



# S.O.S. NEWS

Catch up with all the news on the **S.O.S. Weekly Blog** at [www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk)

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

The Newsletter for the Friends & Supporters of The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary *Issue 19 Spring - Summer 2012*

**On behalf of the S.O.S. team, General Manager Andy Hulme says **WELCOME** to the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary's Spring/Summer 2012 Newsletter**

*Hello everyone, and welcome to our spring and summer newsletter!*

*Well, the winter months have been extremely busy with several building projects in hand. Firstly we (I say 'we' but it was mainly Matt, if I'm honest) built a completely new compound for our Red Squirrel colony, comprising three separate enclosures all joined together via mesh tunnels suspended in the air so the expanding group have plenty of exercise area. Secondly, we refurbished our the rest of our Woodland Walk area and with the aid of new member of staff Liz Haggar, added some new small animal enclosures which will enable us to extend the scope of talks we can give to visiting schools. And, of course, winter is the time when we conduct our annual overhaul of all the aviaries in preparation for the new season ahead.*

*As usual, all members of staff have contributed to this newsletter, so please read on - I hope you enjoy their news.*

*With kin regards and further thanks for your continued support,*

*Andy Hulme*



### **Second Time Lucky!**

*We suspect it's quite rare for an owl to be rescued more than once in its lifetime, but one of our recent patients had already been caught in, and then saved from, a fire - only to find himself on an unexpected journey when he got tangled in a roof rack and taken on a journey 30 miles from home! However we're pleased to report that after some TLC and time to recuperate, we were able to return him safe and well to his home territory. For the full story, see our regular blog at [www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk)*



*Left: The foyer enables us to illustrate some of the cases we've dealt with in recent months*



*Below: Thanks to your generosity, the new hospital facility provides the space and equipment for us to deal cleanly & efficiently with all manner of injury or avian problem*

### **Our New Bird Hospital Opens**

One of the Sanctuary's major projects in 2011 was the total refurbishment of our raptor hospital, which was in dire need of replacement, this thanks to the donations of "Owl Adopters" like you, along with the efforts of Chief Fundraiser Maz who canvassed fantastic support for the hospital project from corporate sponsors Pets at Home and others, including Freecycle, Ideal Interiors, Just Learning and B&Q.

It wasn't just the hospital building itself that needed replacing, it was also desperately in need of new furniture & equipment and thanks to you all, and the hard work of the volunteers who helped with the erection and installation of the project, the new hospital was finally completed at the beginning of December and looks both smart & functional both inside and out!

We also would like to say thank you to our local vet Paul Cannon from

Stowe Vets. Paul looks after all the seriously injured raptors that come into us who need veterinary care and he has been extremely kind in donating an ophthalmoscope for use in checking the eyes of injured raptors. It is especially important for us to check to see what is going on behind the eyes of those that have had head injuries and this piece of specialist equipment gives a clear picture of the 'Fundus' of the eye, which is the interior surface of the eye opposite the lens: this means that we can determine the health of the retina and the 'vitreous humour' (the clear gel that fills the space between the lens and the retina) and whether there has been any trauma caused by injury.

The hospital enjoyed a Grand Opening on completion and the local press came along to witness Paul cut the ribbon as Andy made a short speech of welcome to those who gathered to celebrate the occasion.

### **YOUR ADOPTION RENEWAL**

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 the future care & conservation of our injured wild avian friends.

**Please call 08456 807 897 or visit [www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk) to renew your adoption or adopt-an-owl for a friend. Thank you!**

## Rescue & Rehab Report for 2011

Despite the fact that our raptor hospital was undergoing a complete reconstruction last year, the job of looking after and rehabilitating wild birds of prey continued none-the-less.

Of the birds that were brought in to us in 2011 we were able to rehabilitate around 47%, which is a very good percentage. Of those that couldn't be rehabilitated most were humanely put to sleep by our supporting vets at the Stowe Veterinary Group to prevent any unnecessary suffering.

We're also pleased to report that numbers were down on the previous year, for a number of a number of reasons that would seem to bode well for the future. The increase in grass margins on farmlands is probably contributory to the fact fewer birds are hunting on the roadside and so are avoiding being hit by passing vehicles, though the biggest cause of injury to our birds of prey is still road traffic accidents, which this year accounted for the damage to approximately 71% of the birds brought in to the Sanctuary.

Also, it would also seem that the message to leave foundling chicks where they are, rather than picking them up and moving them or bringing them in to us, has reached a wider audience - we had very few brought in to us last year.

Species-wise, the hospital saw a greater intake of Tawny Owls than any other. Of the balance, some had got themselves into awkward predicaments - one of the Tawnies was actually found in a kitchen and another was wedged in a tree, but thankfully they aren't situations that occur very often. The hospital also had a fairly even intake of other species, including Little Owls, Barn Owls & Kestrels and, more rarely, one Marsh Harrier and a Sparrowhawk that was found in a chicken coup!



*This Little Owl arrived concussed and had obviously met with an immovable object but recovered from a badly bruised eye and was returned to the wild.*

## Joining Forces - S.O.S. teams up with the Thornham Owl Project to extend the nest box scheme for wild owls

As the sponsor of an Owl at Stonham as part of our Adopt-an-Owl scheme, you will perhaps know that some of your donation goes towards the funding of our East Anglian Nest Box Project.

Established in 2000 and thanks to your generosity, we have gradually surveyed and then built, sited, erected and monitored a network of wild owl nesting boxes to replace the diminishing

destroyed a great many of the natural cavity nesting sites favoured particularly by endangered Barn Owls in areas of flatland.

The work of this volunteer group has flourished over the years to the point where it has erected over 250 boxes, maintaining a programme of seasonally repairing and cleaning boxes and methodically recording details of



*A volunteer removes last year's detritus from a Barn Owl boxed perched high in the branches of a remote tree in preparation for the new breeding season*

number of derelict barns, outbuildings and natural nesting cavities favoured by owls and other birds of prey in the region.

Altogether this has proved a substantially worthwhile exercise to date, so we are very pleased to now be amalgamating our efforts with another regional group - The Thornham Owl Project - in order to strengthen, consolidate & extend the important work of providing safe & secure lodgings for wild birds of prey, especially those species which are under threat.

The Thornham Owl Project was started in 1997 with the aim of achieving a very similar set of objectives, especially recognising that the advent of Dutch Elm disease coupled with the damage caused by severe gales in the 1960s & '70s had

occupation & breeding success, in the event of which progeny are expertly ringed for census purposes.

But as the modern age of austerity has dawned, so a shadow has been cast



*"To Boldly Go..." - all the nesting boxes are sited well off the beaten track*



More modern man-made structures can provide idea sites for nesting boxes, as with this Barn Owl box nesting high of the eaves of a grain storage unit.



Each box is numbered for record-keeping purposes and a friendly "Do Not Disturb" notice attached to it.



The result of our nesting box initiative should result in fresh broods of wild Barn Owls like this one

across the survival of the Thornham Owl Project as local authorities have been forced to review and trim their budgets and curtail many of the facilities which have been donated to, and on which the project has been, hitherto dependent.

At this point, it seemed logical that our two organisations pool resources in order to effect to continuance of both our programmes as a single venture, which is now under way. Courtesy of your sponsorship, S.O.S. is providing the vehicles, tools, materials and workshop facilities that we, together with the two principals of the Thornham Owl Project, Roger Buxton and Kevin Boyce, will continue to factor into a hands-on project which will positively benefit wildlife in general and owls in particular over the years to come.

Recently, our Conservation Officer Dean went with a couple of the Thornham Owl Project guys to commence the annual survey of existing nest boxes in preparation for the start of the new breeding season. Each box inspected was carefully examined for debris left over from last year's nesting material and for signs of any unwanted visitors which might deter this year's breeding pairs from nesting there, and also tested to ensure that the boxes were still secure after a year out in all kinds of unpredictable British weather.

Our combined scheme includes nest boxes for Little and Tawny Owls, but reacting to news of recent sightings of Barn Owls in the specific area being surveyed, Barn Owl nest boxes were also sited in the vicinity. Once erected, the new boxes were numbered for record keeping purposes and a 'do not disturb' sign put up, with the explanation that there may be owls nesting there.

Nest box schemes like this are an extremely important part of our "Saving Britain's Owls" conservation initiative as they encourage wild raptors to breed and offer safe environments for them to nest in. We are especially pleased about the opportunity to join forces with The Thornham group on this project and thank you for the support you have given us, which make it all possible.

## Breeding Success

Breeding birds of prey forms part of our contribution to ensuring that there are adequate fresh bloodlines available for future regeneration projects, but as we like to keep our demonstration birds in pairs, it fulfil part of the natural life-cycle of those in question..

Thankfully 2011 was another good breeding season here at SOS and due to the unusual hot weather during March

and April last year, some of our pairs laid eggs a couple of weeks early.

The European Eagle Owls, Tawny Owls, Little Owls and Boobook Owls all produced youngsters and the Red Kites had two progeny

Our pair of Snowy Owls laid eggs, but for the second year running they were all clear, which is not surprising when you think the Snowies are twenty and twenty one years old. In human terms they would have been drawing their pension for a good number of years.



Top: our pair of Red Kite chicks - very downy at the time, but now sporting the very elegant rust plumage of the species. Below: One of our young Peregrines was hand-reared - this helping hand at feeding time is all part of the process.

One of our pairs of Harris Hawks reared two youngsters of which we retained the male and named him Montgomery Burns, keeping up our tradition of Simpsons' character names.

We had two firsts, Freya and Meteor our Peregrines producing four young, three females and a male. We kept back and hand reared the male and a female for future breeding and another female to fly - she was named Hnossa, which is a Nordic god and the daughter of Freya.

The second 'first' was our pair of wild disabled Hobbies. who produced two young and we retained the young female for educational talks and visits as well as flying demonstrations. She was named Swift and has developed into a diminutive but beautiful & very agile flyer.

## 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 kindness of supporters like YOU, which is why we are so grateful for every bird you adopt and every donation you are able to give. Thank you!!



**HELPS** us dispense free conservation literature



**HELPS** feed a rescued owl for a week



**HELPS** provide secure space for injured owls to fully recuperate



**HELPS** settle the bills after each visit to the Vet



**HELPS** towards the cost of a school visit



**HELPS** build, erect & maintain a wild owl nestbox

**To renew your adoption today, please return the enclosed Adopt-an-Owl form or call us on 08456 807 897**

*Thank you!*

## A Narrow Escape

Our good friend Maz recently took over responsibility for the Raptor Hospital and almost immediately had an unusual case to deal with...

On the 21st January, a Common Buzzard was brought in to the Sanctuary by a doctor who was out having a country walk with his son. They found the unfortunate buzzard under a bush and the immediate nature of its condition - bloodied wings, belly and foot - suggested that it had been mauled by either a fox or a dog.

First impressions weren't good when I examined the bird and I wasn't at all hopeful for its survival. However, as it wasn't possible to get the buzzard seen by a vet until the following day, I elected to take it home with me overnight, where I kept it warm and regularly administered fluids to avoid dehydration. I was actually more than somewhat surprised to find that it was still alive the following morning and immediately made the first possible appointment with the vet.

X-rays proved rather shocking: the bird hadn't been mauled at all - it had been shot! The nature of the injuries also indicated that it had been shot while on the wing. The poor bird had not only sustained a badly broken wing, but the x-rays showed clearly that it had been shot in both a leg and the stomach. Apart from the obvious implications of being shot, the buzzard could easily have died from shock or from poisonous lead getting into its system - fortunately, it appeared that tissue had grown around the lead shot and had sealed it from the rest of the bird's system, thus saving it from lead poisoning.

I really felt the bird had already battled so hard to live that I had to give it the best possible chance to make a complete recovery. The vet recommended a high dose of Metacalm, which is both a painkiller and anti-inflammatory and strong antibiotics for two weeks.

He also advocated that the buzzard be confined for three weeks so that it didn't damage the healing wing bones. Broken wings can be very tricky and it very much depends on where the wing is broken as to whether it will ever support flight again. Fortunately, in this case it appears that the main wing bone had supported the broken bone, allowing it to callus over and heal.

The raptor spent several weeks in one of the Sanctuary's specially designed rehab aviaries, where it could recover in a calm and quiet environment. I'm really

pleased to report that the buzzard was finally released in a suitable environment early in April. It has a lovely, quiet wooded area, with plenty of ideal hunting ground and the land is owned by a farmer who thankfully has a great deal of respect for our native birds of prey. I'm really hopeful that the buzzard will thrive here and, who knows, even settle well enough in the future to raise a family!

### Important Notice!

*Shooting birds of prey is illegal and carries a heavy maximum fine of £5,000!*



*The two white dots on this x-ray of the injured buzzard indicate where it had been shot.*



*Volunteer Pete takes time out from the seemingly never-ending building and refurbishments tasks to*



*Alls well... It wasn't long before the Buzzard got acclimatised to his new surroundings which should provide ideal for his requirements.*