



Suffolk Owl Sanctuary News

Stonham Barns, Stonham Aspal, IP14 6AT
Tel: 03456 807 897 e-mail: info@owl-help.org.uk
www.owl-help.org.uk

Regd. Charity No. 1086565

General Manager Maz Robinson welcomes you to the new Suffolk Owl Sanctuary newsletter:

Hello! As we all continue to endure this torrid year, we'd like to throw some encouraging light on the results that your generosity has enabled Suffolk Owl Sanctuary to achieve, either directly as a donation or when you have placed an order with the Owl Barn Catalogue. Your magnitude has helped us maintain the rescue and rehabilitation of injured wild birds of prey throughout, and continue our broad efforts towards the promotion of wildlife conservation which you can read about in this newsletter. On behalf of my colleagues and the birds in our charge, I would like to take this opportunity to express how VERY grateful we are for your contributions. Thank you.

Maz Robinson, General Manager, Suffolk Owl Sanctuary

A very sticky situation



With her wing stuck fast to her leg after being caught in a glue trap, a combination of olive oil and weak solution of washing-up liquid released the wing of the unfortunate creature only to reveal the loss of feathers.

Midway through lockdown we took charge of a young barn owl that had been found caught in a glue trap. Glue traps present a huge risk to wildlife, especially birds of prey who will go down to snatch the rodents the traps are designed for.

If the traps are not checked regularly raptors unfortunate to fall foul of them in this way can suffer a slow, unnecessary death.

Luckily this barn owl was found in time and brought into S.O.S. Her left leg and wing were stuck solid to each other and

the wing feathers were also badly damaged by the sticky substance.

First of all we needed to get the wing unstuck

from the leg, so the affected areas were dribbled with olive oil which can release the glue, and then gently washed in a weak solution of washing-up liquid.

Over the period of a week we were gradually able to remove the vast



Her moult now nearly complete, this beautiful bird will soon be able to start exercising in preparation for her release back to her natural habitat, fit & flying free.

majority of the glue, enough that the owl could move freely. Unfortunately the process removed the natural oils from her feathers which became quite weak and lost their waterproofing qualities.

Though she had a very lucky escape, as a consequence of the weakened state of her plumage, our feathered friend is undergoing a long period of rehabilitation with us as her feathers are moulted and repaired enough for her release.

The process of moulting a full set of feathers takes up to 3 months, during which feathers are shed and re-grown over the entire body in a regular pattern, which only allows a few of the primary or secondary flight feathers to be shed at time.

Soon to be transferred to our new hack aviary once her moult is complete, she can then begin to stretch her wings and have the room to exercise and build up muscle strength prior to a safe release back to the wild.

Thank You!

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic escalating in the UK, Suffolk Owl Sanctuary had to close its doors to the visiting public through a crucial time of year which gnawed away through the important revenue window of Spring & Summer generated by visitors to the Sanctuary. As such, our main concern became our being able to care for all the birds in our charge for the duration of 'lockdown'

As a result of our Save Our Sanctuary appeal, so many of you stepped up to the plate, leaving us absolutely overwhelmed by your support! Without it, the future of the sanctuary was held in the balance and your generosity during a difficult and worrying time for everyone is applauded by all involved at S.O.S. Though not out of the woods yet, your support so far has provided us with the lifeline that has enabled us to function fully as we strive to survive. All of us at Suffolk Owl Sanctuary wish you and yours continued good health and safety, and a speedy recovery should you have been affected.

Age catches up with us all...



Along with Bug the Tawny, Alnwick the Long Eared and Loki the Snowy, Cobweb the Barn Owl shown here quartering the flying ground on display has captured the hearts of many supporters of our Charity, but now it's time for a rest...

Over the years, many of our supporters have adopted one of the beautiful birds of prey that reside at Suffolk Owl Sanctuary.

As many are pleased to tell us, this connection with S.O.S. has established a firm bond with nature which, although often at arm's length, has benefited those involved in many ways.

During their time with us the adopted birds have made a terrific contribution to the success for the Sanctuary - always on view to the public, willing to demonstrate their individual characters and prowess in flight and patiently starring as the centre of attention on school visits.

But after many years on what you

might call the front line, we're pleased to announce that we're devoting part of the Sanctuary to a suite of 'retirement aviaries' where our older birds can take things easy in repayment for their years of service. Located in a quiet corner of the centre, they'll each have plenty of space & perching, a good view and a place to hide away when the mood takes them.

So soon their places on the adoption roster will gradually be taken by some of our younger birds, and we hope you'll feel inclined to follow the fortunes of the replacement youngsters when the time comes!

Keeping up with Stanley

Even during these unprecedented times, enrichment programmes still form an important part of the Sanctuary's daily schedule.

Enrichment involves setting tasks to encourage our captive bred birds to adopt natural behaviours and forms a crucial part of good husbandry - an absolute necessity for both physical and psychological welfare.

One example of a bird which is particularly responsive to enrichment is Stanley the striated caracara.

These scavengers are very intelligent birds and their learning potential rivals that of corvids such as crows and ravens.

It is absolutely vital to Stanley's wellbeing, therefore, that he receives stimulation in the form of challenging exercises as part of his care.

To this end, the falconers are constantly setting him new tasks, which he is swift to master. In his natural environment, Stanley



When it comes to searching for a tasty morsel, Stanley's ingenuity knows no bounds!

would lift stones and vegetation to find food and forage on rubbish tips to expose tasty morsels.

When Stanley is interacting with the falconers, he is encouraged to extract titbits hidden in toys and plastic bottles, lift cones and dustbin lids to expose food items and will also investigate a dummy rock pool to extract some fishy reward!

Kindness to kestrels



Kestrels & compost don't mix - this exhausted young chap fell foul of ticks whilst resting for too long on the heap,

S.O.S. receives a wide variety of species through our Raptor Hospital, but there has been a higher incidence of kestrels received during the last twelve months.

The above young casualty was found alone in a garden compost heap. On arrival at the hospital, we discovered 24 ticks attached to his body, mainly around the eyes and mouth, which needed urgent removal.

Ticks can seriously compromise a bird's health, feeding on its blood and causing a loss of condition. Chronic infestations can progress to anaemia and death.

As the bird was very young, there was an increased possibility that it might imprint on the staff members looking after it.

Our head falconer Rufus explained: "Involvement with baby birds is always kept to a minimum by using screens and minimal time, but birds are intelligent and, having strong survival skills... they soon associate our presence with food. If kept in pairs or small groups, they will instead grow up identifying as a kestrel, react fearfully to us and imprint on each other."

As another local rescue facility also had a young kestrel in its care, the two chicks were placed in a rehabilitation aviary together which encouraged their optimum condition prior to their successful release, together, back into their native habitat.

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We later received a young kestrel from the local water company, having been found in one of their outdoor sewage processing plants. Possibly hunting around the perimeter of one of the tanks and losing its balance, the poor bird fell in and was soaked through, covered in "unmentionables" and unable to fly!

As no signs of injury, disease or starvation were discovered, fluids were administered to assist hydration and alleviate shock and the bird was bathed in warm water and much-diluted washing-

And the Award goes to...

Suffolk Owl Sanctuary's industrious workforce was recently nominated and successful in the "Animal Charity Team of the Year" category in the 2020 Petplan & ADCH Animal Charity Awards!

These annual awards "celebrate the outstanding work of staff and volunteers in animal charities and not-for-profit organisations across the U.K., Ireland and Channel Islands."

The exceptional work of the S.O.S. team including the falconers and our admin & reception team was recognised during the online presentation ceremony, and we received a splendid modern trophy.

This year 6,000 nominations were received for the awards, so we are extremely proud that our amazing team was recognised on this national platform, and it came as a real boost to the team, arriving as it did in the middle of our 5-month pandemic shutdown.



Pictured clockwise: Maz, Rufus, Nick, Tim, Rob, Jess, Beckie and Jennie. Also in the team but not shown are Pete, Catherine, Karen, Lorraine, Andrew and Sharla and volunteers too many to mention but every one contributing to winning the award.



After falling into a sewage processing plant, it was an early yet tenderly administered bath for this young fellow in order to get him on the road to recovery

up liquid, a solution ideal for removing contaminants from plumage, although it unfortunately removes waterproofing oils from the feathers temporarily.

The kestrel therefore needed several days' box rest to dry off properly and preen. Through this process, the bird was able to redistribute oil from a gland at the base of its back into its plumage.

From day one, the kestrel ate well and was swiftly moved to an outside aviary for a period of rest and recuperation before released back into the wild.

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Found in a field and unable to fly, we suspect the damage to this kestrel's wing was likely the result of attack by another bird of prey. Our vet strapped up the wing until the swelling receded and after a period of TLC and rest in a rehab aviary, the bird made a full recovery and we were able to release him.

Tawny tribulations



Tawny owl chicks feature regularly in our raptor hospital admissions ward and although fewer victims of road traffic accidents have appeared at the sanctuary due to the reduction in traffic during lockdown, other casualties are still making frequent appearances.

Two very young tawny patients were treated in our facilities recently. The first was found in a compost heap looking emaciated and weak and covered in fly eggs - the initial prognosis for such a tiny bird was not promising and it was suggested that it had suffered a prolonged period without food, possibly due to abandonment by its parents. In this scenario, a chick will often exit the nest site prematurely, driven by its desperation for food.

Luckily, this particular baby was discovered in time to be a perfect candidate for recuperative care under the watchful eye of falconer Jess.

After a soothing bath and the meticulous removal of fly eggs, the chick felt settled enough to take tiny pieces of food soaked in a support fluid and started to gain weight.

The second of the recent baby casualties was a tawny owl which had been found upside down in a bramble bush!

After being extricated from this predicament, the chick could not



be left alone to fend for itself in the hostile surrounding environment, so was admitted to the sanctuary's raptor hospital.

Here it was able to receive regular and frequent meals, warm accommodation and protection from predators.

More importantly, it could be "buddied up" with the other young tawny casualty to provide the companionship and close physical proximity so vital to a successful outcome for both chicks.

When a little older, the tawny pals were hatched out together in a purpose built release aviary until they felt confident enough to strike out independently.



These two young Tawny Owls were rescued in various states of disrepair, but the opportunity to rehabilitate them together helped prepare both for a successful release

No, no... not Corvid-19!!



Rey the Raven appreciates the joke about Corvid-19!!

Rest assured - the ongoing progress of the dreadful Covid-19 virus is NOTHING to do with corvids!

During the chaotic early weeks of the evolving pandemic, enquiries were received from concerned members of the public, anxious about a possible link between the human virus and ravens, rooks, magpies, jackdaws and crows - collectively known as corvids.

Enquirers were assured that this group of birds are not carriers of the disease and that there is absolutely no link between the two, other than a spelling mistake!

Though this brought a smile to our faces, it did raise the issue of the health status of wild birds and animals within the context of coronavirus.

According to the Animal and Plant

Health Agency (a department of DEFRA), there is to date no evidence of the presence of the virus in wild animals or birds within the U.K. nor any suggestion that the disease may be transmitted to humans by such hosts.

The Agency states that there is a risk that wildlife could carry any virus on fur or feather for a short period of time, but that risk is no more heightened now than at any other time, so please do not be deterred from assisting an injured or emaciated wild owl or other bird of prey due to covid concerns although make sure to wash your hands for at least 20 seconds after handling any wildlife, whether or not it is injured.

The Gift of Life



A gift in your Will can support the wildlife conservation work of Suffolk Owl Sanctuary

For more information

please contact

The Trustees

**Suffolk Owl Sanctuary
Stonham Aspal IPI 4 6AT**

03456 807 897

info@owl-help.org.uk

www.owl-help.org.uk

Charity Reg. 1086565



This emaciated Barn Owl is typical of many visitors to the hospital over the winter months but the food, a generous dollop of TLC and the space & time to recuperate can work wonders prior to their release back to an environment where food is more prevalent.

Winter is coming...

With winter just around the corner, we have already begun to see a number of younger birds brought into our Raptor Hospital suffering from starvation and dehydration. This is nature's way of determining the "survival of the fittest" by making sure that only healthy birds survive to breed and pass on their genes to the next generation.

In the wild, birds will often overcompensate for this and lay more eggs than would be required to replace the parents. Birds of prey start incubating the first egg as soon as it's laid, which means that the chicks don't all hatch at the same time and in larger clutches it can mean a week or more between the first and last chicks hatch.

This gives the first chicks to hatch a massive head start, so by the time the youngest has hatched, it is often at the bottom of the pile for food and means that the younger chicks often die of starvation. For our native birds of prey, most youngsters have been out looking after themselves for a few months now, gaining experience hunting for prey and learning where to find shelter in bad weather. But with bad weather days being more frequent as winter approaches, some struggle to find enough food.

Young bird feathers are not as waterproof as adult feathers, so constant rain can be a killer as the birds strive to hunt in rain - the juvenile's plumage gets wet in the process and feathers can't dry before the birds have to try hunting again. Whilst we do everything we can for all the birds that are brought into the hospital, some come in so weak that they are unable to eat by themselves. We can intervene and tube feed to get essential nutrients into them, but regrettably this sometimes comes too late and a number may die if we are unable to nourish them in time.

Out to hack!

As part of our work rehabilitating rescued raptors, having suitable facilities to give these birds the best possible chance of survival once released is crucial.

A hack pen allows us to do a soft release of birds which are approaching the time when they are fit and well enough to return to the wild. With this method, we continue to care for the birds close to their release site, allowing them to develop their own survival abilities naturally, as if they had fledged in the wild. The problem is that birds of prey can imprint to a human caregiver very quickly, so it is imperative we keep our distance during the process.

S.O.S. has just completed a new hack pen which has been erected at a secret location on a farm in the region and this one in particular has additional benefit of lots of space.



Our new soft release hack aviary is purpose built for larger birds such as this rescued buzzard which will soon be ready for release.

Over recent years the incidence of larger birds brought into the Sanctuary has risen. Buzzards, the occasional Harrier and now a Red Kite means that this type of bird needs more room in which to exercise and build up muscle strength in preparation for a return to the wild.

Our new hack aviary is located in a secluded spot, away from human disturbance also allows the rescued birds to get used to being in the wild environment while still being protected from the elements and having food provided for them.



This spacious hack aviary provides room for birds with larger wingspans to fully exercise and build up muscle strength prior to release.

Our release aviaries are located in rural locations close to habitats ideally suited to the birds about to be released.

When the time is right the door will be opened and the birds will be free to come and go as they please. Meanwhile we will continue to put food out for as long as is deemed necessary.

Special thanks go to our falconer Jess and her partner Gav, who built the hack pen over a recent, very wet weekend.

It's important that the hack pens are sited in a habitat conducive to the species to be released. Here Nick and his colleague put up a hack box in a wooded copse, ideally suited to the needs of the tawny owl which will soon be reconnected with its natural environment



Not so long ago, we took into care 5 young little owls who when fully fledged were almost ready to be returned to the wild

The suitable site for their 'soft release' hacking pen for these particular little ones was located in a private barn, near wild meadows. Over a period of weeks it was supplied with food (in this case dark mice - a recognisable food source) and the door left open. While the young owls lacked the required skills to hunt, we continued to supply food over a period of weeks until we felt the little owls had dispersed into the surrounding area.

This picture at the bottom was taken from a video "trail cam" which is a very handy way of checking to see if youngsters are still visiting, and this one caught the owlets coming in to feed. You can see it 'live' together with many other video stories on the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary channel on YouTube. Don't forget, you can keep up to date with all our activities by following us on Facebook or subscribing to our free digital newsletter send out by email every other month.

Building practical projects like these are made entirely possible by your donations - we thank you for your generous support which enables this important conservation work to continue as we strive to survive.

One of the five baby Little Owls brought into our hospital, like his companions it was given time and space to fledge before moving it to the perfect site for a soft release aviary in a remote dilapidated barn.



Here a 'trail camera' designed to remotely film wildlife activity captured the Little Owls as they acclimatised themselves to a return to the wild - visit our YouTube Channel to see the activity!

Conservation Round Up.



Vulture culture

Part of our remit as a Charity is to promote the importance of wildlife conservation.

From the central message of the demonstrations and talks we give to the visiting public to our role in maintaining a network of nearly 300 wild owl nest boxes for barn & tawny owls, the conservation theme is always at the heart of what we do.

Whilst the nest box scheme enables us to do something practical for native birds of prey, we are also working to promote awareness of the need for the conservation of endangered species in other parts of the world.

Vultures are an ecologically vital group of birds that face a range of threats in many areas. Populations of many vulture species are under pressure and some are facing extinction.

We are passionate about these intriguing birds and the need for their conservation and we are lucky to have such wonderful species in our charge - truth be told, they always capture the hearts of visitors to the Sanctuary as they learn of the urgent need for vulture conservation.



Rüppell's Griffon Vulture

A recent addition to our Vulture squad is the magnificent Ruby, also a Critically Endangered species which is found in the Sahel region of Africa, between the Sahara to the north and the Sudanian Savanna to the south. The Rüppell's vulture is considered to be the highest-flying bird in the world, with confirmed evidence of a flight at an altitude of 11,300 m (37,000 ft) above sea level.



Hooded Vulture

Globally threatened and Critically Endangered, Hooded Vultures are found South of the Sahara through Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Though smaller than other African vultures, the hooded vulture can rise on thermals more quickly and is often the first to spot a carcass.

Project Lugger

S.O.S. is also proud to be involved with Project Lugger, a conservation scheme established in 2017 by a group of bird of prey enthusiasts anxious to halt their rapid population decline of the falcon. This has decreased by 4/5ths over the last 50 years as a result of persecution and illegal trapping in large numbers for use in illicit trade. The aim of the project is to build a gene pool of youngsters which will be exchanged with other breeders in the UK until a stable breeding programme is established and then donated to the Governments of their host countries of India and Pakistan to establish breeding programmes domestically. We currently have two breeding pairs at the sanctuary and will donate progeny to this worthy project.



We join Project Lugger

Bob Dalton, the inspiration behind this important conservation scheme, presents Maz Robinson with the Certificate of Appreciation awarded to S.O.S. for our engagement with the project.



Lugger Falcon

Maisie the Lugger Falcon has been with us since May. Over the Summer she has built confidence, fitness and skill on the wing - invaluable attributes that future generations from the breeding programme will need in their armoury to survive in the wild.

S.O.S. news snippet!

Face masks have now become part of our everyday attire, but how many of these new accoutrements will prove a hindrance rather than a help in ecological terms?

Wildlife has already been impacted by discarded single use face masks and plastic gloves and environment agencies predict that it is just a matter of time before we start to see wildlife washing up dead with masks in its stomach or gagged around its beak. World Wildlife Fund Italy is of the opinion that if even only 1% of the masks were in Italy were disposed of incorrectly and dispersed in nature, this would result in 10 million masks per. month in the environment."

To reverse this trend, we all need to consider our means of disposal of PPE and reduce our dependence on single use items. Reusable, washable face masks are perfectly adequate for the majority of people needing to cover their face in public and proper hand washing can effectively reduce the necessity for plastic gloves. Let's protect our precious environment whilst protecting ourselves!



Lockdown Rundown



Blessed with beautiful weather though lockdown meant we saw no visitors for months!

Like all charities throughout the U.K. Suffolk Owl Sanctuary was plunged into unknown territory by the impact of coronavirus in March of this year.

Nevertheless, although closed to the visiting public for nearly 5 months, life went on inside the centre as we cared for the many birds in our charge.

This included the all-important running of the raptor hospital and reception of the flow of injured wild owls and other birds of prey for treatment and rehabilitation, as well as the careful maintenance of all aspects of the centre's captive-bred bird population, including those comprising the education and flying teams.

Equally important was addressing the needs and care of our wonderful staff, who despite the pressures regarding personal safety which everybody endured during the early days of the pandemic, diligently and patiently went about the jobs in hand.

That said, the need for extra bio-security measures and the necessity for staff and volunteers to adhere to social distancing and strict sanitising regimes caused many problems, and a few scratched heads.

The first was the need to make space to work in and we maintained heightened individual security by dividing our staff into two teams, each working turn and turn about for a period of three weeks while the other team were furloughed. This effectively doubled the space available so staff could distance safely from their colleagues, although it also doubled the duties of each team! However, as the work schedule was not impacted during lockdown by flying displays, falconry courses, school visits, administration and the accommodation of large numbers of the visiting public, more time was comfortably allocated to bird husbandry.

Staggered start times and rest periods, additional cleaning protocols, and copious amounts of PPE and informational literature all contributed to ensuring the safety of all staff.

Though a facet much missed by both staff and our avian residents, the enforced 'downtime' with no visitors enabled us

to build and needfully prepare a safe & secure social distancing environment in anticipation of welcoming the public back.

To this end, when we re-opened S.O.S. again at the end of July, informative signage had been discreetly placed throughout the centre, a one-way system helped guide visitors around the aviaries safely, extra seating was provided at the flying ground and sanitising stations were in place. Since opening visitors have been unobtrusively welcomed by temperature checks and NHS Test & Trace facilities whilst perspex screens have been set up within reception and free face masks available on demand. We could do no more!



The Trustees would like to pay tribute to all at S.O.S. - falconers, ground staff and those looking after the administration - who worked so hard to keep the show on the road through difficult times. When we re-opened they ensured that the visitor experience, though slightly tweaked, was as exciting and unique as ever and our wonderful collection of birds enjoyed many hours providing an awe-inspiring display schedule too!



Before and after: Nick and Gav cleared space to allow visitors room for social distancing



It was 25 years ago today...



Above: The hub of the visitor centre as it was being constructed in 1995. Right: Rheia the European Eagle Owl and Mir the Steppe Eagle - our oldest residents who have been with us since day one and both remaining in good health!



The last weekend of August this year marked the 25th anniversary of the opening of our organisation at Stonham Barns. When we opened in 1995 we were originally called The British Bird of Prey Centre. The name was changed to Suffolk Owl Sanctuary and the company established as a charity in 2001 when our primary function changed its focus to the need for the rescue and rehabilitation of injured wild raptors throughout the region.

Since then, with the help of a legion of staff and volunteers over the ensuing years, together with the generosity of many, many private donors and corporate sponsors, S.O.S. has developed to serve the community with a variety of initiatives to promote the conservation of wild owls and other birds of prey. These include our own dedicated bird hospital; provision of free education facilities for schools; and supporting the volunteers of the Thornham Owl Project which

builds, repairs and monitors an extensive network of wild owl nest boxes.

On what was a special occasion for us, significant thanks go out to those who were with us at the very beginning in 1995. These include Mike Raphael, John Finnis and Crispin Worledge who originally designed and set up the centre, together with Julie Finnis who looked after the administration. This small team was supported by Robbie Murray and Jacque Freear - both still connected to the centre, god bless 'em - who tackled the many details and headaches of setting up a new enterprise.

At the same time our friends at the Raptor Trust including Clive and Chris Britcher provided copious advice and information for our publicity material. Of course, we mustn't forget the grand old lady of S.O.S., Rheia the European Eagle Owl and the imperial Mir the Steppe Eagle, who both remain resident at the centre today.

We would like to pay tribute to every single one of those members of staff and the volunteers past & present who played their part in bringing Suffolk Owl Sanctuary to fruition and maintaining it over the last quarter of a century. Over the years we have overcome a myriad of challenges and problems, but with thanks to the founders and the members of our current team, together with the generous support from members of the public over the years we strive to survive as we move onwards and upwards in our endeavours.

Bugs go wild at the Sanctuary

Despite the restrictions that the coronavirus imposed on day-to-day activities at S.O.S. during lockdown, some positives emerged from this period of gloom!

Wildlife has not enjoyed such a seismic shift in its fortunes for a long time. A huge increase in numbers and diversity of



mini beasts and bugs have resulted from a reduction in the carbon emissions of traffic and the noise and activity of the

human race.

Bees, bugs & butterflies were able to pollinate and propagate in peace in back gardens throughout the country as well as in the wild environment.

Within the sanctuary grounds the falconry team encouraged the establishment of insect communities by developing natural conservation areas and expanding existing wildlife corridors throughout the centre.

As the past summer progressed, within a matter of a few weeks, these beautiful little oases of calm were teeming with insects including lacewings, ladybirds, hover flies, sawflies, grasshoppers, beetles, spiders woodlice and earwigs.

Bees, moths and butterflies were also abundant and we hope that their confidence does not take a dent, leading to their disappearance, once more frenetic human activity returns to the Sanctuary!



Donations remain central to the survival of S.O.S.

They can be sent to

**Suffolk Owl Sanctuary,
Stonham Aspal IP14 6AT**

Tel: 03456 807 897/ Opt. 3

www.owl-help.org.uk

Thank you!