

# SUFFOLK OWL SANCTUARY NEWS



Photo by Tony Betts, entered in our 2016 Photo Competition

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

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

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

**MAZ ROBINSON**

General Manager, S.O.S.

**S.O.S. urgently need a new Raptor Hospital to care for the increasing number of injured wild birds of prey it receives annually.**

**The number and frequency of injured wild bird cases brought into Suffolk Owl Sanctuary is on the increase and we're in danger of outgrowing our facilities.**



**If you can, please help us enlarge and improve our hospital facilities by making a donation towards the rebuilding & equipment costs - see enclosed leaflet for more details. Thank you.**

## Double Trouble!



As a supporter of S.O.S. you will know that we are often the first port of call for members of the public who have encountered injured wild birds of prey in a variety of circumstances.

The patients usually consist of road traffic accident victims, starvation cases, birds which have flown into windows and others that have trapped themselves in one way or another.

Just recently some local householders heard movement in their unused log burner. Scratching sounds and falling soot persisted for a few days, so they contacted a chimney sweep to investigate further.

What he discovered was a pair of owls who had taken a tumble down into the grate. A mating pair, it seemed likely that they had chosen the old, wide chimney as a perfect roost, little realising that the bottom was a LONG way down!

The house owners rang us for advice, then carefully handled and boxed the dazed pair and brought them in to us. On arrival, a thorough health check revealed a forlorn pair of very thin - and very black & sooty - Tawny Owls. Apart from these very treatable conditions, however, the birds seemed none the worse for their ordeal.

Our team quickly got to work with suds and water and after several baths, two handsome looking owls emerged. Both were initially fed by crop tube as a precaution to ensure that they received immediate sustenance.

Our secluded rehabilitation facilities then allowed for the most important element of any rescued wild bird's treatment - that is, the time and security required for them to build their strength and muscle tone to resume efficient hunting whilst being fed regularly and protected from predators by us.

When the time came for their release back into the wild the pair were not returned to the location where they were discovered - breeding pairs will

often return to the roost that they thought to be so ideal - so on this occasion, a safe secure woodland habitat was found for them well away from inviting chimneys!



*The two Tawnies, back to their beautiful selves just prior to release*



Every year we invite visitors to the Sanctuary to enter a competition for the best photo of one of our residents. The event always draws a great response and last year this impressive photo of our equally impressive young Bald Eagle, Lincoln, was adjudged the winner. Aside from the dramatic composition of amateur photographer Stuart Burns, we particularly liked the way Lincoln's typically stern expression had been captured!

When you have the opportunity to visit us, please bring along your camera or use your phone to take a snap. There are prizes for the top three photos in each category - Under 16 and Over 16 - and any wildlife subject is eligible if taken within the confines of the centre!



## The Pilgrim's Tale!

Suffolk Owl Sanctuary plays host to visitors of many nationalities, cultures, religions and professions throughout the year and the huge diversity of visitors is united by an interest in conservation and, particularly, a love of owls.

Just before Easter we were surprised but thrilled to welcome two pedestrians who were making their way past the centre on their Lenten progress - two bishops arrived at the Sanctuary on Tuesday for a short respite, to rest their feet and to find out what we do!

The Rt. Revd. Martin Seeley, Bishop of Saint Edmundsbury and Ipswich and the Rt. Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Dunwich were walking 70 miles across the county during Lent to meet

communities face-to-face and discover the huge assortment of challenges that they face daily.

The bishops invited members of the public to walk with them for a couple of miles during their 11 day pilgrimage visiting schools, youth groups, farms, businesses, churches and pubs en route as the ideal way to meet, farmers, villagers and people from all walks of life.

Falconer Jess were happy to introduce the bishops to Pippin the Barn Owl and Titch the Tawny Owl - young birds who arrived at the sanctuary at the same time last year and quickly established a close bond., so much so that Pippin & Titch fly as a pair in our daily flying displays - an unusual but endearing sight.



*Unaccustomed as I am... Taino the Ashy-Faced Owl lands safely on the gloved fist of Emily, one of our young volunteers during an indoor session designed to maintain strength & fitness when the Avian Bird Flu scare prevented free flight of birds from our demonstration team!*

## When Nature Threatens

During the Spring of this year the daily running of the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary was disrupted by the outbreak of Avian Bird Flu in the UK. The strain was a particularly infectious type of influenza which could be spread throughout the native wild bird population by infected migratory birds. Infection is spread from bird to bird by direct contact or through contaminated body fluids and faeces.

As a result of the outbreak, DEFRA issued guidelines on bird care protocol at centres like ours to minimise the threat to captive birds. A number of biosecurity measures were put in place - disinfectant foot baths at entrances, precautions to avoid contamination being transferred between premises, vehicles and equipment, plus others to minimise direct contact between captive and wild birds - the

dropping of wild bird faeces into the mesh-topped aviaries where many of our birds are housed was of concern. Special care was taken when dealing with the injured wild owls and other birds of prey brought into our Raptor Hospital, whose route into the centre was kept entirely separate, and the hospital itself isolated.

DEFRA also recommended a restriction on the flying of captive birds and as the physical and psychological health of the Sanctuary's birds who fly in our demonstrations is of paramount importance, they still needed to be exercised in preparation for the upcoming display season.

To achieve this we took every opportunity to conduct daily indoor "fist jumping" sessions, the birds launching themselves across our large mews room to the falconer's glove as an effective means of building their muscle and fitness levels and helping increase the stamina and technique they needed when eventually able to fly free again early this May.

## The Fight Against Frounce

Our Raptor Hospital is busy at all year round, but particularly during the warmer weather.

Not only are the patient numbers swelled by a steady flow of young "branchers" that have fallen out of trees through April, May & June but adult owls and other bird of prey admissions also tend to peak during the Spring and Summer seasons.

In the main, casualties will have suffered some degree of trauma due to incidents such as chimney falls, flights into windows and road traffic accidents. However, around 10% of cases consistently present with symptoms of bacterial infections or disease.

The commonest, but most virulent of these diseases is called Frounce - a yeast infection of the digestive tract caused by a protozoan called trichomonas. This debilitating condition is transmitted to birds of prey through eating pigeon meat. This is why falconers never feed pigeon meat to their birds and why our raptor hospital is unable to accept avian casualties other than birds of prey - the risk of cross contamination from pigeons, doves or other garden birds to the Sanctuary's resident population or hospital and recuperating inmates being too great.

Regrettably, birds suffering from frounce do not usually arrive at the raptor hospital until they have become so debilitated that their normal functions have become compromised, as an infected bird will be unable to hunt efficiently or eat enough to maintain health and condition.

Frounce is a particularly insidious infection which is difficult to treat once well established, however, there is some chance of a successful outcome if treatment with antibiotics can be initiated early in the cycle of the infection.



As an example, this Buzzard suffering from the disease was admitted to our raptor hospital lacking in energy and condition, though it appeared to be relatively fit and alert. An initial assessment revealed the presence of the infection and a course of antibiotics was started immediately. Luckily, the disease did not appear to have spread further, so the prognosis for this bird seemed cautiously positive! Over time the bird gained strength, the infection stabilised, then subsided and eventually after five weeks of care & attention we were able to release it back to the wild in a healthy condition.

# S.O.S. Scrapbook



**LEFT:  
Chimney Stack**  
That's Maz up the chimney in the process of rescuing the two Tawnies in our front cover "Double Trouble" story.



**RIGHT:  
Sharp Eyed**  
Our pair of Great Horned Owls are always the first to produce young each year - this sharp-eyed owlet, just 3 weeks old, will grow at a rapid rate!



**RIGHT: Up, Up and away** We release many Tawny Owls back to the wild every year - the sight of one soaring back to freedom is always a wonderful to behold.



**ABOVE: Red Alert - Caught on Camera.** The inquisitive nose of one of our newest Red Squirrel kits investigates the big wide world...



**LEFT:  
Off you go then...**  
Volunteer Steve had the pleasure of releasing one of this Spring's crop of injured Tawnies after it had fully recuperated, choosing a spot close to the woodland where it was found - an exhilarating experience which always makes our job seem so worthwhile.



**RIGHT:  
Vera the Hooded Vulture comes to stay**  
We're delighted to welcome Vera to our midst. The species is on the Endangered List, and if we can find a partner, they may breed and enable us to donate some progeny back into the re-population programmes.



**RIGHT:  
Wash & brush up!**  
This tiny Little Owl arrived in a very sooty state after an excursion down a chimney. Soft hands and warm water soon had him looking his best again, ready for release back to the wild.

**RIGHT:  
Well, somebody has to do the paperwork...**  
General Manager Maz spends a good deal of her working life slaving over a hot keyboard and keeping the mandatory records in good order - not the most glamorous but certainly one of the most important of jobs.



# Rescue Update!

As we've said, our Raptor Hospital has been kept increasingly busy over the last few years as we become better known and vets, other wildlife rescue centres and members of the public contact us for help concerning birds of prey in distress.

Spring always brings an influx of baby birds which have fallen out of trees (branchers) to swell the usual patient numbers, which places quite a strain on our current resources. More birds in the hospital also means more birds in rehab and more birds being hacked out as they acclimatise to life back in the wild!

Luckily, as young owls grow rapidly and generally recover well from initial accidents with warmth, food and rest, normal service is resumed quite quickly in the hospital ward, as



*They look angelic, don't they? But the four young Tawnies, who arrived with us as bedraggled heaps, were soon taking to the skies in freedom when old enough to fend for themselves*

casualties recover, mature and are returned to their natural habitat. Patients gradually regain weight and condition to the point where they can be transferred to a rehabilitation aviary. In spacious, quiet accommodation the recovering birds can regain flight confidence and increase muscle tone and strength.

Eventually, the falconers will deem these birds fit enough to reside in a hack box at one of several secluded, peaceful sites local to the sanctuary. Here, recovered birds can take their first tentative flights out into the natural environment, whilst having a secure, protected roost and regular food supply to return to until they take the final flight out into the wild.

Every year brings its 'special cases' and in particular recently, a family of tiny Little Owl quintuplets which were exposed to the elements during renovation works at a local farm. Workmen found the family after removing the barn roof, by which time the parent birds had been frightened away from their young.

Dubbed the "Famous Five" the tiny progeny were brought into us cold and hungry, but otherwise robust, the parent birds having done an excellent job of raising them so far. The quins grew RAPIDLY and after only a few weeks

of warmth, food and general TLC were soon established in rehab and ready for hacking out!

On another occasion four young Tawny Owls were successfully transformed from tiny, wet bedraggled scraps to strong, fit adult birds displaying handsome adult plumage. The Tawnies were received into the hospital as separate "branching out" casualties, a few days apart, but recovered and matured together into a closely bonded group which were hacked out together shortly afterwards.

Although the sanctuary staff always try to return wild recovered birds to the territory from whence they came, this is not always possible for their own safety. However, our team then use their experience to release these birds in remote areas where establishing their own territory and pairing with partners within a few days of leaving the hack site to produce progeny stands a more than fair chance of success.

Without the continuing generosity of its supporters, the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary could not continue to offer such effective long term treatment and care to all the wild injured owls and other birds of prey admitted to its hospital. We hope that our reports of successful outcomes for large

percentage of the birds brought into our care are proof positive of the very real difference we can make, and hope that you will be able to support our appeal for contributions towards the cost of the extended hospital and rehabilitation facilities we need to deal with the demands that nature lands on our doorstep!



*The Famous Five came to us as tiny motherless mites, but over the following weeks they grew, fledged and matured ready for a successful release into the wild.*



# A Helping Hand



We have been lucky enough to receive a hard earned donation from one of our youngest fundraisers - eight year old Patrick Hagan, shown here with Cobweb and falconer Liz. He utilised his artistic talents building a portfolio of owl illustrations which he then sold to family and friends to raise an astonishing £50.00 in the cause of conservation. Well done Patrick - & thanks!



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

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

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

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

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