



# SUFFOLK OWL SANCTUARY NEWS

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

*Welcome to 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. Each is largely funded through YOUR generous donations, so 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 our endeavours would have been possible. Thank you for your support - and come and see us again soon!*

*Andy Hulme*  
General Manager, The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary



## Now You See It...

Over the last 20 years, our trucks have chugged unobtrusively about their business. They have been invaluable for ferrying us to local schools to spread the conservation message, transporting display equipment to country fairs to raise our profile and as a workhorse enabling access to the remote locations of our Wild Owl Nest Box project sites.

But, it was decided that our long-standing trusty truck should be ignored no longer and that its potential as a piece of travelling artwork should be utilised!

So a local company were engaged to transform the truck from the mundane to the spectacular! The new livery features images of the sanctuary's own birds and red squirrels and the eye-catching design turns heads wherever it travels, instantly recognisable to the public and schoolchildren on its progress throughout the region.

## New Arrivals



We knew that summer was on its way with the arrival of these three young Tawny owls - see page 2 for more

## 12 Months In A&E !

The S.O.S. Raptor Hospital here at Stonham is a busy place! Over the past 12 months there has been no decrease in the demand for its services.

As the only specifically designated raptor hospital in the region, its medical facilities are in constant demand. Not only is there a steady stream of casualties brought in to the hospital by members of the public, but the centre offers a vital support service for local vets who are unable to offer the specialist treatment, environment and time so necessary to successful rehabilitation outcomes.

At the Sanctuary the expert knowledge of our experienced falconers, appropriate nutrition and recuperative peace and quiet offer the very best chance for full recovery to injured birds.

Throughout 2014, of the hospital cases received almost 50% were fully recovered, rehabilitated and released back into the wild under the stewardship of the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary - an impressive result in terms of highly stressed and nervy avian casualties.

For the last 12 months the story has been a familiar one, bringing a preponderance of Tawny Owls to the hospital, of which 60% received their injuries in road traffic accidents; the remainder falling victim to predators or as casualties of "branching out" from their nest prematurely.

Little Owls and Kestrels have also appeared regularly at the hospital over the past year along with injured Tawnies, these three species accounted for 75% of hospital admissions. Again, collisions with vehicles, starvation and predator attacks were responsible for their injuries.



Bruised, battered and bewildered - three recent visitors to the Raptor Hospital at S.O.S.

Less accident prone, apparently, were Barn Owls, Sparrowhawks, Peregrine Falcons and Common Buzzards to whom we have also played host in the last 12 months.

Although successful outcomes are always very satisfying, it is regrettable that road traffic accidents still account for horrific injuries to many birds. This is one area perhaps in which humans could contribute to meaningful hazard reduction for these iconic birds.

## School's Out

Always mindful that the next generation will one day become the guardians of the countryside, Suffolk Owl Sanctuary is always keen to take part in the regional Schools Farm and Country Fair, which is held locally.

2015 marked the 12th. year that this event has been organised by the regional agricultural association, engaging schoolchildren and their teachers in all aspects of farming, food production, conservation and the countryside.

Suffolk Owl Sanctuary's falconers, owls and other birds of prey played host to 4,000 children aged between 7 and 9 years of age during the course of the day!

This enormous fair is now firmly established as the premier schools event in our farming county where pupils can meet farmers and conservation and countryside experts to learn about all aspects of their rural environment.

Each school is paired with a farmer steward who acts as their guide and enabler for the day, talking them through the various activities and explaining exhibits.

Suffolk Owl Sanctuary staff introduced the children to Spirit the Barn Owl and Dodge

the Kestrel, and explained the importance of wild birds of prey as an indicator of the state of their surrounding habitat and the wider environment.

Teachers attention was drawn to the fantastic facilities on offer to school groups on a trip to the owl sanctuary and the variety of S.O.S. resources and activities which are available to support the curriculum, including owl pellets for dissection, class games, craft projects and worksheets.

The Sanctuary's junior newsletter, the "Stonham Screecher" was also popular with children and adults alike. You can download a free copy of The Screecher from our website at [www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk) along with some extensive owl & conservation projects for FoundationStage & Key Stages One & Two pupils.

The children were also able to witness a demonstration of falconry in the show's main ring as well as sheep shearing, gun dogs and ferret racing.

This event afforded the Sanctuary another valuable opportunity to meet local schoolchildren and inspire their interest in owls and conservation - reinforcing the messages that, over the course of the last year, have been delivered by S.O.S. to a record 2,300 pupils throughout Suffolk on school visits.



## Simply Red

2015 has not only seen an increase in bird numbers, but the sanctuary's red squirrel colony has also expanded. During April three kits have been born to one of our eight adult red squirrels, after a gestation period of 38 days.

The young are very vulnerable when born, being deaf and blind and totally dependent on their mother. Within 21 days their bodies are covered with hair and their eyes and ears open after three or four weeks.

As usual there were no obvious signs in the enclosure that babies had been born until about 40 days later, when they are able to eat solid food. After that, they take trips out of the nest to find food, still returning to suckle from their mother until fully weaned at 8 to 10 weeks.

Red squirrels that survive their first winter have a life expectancy of at least 3 years - in the wild, many live for up to 7 years; in captivity, up to 10.

The Sanctuary's squirrels have plenty of room to roam and play, with three large enclosures connected by tree top level corridors. These allow plenty of room for individuals to "enjoy their own space" - red squirrels are solitary animals and their social organisation is based on dominance hierarchies within and between the sexes, so plenty of spacial independence is essential.

The sanctuary's new editions will move on once they become mature; in order to maintain a healthy gene pool, young from this colony will be

## A Fistful of Babies

The advent of spring is always marked at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary by the hatching of chicks!

This year, though slightly overshadowed by another high profile birth, the owls and other birds of prey have also produced heirs!

Three Tawny owl chicks were safely hatched by one of the Sanctuary's most popular adoption owls, Bug and his long term partner Beak.

Phoenix and Huron, the Great Horned Owls again produced one chick, Rhea and Sam the European Eagle Owls produced one chick and Peregrine Falcons Freya and Meteor also increased their number by one.

Becky and Flint, the Lanner Falcons again laid three eggs, which all hatched successfully, but the real surprise was the chick raised by Maluka and Bekash, the Malaysian Brown Wood Owls.

Aged 17 and 14 respectively, Maluka and Bekash have spent the last 12 years together and were thought to have been approaching retirement, having not raised a chick for 5 years.

However, royal baby fever must have gripped them too as a youngster was unexpectedly discovered in their nest in mid April!

All progeny and parents are doing extremely well and sanctuary staff look forward to supporting all this year's babies to full independence. As is normal, progeny are usually circulated to other bird of prey centres and breeders to help maintain fresh bloodlines which sustain healthy stock levels for the future.



*A pair of Red Squirrel 'kits' snuggle up together*

swapped for squirrels from other conservation projects or donated to one of the successful release schemes now established throughout the country, by conservation groups such as the Red Squirrel Survival Trust in Anglesey and the Wight Squirrel Project. Assisted by such schemes, the red squirrel continues to recover in population in specific areas of the U.K. - particularly in Scotland, the Isle of Anglesey and the Isle of Wight.

This correlates with the decrease in grey squirrel numbers, in turn accelerated by the increase in pine marten populations, the grey squirrel's main predator.



# Passionate About Pellets!

Suffolk Owl Sanctuary has developed a rich programme of outreach work with schools and offers a wide variety of educational resources to support classroom learning. Most popular with teachers of all age groups are owl pellets for use in dissection sessions. One such request came from a school in Yorkshire only last month, about which we had some typically positive feedback, complete with pictures!

Peter Riley is a former teacher and award winning author of science books for schoolchildren of all ages. He is well known in the academic world as a "science evangelist" who has always wanted people to know that "science is much more part of our world than we realise, It's all around us all the time and if we can enjoy it, we will understand our world a lot better:"

So, when his granddaughter and avid Harry Potter fan, Tabitha enthused about her latest science project - habitats - Peter saw an opportunity to bring some excitement to the classroom!

He asked the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary to help by despatching enough pellets to involve all of Tabitha's class in a dissection session. By studying the contents of the fragmented pellets, pupils would be able to ascertain what owls had been eating and, thus, which small mammals were abundant in their habitat. The pellets were sterilised and foil wrapped before being sent out and were accompanied by photocopyable bone charts and record sheets for listing and drawing pellet contents.

Tabitha's class used eyebrow tweezers and cocktail sticks to disassemble their pellets and the evidence gathered indicated that most owls had been feeding on mice, with one having eaten a shrew. The children were delighted to discover the shrew's lower jaw bones "with its red-capped, crocodile like teeth!!"

Peter reports that the children were "totally engrossed and the teacher said it was one of the best lessons he had had for years!"



## Access All Areas

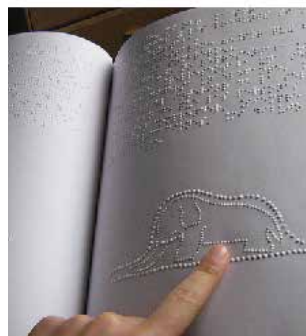


As our supporters will know, Suffolk Owl Sanctuary's central mission statement is one of "conservation, rehabilitation and education".

Staff are continually working hard to ensure the educational remit is enhanced and complemented by the evolving recreational facilities at the Sanctuary and that these are accessible to all visitors. Over the winter months, chief fundraiser, Maz Robinson has been working hard to raise funds to improve the design and content of the site to better meet the needs of disabled, deaf, hearing impaired, blind and sight impaired visitors. This has resulted in the inception of the S.O.S. "See Hear" project, through which we aim to elevate the visitor experience to the gold standard through improved communication and support

and a variety of new innovations.

Phase One of the project has seen fundamental access around the whole Sanctuary improved for buggy and wheelchair users with the completion of level, tarmac paths - these extend into the new seating enclosure at the flying ground which also has improved wheelchair space and carer seating. A new bird hide has been built in the Woodland Walk with a wheelchair specific viewing hatch and entry ramp. Braille information boards have been installed around the aviaries and the help of a BSL signing interpreter has been enlisted to aid communication of the falconers' flying display commentaries. Resources have also been developed in the Sensory Garden - the pretty, relaxing area has been enhanced with a delicate water feature, subtle wind chimes and unique wooden sculpted seating particularly suited to class gatherings and storytelling.



For younger visitors, a new play area has been built comprising of custom made wheelchair friendly equipment



with increased capacity for supported play, with a soft safe surface beneath. Sponsorship for the completion of the play area was generously provided by ABC Charitable Trust, Paul Bush Foundation Trust, Branch Out, Grey Court Trust, Moondance Foundation, People's Postcode Lottery, Pets at Home, David & Claudia Harding, Hamilton Wallace Trust, the Grocer's Charity, the Ivo Trust, Warburtons, Rowan Bentall, and the Roger Vere Foundation. We are extremely grateful for all their contributions.

Fundraising is now ongoing to finance Phase Two of the See Hear project. This will hopefully include a large outdoor touchscreen information point with subtitled images, a hand held or smart phone enabled audio guide of the Sanctuary and an S.O.S. subtitled DVD which will be freely available to teachers and those working with the deaf.

## A Lasting Legacy

To mark its 150th anniversary in 2014, the Yorkshire Building Society set up a Lasting Legacy Fund and invited fifteen charities to apply for a share of a special fund to assist them in supporting their community and leave a "lasting legacy". More than six hundred charities applied by submitting an application for a specific project which would have a "tangible outcome and lasting benefit to a community within the U.K."

Suffolk Owl Sanctuary submitted its proposal for the development of a Sensory Garden within the Sanctuary grounds to significantly improve the visitor experience for disabled, deaf and blind visitors. Not only a quiet reflective place to sit, the garden would offer wheelchair accessible picnic tables, a delicate water feature, atmospheric wind chimes, tactile wooden seating and highly scented, butterfly friendly borders.

The YBS Lasting Legacy Committee chose a shortlist of thirty charities and invited colleagues, customers and members of the



Andy receives the award from a representative of YBS public to vote for the three projects that they felt most worthy of a substantial donation. Suffolk Owl Sanctuary was a popular choice with voters and an award was granted towards our project in April.

YBS Corporate Responsibility Manager, Pauline Giroux commented "We are delighted to be able to support these fifteen projects and we are looking forward to seeing the benefits they will bring. To be chosen from over 600 charity projects shows that they have really resonated with our colleagues and members of the public and will deliver a tangible benefit to their local communities."

## 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 adopters receive this special lapel pin with our compliments as a "Thank You!"

## Birds On Film....

A central element of the S.O.S. "See Hear" project will be the creation of a DVD explaining the work of the sanctuary, its conservation projects and introducing many of the resident bird species.



Dean & Mary 'act natural' for the camera

This resource will be used both as an educational tool by the Sanctuary and offered as a valuable support resource for classroom learning in schools. The script of the DVD will also be subtitled to warrant it useful to those working with or teaching the deaf.

To this end, the sanctuary has been the subject of filming by Stu McOmie, a local cinematographer for the last few months. Stu has worked closely with the falconers to gain the access to the owls and other birds of prey necessary to complete his film and has immersed himself in every element of the Sanctuary's work routine to produce some intimate footage of "behind the scenes" procedures.

All areas of the sanctuary's work have been captured on film for posterity from the excitement of the audience during a flying display to the earnest concentration of a novice participant in a falconry course, from the reflections of a young and enthusiastic volunteer to the endeavours of the highly experienced handlers of the Wild Owl Nest Box Project.

The completion of the film will not only produce a valuable educational tool, but also a rich archive of the sanctuary's development for the benefit of future generations.

Fundraising continues apace to enable Stu to complete his work within the next few months.

## H is for Hawk.....

The Sanctuary was again thrust in front of the camera in early February when the B.B.C. Countryfile team, complete with presenter Ellie Harrison arrived to gather some footage in support of a topical story.

That story was of author Helen McDonald's struggle to come to terms with the death of her father and the training of her Goshawk, Mabel, which provided a healing, cathartic outlet for her grief.

Helen spent a day at the Sanctuary with Ellie and the falconers filming some environmental context for her story, which culminated in her flying a Goshawk owned by Head Falconer, Matt Lott.

This was the first time that Helen had flown a hawk since the death of her beloved Mabel and the expression on her face suggested that it is one flight that she will not forget!

Local school children were able to share the day with Ellie and Helen and after marvelling at Willow the Harris Hawk in flight, took part in a lively question and answer session with General Manager, Andy Hulme.

Helen's award-winning book "H for Hawk" has been acclaimed as one of the most emotive and evocative reads of recent years: watching the genuine response of the children to these awe inspiring birds proved a wonderful affirmation of the co-existence of man and nature.



ITMA Andy, his son Alfie, Willow, Helen and Ellie



In the words of Laura Beatty - one of H for Hawk's many reviewers, "...it deepens what we have always known; that we live side by side with each other, as we do with the creatures around us"