



NEWS

Regd. Charity
No. 1086565

PLEASE
remember to
re-adopt your
owl - every
little bit
helps!

Catch up with all the news on the
S.O.S. Weekly Blog at www.owl-help.org.uk

The Newsletter for the Friends & Supporters of The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary *Issue 18 Spring - Winter 2011*

**On behalf of the S.O.S. team,
General Manager Andy Hulme
says **WELCOME** to the Suffolk
Owl Sanctuary's Autumn/
Winter 2011 Newsletter**

Hello again, everyone!

*As I write this, the first frost of
Autumn has decorated the centre and the
surrounding countryside as a reminder that
chilly times are ahead. So it's with some
comfort to take this opportunity to look
back at the sometimes hazy but never lazy
days of Summer to reflect on what has
been achieved over recent months, which I
hope you will find of interest.*

*But first, I'd like to extend a big thank
you from all the team here at SOS,
especially to the team of staunch volunteers
who help us week in, week out with the
work that has to be done; and of course
to YOU for your continued support and
contributions over the last year and without
whose support we would not have been
able to make the progress that we have.
Thank you again - and if you haven't
already done so, we do hope that you'll be
able to come and visit us soon!*

Stepping Back...



To reflect the vivid history of the
role birds of prey have played in social
life through the ages, in the summer the
Sanctuary stepped back to mediaeval
times as we hosted an encampment of
the "Black Knight Historical Group".
All our visitors were able to witness
& participate in a range of fascinating
activities from archery to armour-making
and high on the agenda was a focus on
falconry from times when 'a kestrel for
a knave' meant just that. We're planning
a similar event for 16th & 17th June
next year with special schools days
beforehand - please join us if you can!



Up, Up & Away!

Rescuing, repairing and rehabilitating
all kinds of wild birds of prey is top of
our agenda here at the Suffolk Owl
Sanctuary, and thanks to your support
our year is peppered with opportunities
to do just that.

Earlier this summer, for instance, a
juvenile Marsh Harrier was brought to
the Sanctuary having been found with
a damaged wing over at Blythburgh on
the Suffolk coastline - an area prevalent
with reed beds & marshland which form
the natural habitat for this rarely-sighted
species.

After a trip to the vet for a check-up
it was verified the wing was broken, the
severity of which usually determines the
chances of a full mend & recovery. In this
case it was deemed likely that after some
lengthy rest-&recuperation time at the
Sanctuary, the bird stood a chance of

Above: The
Harrier flies
up and away
back to its
territory



*Inset: Closely supervised, Stephen holds the
bird ready to release it.*

survival and this indeed proved to be the
case. Nevertheless, as Marsh Harriers
are very sensitive birds, great care had
to be taken that our charge to ensure it
was not stressed during the treatment &
rehabilitation period, so it was kept in a
secluded aviary at the edge of the centre.

So happily, the Harrier was eventually
passed ready for release and was taken
back to the place where it was found:
here we met the finder, Stephen Hall,
who carried out the release. Andy was
in attendance and reported that the
Harrier "flew strong", circled a few times
and then - surprise! - was joined by
another Harrier.

YOUR ADOPTION RENEWAL 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 the future care & conservation of our injured wild avian friends.

**Please call 08456 807 897 or visit www.owl-help.org.uk
to renew your adoption or adopt-an-owl for a friend. Thank you!**

Out & About

One of the services that we offer here at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary is our Wise Owl Roadshow. Although mainly part of our education package for schools, we do also take our birds to see people at day centres, WI meetings and various other venues especially for



Ashley hits the highways & byways with our Wise Owl Roadshow whenever possible to explain the important role of Owl conservation in the ecological scheme.

people who are unable to get to us. And although lots of local people have heard of us, it's surprising how many don't actually know what goes on behind the scenes here at the Centre and what our 'raison d'être' really is.

Established as a registered charity in 2001, the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary is not just a haven for owls, but also many

other birds of prey, including owls, eagles, falcons, hawks, buzzards and one mischievous vulture! There are owls of all kinds, from the native Barn Owl with its stunning and intricate gold and grey plumage to the exotic, tropical Spectacled Owl. All 90 or so of the birds that live at the Sanctuary are captive bred and help to provide a unique opportunity for visitors young & old to learn about different birds of prey and their importance in our world.

The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary is run by a small but dedicated team, supported by a devoted and much appreciated group of volunteers and its key aims are to provide Care and Rehabilitation for injured wild birds of prey, Education about a wide variety of raptor species and the promotion of Owl Conservation throughout the UK and beyond.

The Sanctuary's spectacular flying displays daily between April and the end of September provide an opportunity to see some of the world's most beautiful birds of prey demonstrate their stunning aerial skills and we also run a breeding & conservation project for Red Squirrels, which you'll learn more about later on. So there's much more to the Owl Sanctuary than an array of stunning birds of prey for visitors to see!



A visit to the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary during the summer presents the best opportunity to appreciate the role owls and other birds of prey play in the natural scheme of things as well as a chance to see them in beautiful flight.

The Final Flurry

Photography may not always be our strongest point but we were lucky enough to snap the final flurry of a recent patient at our hospital, a male Sparrowhawk, as he was released back to the wild. The young chap was found in a local garden and close examination revealed some superficial damage to one wing and that the skin underneath the feathers was clearly inflamed and bruised. The most likely scenario was that the bird had collided with some kind of obstacle, hence the bruising. Time to recover from the trauma is often what's most needed in such cases and in this instance the bird was also treated with Metacalm to help reduce the inflammation. After spending a couple of weeks in one of our quiet, secluded rehabilitation aviaries, one of our volunteers, Doug, had the pleasure of being able to release it close by to the spot where he was found.



A New Arrival



In our Spring/Summer 2011 newsletter this year, you may remember we reported on the arrival at the Sanctuary of our stunning Spectacled Owl Cecil. Cecil was donated to us by Mr Brian Draycott as a poignant tribute to his late parents. And Cecil has turned out to be a true star - not only is he wonderful to handle, but he has also wowed our visitors for the last year with his striking appearance.

So it's with great delight that we are able to announce the arrival of Phyllis, future spouse to Cecil. She hatched in the summer of this year in Oxfordshire and is currently residing in one of our weatherings to give her time to settle and get used to visitors. Once she is ready, she will become the newest member of our flying display team, replacing her husband-to-be Cecil, who will then retire to an aviary for a well earned rest.

As yet, Cecil and Phyllis are too young to breed but once they are both mature enough, they will be paired into an aviary and we will await with bated breath the sound of tiny talons.

Dirty Diggers!

If you've read our blogs at www.owl-help.org.uk you'll know that the Sanctuary is in constant need of repair, updating and sometimes good old fashioned replacement. Rain, snow, frost and the vigorous winds of Suffolk have all played their part in continually undermining the fabric of our substantially wooden structures, none moreso than one particular block of owl aviaries which - being on the edge of the wide open spaces of our flying ground - bear the brunt of our brisk nor' westerlies!

The tremendous support we receive from donors like yourself to help us maintain the centre in good order is vital and therefore we were very grateful last year to be given a donation specifically for restoring this particular suite of aviaries. Many thanks go too, to our regular volunteer Pete Ruddy who generously donated his time to lay all the blocks for the aviaries' foundations. The aviaries are now up and running and looking very smart, providing five star accommodation for some of our raptor residents!



Above: Never let it be said that our trusty team fight shy of the heavy work!

Right: The recently completed new hospital building, erected with the aid of donors like you!



Beautiful, but Bedraggled!

During the year we are pleased to welcome a great many visitors to the Sanctuary who come to find out more about owls, their lifestyles and their care & conservation. One of the best ways of illustrating the diversity of species & their characteristics is during the flying displays, when the owls and other birds of prey fly free, accompanied by a commentary from one of the falconers about the many aspects of their lifestyles.

Throughout our flying season, from April to September, our display birds are carefully observed to ensure that they are fit and well and that their feathers are in pristine condition for flying. Sometimes one of our display birds may begin to moult before the end of the season and will then go back into its aviary to start the annual process of naturally replacing worn or damaged feathers. At other times, one of our raptors may not be quite ready at the beginning of the season, having already started to moult, as was the case this year with our Great Grey Owl, Taiga. Normally, his appealing face and stunning plumage are immaculate, but for a while he looked as though he'd been dragged through a hedge backwards! Fortunately it wasn't too long before Taiga was back to his former glory and he has been impressing visitors with his fantastic flying dexterity ever since.

The Great Grey is also known as the Lapland Owl and can be found from Alaska across Canada, down the Northern Rocky Mountains, and northern Minnesota. They are also found in northern Europe and Asia. Taiga's species has a rather fine Latin name, 'nebulous', meaning misty or foggy, an apt description for this beautiful bird of prey.

This is why YOUR Owl adoption counts!

Everything that we do at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary - from every raptor rescue we make to every bird we manage to rehabilitate back to the wild,; from every wild owl nestbox we erect & maintain to every school we visit - is dependent on the support of people like YOU, which is why we are so grateful for every bird you adopt and every donation you are able to give. Thank you!!

Road to Recovery



Our Conservation Office Dean Wenham explains what goes on 'behind the scenes' at S.O.S.

Last year we achieved a rehabilitation rate of 48% for the injured wild birds of prey brought in to S.O.S. but it's a sad fact that a many of the injuries we see are caused by road traffic accidents.

There isn't always a lot that can be done for a bird which has shattered bones after either colliding with a vehicle or being smashed into the road via the downdraft and often the kindest thing to do is to ask our vet to relieve them from their suffering.

Sometimes though, luck is on the bird's side - as was the case with a Little Owl found by a member of the public at the side of the road earlier this year.

Fortunately, close examination by one of our falconry team revealed no broken bones but the poor owl did have extensive facial bruising and both eyes were swollen completely shut. It seems most likely that the bird had been caught up in the slip-stream of a vehicle, rather than being involved in a collision.

Owls in particular can be pretty unstable in flight in windy conditions as their feathers are designed to have a lot of movement in them, enabling the owl to fly completely silently and thereby catching their prey by surprise. Unfortunately this does mean they are



easily caught out by a gust of wind or the draught caused by a passing vehicle.

A visit to our supporting vet confirmed the diagnosis had probably hit the ground fairly hard and the Little Owl was put on a course of antibiotics and eye-drops as the best course of treatment, Regular volunteer Steve was often on hand to help Andy administer the medication – definitely not a one person job when you're dealing with a feisty Little Owl, whose tiny talons are especially sharp!

Thankfully, this is one of those stories with a happy ending - after a few weeks the little chap was fully fit and we were able to release it back to its natural habitat soon after!



Top left: Bruised & battered, this Little Owl arrived with us in a fairly beaten-up state.

Above: Andy & Steve administer the eye-drop medication

Left: Hand-feeding with tid-bits starts the road to recovery for this feisty Little Owl.

Snap Happy



Our Adopt-an-Owl fundraising scheme is vital to the upkeep of the Sanctuary and each adoption pack comes with a stunning picture of the bird you have adopted, taken by our good friend, professional photographer Paul Sawyer. Here he discusses the photo of our newest adoptee, Pungu, with general manager Andy, and the result of their deliberations is shown below - a stunning image capturing the magnificent plumage of the Bateleur Eagle.



Tail Piece

As you may have noted from our front page story, falconry played an intrinsic role in life during mediaeval times, where the pecking order for owning a bird of prey was indeed taken very seriously. The following list details the accepted order of possession - perhaps providing a question idea for all pub & club quizzmasters!

- Emperor** - Eagle or Vulture
- King** - Gyr Falcon
- Prince, Duke or Earl** - Peregrine
- Baron** - Buzzard
- Knight** - Saker Falcon
- Esquire** - Lanner Falcon
- M'Lady** - Merlin
- Young Man** - Hobby
- Yeoman** - Goshawk
- Priest** - Sparrowhawk
- Holy Water Clerk** - Musket
- Knave or Servant** - Kestrel