



Photo by John Christies, entered in our most recent Photo Competition

Stonham Barns,  
Stonham Aspal, IP14 6AT  
Tel: 03456 807 897  
[www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk)

Regd. Charity No. 1086565

General Manager Maz Robinson says **WELCOME** to the latest Suffolk Owl Sanctuary Newsletter.

*Hello! I hope you enjoy this, our latest newsletter, bringing you up to date with some of the raptor conservation, rescue & other projects we've been involved with for the last few months. As our work is largely funded by the generous donations made by you, and the host of adopters, donors and volunteers who support our cause, I would just like to take this opportunity to express how very grateful we are for your contribution.*

*My thanks also goes to my colleague Catherine, who has once again compiled many of the stories in this newsletter and those you can read on our blog at [www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk).*

**MAZ ROBINSON**

General Manager, S.O.S.

## Boxing Clever

As a supporter of the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, YOU have been instrumental in realising the development of our network of roosting sites for the local population of Barn Owls and other wild birds of prey by funding the wild owl nest box scheme we run in conjunction with the Thornham Owl Project.



We're pleased to report that 2017 proved to be a record year, with 152 Barn Owl progeny ringed. This surpasses the previous high in 2014 when 147 were ringed - a successful outcome which brings the grand total of Barn

Owl youngsters ringed over the last ten years to 715.

Project leader Roger, his volunteer colleague Kevin and Steve from S.O.S., began nest box checking in the first week of June as usual and it quickly became evident from the amount of debris found in some Barn Owl boxes, that young had already been fledged. This was due to a very warm spell of weather in late March of last year, which is thought to have encouraged some early breeding.



The downy plumage of a young fledging Barn Owl

When weather conditions took a turn for the worse, breeding was delayed again. As a consequence young were still being ringed in late September and well into early October.



This trio of young Barn Owls raised in one of our wild owl nest boxes have been weighed, measured and ringed as part of our annual survey

2017 was also another success story for kestrel nest boxes with 20 of the 46 boxes being used allowing Roger to record and ring 88 youngsters. This is a particularly satisfying result for the project since the British Trust for Ornithology have recently raised the conservation status of the kestrel to "amber".



A promising number of young Kestrels were ringed during our 2017 nest box campaign

Tawny Owls did not fare so well last year - only 8 of the 47 boxes had

been used, from which we were able to ring 19 youngsters. These figures seem to reflect the worrying national trend for the gradual but consistent decline of Tawnies over the last few years, which saw its conservation status elevated from green to amber in November. The BTO have launched a scheme to research the reasons for this general decline more thoroughly.

### HELP FOR HILDA!

If you sponsor a wild owl nest box in our Scheme, you will be helping us replace "Hilda" - the trusty but past-her-sell-by-date off-road vehicle which enables us to reach the necessarily remote and often muddy locations of the nest boxes. Please call us on 0345 680 7897, use the form enclosed or visit [www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk) where you can set up a one-off or monthly donation. We fear for Hilda's longevity, so your assistance will be much appreciated!

## We're Nicked!



Visits to S.O.S. are sometimes made by the most unexpected people!!

Just recently ten police officers of the local Constabulary joined us for an instructional morning. They were all connected to the force's rural beats and were interested in expanding their knowledge of owls and other birds of prey.

During the course of their usual duties throughout the countryside, the police are often involved in situations concerning wild animals and birds. Although agencies like ourselves exist to meet the specific needs of local wildlife, the police often find themselves playing a supportive role in such incidents.

Instruction concentrated on bird recognition - in order that police could relay accurate information to other agencies called in to assist them - and bird handling in order for officers to gain a degree of protection and confidence when dealing with beaks and talons at close quarters!

## In the Bleak Mid-Winter...



Falconers Nick, Liz and Harry braving the elements with our trio of Red Kites, Jester, Nessa and Bryn

Loathe as we are to recall the heavy snowfall and blizzards which brought the country to a virtual standstill when visited by the Beast from the East back in February, it was of course necessary for us to maintain the care of our charges.



The Sanctuary was blanketed with drifting snow which caused a hazardous, though beautiful, landscape. Due to concerns for the safety of visitors during such treacherous conditions, the site was reluctantly closed to the public for several days.

The falconry team struggled through the frozen wastes to continue their dedicated care and attentive monitoring of all the sanctuary's resident birds and to



remain on call for hospital casualties.

Although all birds of prey are well equipped to deal with sharp drops in temperature and adverse conditions, staff still observed the birds diligently to spot any vulnerability swiftly and to prevent the health of any bird being compromised

by the conditions.



Some of the residents at the Sanctuary relished the cold weather. Mishka the Snowy Owl felt totally at home in the white stuff - her cousins in the wild are able to withstand temperatures as low as -40° C and Mir the Steppe Eagle enjoyed his free flight in conditions with which his Russian relations are totally familiar!

In order to make sure that all birds had extra resources to draw on, feed quantities were increased and the temperature of the mews room in which the non aviary birds are accommodated overnight was raised.

Ourt team increased the frequency of their usual observation rounds and daily checks were carried out on all outside accommodation to ensure that roosting spaces all remained dry and draught free.

## The Whole Kit & Kaboodle

The S.O.S. red squirrel colony enjoys luxurious accommodation within the centre's pretty Woodland Walk.

Three tall, spacious enclosures connected with unique treetop walkways provide the extensive habitat and aerial cover that these solitary animals enjoy: there are plenty of communal areas where family members can congregate but also lots of secluded nooks and crannies in which individuals can enjoy some peace and quiet.



One measure of the squirrels' wellbeing, both physical and psychological, is their breeding success. During 2017, there were seven kittens born within the Sanctuary's colony (from two breeding pairs) - an achievement of which we're proud.

There are estimated to be only 140,000 red squirrels in Britain presently, compared to 2.5 million greys, so the necessity of captive breeding programmes has never been more apparent. Successful progeny from the S.O.S.

squirrel colony are usually transferred to other national breeding centres, to introduce new blood lines and improve the gene pool, most notably the Isle of Wight Red Squirrel Trust. The geographical advantages of this small island are particularly conducive to successful breeding with the Solent providing a barrier to the infiltration of grey squirrels.

The seven most recent Suffolk Owl Sanctuary progeny have just settled into their new home in Hereford, where we hope they will enjoy many years successfully breeding their own young.



## Raptor A&E

Last year the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary undertook it's biggest fundraising drive to date. The aspiration was to raise the money to build a new, larger raptor hospital which would be better equipped to deal with the increasing numbers and larger sizes of some of the avian casualties brought into the centre.

We are pleased to announce that thanks to **your** generosity as a supporter of S.O.S., or an adopter of one of our owls or by making a donation when placing an order with Owl Barn Gift catalogue, we reached our target. The foundations for the new hospital have been laid and we are due to begin the construction work very soon.

As a supporter, we'd like to tell you something about how the hospital operates.

Most birds enter the hospital via two routes; either our team go out to rescue birds caught in difficult situations like being trapped in a chimney, or they are brought into the hospital by members of the public, often referred to us by local veterinary practices. On arrival at the centre our team are able to assess the severity of the injury or trauma and administer necessary first aid before the bird enters rehab.

In more serious cases, such as a broken



We're beginning to received larger birds like this Marsh Harrier as they become more prevalent in the area

wing or where a bird may have been shot or poisoned, we take the bird to our veterinary who has the expertise necessary to treat the birds' injuries in surgery or diagnose more specialist medication as required. After treatment, the injured bird is returned to us, as the vet does not have the time and facilities needed for several weeks' recuperation and rehabilitation.

The sanctuary's hospital is in most demand from May-July when capacity

is quickly reached with the springtime influx of baby owls which have fallen from their nests. In most cases, these tiny creatures only need plenty of food, warmth and TLC to equip them for life back in the wild and as baby owls grow extremely quickly, they outgrow their cosy brooders within a few weeks. The new hospital will include a larger incubator room and increased numbers of brooders and nursery accommodation.

"Baby season" aside, the normal admissions of adult birds into the



As Maz looks on, our vet Paul Canham looks for signs of damage in the wing of a Barn Owl

hospital due to road traffic accidents, chimney falls, hypothermia and starvation still continue through every season - these have included barn, tawny, little & long eared owls, sparrowhawks, kestrels and buzzards. In the past year or so we have noticed an increase in the number of larger birds being brought in to us - buzzard populations are now on the increase in this locality. Bearing these birds and the native Red Kites and Harriers which are also becoming more prolific in mind, that accommodations will be augmented within the new hospital.



A buzzard with a severe case of frounce, is crop-tubed - a method of getting liquid food into the stomach when the condition makes it difficult for the bird to ingest food by itself

natural environs. We also hope that you will take the opportunity to visit the sanctuary and witness at first hand the essential work carried out in your name in our hospital, which should be completed by the end of the summer.

## Kestrel Cast Down - but not out!

Amongst those we sadly receive into our bird of prey hospital are beautiful kestrels.

This little girl was brought into us by a family who had seen the bird injured at the side of the road. After turning around and collecting her, they drove to the centre where we received her in a soaking wet, very skinny condition and barely clinging to life.

Feeling it unwise to leave her overnight for fear that she would not survive, one of our team took the kestrel home and fed her through the night. Visiting the vet the next morning, it was discovered the bird also had an injured leg, the remedy being a cast for support during the recovery period.



Initially the kestrel's injured foot was tightly closed...

... but gentle physiotherapy enabled us to ease the foot open again

Whilst gradually bringing her back into condition, for the first 10 days of her treatment we gave her physiotherapy on her left foot twice a day, which involved gently opening and closing her talons. The picture above left shows her standing with her closed foot but by the end of the treatment (right) she was able to keep her foot fully open. From there, the kestrel went from strength to strength. Shortly after the cast was removed, she spent a week in one of our secluded rehabilitation aviaries and after a final check over by the vet, she was released back to the wild



close to where she was found. It took quite a time to get her back to health - but it was worth every second!



## Short Stay for a Long Eared Owl!

The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary Raptor Hospital is always busy in the Spring - casualty numbers being augmented by founding babies which have fallen from nests or been separated from parent birds. These are generally barn owls, tawny owls and, less frequently, little owls.

Recently, however, a long eared owl made a rare appearance in the hospital treatment room, having been brought in to us by a member of the public. The incidence of long eared owl patients in the hospital is probably less than a couple each year, so it was highly unusual (but interesting) for the falconry team to be assessing such a patient.

The owl had been found caught in netting within a warehouse at some docks. Luckily, it was within the reach of some of the dockyard workers, who were able to collect it up into a box and transport it to the Sanctuary's hospital.

On arrival the mature adult owl was assessed and found to have no injuries, although it was, understandably, suffering from shock due to its ordeal. The remedy for the stressful rescue and journey to S.O.S. was merely a few days' peace and quiet in a secluded rehabilitation aviary with regular food and protection from predators.

After a week in accommodation akin to a luxury hotel (!) the owl was back in condition and ready to return from whence it came, in the protective custody of its kindhearted rescuer.

Long eared owls are strictly nocturnal and very well camouflaged within their favoured wooded habitat, so are rarely seen within daylight hours. They also compete for hunting grounds with tawny owls, so are rarely seen in areas in which tawnies are plentiful and this could explain why coastal areas may offer favourable habitat.



Our free newsletter The Stonham Screecher is one of the free educational resources we produce for young people. If you'd like copies for a school, please contact editor Catherine on 03456 807 897 or email her on [info@owl-help.org.uk](mailto:info@owl-help.org.uk). You can also download a copy from our website [www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk)



## THE S.O.S. ADOPT-AN-OWL SCHEME

As we hope you can see from this newsletter, the work of S.O.S. continues with dedication & enthusiasm. Please consider adopting an owl to support our various projects, or renewing your previous adoption if it has expired.

Your donation is vital to helping us continue with our work with the care & conservation of our native owl species.

**Please call 03456 807 897 or visit [www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk) to renew your adoption or to adopt-an-owl for family or friends.**

## A Helping Hoof!



Our colleague Roger was offered help from an unexpected source when weighing and measuring young barn owl chicks for our wild owl nest box project recently. Reluctantly, Roger had to say 'neigh' on this occasion.

## Tail Piece



Falconer Matt replaces one of the important tail feathers of one of our red kites. The painless process involves gluing the broken feather to its replacement new feather by inserting an "imping needle" (a thin shaft of bamboo) into the shaft of the broken feather.



When our display birds damage tail feathers, it can take over a year for them to moult the broken feather out, to allow new growth to take place. In order that birds can get back to efficient free flying more quickly, it is often necessary to "imp" or implant new feathers into the tail - a skilled job only undertaken by the most experienced falconers.