady stream of casualties passing through our raptor hospital facilities, usually suffering from starvation, hypothermia or mobbing by larger birds.

Such a case arrived at the sanctuary recently, having been found in a ditch, unable to fly, during a spell of extreme wet weather. Initial assessment found no significant injuries, but a routine weight check revealed that at 245 grams, the owl

was considerably overweight and less aerodynamic than normal!

It is unusual for wild birds to carry so much extra weight and as the bird carried no rings, microchip or jesses on its legs, the only way to determine whether it had escaped from an aviary was to test its food preferences. If it preferred chicks (not a natural food option for wild birds) this would indicate a captive bred bird, but if it opted for brown mice (more akin to the voles and shrews which constitute the wild diet) then the bird could be assumed to be wild, which was indeed the case.

After a time in our hospital on a diet strictly monitored by the falconry team, this little owl was restored to full health and agility before being released back into the wild.

Nicknamed Plump, the owl's story travelled around the world, to Italy, Croatia, Ghana, Poland, Australia, Romania, New Zealand and Kenya! Accounts of her experience also made copy in the Guardian and the New York Post, and on the BBC!

Please Renew Your Owl Adoption

We are perpetually grateful to all our supporters and for the diverse ways in which they show that support. Many people choose to make a donation to our work by adopting one of our resident birds. The ranks of our current adoption list are soon to be swelled by some new faces including Woody the Wood Owl, Hakin the Red Kite and Tura the Siberian Eagle Owl. These magnificent birds are sure to be popular choices with all our adopters as a unique and very personal gift for birthdays, anniversaries, weddings and retirements.



Please call
03456 807 897

or visit
www.owl-help.org.uk
where you can donate any small amount on a regular basis to renew or make an adoption for family or friends

All new adopters receive this special lapel pin with our compliments as a "Thank You!"