

**Includes
plans for building
Owl Nesting Boxes**

SAVING BRITAIN'S OWLS

*A guide to
the lifestyles
& habitats of
Britain's Owls,
with details of
what YOU
can do to help
preserve those
species which
are under
threat.*



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details....**

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Know Your Owls



OUR MISSION ~ SAVING BRITAIN'S OWLS

At the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, we are frequently asked about the best way to 'attract owls' - often by those who used to see owls in their area but feel they are no longer there; or think they have suitable local habitats for owls and wish to attract them to their vicinity.

Many others come to us for advice and guidance on what they can do to help conserve these valuable creatures for the future, perhaps by developing suitable habitat or building and erecting nest boxes.

Established as a registered charity in 2001, S.O.S. has many functions but our primary purpose is to help maintain the continued survival of Britain's owl species and to aid those which are threatened around the world.

We hope this booklet will help provide you with useful information and the encouragement to understand, aid & support this cause with thoughtful & practical advice.

WHY DO WE NEED OWLS?

Owls and other birds of prey form an integral part of a functioning ecosystem. Biodiversity is the earth's life support system: it includes all plants, animals and micro-organisms and the places where they live - in essence, the variety of life on the planet. Conserving biodiversity is vital to our future survival and our quality of life. It provides economic benefits, not only directly in farming, fisheries, pharmaceuticals and tourism, but also indirectly through measures such as flood control, water quality and human health. It enriches our quality of life by increasing our enjoyment of the countryside and makes the world a better and healthier place in which to live.

Every living thing has to eat. Plants make their own food by a process called photosynthesis and by absorbing minerals from the soil through their roots. Animals cannot make their own food so they eat plants or other animals.

This is the basis of a "food chain", which is usually around 4 links long. In a food chain, energy passes from one link to another, with each organism along the chain passing on less energy (in the form of body mass) than they receive from the organism from below them. However, because of the large amount of energy that is lost at each link, the further along the chain you go, the less food (and hence energy)

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remains available.

Most food chains have no more than 4 or 5 links because the animals at the end of the chain would not get enough food (and therefore energy) to stay alive. As predators, owls are at the top end of their particular food chain and their special value is that they act as a key indicator to conservationists & advisory groups as to the success of species that are in the chain below them.

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Distinctive orange eyes are characteristic of the Long-Eared Owl - though it is unusual to see one in flight!

THE BARN OWL

The Barn Owl was once a familiar sight in the British countryside, frequently found in and near farm buildings, where it was welcomed by farmers because of its usefulness in pest control.

Unfortunately, farming methods of the last century led to the destruction of hedgerows, meadowland and field headlands with the consequential loss of habitat for prey species, a factor which the increased use of pesticides then accelerated. As old farm buildings were either demolished or converted to other uses, the Barn Owl population crashed to a dangerously low level and by the year 2000 it was estimated there were less than 4,000 breeding pairs left in Britain. The latest studies estimate there could be as many as 10,000 breeding pairs across Britain, although this is still lower than historic peaks at the start of the 20th Century.

Changes in agricultural practices have helped halt and reverse this decline and favourable weather patterns have contributed towards increased breeding success, resulting in Barn Owls moving from Amber to Green status on the British Birds Conservation List.

Though widespread throughout Britain but scarce or absent from the highlands & islands of Scotland, Barn Owls are found in low-lying arable areas near coasts, where prey is abundant; farmland with hedgerows and copses; uncultivated areas such as heaths and marshes; and sometimes large gardens, or even occasionally in villages close to fields. They nest in hollow trees, buildings and crevices in rocks.

The Barn Owl's prey consists mainly of small mammals, in particular bank and field voles, mice and common shrews. These it either hunts from a perch or searches for by quartering over meadowland, usually in the half-light at dusk or dawn and often hovering with moth-like silent fluttering flight as it relies on its superb hearing to locate prey. It is estimated that a pair of Barn Owls and their young may eat about 1,000 rodents between them during the three-month breeding season.

The Barn Owl has a distinctive heart shaped face, buff back and wings and pure white under parts (which often lead to it being incorrectly identified as a Snowy Owl when seen in head-on flight). Although flight is silent, the screeching, wheezing and gurgling of the Barn Owl gives it a unique aural signature.



One of our most beautiful birds, the depleted population of Barn Owls remains under continual threat from loss of habitat

THE TAWNY OWL

The Tawny Owl is Britain's largest native & most numerous mainland breeding owl. This prevalence is largely due to its nocturnal habits, which have given the Tawny some protection from persecution. Its size, physical dominance, varied diet and ability to adapt to changing circumstances and exploit new habitats such as urban parkland and even large gardens, have enabled it to sustain larger numbers. That being said, in 2015 it was listed as Amber on the British Birds conservation list following a steady population decline in recent years.

The Tawny Owl has also been relatively unaffected by pesticide poisoning - indeed the only major problem it has experienced during recent decades is the loss of some nest sites following the spread of Dutch Elm disease and the years when severe winter gales prevailed.



This young Tawny Owl is not yet fully fledged: its nocturnal habits mean it is one of those often heard but least seen of our species

THE SHORT-EARED OWL

Short-Eared Owls are unusual in their preference for open country habitat, notably moorland, heathland, marshes and sand dunes. Here they build their own nests, either ground scrapes in tall vegetation, or more substantial structures in wet areas. When seen, they will sit on the ground in a much less upright posture than other owls.

Despite being a specialist feeder on small mammals - particularly voles - the Short-Eared Owl is very adaptable and can feed on a wide variety of other species during temporary slumps in the vole population: diet can include mice, rats, hedgehogs, birds up to thrush size and amphibians. Its normal hunting method consists of quartering the ground at a height of less than 3

As the legendary owl of fairy tales whose famous (though equally mythical) "tu-whit, tu-who" call has become part of our literary heritage, the Tawny has many folk names including Hoot Owl, Brown Owl and Jenny Howlett. In fact the "twit" or more accurately "ke-wick" is a Tawny Owl's contact call and the "twoo" or again more accurately "hoo-hoo-oooo" is the male's territorial call. Consequently, if you hear "ke-wick hoo-hoo-oooo" it is most likely a male answering a female.

The Tawny Owl usually nests in hollow trees, most commonly in deciduous and mixed woodland but it will also live on farmland, in parks and even large gardens, provided there are trees and prey. The Tawny's large eyes provide excellent night vision; hearing is exceptional and ornithologists believe that it is also an intimate knowledge of their surroundings which allows Tawnies to move so easily at night in thick woodland.

As a result Tawnies enjoy an extremely varied diet which includes rodents, birds taken from night roosts, and invertebrates. They occupy a favourite perch, dropping onto prey that passes by; inedible remains such as fur and bones in the form of 'owl pellets' gather below these perches. Some Tawny Owls have been known to take fish, frogs and other amphibians by wading in the shallows.



Once declining populations of The Short-Eared Owl are now thought to be in the ascendant, which accounts for its "Amber" status on the British Bird Conservation List

metres, alternating between flapping its wings and gliding, and occasionally hovering whilst searching for its prey.

The plumage of the Short-Eared Owl is buff with dark brown blotches, with a tail boldly marked by four bars. Their eyes are yellow surrounded with black patches that give it the characteristic glaring stare. The very small & often unseen ear tufts from which the Short-Eared Owl gets its name have nothing to do with hearing but are used to communicate mood to would-be aggressors.

The male's song, which is often given in flight, is a soft, deep "boo-boo-boo-boo"; you may also hear an alarm call which is an almost Jackdaw-like - "chef-chef-chef". The Short Eared Owl population is extremely mobile and this - combined with its migratory habits - makes any estimation of their numbers very difficult, so much so that the Winter Atlas of 1986 put the midwinter population anywhere between 5,000 and 50,000 individuals! However in recent times the number of breeding pairs is thought to have fallen and this decline has placed it on the British Bird Conservation Amber List. The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) has been tagging Short-Eared Owls over the past few years and discovered the vast migratory journeys that these birds undertake every year, as well as monitoring breeding and hunting behaviour.

THE LONG-EARED OWL

Superb camouflage, an ability to alter its shape to blend with its surroundings (by fluffing-up or flattening its feathers), very nocturnal habits and a tendency to favour woodland habitat - all these factors make the Long-Eared Owl the least known of Britain's native owls.

The Long-Eared Owl prefers to live in woodland, especially conifer plantations, although it avoids the centre of dense woods; it favours open ground such as clear felled areas for hunting. It does not nest in holes, but uses abandoned nests of other birds such as magpie and crow.

Long-Eared Owls are predominantly buff-brown with darker brown streaks; the belly is paler with bold streaking and the tail feathers are finely barred. Their eyes are a deep orange, surrounded by golden-buff coloured facial disk feathers, and the hooked bill is blackish. The Long-Eared Owl's most prominent feature is the pronounced 'ear' tufts from which it derives its name. In most 'tufted' owl species (the Eagle Owl family, for example) these have probably nothing to do with hearing but are manoeuvred by the owl to reflect mood or to aid with camouflage.

However, the Long-Eared Owl has remarkable hearing: its facial disc channels sound to complex and asymmetric ear openings which run nearly the full height of its skull. The muscles required to alter the position of the ear tufts are also thought to play a part in changing the shape of the ear openings and therefore, may well mean that in the case of the Long-Eared Owl the 'ear' tufts have a role to play in hearing that enables the owl to detect, locate and strike at prey with total accuracy, even in complete darkness.

The male's song is a moaning "hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo" and the distinctive call of the female is a nasal hoot; both are usually heard only at night. In the summer and autumn, young will make a distinctive squeaky gate call when begging for food, which can be heard during the daytime as well as at night. During the breeding season the Long-Eared Owl relies mainly on mice and voles for its food, but during the winter will shift its feeding habits and place a far greater reliance on small to medium-sized birds. This trend is almost unique to the UK and happens in few countries other than the U.K.

The best time to see Long-Eared Owls is in the winter, when you may stumble across them roosting in a bush or tree (they often form communal roosts consisting of several birds) or on migration, when birds may turn up on coasts at any time of day. Population is cyclical, increasing when rodents are prevalent - at the moment their numbers are thought to be declining.



Though ear-like tufts on Owls are usually for show rather than having any aural purpose, it's believed that in the case of the Long-Eared Owl, the two may be connected

THE LITTLE OWL

The aptly named Little Owl is Britain's smallest owl and with a wingspan of less than 60cms and weighing a maximum of 230gms, is just about the size of a mistle thrush. But its aggressive expression, accentuated by pronounced eye ridges and a relatively undeveloped facial disk, makes this tiny predator appear fierce out of all proportion to its size.

Often active during the daytime, Little Owls prefer to live in open country with plenty of hedgerows, parkland and orchards, though they avoid dense woodland. With a call that is a sharp 'keew keew', the Little Owl can be often be seen perching on a tree branch, telegraph pole or rock, from where it will drop down onto its prey. For most of the year the Little Owl's diet consists mainly of large insects, earthworms and a few small mammals. However, during the breeding season, this is supplemented with small birds such as sparrows and thrushes.

The Little Owl characteristically bobs its head up and down when alarmed. Nests include holes in trees & walls and in the ground, including rabbit burrows. In flight the Little Owl has long, rounded wings, rapid wingbeats and flies with a slight undulation.

Whilst the Little Owl is now established in Britain, it is only a recent arrival, having been introduced by man in the late nineteenth century from Europe. Numbers grew rapidly and reached a peak in the 1930's but since then, the population has declined, due largely to loss of habitat, pesticide poisoning and – because of its largely diurnal habits – persecution and collisions with road traffic.

THE EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL

The European Eagle Owl was a native of Britain until the latter part of the 19th Century and became extinct here largely as a result of man's persecution. However, in recent times reports of its return have become more frequent, although whether these owls have migrated here or simply escaped from the large population of eagle owls captive-held in the UK (added to which several fox hunts in the UK have, controversially following the ban on hunting with dogs, begun to use Eagle Owls to catch foxes) - is unclear.



The fierce countenance of the Little Owl projects an apparent level of aggression out of all proportion to its tiny size.

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Picture courtesy of Brian MacFarlane

"I'll be back!" Though absent from these shores for over 100 years, there are reports that the large European Eagle Owl has been seen & thought to have bred in the wild in the UK. Its dominance over other owl species has led to concern amongst conservationists.

Eagle Owls are one of the largest species of owls and their sheer size and aggressive nature makes them the most dominant bird of prey (both nocturnal and diurnal) wherever they are found. Very occasionally they are killed by large Eagles, but more often it is they who prey on other Raptors.

The arrival of a new Eagle Owl in the vicinity causes panic amongst other Birds of Prey and a general re-arrangement of territories usually follows, as its new neighbours try to give it a wide berth. European Eagle Owls prey mainly on mammals – chiefly rabbits and hares – but they will also take birds up to the size of a large Buzzard, which are usually taken from night roosts. Large Eagle Owls have been known to take roe deer and foxes, which they kill by crushing their skulls with huge, powerful feet.

Lack of suitable habitat and our own reaction to them makes it more unlikely they will ever be able to return here in significant numbers - the jury is out as to whether indeed they should be allowed to, until it is assessed what effect their rumbustious behaviour may have on native mammal & bird species.

The Eagle Owl nests in ground scrapes usually among rocks in open woodland in mountain foothills up to an altitude of 4,500m. Although sedentary, this large Owl requires a territory up to 10km in diameter.

BRITAIN'S OWLS IN DECLINE

Britain's owls (like all other native wildlife) are split into three categories of conservation importance – red, amber and green. Red is the highest conservation priority, with species needing urgent action. Amber is the next most critical group, followed by green. Those on the green list have no significant decline to the population status. There are many criteria which influences which list a species will be placed on but historical population decline during 1800-1995 or a significant decline in the last 25 years are key indicators.

Of the five species of owl in Britain, two are amber listed (the Tawny Owl and Short-Eared Owl), two are green listed (the Barn Owl and Long-Eared Owl) and the last (Little Owl) has no specific conservation status as it is an "introduced" species and not native to the UK. There are many that believe that the Long-Eared Owl should have, at the least, an amber status. But, as the least visible of our native owls there is still a great deal of research needed to be done.

In 1935 it was estimated there were 12,000 pairs of breeding Barn Owls in Britain. Since then two major surveys have been conducted. The conclusion is that the population has fallen by an incredible 70% in the last 50 years. Changes in farming practice and weather patterns have now been identified as the two major influences on the decline of this beautiful bird.

More intensive farming methods (combine harvesters, higher levels of livestock etc.) have resulted in larger, prairie-style fields. Many thousands of miles of hedgerows have been removed along with the uncultivated field margins. The rough, vole-rich grasslands - the favourite hunting ground for the Barn Owl - have been turned over to crop production. Even where small areas of suitable habitat have remained they are isolated, so that small Barn Owl communities are unable to spread or merge.

Hard winters in themselves do not seem to be the cause of Barn Owls dying, but prolonged periods of snow cover make it very difficult for them to find small rodents which are their staple diet. Twenty days of snow cover in a year appears to be the critical level. Continuous rain and drought also seriously affect breeding success.

Another major killer of owls, who often hunt in the open stretches of countryside adjacent to roads, is fast-moving road traffic. Despite their sometimes bulky appearance, the deceptively light weight of owls makes them prone to being sucked into the draft of large or speeding vehicles. Between 3,000 and 5,000 Barn Owls are killed in this way every year and motorways have now wiped out all adjacent populations and less than 0.05% of Barn Owls now nest within 1Km of any motorway. Less than 2% are within 3Km - the distance generally considered to be the limit of the bird's hunting range.

The final factor to take into consideration is the lack of suitable sites for Barn Owls to nest. Barn Owl chicks do not leave the nest until they are ready to fledge. This means that the nest needs to be a fairly large hollow or cavity. This is the main reason why they are attracted to disused buildings which offer



Saved! It's not always motorists, planners, developers or intense farming methods that are to blame. Luckily this bedraggled Tawny was disentangled from abandoned fishing line by S.O.S. and returned to the countryside.



Barn Owls are attracted to disused buildings which offer the protected space needed for their young to fledge, but old barns are often now redundant and have been demolished.

them the space they need. Many barns have long since become redundant and have either been demolished or converted into living accommodation for humans. Dutch Elm Disease and several severe gales have also resulted in a loss of many suitable trees.

Many of the factors affecting the population of Barn Owls are equally relevant to our other owls. Little Owls also favour farmland and live on wood margins and in hedgerows. As a species introduced in the late 19th Century, it is too short a period of time to be certain of where a stable population figure should be. However, they have certainly been affected by changes in agriculture in the last 50 years. Short-Eared Owls, like Barn Owls, need wide open meadows, moors and marshes

and are further hampered by being the only ground-nesting Owl and needing long, tussocky grass and heather in which to safely rear their young. Currently, the way we live threatens the existence of many species we have always taken for granted. Owls are a good example of this.

ENCOURAGING WILD OWLS BACK TO THE COUNTRYSIDE



As we have said, we are often asked about the best way to encourage owls back to the countryside. This is often by those who used to see owls in their area but feel they are no longer there; or think they have suitable local habitats for Owls and wish to attract them to their vicinity.

The task is neither simple, easy or quick. For example, in order for a pair of Barn Owls to survive and breed successfully, they need in the region of 120 acres of permanent rough tussocky grassland over which they can hunt and catch their preferred prey, the vole. This area should not include grass that is cut or grazed as it will drastically reduce the vole population necessary to sustain a pair of breeding Barn Owls. Though not as successful in sustaining breeding Barn Owls, other forms of ungrazed terrain - bog/moss; woodland edge, field margins or headlands; river or canal banks; dykes and ditches; disused quarries or railway

embankments, plus new or young woodland plantations - can contribute to a successful habitat. Barn Owls also then need a suitable nest site e.g. a seldom-used or undisturbed barn or building; a hollow isolated tree, or a suitably-located man-made nest box. And finally, the process needs time & patience. It's unlikely that Barn Owls will respond to even your best efforts immediately, and may indeed take some while to do so.

So if there have been owls in your area in the past, ask yourself why it is they are no longer there. Perhaps there have been changes to local agricultural practice - for example, revised land usage or increased stock grazing which may have decreased the bird's food supply. Have new roads been built nearby, leading to increased mortality through death caused by traffic? Have possible nesting sites like old trees or disused farm buildings been destroyed, or an old man-made nest box fallen into disrepair? These will give you the clues and provide a valuable starting point to what follows.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

Inform Yourself

Generally speaking, you can do a great deal just by informing yourself about the lives and habits of owls and by helping to spread the word to others. Much good general information and guidance can be found in your local library or bird group but if you'd like to be a little more involved you can keep in close touch with us at The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary. If you're able to visit we'll give you a chance to meet the birds at first hand be inspired by our daily flying displays.. Our website provides not only expert information and advice, but also educational content, including information about visits, our nest box project and the chance to adopt an owl.



Little Owls prefer to live in open country with plenty of hedgerows, parkland and orchards, though they avoid dense woodland. The convoluted branches of a tree this makes an ideal nesting spot

Get Active

However, if you want to be more actively involved, you can help to give the owl its habitat back. You can play your part in trying to recreate for it the kind of places which will supply its food needs and the kind of places it likes to live: both must be right before you can expect an owl as a neighbour.

Explore your surroundings

Obviously, an owl is unlikely to take up residence near you unless there's sufficient food to be found in the immediate neighbourhood, so you'll need to assess how rich in prey your surroundings are.

As a general rule large areas of open grassland or farmland intersected by rivers, streams and ditches are the preferred habitat of Barn Owls, whilst mown or grazed grassland and old orchards are better suited to the Little Owl species. Tawny Owls, by contrast, prefer woodland and dense forest.

An obvious way to find out if you have suitable habitat around you is to establish whether you already have owls within your area. You can do this the old-fashioned way, by going out into the countryside with a pair of binoculars or you could make contact with a local ornithological group: they may help research this for you, or at least give you the help and guidance you need to find out the information for yourself.

Decide whether you can provide suitable habitat?

Once you have some idea as to whether you have owls in your area, you should then try to find out where they roost. A 'roost' is a favoured perch site which the owl frequents in order to rest after hunting, in order to digest its meal: look for 'whitewash' (owl droppings) on walls or posts, or a collection of owl pellets on the ground underneath. Owl pellets are the indigestible parts of an owl's diet - bones

and fur, for example. These will also provide a good indication as to the abundance of your local small mammal population.

It would also be worthwhile finding out whether you have a local Small Mammal Society. These societies have the necessary authority and permits to trap small mammals humanely and legally and thereby give you information about the health of your local small mammal population. In many cases these societies may already have current data in their possession which eliminates the need for a separate survey.



Happy hunting grounds - wide open landscapes with tussocky grass and headlands populated by voles and other small rodents comprise the ideal habitat for Barn Owls

with your local council. Many of these now have dedicated conservation officers who should be willing to help you, or at least point you in the right direction to find the information you require.

Local environmental, conservation & wildlife organisations may also be a source of help, advice and inspiration and may already be involved with local owl conservation projects in your area. They will tell you how your project could be integrated with theirs, or else whom to contact locally to get more information. To find details of these various organisations, contact your local library, look in your local telephone directory or go on-line: there's a huge amount of information – you just need to know where to look. The better researched you are, the more successful your nest box scheme will be.

Location, location, location

As a general rule owls don't build their own nests; Barn Owls, Tawny Owls and Little Owls, for example, prefer to make their nests and raise their young in sheltered inaccessible places. In the wild, these birds would naturally be found nesting in the interior spaces provided within old mature trees. Long-Eared Owls will re-use the old nests of other birds such as hawks, ravens, crows and kestrels. For this reason, old and dead trees should, wherever possible, be left standing, as they provide homes not only for owls, but also for many other species of birds. However, man-made dwellings such as outbuildings and even attic spaces can provide good alternatives, as can a well-constructed and thoughtfully sited nest box.

The cavity created by this storm hit woodland tree should soon provide ideal accommodation for a roosting Tawny Owl

Developing owl habitat

If you don't have access to the correct type of prey-rich habitat, it doesn't necessarily mean that you should abandon your plan to provide a nest box, just that you'll have more work to do: you'll need to create, maintain and manage a habitat that will support the prey of the owl species you want to attract.

This is a large undertaking, and will require a great deal of long-term commitment. Ultimately, any additional wildlife habitat management programme will be of benefit to the owls, but if the land you're to use doesn't belong to you, you must have permission from the landowner before you begin. If you're unsure who owns the land you wish to work on, or of how to manage it correctly, then get in touch



PROVIDING A NESTING BOX

If you have the facilities and the environment is right for the Owls, erecting a nesting box for those species that are known to use them - Barn Owls, Tawny Owls and Little Owls - will serve a very useful function in providing suitable accommodation in which Owls can raise their young safely and securely. A well-designed and properly sited nest box can help to increase wild owl populations. Latest nest monitoring records from the BTO suggest that a significant proportion of the wild Barn Owl population now nest in boxes provided by humans,

When built from the right materials, artificial nest boxes are likely to be better designed, better built and able to withstand the rigours of weather, as well if not better than their natural counterparts. They can also be sited close to the all-important recognised prey sources - this will prove especially beneficial in winter, when any resurgence of the owl population is most likely to suffer due to the lack of food.

Regarding materials, for all exterior boxes it is necessary to choose marine grade plywood or other robust timber that will weather well. Do not use CCA pressure-treated timber or tropical hardwoods. Join the sections together with softwood battens fixed inside the box. Preservative can extend the life of the box, but only apply it to the outside and only use selected water-based preservatives which are known to be safe for animals. It is essential to drill several drainage holes to the bottom of each box to enable it to remain dry inside.

As owls do not build their own nests inside a box and cannot nest on bare boards, placing a 1" (2-3 cms) layer of woodchips or similar material (but not straw) in the box is a preferential option, though owls will lay eggs on top of their own absorbent pellet material.

Nest boxes should be installed by November to give the best chance of success the following year, although it may take several years before a new box is used.



A chalet-style owl box like this one can be located in trees or buildings to provide safe, dry sanctuary for Barn Owls and will provide a secure environment in which to raise young.

Which box for which owl?

A few basic things to remember about Owl Boxes:

- Owl boxes are larger than common bird boxes. They are shaped according to the specific needs of the species you're trying to attract.
- Little Owl boxes can vary in design, but are generally fairly long with an entrance at either the top or the side. They need to have a secluded nesting chamber inside, as Little Owls prefer smaller cavities.
- Tawny Owls naturally nest within hollow tree branches, so, wherever it is safe to do so, you should try to leave hollow branches on your trees as natural nesting sites. Nest-boxes are tube-like in shape to mimic these conditions.
- Barn Owl boxes are the largest of all: they can be square or triangular in shape and will need a ledge outside for the young owls to stand on.

Making an Owl Box - General

Buying wood:

If you do wish to make an owl nest-box for yourself, then one of your first considerations must be to select the correct type of materials. Exterior grade plywood between 9-12mm in thickness is a suitable compromise in terms of weight and durability.

Cutting panels and assembling them:

Once you've cut out all the sections of the box according to your plan, they should be fixed together with softwood battens on the inside of the box and nail-heads and protruding screws flattened so that they don't cause injury to the owls or their young. The base panel

should be drilled with several 7mm holes in order to provide drainage and covered with 2-3cms of untreated wood chippings or crushed tree bark to form a 'scrape', as owls will not usually nest on bare board. Make sure that this doesn't block the drainage holes.

Straw should be avoided as a floor covering as it may contain fungal spores which can prove fatal to the owls. Boxes which are not designed with open fronts should be provided with inspection doors or panels of sufficient size (at least 25cm square) to allow accumulated debris to be removed. The inspection panels should be hinged in some way and should be fastened either with a bolt, latch or hook-and-eye system. Cable ties make a good alternative both to bolts and to hinges when threaded through holes in the relevant adjoining panels, and have the added advantage of 'locking' the inspection door panel in place. This will help to deter casual inspection by unauthorised observers.

BARN OWL BOXES

Barn Owl nests are protected by Law from disturbance, and before choosing your site you should consider contacting a local Disturbance License holder who can give advice. Disturbing a Barn Owl nest during breeding season can result in unlimited fine and/or a custodial sentence.

The preferred "natural" nest sites of Barn Owls include hollows in high trees, tall rural buildings (old and new), rock crevices & holes in cliffs and though Barn Owls like their privacy, successful boxes can be sited near to quite busy locations such as farmyards. In all cases, however, the predominant requirement is shelter from rain, due largely to the Barn Owl's lightly oiled plumage, which makes them more prone to soaking than other species.

There are three different types of Barn Owl nest-box, each suited to different types of nesting situation.

- Interior Boxes, for use within buildings
- Exterior Boxes, for use on vertical tree trunks or within the branches of very large trees, and the outsides of buildings.
- Pole boxes, for when there are no suitable buildings or trees to make the first two designs practicable.

Holes Not Boxes

Before you attempt to erect either, it is worth remembering that Barn Owls are not in the least bit interested in boxes as such: they are, however, very interested in holes or cavities that could provide a good roost or nest site and protection for their young. So if you provide an interior box, make sure the hole is visible to the owl as it enters the building. If you have to make a hole into the building to provide access, select the end of the building that is most visible – also the end that overlooks the most suitable piece of open ground.

For tree boxes you need a tree with an exposed trunk, so that the hole into the box is visible to an owl that may be passing and wish to investigate.

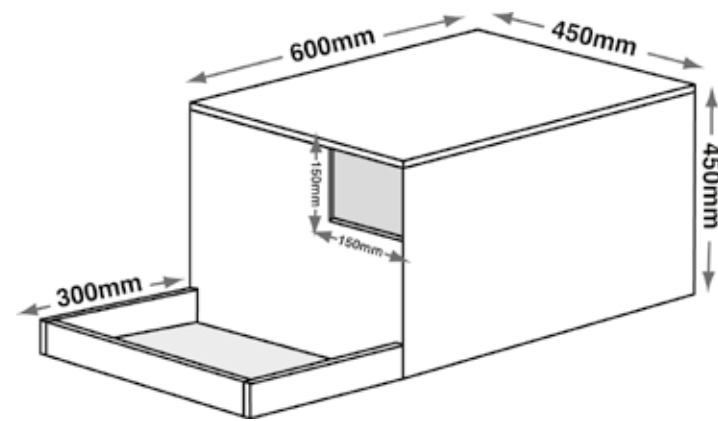
Interior Barn Owl Nest Boxes

This design is suitable for use in almost any agricultural building, either traditional or modern. If you have access to a large rural building which the Barn Owl can enter at a height of 3 metres (10') or above, this is almost certainly the best place to put the new nest-box. Owl boxes in buildings are easier to erect, cheaper and quicker to make, they last a lot longer and the extra shelter afforded by the building will definitely be of benefit to the owls and their young.

If the building currently has no access for owls, you should consider whether it would be possible for an 'owl-hole' to be made which leads to the entrance to the nest-box. Mounting a box on the outside of a building is a viable option, but has disadvantages.

The building you select for the box should be as free as possible from noise and general disturbance and the box should be sited a little back from the main entrance. However, providing the building is relatively quiet these birds can get used to almost any kind of human activity - as long as they are able to stay out of sight.

If you haven't provided for an owl-hole it is also vitally important that there is a permanently open door or window within the building, so that the owls are not trapped inside or shut outside, away from their young.



So even when contemplating an indoor box - best when there is little risk of immediate disturbance and a permanent & visible means of access, the idea is to create a cavity space that is enclosed on at least three sides and has at least one internal baffle to allow the inhabitants to hide away from view. An important design element of Barn Owl

nest boxes is the provision of a front shelf or tray, which reduces the risk of young owls falling out of the box and will allow fledglings to exercise their wings before first flight - Barn Owl chicks take a long time to fledge (about 8 weeks on average) and, once fledged, remain dependent on their parents for a further three to five weeks.

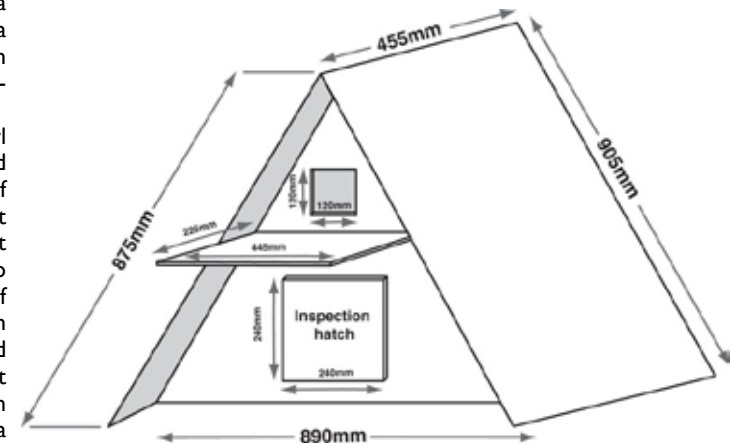
The ideal size of the Barn Owl box is large - a minimum of 15" x 13" x 25" is recommended, with 6" ledge and 8" x 6" entrance (36 x 32 x 60cms with 15cms ledge & 19 x 15cms entrance). A removable lid or panel should be included for licensed inspection and occasional clearing out between occupants. A converted tea-chest also makes an ideal indoor nesting box for a Barn Owl.

An indoor box should be secured to beams, ensuring that no nails, screws or other sharp edges or points are left to protrude into the box or any part on which the birds might perch. It should be positioned as high as possible - at least 10 feet (3m) above ground level, but in the case of unventilated modern farm buildings, below the apex of the roof, where it can get very hot in summertime. It is best to have the front opening of the box directly facing the owl's point of access to the building. Alternatively Barn Owl boxes can be fixed under the eaves of remote buildings and are likely to be as equally as successful if they provide privacy, shelter from the rain, direct access and are spacious enough.

Exterior Barn Owl Nest Boxes

If there's no suitable building available of at least 3 metres in height, or none accessible by Barn Owls, then a tree box is generally the next-best option. Tree boxes are more expensive and more difficult to erect than indoor boxes, they don't last as long, and the owls won't be provided with as much shelter. There is also a greater chance of occupation by other species. However, provided that you have a suitable tree in a suitable position they are a much more practical option than a pole-mounted nest-box.

Exterior Barn Owl boxes are best positioned in trees well out of reach of the casually curious, (but not so high that any stray owlet might be killed in the fall to earth) either at the edge of woodland overlooking open land, or in large isolated trees or on purpose-built poles located on open meadow or grassland at a



location at least half-a-mile (1km) from the nearest busy road. The box needs to be sited in or close to habitat that has an abundance of suitable prey - small mammals, etc. Visibility from the nest and a clear flight path to it are essential. Equally important, the box needs to face away from the prevailing wind & rain direction, usually towards the south east. The box should be firmly and securely fixed to its support. Fixing a box to a tree with nylon cable ties or bolts is certainly the best way to protect the tree from damage. If possible, the box should be angled so that the floor slopes slightly away from the entrance, so that eggs remain dry & protected.



This design of exterior barn owl box is suitable for pole-mounting or location high in exposed treelines.

Pole Boxes for Barn Owls

Similar in construction to the interior barn owl box, this rectangular design with outer shelf is best suited to remote locations which may provide the ideal habitat but are devoid of trees or man-made structures of sufficient height. The ideal size would be a minimum of 15" x 13" x 25" with 6" ledge and 8" x 6" entrance (36 x 32 x 60cms with 15cms ledge & 19 x 15cms entrance) and the boxes should be constructed from 12mm or thicker marine ply and mounted on a sturdy pole at least 2m above ground level, with the aperture facing away from the prevailing wind. This type of box is also suitable for installation in high trees.

LITTLE OWL BOXES

Little Owls don't build nests but rely on ready-made natural nesting sites including hollow branches and rabbit burrows. They will also nest in holes in buildings, cliffs, haystacks and nest boxes which are sited on farmland, orchards, parkland, sand dunes and industrial wasteland where their preferred prey of invertebrates (worms, beetles, slugs, earwigs & moths) supplemented with small mammals, is prevalent.

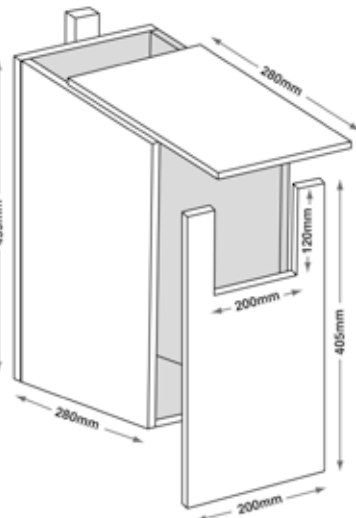


The aperture on Little Owl boxes should be small enough to deter larger birds.

There are two equally effective designs for Little Owl nest-boxes, the first a fairly standard box, with a 12cms square opening in the front, the ideal size of which is 8" x 8" x 15" (37cms x 19cms x 19cms). The second is of rather more unusual design, but possibly the more effective, although this has yet to be proved. The benefit of this design is due to the fact that it provides an artificial tunnel for the birds and has a small access hole to discourage occupation of the box by other species. Two internal baffles help to reduce the light reaching the nest chamber and also allow for

the adults to roost separately. A critical measurement is the size of the entrance hole - a 3" (7cms) aperture allows the Little Owls easy access but prevents the much larger Tawny Owl from entering. Depending on design, they can be attached to tree trunks with cable ties, or wired to the underside of branches. Ensure that no nails, screws or other sharp edges or points are left to protrude into the box or any part on which the birds might perch.

Young Little Owls begin to leave the nest site at about 3 weeks and like to hide in surrounding vegetation and branches



to minimise the risk of the entire clutch being taken by a predator, so bear this in mind when siting your box. Young Little Owls fledge at about 5 weeks, but the parents continue to feed them for another month, at which point they are independent and leave the nest to establish their own territory.

TAWNY OWL BOXES

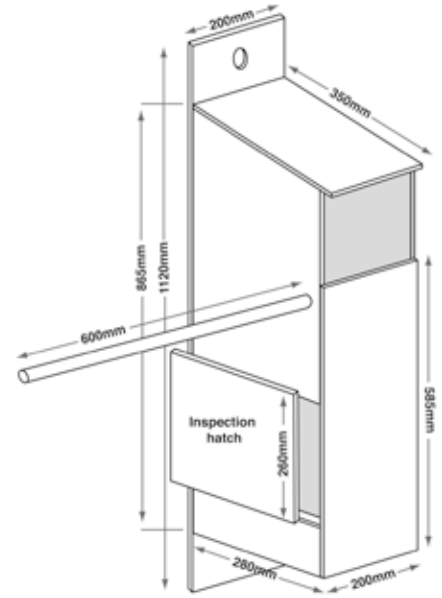
The Tawny Owl is a woodland bird and as one of the most adaptable of owl species, can be found even in urban and garden environs. Tawny Owls are content to nest in smaller cavities than Barn Owls and the designs for suitable nest-boxes reflect this.

The upright kind can be fixed to tree trunks or larger branches and measure up to 36" (90cms) in length; chimney nest boxes - which replicate the hollow ends of large broken branches - can be longer, up to 60" (150cms) in length and can be strapped to the underside of sloping branches with an angle of c. 45 degrees. Both types of box need an entrance of not less than 10" (25cms) square which should face away from prevailing wind and rain; should have several drainage holes at their base and need to be sited at least 12 feet (3.7m) from ground level.

Because, unlike Barn Owls, Tawny Owl chicks start to explore their surroundings well before fledging, the box needs to have nearby branches they can climb over. As a possible garden dweller, it should be appreciated that Tawny Owls are sensitive to disturbance when on eggs, and can also be aggressive, dangerous even, if they or their young are approached. So it is best to leave them well alone while they are nesting and you need to consider the likely proximity of young children in the garden before putting up the box.

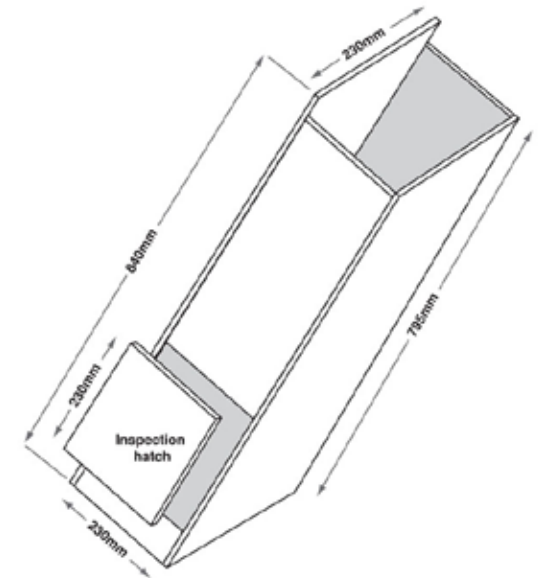


A funnel box slung under a branch is ideal for Tawny Owls.



BUYING A READY-MADE BOX?

Boxes are also available commercially and, provided you find one which is well-constructed and well-designed for your target species, you may choose to buy ready-made. Price is not necessarily a guide to suitability or quality and you should look carefully both at workmanship and to see that the right materials have been used. The Nest Box Company of Solihull (01675 442299) would be a good place to start.



SITING & ERECTING AN OWL NEST BOX

Here are a few tips about siting owl nesting boxes

- Your nest-box should not be obscured by foliage: the more visible the nest-box, the more chance of success you'll have. Remember that a foliage-free approach path in November may be overgrown in summer. Allow for spring growth.
- All boxes should be designed to include an opening high up in the box to help prevent the chicks from falling out
- The base of the box should be fixed with a slight backwards slope to stop eggs rolling out of the entrance.
- Make sure that the box is firmly and securely fixed to its tree. The best method is by a 'mounting board' which can be adjusted annually where necessary. Non-metallic fixings, such as nylon bolts are by far the best option, as they minimize damage to the timber and the potential hazard to chain saw operators in the future. If there is no sensible alternative, galvanized nails and screws are generally preferable to wire ones.
- Alternatively, boxes can be fitted to trees with a length of wire inside a piece of hose or other means of protecting the bark. If you use this method, remember that trees grow and you may need to make annual adjustments. In any case, if owls have made no attempt to use the box after three or four years, it may be useful to consider moving to another location.
- Never carry a box up into position until all preparatory work is complete.
- Double-check your measurements to confirm that the box will fit the available space.
- Preferably, work with a companion, using two ladders.
- If you do choose to install your nest-box on your own at an isolated site, let someone know where you're going and take a mobile phone.
- Secure ladders by tying at top and bottom before taking up your box.
- If possible, wear a hard hat and a safety harness.
- Avoid over-reaching; never attempt to carry out any task up a ladder if you cannot reach comfortably.
- When carrying a nest-box up a ladder, ensure that it is kept low relative to your body (ideally not above waist height). This will keep down your centre of gravity. Try to keep the box in



front both of you and the ladder so that it pulls you towards the ladder. Never hold a nest-box behind or above you.

And a final word about siting Barn Owl Nest boxes. Although in the wild they are usually well spaced out, if you place your boxes in pairs, from twenty to a few hundred metres apart, you will provide a bonded pair both with adequate roosting and suitable nesting sites, thereby encouraging the owls to nest and raise a family. The male and females of this species roost separately, and some pairs prefer to use different boxes to do this. In a plentiful breeding season the close proximity of two nest-boxes may even result in two successful broods.

Since many Barn Owls are killed by road traffic accidents, it is best not to put up owl boxes close to motorways and main roads. Finally it is wise to remember that Barn Owls are protected by the full force of the law and that it is absolutely illegal to disturb them either in or close to their nests. Occupied nests, even your own box, should only be visited by someone who holds a valid Disturbance Licence to do so. Therefore it may be wise to consider where you intend to install your Barn Owl nest-box as, once they are in place and in use, you cannot interfere with them as it is illegal to disturb a Barn Owl nest box in any way, unless you are in possession of a Disturbance Licence.

MAINTAINING & CLEANING AN OWL NEST BOX

Boxes will need to be cleaned out periodically when debris has built up (usually once a year). Nest-boxes should be checked during the winter months, ideally between mid-October and the end of November, to be assured that the nesting season is completely over. However, please remember that without the aforementioned Disturbance Licence it is illegal to disturb a Barn Owl nest box at any time.

This job of cleaning and maintaining an owl nest-box is made much easier if an inspection hatch has been incorporated into the design. A box that has been successfully used by owls or other birds of prey will usually contain a build-up of soft pellets and other lining materials. As owls prefer to use second-hand nests, this material should not be removed unless it has built up to a depth of 4" (10cms) or more, in which case it is time to clean it out. To achieve this satisfactorily you will need:

- Rubber gloves and face mask (inhalation of the dust from the nesting material and dried droppings can be a health hazard).
- A trowel or other scraping tool and a rubbish sack.
- A drill or wire cutters to open up the inspection hatch.
- Replacement chippings
- An assistant to hold the ladder.
- To make sure the box is uninhabited: a Tawny Owl may remain within the box until the very last moment and can be dangerous if cornered. If you do find the box inhabited, the best thing to do is to return at a later date. However, if the owl flies out, then proceed with the cleaning of the box as planned.

Once you have opened the box, use the scraper tool to loosen the "carpet" of pellets and other material inside. This may be stuck to the bottom and require some leverage to remove it. However, it may come loose in one piece and be placed in the plastic rubbish sack for removal.

While cleaning the box, you should be able to get a good look at the remains of what your owls have been eating. You may find loose bones and possibly the desiccated remains of other prey. There may be some live insects in the box, usually beetles and the occasional maggot, but on the whole it should be quite dry and insect-free. Sometimes wasps will build a nest inside owl-boxes (another reason why November is a good time of year to clean them) but these can usually be removed safely. If in doubt, take professional advice.

If you find the remains of a dead owl with a leg-ring still attached, please make a note of the ring-number and report to the BTO before disposing of the body. Also, any abandoned eggs should likewise be removed. However, you can only legally remove them between October and January and then they must be destroyed (Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981). It is currently illegal within the UK to keep abandoned eggs.

After getting as much debris as possible out of the box, make sure that the drainage holes in the bottom are clear. Replenish the carpet of wood chippings or crushed tree bark on the floor and then close up the box and re-secure the inspection hatch. At this point you should also take a look at the box to see if there is any need for repair: does it still look water-resistant? If it has rained recently and

the box looks wet inside, it may need to be taken down and repositioned facing away from the prevailing wind. Pay particular attention to the floor panel and replace it if it shows signs of rotting. Then your box will be ready for a new owl family to set up home next breeding season.

OTHER WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN HELP

If erecting an owl box or creating habitat to help conserve the population of owl species in the UK is not a practical option for you, there are many other direct & indirect ways & 'green' initiatives in which you can help towards the cause. Some of them may seem trivial, but they can make a significant difference when combined with the efforts of others!

- **Don't waste paper.** Recycle paper when you're finished with it and buy recycled paper wherever possible. When forests are cut to make paper, it hurts the birds that require older forest growth in which to nest. Another way you can save paper is to stop accepting junk mail. Look for information (via websites) about the simple things you can do to receive less junk mail.

- **Keep your cat indoors.** House cats occasionally kill or injure small owls, but the larger problem is that they kill a lot of the smaller rodents which make up an owl's diet.

- **Don't let your dog chase birds.** When an owl kills a large prey animal, it sometimes spends several minutes on the ground eating. During this time, it can easily be killed or badly injured by a dog. Young owls just learning to fly are also especially vulnerable to dogs.

- **Support an owl rehabilitation/research/education centre near you.** Some of these facilities will give you the option of adopting an owl. Your adoption fee goes to help an individual owl and in return you get a certificate and the satisfaction of knowing you have helped make a difference in the life of an owl. (This makes a wonderful gift idea for owl lovers.)

- **Consider becoming an owl researcher.** There is so much that isn't known about owls yet - even our native owls are hiding secrets. For some tropical species, virtually nothing is known, even about their basic biology. Science doesn't have all the answers, but we need interested and dedicated individuals who are willing to help find out.

- **Remove any old or unused barbed wire on your property.** All too often owls get hung up in barbed wire. They either die a slow lingering death, are killed by another animal or, if lucky enough to be rescued, often need to be put down because of the extent of their injuries.

- **Avoid using poisons and pesticides.** Ultimately these will end-up poisoning your local owl food supply and then the owl, through secondary poisoning. Some owls will eat mice, others will eat rats, and some eat insects...and dying animals that have ingested poison will always be easier to catch than healthy prey. Even if you don't poison these species directly, pesticides are still likely to work their way into the food chain and have terrible consequences for your local owl populations.

- **Leave dead trees standing when they aren't dangerous.** Dead trees make wonderful nesting and roosting sites for many species of owls (as well as other animals).

- **Habitat, habitat, habitat.** If you own land, consider the needs of the owls which may be living there. Consider a permanent conservation order to protect the land after you're gone. If you don't own land, support organizations that support habitat conservation.

- **Recycle and be mindful of where you throw your rubbish.** Food waste left unattended attracts all kinds of small rodents, which in turn will attract things that eat rodents such as owls. Owls, in particular Barn Owls are often killed or injured by cars when they hunt alongside roadways. So if you do find yourself in the countryside, always take your rubbish home with you. With regard to everyday household rubbish in your home - always make sure that you recycle. Ultimately this action will benefit the environment for both Owls and Man.



INJURED, EMACIATED or ORPHANED OWLS

We are often asked what should be done if a wild owl is found in less-than-perfect condition. Such cases usually fall into one of two groups - injured or emaciated, and orphaned.

Injured or Emaciated Owls

If you find an owlet that appears injured - lying on its back or side is not a good sign - or emaciated, and are actually able to approach and pick up the bird, it is likely that it is in a very poor state indeed- and

will further be traumatised by being handled! Minimising stress is the prerequisite of effective first aid & remedial action - more birds are killed by shock than their injuries!

If you can, try to get the bird to someone experienced in dealing with these matters by following the procedures detailed below & overleaf. A list of useful contacts nationwide can be found at our website www.owl-help.org.uk or you can e-mail us at info@owl-help.org.uk or call us between 10am and 5pm on 03456 807897 seven days a week throughout the year and we will do our best to help or put you in touch with the nearest bird of prey centre.

If you've found a fledgling or young owlet make a careful and detailed note of where you found it, as efforts are likely to be made to return the youngster to its parents as soon and if at all possible.

Do not attempt to treat or feed the bird yourself. It is all too easy to imprint a youngster on humans, thus rendering it incapable of being returned to the wild, and there is no quicker way of doing this than hand-feeding. Do not attempt to examine any obviously injured bird yourself as this is also very stressful and requires a trained rehabilitator or vet to do so correctly!

What to do when you find an injured or emaciated owl

1. Gently throw a jumper or blanket over the injured bird to enable you to pick it up safely & with least distress to the owl.
2. Put the bird into a well ventilated, darkened cardboard box - not so small that the bird will sustain further damage, but not so large that it can jump around inside. The box should preferably be lined on the bottom with another towel or, if not available, newspaper. Never use straw or sawdust and do not place water in the box or try to feed the owl.
3. Get the bird to the nearest bird of prey centre or raptor rescue organisation, who will be experienced in dealing with owls and other birds of prey. Contact the RSPCA about other types of injured bird, or take it to a vet. You will find a list of contacts on our website www.owl-help.org.uk or can telephone us on 03456 807897
4. Always wash your hands if you have touched a bird.

Orphaned Owls

Many 'orphaned' Owls are not usually orphaned at all - they may be just in the process of testing their wings! Fledglings tend to spread out and away from their nests long before they can actually fly - this prevents overcrowding in the nest as the youngsters grow rapidly, and is nature's way of helping to minimise any threat to the entire clutch from predators. But, many young birds lose their footing during these first explorations and fall to the ground.



If you find Barn Owl nestlings like these on the ground, they will need your help to get them back home, as their parents will not retrieve them

The first thing to do is determine what sort of owl chick you may have stumbled across, as each may need your help in a different way. If the unfortunate is discovered in the proximity of a building, it is most likely to be a Barn Owl nestling, though they can be found near tree hollows or nest boxes mounted in trees. The owlets can be identified by their thick, fluffy white down which, after 7-8 weeks, begins to take on the colouring of an adult bird. The chick will certainly need your help because adult Barn Owls usually feed only fledglings that are in the nest, so if the youngster has had the misfortune to fall out, the parent is likely to ignore it and leave it to die.



Be circumspect of Tawny Owllets you may find apparently abandoned - the chances are its parents know exactly where it is and will continue to feed it, or the youngster will climb back to its nest

If the Barn Owllet is not obviously injured and you feel capable, try to replace it IN (not just near) the nest by dusk of the same day. Make sure you have correctly identified the actual nest site, either visually through the activity of the parents or the strong, ammonia-like smell which is the tell-tale sign of a populated nest. But take care - Barn Owl nests are usually high off the ground, so you may need a companion to help and a good, solid means of ascent.

Tawny Owl nestlings need handling differently to

Barn Owllets. You are likely to find the apparently 'orphaned' youngsters in woodland or near trees, their natural habitat. A grounded Tawny chick may look lost and vulnerable, but the chances are its parents know exactly where it is and, unlike parent Barn Owls, they will continue to feed it even though it may be on the ground away from the nest.

Many young Tawnies are in fact quite capable of climbing back into their tree using beaks and talons, and so if you believe it to be a Tawny Owllet, the best thing you can do is make sure it is out of the way of direct harm from predators, vehicles and people by putting it in the branches of the nearest tree, and quietly walking away.

Only ever remove the bird from the area where you find it if you are positive it has been abandoned or clearly injured.

KEEPING OWLS AS PETS

Despite their decline in the wild, Barn Owls breed very easily in captivity and there is a large population of legitimate captive birds in the UK. This has led to a propensity of owls being offered for sale through the likes of local papers, car boot sales, etc.

However, our basic advice to those who may be considering keeping an owl as a pet is - **DON'T**. To begin with, owls do not make very good pets. Beautiful, majestic and as awe-inspiring as they may be, in captivity they can be noisy, smelly and dirty and will need a lot of your time, care & attention. They require a regular, specialist diet, and in our opinion to be kept properly they need a large, purpose-built aviary which can be expensive to build and maintain.

Also, it should be considered that owls are predators. They can be quick, powerful and with the sharp talons they use to kill prey, extremely dangerous - especially for children. Even those with many years experience of bird handling have lost eyes or been severely scarred by wayward captive raptors.

With the heightened awareness of owls amongst youngsters due to the success of the "Harry Potter" books and films, author J.K. Rowling has made a strong plea to fans not to copy their hero by keeping owls as pets.

She says, "If anybody has been influenced by my books to think an owl would be happiest shut in a small cage and kept in a house, I would like to take this opportunity to say as forcefully as I can: You are wrong.

"The owls in Harry Potter books were never intended to portray the true behavior or preference of real owls. If your owl-mania seeks concrete expression, why not sponsor an owl at a bird sanctuary where you can visit and know that you have secured him or her a happy, healthy life."

Keeping Owls is really the province of the experts, and you will find that there is plenty of advice



and information available about the proper environment and conditions in which owls can be kept available from organisations like the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, who have experienced falconers on hand; have specialised information available on the care & conservation of owls and run courses on the subject.

FURTHER READING

This book provides a compact reference to all the owls and other birds of prey which can be seen in the British Isles. Alongside some stunning photographs you will find specific information about the population, distribution, size, habitat and conservation status of each species including Barn,

Tawny, Little, Short-Eared, Long-Eared, Snowy and Eurasian Eagle Owls together with the Merlin, Hobby, Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Sparrowhawk, Goshawk, Common Buzzard, Honey Buzzard, Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, Montagu's Harrier, Red Kite, Osprey, Golden Eagle and White-Tailed Eagle. Priced just £3.00 + p&p, the 48-page book is available from our online shop at www.owl-help.org.uk or can be ordered by calling 03456 807 897 / Option 3

OWLS & THE LAW

Harmful interaction between humans and wild owls and the disturbance of Barn Owls in the wild is thankfully well protected by the law. Inspection or interference with a nesting box is prohibited unless in possession of a current Disturbance Licence. It is illegal to disturb wild Barn Owls at or near their nest whilst they are breeding, or to remove, damage or disturb the nest, the eggs or the young of a nesting Barn Owl. However, it is unlikely that anyone making a single visit to return an owl to its nest would be prosecuted.

Although Barn Owls breed easily in captivity, owing to large population of legitimate captive birds in the UK, the law does not require captive Barn Owls to be registered.

To prevent wild adult Barn Owls being caught and sold, the law requires that when offered for sale, it must be proved that they have been captive bred and the owls must wear a close ring - a continuous metal ring whose restricted size enables it only to be slipped on to the leg of a nestling, not an adult.

The sale or commercial use of, a Barn Owl for exhibition or display also requires a DEFRA "Article 10" certificate to accompany the bird. It is worth remembering that any person with a Barn Owl in their possession can be called upon at any time to prove their possession is legal in a courtroom.

Paradoxically, the release of captive-bred Barn Owls into the wild is illegal unless carried out under licence, but such instances are strictly controlled by DEFRA and applicants are required to comply with detailed guidelines which evaluate the effectiveness of such release schemes as a conservation measure.

OVER TO YOU

We wish you every success with your own nest box project and would like to thank everyone who has contributed in terms of the material researched & supplied for this publication. Now that you are in a position to make an informed decision about owl nest boxes, we hope that you will join us in our mission to Save Britain's Owls!



About The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary

Established as a registered charity in 2001, the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary is based at Stonham Aspal in Suffolk, where it operates a comprehensive facility for the care & rehabilitation of owls from the region, and the promotion of owl conservation throughout the UK and beyond.

Open to the public all year round, the Sanctuary maintains as the beneficiary of public donations:

- AN OWL INFORMATION & ADVICE CENTRE
- AN OWL & RAPTOR HOSPITAL
- FLIGHT RECOVERY AVIARIES FOR RECUPERATING WILD OWLS
- A HACK TEAM FOR RE-INTRODUCING ORPHANED OWLS TO THE WILD
- OWL EDUCATION VISITS FOR SCHOOLS, COLLEGES & YOUTH GROUPS
- EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL & HOME LEARNING
- AN OWL NEST BOX PROJECT
- AN OWL HELP-LINE & WEBSITE FACILITY



The S.O.S. team build, site and maintain the boxes for an nest box programme at safe & suitable habitats where owls are known to reside.

Our Information & Advice Centre is open every day of the year except at Christmas. During summer months demonstrations featuring owls in flight are given with commentaries which inform visitors about the lifestyles, habitats and conservation status of British owls and other birds of prey.

The Owl & Raptor Hospital at S.O.S. is fully equipped for the care and treatment of the many injured wild owls & other birds of prey which are brought into the Sanctuary every year. Many of these can be given a recuperative overnight pick-me-up before being re-released back to the wild shortly thereafter. Others with more serious injuries but stand a good chance of mid- to long-term recovery are given medical aid & sometimes surgery, and are then allowed the space & time to fully recuperate in one of the secluded flight recovery aviaries at the Sanctuary before returning to the wild. Regrettably, injured owls that are brought into the Sanctuary but are professionally judged to be beyond repair, with no hope of meaningful quality of life, are euthanised by a vet.

SOS also receives a number of nestlings and these require specialised handling from the hack-back team. A temporary hack box (an enlarged nest box with a mesh-covered outdoor area) is sited in a suitable location from where owlets will gradually be reintroduced back to their natural environment.

One of the most important spheres of operation for the Sanctuary is the S.O.S. Nest Box Scheme. This includes the time-consuming search for suitable locations for man-made nest boxes (the availability of proper habitat and sufficient natural prey species being the chief determining factors); the building and secure erection of nest boxes made from safe, long-lasting, environmentally friendly materials; and the careful monitoring of nesting activity within the boxes that form part of the network.

Giving talks and setting projects for schools, colleges and youth or community groups who either visit the Sanctuary, arrange a visit from us to their establishment or reach us remotely via our virtual sessions is the focus of our Education Team. Our website at www.owl-help.org.uk is the place to find free downloadable curriculum-based resources including fact sheets and activity projects for Foundation & Key Stage 1 & 2 pupils. We also visit local landowners and farmers with advice for those interested in developing suitable habitat or nesting locations for owls in the wild.

Finally, extending the reach of information and advice about owls beyond the confines of the Sanctuary is covered through the publication of various freely-available leaflets on specific and general related topics. In recent years the round-the-clock manning of a Q-&A Website at www.owl-help.org.uk offers immediate qualified response to enquiries from around the world - on average, around 2500 e-mail questions a year about owls, their care & conservation.

Please support Suffolk Owl Sanctuary.

Adopt an Owl

By adopting one of our friends at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary you will be helping to fund the running costs, raptor rescue, first aid, veterinary, rehabilitation and education projects that we run. If you would like to adopt an owl, please tick the box of your choice. The amount you donate is up to you - the usual amount is £25, paid annually at your discretion.

Please tick the box of the owl you would like to adopt



COBWEB
Barn Owl



BUG
Tawny Owl



LOKI
Snowy Owl



HOLLY
Little Owl



WOODY
Wood Owl

Sponsor a Nest Box

Sponsoring a nest box will help towards the building, siting, repair & maintenance of a wild owl nest box - each one providing a safe & secure nesting site to replace the natural sites decimated by the vagaries of weather or the encroachment of man on the landscape. The amount you donate is at your discretion. The usual amount is £65.00



I would like to contribute £ _____ towards the running costs of Suffolk Owl Sanctuary by Adopting the Owl Sponsoring a Nest Box or Making a Donation (as ticked above)

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Tel: _____

Tick this box if you would like to receive a regular emailed newsletter with updates on Suffolk Owl Sanctuary activities to see how your donation is helping support our conservation projects Your email address for free newsletter

Are you a UK Taxpayer? If so, by simply ticking the RED BOX you would help us reclaim an extra 25% from the Government on top of your donation. It won't cost you a penny!

I would like the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary to reclaim the tax on my donation. I confirm I have paid an amount of UK Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax equal to any tax reclaimed for the Tax year.

giftaid it

Please tick to GIFT AID your donation

* I would like to pay by cheque for £ _____ made payable to Suffolk Owl Sanctuary

* I would like to pay £ _____ by Credit or Debit Card



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The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary Ltd., Stonham Barns, Stonham Aspal IP14 6AT
Tel: 0345 680 7897 www.owl-help.org.uk



All donors receive this enamelled lapel badge with our compliments as a "Thank You!"

PLEASE!

WE NEED YOUR HELP

FOR THIS

Funding the first aid & veterinary care for the injured owls and other birds of prey that are brought into the Sanctuary



FOR THIS

Funding the retrieval, nurture and safe charge of many foundling owlets reported to us each year



FOR THIS

Funding the building, siting, erection, monitoring and maintenance of wild owl nesting boxes and hack boxes in remote locations



FOR THIS

Funding the recuperation of injured wild owls and other birds of prey and their careful and expert release back to the wild



AND FOR THIS

Funding an extensive education programme which is teaching the youth of today about the importance of conservation for tomorrow



BY GIVING WHATEVER YOU CAN AFFORD TO "ADOPT-AN-OWL" OR SUPPORT OUR WILD OWL NEST BOX SCHEME , YOU WILL BE CONTRIBUTING TO A RAPTOR RESCUE & CONSERVATION PROGRAMME WHICH IS HELPING SAVE BRITAIN'S OWLS.

