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

Welcome to our latest newsletter, in which we take pleasure in bringing you up to date with some of the many owl rescue and rehabilitation cases we've been involved with during the past few months, as well as other projects that have been going on at the centre. First, however, on behalf of us all - and that of course involves the owls and other birds of prey for which we are responsible - I would like to express how very grateful we are to all our volunteers, supporters, donors and owl adopters - without whom none of this would have been possible. Thank you - and come and see us again soon!

Andy Hulme
General Manager, The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary



Condition RED

Earlier in the year we completed the renovation and extension to our Red Squirrel enclosures. This was the result of much hard work by Head Falconer Matt, our trusty brigade of volunteers and a generous donation from Adnams Brewery.

The colony currently consists of two pairs of residential squirrels, thanks to recently sourcing a new female from the British Wildlife Centre in Sussex. This summer they have been enjoying their recently redeveloped enclosures, which have been designed to allow us to accommodate an expanding colony in comfort.

As we approach the winter months the squirrels here at SOS have started creating food stores and improving on their dreys. Unlike their grey cousins, Red Squirrels do not hibernate and will be awake most of the winter, only sleeping through some of the worst days.

The Red Squirrels at the Centre give our visitors a rare chance to see these fascinating animals which breed regularly, enabling us to provide youngsters for the release projects that are currently take place on Anglesey.



Three large squirrel enclosures allow plenty of space for recreation and seclusion

Five In A Row

Last May when fledgling Tawny Owls were starting to find their way around, in the course of just a week we acquired a total of five babies who were either brought into us as 'orphans' or had to be rescued in various states of repair.

The first owlet had wandered too far away from its nest to be put back and had obviously been absent-without-leave from home for quite a while as it was very hungry by the time it was brought into us.

The second and third owlets were lovingly picked up by a kind Labrador - yes, Labrador - whilst out with its owner. Again the babies could not be put back in or near their nest immediately as the lady dog-owner was walking in a wood and had no idea where exactly they had been retrieved from.



The first of the few... one Tawny Owlet takes flight under Dean's watchful eye... and then the others get the idea!



Exhausted and stuck behind a patio planter, this little chap was eventually released safe & sound

The fourth owlet was rescued in a very poor and extremely smelly state as it had fallen in a septic tank and was basically just a little lump of poop. At first it was actually difficult to see what type of owl it was until it had had a bath and several bowls of stinky water later, we had one very happy, poop-free Tawny Owl chick.

And last but not least, the final Tawny baby was found all alone and very wet, too wet to be left where it was found so after a good dry up and feed, owlet number five joined the other four in the recuperation aviaries awaiting release.*

A few weeks later it was decided all the babies were ready to be taken to a safe & secluded site where they were placed in a Hack Box - basically a false nest - where they were fed daily until willing and able to fend for themselves. While in the box, they got used to the sights and sounds of the surrounding area where they would eventually be released. The day came around not long afterwards when it was felt they were ready to go and in beautiful warm & sunny weather, we had the pleasure of watching them all fly off very happily into the surrounding woods, all 'as free as a bird'.

* P.S. We always suggest that 'found' baby Tawny Owls should never be picked up but whenever possible left where they are, as their parents usually know of their proximity and will still care for the youngsters even though they may be out of the nest.

Cecil becomes the focus of attention



After a preparatory visit, students from Ravensbourne College in London travelled up to see us and spent the day making a short documentary film about the Sanctuary

Recently, we were contacted by some students from Ravensbourne College in London, asking whether our falconers could donate some time to talk about the Sanctuary and the work we do here for the purpose of a documentary film they wanted to make.

The students in question, Sean, Georgina, Jade, Nathalie, Stephen, Scott and Aiste were keen to visit on two dates, 19th April and 17th May. The objective was to find out all about the Sanctuary's Education, Conservation and Rehabilitation projects and to film around the Sanctuary. Matt and Maz were on hand to welcome the students and give them a guided tour and then the students were able to film the two of them talking about various aspects of the Sanctuary, including Matt's

conservation project for rearing and releasing Red Squirrels

Maz showed them around the hospital, explaining the equipment and medication the falconers use and demonstrated the procedure of what happens when an injured raptor is brought in to the Sanctuary.

At this time of year, the flying display birds are also in their prime and the students were able to film the raptors in all their aerial magnificence.

The information and footage collected helped the team complete a final major project for their degrees in video production and you can see the results on our website at www.owl-help.org.uk or on YouTube.

Work experience!

Part of our remit as a charity is to offer educational facilities, as part of which we have a lot of students coming to the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, not just to visit, but also often for work experience. 15-year-old Harry Studd came to work last summer and wrote an essay about his time with us.

"When I arrived at the Sanctuary the first thing I was taught to do was how to transfer some of the flying display birds who spend their nights in the mews room to the outdoor weatherings by picking the birds up from their darkened night boxes and placing them on their perches for the day.

To keep them from flying away, the falconers tether the birds to their perches with a soft leash with what's known as a falconers knot. The knot itself is very simple but difficult to perfect as you have to do it with one hand because, of course, you always have a bird on your other wrist - when I took the birds out for the first few times, Head Falconer Matt helped me with my knot and taught me how to do it.

Every day at the centre I had a specific morning routine, which included getting the birds out of the mews room and then cleaning their night boxes. This was followed by preparing food for the birds, which included chopping up frozen chicks, rats and quail into pieces. At first I found this work quite gruesome but after a few days I got used to the sights and smells of the task.



Work experience student Harry on the flying ground with Cecil on his wrist

After that, I helped clean out some of the big aviaries which held the pair of Tawny Eagles, a Black Vulture and a Steppe Eagle.

Another thing I did quite often during work experience was PAINTING!!! I painted the flying owl aviaries and the outside of the falconers hut - hard work but worth it! Sometimes I even got the paint onto the aviaries and buildings besides all over me!

I learnt a lot by asking the falconers questions about the birds. I thought all owls are nocturnal and that they are very smart, but neither of these myths are true. Firstly, many owls fly at dawn & dusk, and secondly owls are not very bright either because their brains are proportionately quite small compared with the size of their head as they have big eyes and ears which leaves very little room for a brain. If we take Cecil as an example, when we look at him we can only see about 30% of his eye because they are shaped like Cornetto's - we can only see the 'ice cream' part at the top whilst the cone part is actually inside Cecil's head.

The best part about my work experience time was when I was able to help exercise some of the birds that flew in the displays - these included a Little Owl, a Barn Owl and a Spectacled Owl - brilliant!"



Falconer & fundraiser Maz, our Spectacled Owl Cecil and video project leader Georgina go through the script before shooting for 'artist's approval'

Three into two DOES go!



We have been extremely busy over the last nine months in our Raptor Hospital and it has to be said that the up-and-down nature of the weather recently year has not helped young birds who have suffered as a result.

A consequence of the wet summer has been the resultant profusion of late broods, the health and survival of which have subsequently been threatened by the onset of moulting by the mature birds: this state has weakened the parents, rendering them unable in many instances to provide sufficiently for their offspring who have died of starvation in significant numbers.

Such occurrences have frequently been logged by our friends Roger & Chris who - as key members of the Thornham Owl Project, and partners in our East Anglian Wild Owl Nest Box scheme - have repeatedly come across similar cases in the last few months.

So when we recently received a report of an abandoned young barn owl, on investigation it proved to be just such a case - the survivor of a late brood neglected by parents in moult. Luckily Roger & Chris had just previously recorded a box inhabited by two healthy chicks of a similar age.

As a result we were able to introduce the single orphan to this group. To give the trio a better chance of fledging, we are helping the parents out with food by providing extra mice with which to feed the family each day: this should take the pressure off the parents whilst they complete their moult and encourage them to concentrate their efforts on looking after their babies.

Our website at www.owl-help.org.uk will keep you posted on the outcome, but this close co-operation with other local agencies proves just how valuable such an association can be in our mutual quest for the rescue and re-habilitation of injured or distressed birds of prey.

Top: Chris McIntyre of the Thornham Owl Project climbs aloft to put the young owlet pictured into the nest box.

Bottom: Our falconer & fundraiser Maz together with Chris's wife, Bridget, with the trio of owlets.

Conservation Day

August saw S.O.S. stage a well-attended "Nature Conservation Day" at the Sanctuary, the brainchild of our administration team Catherine & Anna, who together put in some great work staging the event - thank you, girls!

During the day visitors were able to meet with representatives of a number of local groups and societies concerned with all matters 'green', discuss topics of interest with them and pick up information, hints & tips.



The local Bat Group told visitors about the habitat, behaviour and characteristics of this nocturnal native and invited them to take part in a variety of exciting activities that compose the group's annual calendar including 'bat walks', sightings and audit projects.

The RSPB needed no introduction as the foremost organisation in the country concerned with bird welfare & conservation. Their stand appealed to both old and young and the Society were able to sign up some new members during the day.

A local amphibian & reptile group brought along a fascinating collection of native species including lizards, slow worms, grass snakes, greater crested newts, toads and frogs and offered some valuable advice on creating the ideal habitat for these creatures in your own garden.



Newts & Toads illustrated just a few of the amphibians & reptiles to be found locally

The British Deer Society brought along lots of information on the importance of protecting our native deer species. They are very proactive in raising awareness for their RTA (Road Traffic Accident) Campaign, the aim of which is to reduce the number of deer deaths through road traffic accidents & "Slow Down!" was the succinct message for visitors, who were made aware that this one simple measure whilst out and about on country roads could reverse this unfortunate, increasing trend.

Roger the Ringer



Regular readers will know that S.O.S. recently formed an association with the Thornham Owl Project to expand and enhance the capabilities of our own East Anglian Nest Box scheme, which builds, erects and monitors a network of wild owl nestboxes in the region. Such boxes replace the demolished out-buildings and depleted natural-cavity nesting sites favoured by Barn Owls and Little Owls in particular. Roger Buxton (above) and his Thornham colleagues bring additional expertise to the endeavour, inasmuch as they are skilled bird ringers, a process which enables them to monitor breeding rates and track owl movements which contribute to their valuable on-going regional raptor survey.

Bird ringing is a delicate business - here we show how Roger carefully closes the ring he's added to the leg of a fledgling owl, wary of harming the bird in the process.

PLEASE RENEW YOUR OWL ADOPTION

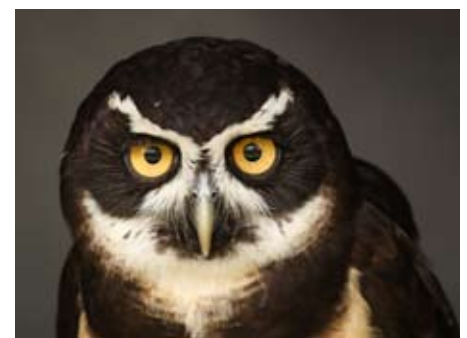
As we hope you can see from this newsletter, the work of S.O.S. continues with dedication & enthusiasm. But - if you can - PLEASE renew your owl adoption as your donation is vital to our future and the well being and care of our avian friends.

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



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

What a Spectacle!



New newsletter for schools out now



As part of our comprehensive programme of free teaching & learning aids for schools nationwide, we have just produced the first edition of an 'owlish' schools newsletter - "The Stonham Screecher" - designed for Foundation and Key Stage 1 & 2 pupils. If you'd like some copies, please contact us at the address below or you can download this and a host of other learning projects and activities from our website.

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Increased hospital intake requires new rehab aviaries

Our Raptor Hospital was very busy over the last few months. As the intake of cases has increased, we have had to build more rehabilitation aviaries to house the number of injured wild birds. This accommodation provides quiet and safe surroundings which enables them to recuperate as the last leg of recovery before being released back to the wild.

The team worked hard to get the aviaries completed as quickly as possible - Steve and Doug pictured here are but a few of the brilliant volunteers that helped with the building work. Our loyal supporters Eastern Concrete once again have come up trumps by donating the materials for the base of the aviaries.



Our Spectacled Owl, Cecil, has been with us for a couple of years now and you can see from the above sequence of pictures just how much his appearance has changed in that time. Reverting from a snowy white plumage to a half-and-half colour scheme, he has now matured into the a rich all-over dark brown with just traces of the white left around his eyes and chin which give him his name!