



NEWS

Regd. Charity
No. 1086565

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

The Newsletter for the Friends & Supporters of S.O.S.

Issue 17 Spring - Summer 2011

General Manager Andy Hulme says **WELCOME** to the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary's Spring/Summer 2011 Newsletter

Hello again, everyone!

Well, Spring has Sprung here at S.O.S. and after a fairly bleak and often snowy mid-winter it's good to see the countryside around us come alive again. We hope you enjoy this newsletter and remember, you can keep up-to-date with all our news, events and activities on our website at www.owl-help.org.uk

Here at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary we are extremely lucky to have a very dedicated band of volunteers, some of whom have been with us for a number of years. The Sanctuary wouldn't be able to run anywhere near so smoothly or efficiently without their help and this is a good opportunity for me to say a big thank you, from all of the team here to ALL of our volunteers for their hard work and support. One of our long standing supporters, Steve, agreed to give us a volunteer's eye view of what it's like to help out at the Sanctuary and here's what he had to say...

Hi, I'm Steve, one of the volunteers at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary. I have been asked to provide an insight into the role we play at the Centre. There is a group of half a dozen of us who help on a regular basis, ranging in age from teenagers to pensioners and from all walks of life.

The work we do is partly seasonal; wintertime usually sees us repairing aviaries, painting and generally sprucing things up for the new season. In early spring things start to get busy, what with helping to care for the young birds that are born around this time and exercising the flying display birds to get them fit after they have been laid up for the winter.



NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

Meet Cecil, the Spectacled Owl - a stunning new addition to our in-house team who arrived with us late last year as the result of a donation gifted as a poignant tribute to his late mother, an ardent supporter, by her son. Normally a resident of South American climes, this beautiful creature joins our small team of birds from overseas which are used to illustrate the diversity of owl species throughout the world in relation to the domestic breeds of the UK.

A typical day at the Centre would begin with helping to weigh the birds and take them out of the mews where they spend the night. Then it's time for tea! Next, it's time to clean out the aviaries that need doing, cut the grass,

wash down the mews boxes, prepare the raptors' food for the day and get the following day's food out of the freezer to thaw. Then, it's time for tea!

After lunch is our opportunity to handle some of the birds, perhaps

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helping with the flying displays or exercising the birds that aren't being used in the displays that day. Guess what time it is then... you've got it, time for tea!

Towards the end of the day, we have to feed the birds that are in aviaries, return the birds in the weatherings to the mews for the night and wash down the weatherings for the following day.

The atmosphere at the Centre is fairly laid back and there's a lot of cheerful chatter and mickey taking!

I am now starting my fourth year here and pretty much know how the Sanctuary runs, so the falconers are happy to leave me to get on with my work. Sometimes the volunteers get very attached to the birds, as the birds all have their own distinctive characters and sometimes the birds get attached to the volunteers... but that's another story!

I think we do a good job and help to maintain high standards at the Centre and I hope to still be volunteering here for many years to come.

Rumbustious Reds



As you may well know from our previous newsletters, our Head Falconer Matt Lott is the main man when it comes to our beguiling colony of Red Squirrels. Recently we had a rather unexpected and very special surprise, as Matt explains...

Last year proved to be an enormously exciting time for our Red Squirrel colony, when we were thrilled with the arrival of a new young female from Pensthorpe

Wildlife Park in Norfolk (which hosts the BBC Springwatch series), who joined our existing group of young males and older female.

Our excitement was soon to be tinged with sadness, however, as our older female who had reached a grand old age for a squirrel, passed away. We were sorry to lose her but mindful that she had probably lived for a couple more years than one of her species might normally do.

This however meant we had to have a reshuffle of the colony and we paired one of our young males up with the new female. All went well and they quickly settled in together. Although a year old and at an age when she could begin to breed, we thought the female's youth and new surroundings would make it unlikely, but after just a couple of months of being together, we noticed the young pair had started work on a large drey. This was a great sign that the pair were getting on well together, as a drey is a squirrel's version of a nest. Our pair built theirs out of hay and sticks.

Not long after the female disappeared

for several days and after a check in mid July we discovered she had indeed been getting on really well with the male and had had a litter of 5 young kits.

At this stage, we didn't want to interfere too much and monitored them carefully from a distance, so as not to cause any disturbance or distress to mum or her babies. About 10 weeks later the young emerged and started exploring their surroundings and it wasn't long before they were all playing tag up and down the trees in their enclosure. The key purpose for breeding

our Red Squirrels is the opportunity to work with various Red Squirrel regeneration projects, among them 'The Friends of Anglesey Red Squirrels', who are successfully re-introducing more Red Squirrels across the island on the north coast of Wales. It's wonderful to be a part of such conservation schemes and we can proudly report that two of our Red Squirrel youngsters have now successfully been re-homed on Anglesey.

A Life on The Ocean Waves?



As we're located not far from the East Coast, we're sometimes involved in strange rescue operations involving sea-going birds of prey - not so long ago we were called on to help with advice on a sea eagle that returned to Felixtowe on the back of a container ship!

But recently we received an unusual e-mail from Stewart Green who works on a ConocoPhillips Oil Rig way out in the North Sea, about 50 miles east of Scarborough. He sent us a photo of a strictly non-seagoing bird - a Short Eared Owl which had strayed a long, long way from it's natural habitat of marshlands and moorlands, where - unusually for an owl - it is a ground-dweller.

Though we have heard nothing further since, we hope that it managed to return to terra firma in the UK or somewhere in Europe without too much hassle - wherever it set foot again, no doubt it was one tired owl by then!

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

to renew over the 'phone or adopt-an-owl for a friend or you can do it online at www.owl-help.org.uk

Thank You!

Good Housekeeping

It is a heartening fact that due to a greater awareness of the importance of conservation, raptors in general are now doing much better in the wild in many parts of the country.

We like to play our part and, as well as supporting other habitat schemes, we also have the wild owl nest box initiative which have been funded as a result of the generosity of our supporters and strategically placed around the local area courtesy of local farmers & land owners have allowed us to erect them on their properties.

Over the years we have established a network of some 40 boxes and it's the task of our Conservation Officer Dean to make periodic checks on them, both to monitor occupation and compile a census or to clean and repair uninhabited owl boxes in an effort to make them attractive to species in want of a secure home.

An important part of the process is siting the boxes where they are most likely to be used - evidence of owls already in the vicinity being the most reliable signpost. Another relevant aspect is patience - Barn Owls in particular are notoriously territorial and it takes them quite a while to adopt new nesting areas - we've known it to take up to a couple of years.

In itself this can lead to surprises, one such when Dean approached a hitherto empty and rather dilapidated Tawny Owl box with a view to giving it a spring clean. Carefully resting his ladder up against the tree to make his inspection, a Tawny Owl popped its head over the lip and then vacated the premises in the direction of a nearby wood. Although our colleague Ashley claims to be no David Bailey, she nevertheless managed to catch a snap of the Tawny taking flight and although further inspection revealed no chicks to report, the fact that the box was occupied was very encouraging.



Dean cleans the detritus from a Barn Owl Box we erected on a local farm a couple of years ago - signs of past occupation which bode well for the future

Surprise, surprise! Carefully approaching a box he thought to be unoccupied, Dean was subject to a fly-past he wasn't expecting!

(Please note: Inspection or interference with a nesting box is prohibited unless in possession of a current Disturbance Licence, issued by DEFRA)



A Little Handful!

These four Little Owl chicks were brought into the Sanctuary recently. The circumstances surrounding their arrival were unusual as they were discovered in a tree that had been cut down - certainly not the first time this has happened! Looking tiny and vulnerable when they first came to us, it seemed incredible that they would one day be able to fend for themselves in the wild. But it's amazing how fast they grow and after just a few short weeks later they were robust enough and healthy enough to begin their journey back to their natural habitat. The first step was to put the youngsters into a 'hack box' located on a farm local to the Sanctuary so that we were able to keep an eye on the youngsters and feed them until they were ready to hunt for themselves, finally to be released back to the wild.



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!!

I Be Dragged...



Of the many injured owls and other birds of prey that are brought into the Sanctuary, this poor little mite surely takes the biscuit - it was rescued, barely alive, having fallen down a chimney and arrived with us covered in grime and grit.

However, whilst we regret this particular Tawny Owl didn't live to tell the tale despite our best endeavours, many of them to, as witnessed below where S.O.S. General Manager Andy Hulme releases the second of a pair of rescued Tawnies back to its natural habitat.

... I Be Free!



On The Stump



We didn't have room on page 3 to feature this stunning picture of Andy's short longs or long shorts, but despite his questionable attire our image does show his admirable dedication to duty as he manned the stand once again at a recent Wildlife Trust event. Never too happy when divorced from a cup of tea, our beloved leader nevertheless spent the day fielding questions from visitors about the care & conservation of wild birds of prey with aplomb.

Kites take to the air



We were blessed to breed two Red Kite chicks at S.O.S. last year. Named Nessa & Bryn, they are a fantastic addition to our raptor family and will afford the Centre a tremendous opportunity to help educate visitors about this fascinating species. They will also provide a wonderful addition to the Sanctuary's education team, offering a great chance for kids to see this magnificent bird up close and to learn about the importance of its conservation.

If the Sanctuary is able to successfully develop a breeding core at Stonham and with the correct permissions & conditions to effect a release programme, it may not be too long before the distinctive fork-tailed silhouette of the Red Kite is seen flying free in the skies of East Anglia



2010 Rehab Results



This undernourished Kestrel was brought in to us last winter when it had been unable to find food because of the deep snow cover and was released again when the weather improved

Although the Sanctuary's raptor hospital generally ticks along quietly behind the scenes, it's an aspect of our operations which has a hugely important role to play and, as always, was kept busy throughout the year.

However we're particularly pleased about the recovery of the birds brought into us last year, of which we were able to release a higher than normal rate successfully back to the wild - all told, during 2010 our falconers attended to 77 sick or injured wild birds of prey brought into to the Sanctuary, of which 48% were successfully re-released. Although not listed as injured in our Register, around May time we tend to have a higher proportion of nestlings or youngsters brought in, particularly if they have fallen out of the nest and are looking abandoned!

Tail Piece



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