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General Manager Andy Hulme says **WELCOME** to the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary Newsletter.

Welcome to our latest newsletter, in which we take pleasure in bringing you up to date with some of the conservation, rescue & other projects we've been involved with for the last few months. To start with, we have some great news to report - a dramatic revival in the fortunes of young wild owl populations, evidenced by the results of our Wild Owl Nest Box Scheme that is largely funded through YOUR generous donations. So on behalf of us all - and that of course involves the owls and other birds of prey for which we are responsible - I would like to express how very grateful we are to all our volunteers, supporters, donors and owl adopters without whom neither the nest box scheme or our many other endeavours would have been possible. Thank you - and come and see us again soon!

Andy Hulme

General Manager, The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary

scheme, is delighted: "2014 is turning out to be a bumper year! To have clocked up the 100th chick ringed by the beginning of July is a record for us. Last year was very poor, with only 19 pulli (young owl chicks) registered for the whole season. Since our first inspection round we have checked a further 60 boxes and it seems some Barn Owls even raised a second clutch."

Other owl species who take advantage of the total of nearly 300 nest boxes in Nest Box Scheme have also benefitted. "The regional Tawny Owl population has staged an equally impressive recovery in 2014 - from no chicks at all last year in our network, to 26 so far this year, which is another record for our project."

Nest Box Success!



In the last two years, the breeding activity of many wild owl populations has taken a real hammering - the result of an extreme & prolonged period of wet weather in 2012 and a late but severe cold snap in March 2013. As widely reported, the results combined to have an alarming affect on wild owl breeding successes, in some cases last year recording a drop of 90% over previous seasonal highs.

But in the recent monitoring of our Wild Owl Nest Box scheme - the initiative Suffolk Owl Sanctuary jointly operates with The Thornham Owl Project and which is largely funded by your donations - we can confidently report a remarkable recovery has taken place in 2014. By the end of July over 100 Barn Owl progeny had been ringed from just 26 of the network of 167 wild Barn Owl nest boxes in the scheme - an average of over 3.5 progeny for each nest site. By the end of August, the total number of young Barn Owls ringed had risen to 147.

Indeed, this year has proved to be the best year yet for an enterprise focussed on providing secure roosting sites for wild Barn Owls and other threatened bird of prey species whose natural habitat is being eroded as man encroaches on the countryside.

Our colleague Roger Buxton - the volunteer who oversees the monitoring of the boxes in our



Roger, his Thornham colleague Kevin Boyce and Dean Winham, Conservation Officer for S.O.S., between them visit all the boxes regularly to record raptor populations as well as cleaning, repairing or replacing the boxes themselves.

"I have to say we are equally enthusiastic about the revival in the fortunes of the Kestrel this year, another species which is under threat. By the end of July we had ringed 34 kestrel pulli from 10 boxes, with further man-made nest sites still to be checked. It appears that kestrels started their breeding cycle early this year, I imagine mainly due to the mild weather conditions. In some cases we suspect the youngsters had already fledged when we arrived to check and some mums were already sitting on a second clutch."



Each nest box inspection is carried out under a License issued by DEFRA (it is illegal to approach a wild owl nesting box without one) and the results of the Barn Owl progeny surveys conducted are included with the those of the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project as part of an annual report of The Barn Owl Trust.

Thank you again for the contributions that make this important ongoing project possible.



Left: Details of these two young Barn Owls were recorded as part of the survey.

Top Right: The survey discovered a resurgence of Tawny Owl progeny.

Bottom Right: The young kestrels will soon take develop the distinctive copper plumage of the mature adult shown here.

A Valentines Day Surprise!

Our first orphaned Tawny Owlet of the year was brought in - 3 months ahead of time!



Early May is normally the time of year when we start to receive young orphaned Tawny Owls into our rescue centre at Suffolk Owl Sanctuary - youngsters who more often than not have simply tumbled from their roost and are waiting for their watchful parents to coax them back to the nest.

Sometimes, however, they are waylaid beforehand by well-meaning passers-by who bring them into us under the misapprehension that the birds are either lost or have been deserted.

Imagine our surprise therefore when, halfway through February, we received a phone call from concerned members of staff at a local hospital to ask for help with a small owl they had found on the ground in their car park.

Within an hour they had brought a box in to us and we were dumbfounded to find a two-week-old Tawny Owl Chick inside, a good ten weeks earlier than we would expect to do so, and the first time any of us have come across Tawny Owls breeding so extraordinarily early.

We checked the little chap over and thankfully everything was fine - the youngster was nice and plump, obviously well fed and in good condition. Nevertheless another meal did not go amiss before he was taken home by one of our dedicated team of falconers for some TLC.

This continued for a few nights but in order that the owlet had as little human contact as possible (so as not to become 'imprinted' on humans but remain wild and wary in preparation for release), it went into one of our isolated rehabilitation aviaries where it was able to develop in peace and learn how to fly and land properly for himself.

Then as soon the little creature - now appropriately nick-named "Valentine" - was ready to go back to the wild, we took it to a local farm and hacked it back in an area where there was suitable habitat to sustain it. He was not returned from whence he came, as the parents would probably have by then rejected him as an intruder on their territory.

Under normal circumstances, Tawny Owls usually lay eggs between late March to early April. However, probably due to the mild winter temperatures this year, the parents of our first founding had decided to breed early. We think this youngster was blown out of its nest by the strong winds we experienced at the time.

Voyage of Discovery

Our new Discovery Centre has put fun into learning all about Owls & other Birds of Prey!

Many of our visitors at Suffolk Owl Sanctuary are youngsters, either visiting on holiday or as one of the many schools that make a trip to see us through the course of a year.

Keeping our young friends informed as well as entertained can sometimes be a bit of a challenge but thanks to the ingenuity & creativeness of our resident reception team, Catherine & Anna (with some help from master of the spray paint, falconer Dean), those days are receding quickly.



Back in May we opened our brand new Discovery Centre at the Sanctuary, and our clever girls developed a host of different interactive displays & exhibits. All are proving great fun as visitors use them to find out more about the life & lifestyles of our feathered friends.

Catherine & Anna also took the opportunity to create some interesting exhibits which graphically emphasise the importance of British wildlife conservation in general.

The exhibits include some original, intriguing, and hands-on things to do, like:

HOW DO I LOOK? - Have fun as your photo is taken in the guise of an owl!

GET A GRIP - Test the strength of your grip against that of a Golden Eagle - you'll soon grasp the difference!

MEASURE UP - You'll have to stretch to beat the wingspan of Charlie Condor, the world's biggest bird of prey!

FOOD CHAIN FACTS - Make a bracelet as you discover how the Food Chain links together!

PELLET DETECTIVES - Discover what's in an owl pellet and how it can help you discover more about the diet of an Owl.

HIGH FLYERS - Flying over Everest with only the beat of your wings to keep you airborne is hard to imagine - but we show which vultures & eagles do it every year.



A WORD IN YOUR SHELL-LIKE - Comparing the diversity of size and colour of different raptor eggs.

RAPTOR FACTORS - Loads of fantastic facts about birds of prey are brought to life, contrasting different raptors' extraordinary fields of vision, ability to withstand extreme temperatures and much more...

BOOK CAMP - There's space for families to grab a book and sit around the campfire to read all about owls, both fact & fiction.

COUNTRYSIDE CONSERVATION - We amaze visitors by showing how many British wildlife species are under threat of extinction, and how the Countryside Code can help them.

DAMAGE LIMITATION - Our visitors are startled by our display showing how rubbish we are at conserving British wildlife!



This is the story of how local resident, Jane Helliwell and her neighbour Kevin separately found two undernourished Barn Owlets and brought them into the Sanctuary for care & attention. Stories like this are familiar to us, but Jane wrote about her own particular experience in her local Parish News, which we reproduce here as a third-person view on what happens when a bird in distress is found in need.

"Two years ago a pair of Barn Owls took up residence in a hollow of one of the churchyard trees in our village and successfully reared and fledged a brood of owlets. We saw and heard the adults on several occasions and also heard snoring-type noises, which we eventually discovered were the owlets calling for food and not my husband, as I thought!

Last year a Barn Owl pair again took up residence in the same tree hollow (they may have been the same pair) but because of the late spring that year, the eggs were laid late. All seemed well and for a while after we heard the owlets making their snoring noises again.

However, soon afterwards a neighbour found a very cold and sick owlet on the ground outside our window and took it home. She tried to feed it with a tiny piece of chicken and with the aid of a pipette, got some water down its throat. She then put little bird in a box near some food and came to ask us for help. Being a Sunday it was difficult to contact anyone who could tell us what to do, but eventually we were directed to the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary.

They asked us to bring the owlet into them as soon as we could, where we were seen straight away at their raptor hospital. As the little owlet was very poorly and thin, a high protein liquid was tubed straight into the stomach of the little creature to provide immediate sustenance. The Sanctuary then took charge of the bird (we called her Mary in the belief she was female) so that for the next 24 hours she could be fed every two hours with a liquid feed.

Before leaving her at S.O.S. that day we received a crash course in Barn Owl parenting. Under normal circumstances Barn Owls lay up to 6 eggs, each hatching several days apart to give each owlet more chance of survival. Barn Owls only feed their young in the nest - if perchance the youngsters should fall out as this one did or manage to stray, then they are abandoned. (Other species like Tawny Owls take care of their young out of the nest.) Similarly, parent Barn Owls can abandon the nest themselves if there is not enough food around, or if they begin their moult before their offspring fledge.

The saga continued. 48-hours later - by which time Mary was thankfully eating up to four mice at a time - another neighbour, Kevin, found a second owlet on the ground below the nest. Luckily I saw it as well so was able to explain about our experience Mary and the Sanctuary, which is where Kevin then took his foundling. There they named the slightly younger but also starving owlet Joseph, who was put on a similar course of treatment to Mary.

It was agreed it looked as though the parents had abandoned their offspring, probably through lack of food because of the lateness of the season. This would prevent either owlet being returned to the nest, so the Sanctuary kept them in care. Initially they were put side-by-side

Two's Company...

How these beautiful birds came to be rescued and released back to the wild.



in nursery boxes where their food intake was monitored until they were strong enough to be transferred to the hospital aviary. There they seemed very comfortable together, eventually using the space to learn to fly to and from their perch: we received regular updates on their

progress from the folks at the Sanctuary, and went in to the Sanctuary to discreetly view them a couple of times before they were released."

Postscript: Maz (above) helped us nurse the two owlets back to health and they were hacked back to the wild on a local farm soon afterwards.



Photos:
Jenny Pearson

S.O.S. Call for Help - from the South China Seas!



The wayward owl received a compassionate welcome aboard the Deep Orient, a construction vessel dedicated to subsea construction and flexible pipelaying projects.



This bedraggled mite - which we think was a Northern Boobook Owl - crashed onto the deck of the supply ship in a very sorry state.



Bob Hill, Master of the Deep Orient, attempts to ply the miniature raptor with a morsel. Daily interest in the welfare of the bird spread throughout the international crew and onwards via social media to all corners of the globe!

Although based in Suffolk, the S.O.S. website attracts many calls for help and advice on the care & conservation of owls and other birds of prey from all parts of the country and often much further afield - including this year from Peru, Alaska and Indonesia. One such email came from Bob Hill, Master of a supply ship sailing the South China Seas to whom we were able to give some advice on the emergency feeding of hungry wild birds - tips which should be equally applicable if you find a weak & hungry raptor on your hands, be it in Mumbai or Milton Keynes.

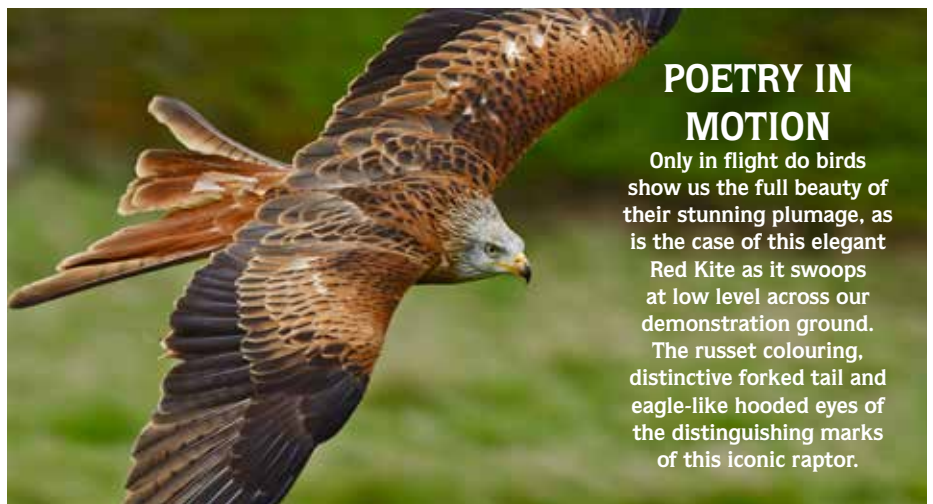
Q. We have a small owl in our care on board our supply ship, the Deep Orient, currently 120 miles out of Hong Kong. It was rescued from the deck after colliding with a wire whilst flying and may have damaged its right wing. It was also covered with grease so we have had to put it through the trauma of a bath to remove the grease. The bath was yesterday evening and the owl seems to have recovered well and is still alert and defensive. However it is not eating (tried an assortment of raw meat) or drinking. We are visiting port in 4 days in China and hope to release the bird then if it can fly by that time. As far as I am aware there will be no bird sanctuary in the port we are visiting. Any advice you could give me to aid it's survival, especially with regard to food/water would be much appreciated.

A. After a bit of debate we think this is a Northern Boobook Owl, which originates from Australasia. The best thing you can do to give the bird some sustenance is force feed it. This will take two people - one to hold the bird gently, encasing the wings and putting the birds legs between their fingers, with the head facing forward. The person who is feeding needs to get small pieces of raw meat such as chicken or beef (which can be moistened in water), then prise open the beak and push the food to the back of the birds throat, over its tongue. Owls do not have crops, so you can literally (but gently) push the food with your finger right down its throat and into its stomach. As for water, owls generally don't drink but will derive the moisture they need from their food. When the bird is settled, contact a local bird of prey centre for further advice on what to do or contact us at www.owl-help.org.uk

Come on you Reds!



Brief news on our colony of Red Squirrels, which though very shy, continue to thrive! Our two pairs have produced three youngsters between them this year, progeny that will once again be distributed to strengthen blood lines in Red Squirrel release programmes in the UK.



POETRY IN MOTION

Only in flight do birds show us the full beauty of their stunning plumage, as is the case of this elegant Red Kite as it swoops at low level across our demonstration ground. The russet colouring, distinctive forked tail and eagle-like hooded eyes of the distinguishing marks of this iconic raptor.

PLEASE RENEW YOUR OWL ADOPTION

As we hope you can see from this newsletter, the work of S.O.S. continues with dedication & enthusiasm. But - if you can - PLEASE renew your owl adoption as your donation is vital to our future and the well being and care of our avian friends.

Please call 08456 807 897 or visit www.owl-help.org.uk to renew or adopt-an-owl for family or friends



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



Presidential Candidate

We have recently taken charge of a young American Bald Eagle on loan from the National Bird of Prey Centre. One of a pair of captive bred birds, he needed a good home where he can get plenty of exercise as he learns to build up his muscles and refine his natural flying skills. Called Lincoln, this spirited two-year-old will gradually acquire the distinctive white head plumage as he approaches maturity over the course of the next five years. His powerful hooked beak and curved talons are the other distinguishing marks of this fish-eating eagle.