



# SUFFOLK OWL SANCTUARY NEWS

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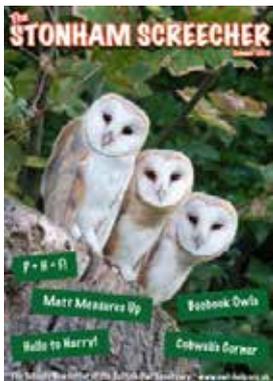
Our new General Manager Maz Robinson says **WELCOME** to the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary Newsletter.

*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.*

*I would also like to thank my colleague Catherine, who has compiled many of these stories and those you can read on our blog at [www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk).*

*Finally I would like to join the staff, volunteers, Trustees and supporters of S.O.S. to say a huge thank you to my previous boss and the General Manager here for the last 17 years, Andy Hulme. We all acknowledge that Andy did a fantastic job as he nurtured our organisation from its fledgling days to its maturity. It was a labour of love for him, and although he has now moved to pastures new, we will never forget the diligence with which he encouraged us all to respect, and always give our first & best attention to, the birds within our charge alongside the wider aims of the Charity. Thank you, Andy.*

**Maz Robinson**  
General Manager, S.O.S.



We produce The Stonham Screecher as a free young peoples newsletter for schools. If you'd like a copy, please contact Catherine on 03456 807 897 or email her on [info@owl-help.org.uk](mailto:info@owl-help.org.uk)

## STANDING ROOM ONLY!

Every Spring, our Raptor Hospital fills up quickly - its regular quota of injured wild owls and other birds of prey is augmented at this time of year by large numbers of baby owls which have fallen from their nests.



Two of the Little Owl triplets blown out of a tree chat about their lucky escape!

Often, these casualties - which are mainly Tawny Owls - have "branched out" prematurely from the roost in preparation for taking flight and have lost their footing. Early morning walkers and their dogs will come across these victims of their own



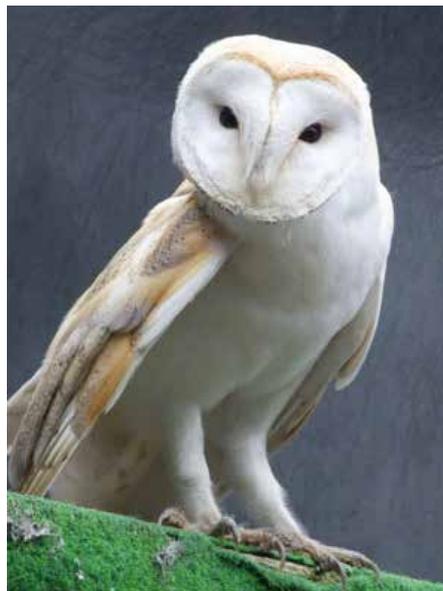
This Little Owl needed a trim so we could clean his wound properly



their nest during a branch fall from the tree they were nesting in; three Tawny Owls, all branchers brought in on separate occasions; and a Little Owl victim of a vicious crow attack.

The latter is a fate quite regularly suffered by owls and other birds of prey. Crows and rooks are quick to pick on a solitary bird, particularly if it has already taken prey, which provides an easy meal for the mobsters! The Little Owl recovering in the hospital sports a nasty bald patch on the back of its head as a result of the crow's persistent pecking. Luckily the commotion caused by this incident alerted a passerby to its fate and after a few days of peace, quiet and good food, a dodgy haircut is the only lasting legacy of its predicament!

Birds that have recovered enough to move outside to the rehabilitation aviaries include three road traffic victims - one Common Buzzard, one Tawny Owl and one Barn Owl. The latter has made fantastic progress, having undergone the stress of treatment at a local veterinary practice which involved pinning a broken wing - often too compromising an injury to cope with in a wild bird. Against all the odds, this owl is now building strength and muscle tone in its peaceful, isolated accommodation and will be hacked out in the coming weeks to enable its successful return to the wild.



This Barn Owl arrived with a broken wing. After surgery and a long spell of recuperation we were able to release it back to the wild in fine fettle.

curiosity and if they appear to be too cold or wet to recover, will bring them into the hospital.

Space is therefore in short supply in the hospital ward and extra boxes are being



## It was a wild and windy day...

*Liz prepares to release the Barn Owl safely back to the wild*

Although most admissions to our raptor hospital are injured wild birds brought in by members of the public, referrals from local vets are also responsible for a proportion of patients.

Early in February a dazed Barn Owl was brought to us by the Oakwood Veterinary Group from Norfolk - an adult male owl had been taken there by a motorist who had been driving in the area. He had been following another car which had hit the owl, but had not stopped - an avian hit and run!

The motorist was able to pick the owl up without any problem - a sure sign that all was not well - and took it to the vets for treatment, whose assessment was that the owl had been extremely lucky to have been just hit a glancing blow by the car.

No damage had been done to its wings - the usual compromising injury - and its legs also looked to be in good condition. The owl was

obviously stunned, which is why its close examination was relatively easy, but would recover quickly with rest, food, peace and quiet.

After an overnight stay "on the ward" at the vet's, the casualty was brought back to us for a period of recuperation. The special enclosed aviaries we have here offer the perfect environment for recovery and after two weeks of food and rest without fear of predators, the owl was ready to be released back into the wild.

Unfortunately, the owl's rescuer was not local, but a travelling sales representative from Devon, so he was unable to take part in the release himself. However, he was able to relay very precise directions as to where the bird was found to the falconry team, ensuring that the bird was returned to its own territory, exactly where it had been discovered and Liz had the pleasure of releasing it on a windy day in March.

## New kid on the block

Meet Tura, our new Siberian Eagle Owl. This wonderful captive-bred bird has been added to our collection of raptors from around the world, and when fully matured will take part in our Summer flying displays which help illustrate the diversity of owls and other birds of prey on the planet and their need for care & conservation. A bundle of fluff now, Tura will soon grow into an impressive and statuesque honey-coloured owl.



## WELL HACKED OFF!

When four young owlets' parents had been killed by a fox and the babies were left defenceless in their nest in an old tree stump, we undertook to look after them until old enough to be released back into the wild.



Heather, the owner of the land where the owls were found asked to get involved with the re-habilitation process and invited us to site some hack boxes on her land.

Hack boxes are wooden structures, not unlike owl nest boxes, but with the addition of a removable mesh extension, which allow the birds a vantage point from which to acclimatise to the natural environment when they are removed from our care.

The birds are initially fed in the hack box but once they grow stronger the mesh side is removed, allowing birds freedom of movement between the secure enclosed environment and the "big outside world"! As guardian of such boxes we continue to provide food for



the birds, within the box, so that they have sustenance until confident enough to leave and live independently.

The four Little Owls referred to above, plus one extra who was brought into the Sanctuary the day before we introduced the quartet to the hack box, were duly installed and were finally released. Indeed, one of them chose to stay close by, and Heather continues to enjoy his company on a daily basis!



## It's A Small World!

If proof was needed that our message extends beyond the shores of the U.K. then it was recently provided by an email we received. The request for assistance came from a resident of Transylvania who had unwittingly become host to a small owl which had entered her apartment through an open window. As we operate a worldwide online advice service just for such eventualities, falconers were able to assist with immediate advice.

In the first instance, we recommended relieving the bird's inevitable stress as soon as was practicable. The rescuer was advised to place the owl into a well ventilated, covered cardboard box - large enough to prevent the bird from further abrasive injury, but not so large that it had room to thrash about. In this case the owl seemed relatively quiet and inactive - a positive advantage for the rescuer, enabling transfer to the box, but a distinct worry in the context of the bird's physical state.

Once the owl was quiet and secure, we asked for some photos in order to aid species identity and ascertain injuries. Due to the wonder of the internet, images arrived instantly and with its distinctive feather tufts, bright yellow eyes and brownish grey camouflaging plumage, we saw it as a Screech Owl. Close study of the photos suggested that the bird was a mature adult and uninjured.

After a night spent recuperating, the rescuer reported that the owl seemed feisty - a sure sign that it was able and ready to return to its native habitat. We advised that the owl should be released in the immediate vicinity of the apartment block. Although an urban area, this was the natural territory of this bird and, as Screech Owls are monogamous, it was likely to have a partner close by and may even have been rearing young.

The owl was duly released at dusk, and the short adventure for both bird and human came to a successful conclusion - one example of the truly international capacity of the advisory services offered by S.O.S.!



## SCOOPED!

It's not often that we're scooped by the Daily Mail, but they beat us to it with some pictures by a local photographer who captured some amazing photographs of an unusual aerial hijack - a Kestrel stealing food from a Barn Owl on the wing!

The audacious heist was recorded by photographer Chris Skipper over the Norfolk Broads near Wroxham.

Chris said: "After watching the Barn Owl spend a good 30 minutes hunting for prey, it was returning to its chicks with food when a Kestrel decided he wanted the kill. The Kestrel just came from out of nowhere and attacked him."

At first the Barn Owl seemed unaware of the intruder's presence but before long the Kestrel was attempting to wrench the prey - probably a vole - from the Barn Owl's talons. There was a brief tussle and at one point they both had hold of the prey, but the kestrel eventually won the day.

Not long after, Chris was able to photograph the Barn Owl out hunting again.

Chris is curator and contributor to the popular Norwich Peregrines website, which showcases his wonderful images of the peregrines who roost and breed in the tower of the city's cathedral. "I try to get down to the cathedral once a week, weather permitting, to keep a digital 'diary' of the peregrines throughout the year."

If you'd like to see a selection of Chris's other superb bird photography, visit his Facebook page at [ChrisSkipperPhotography](#).



## A LASTING LEGACY

**As an owl adopter or supporter of S.O.S. we hope you enjoy receiving our newsletters and keeping up to date with our activities. Your donations are very important to the survival of our charity, so please read the enclosed leaflet on bequests and legacies if you would like to help us in the years to come. Thank you.**

## FIRST TIME VISITOR



We recently received a casualty into our Raptor Hospital the likes of which had never been seen there before!

A call was made to us early in the day to say that an unidentified bird of prey had been found by a lady walking on a nearby airfield. The bird did not have obvious injuries (such as a wing hanging down or difficulty walking) but its tolerance of humans in close proximity suggested that it was in need of assistance, so the rescuer was able to gather the bird up and visit her local vet.

The vet ascertained that there were no physical injuries but that the bird was suffering from starvation and that, in the

right hands, the bird would stand a very good chance of complete recovery. After crop tubing the casualty to kick start the digestive system, the vet transferred the mystery bird to our specialist facilities for care.

On admitting the patient to our hospital, we were stunned to find that the bird was a Rough Legged Buzzard - the first of its kind to come into our care. A migratory bird, only a handful come to the U.K. from Scandinavia every autumn, mainly to locations on the east coast.

Occasional large influxes of the species do appear, usually as a result of a particularly good breeding season which then causes pressure on food sources in the homeland. The birds will then migrate to coastal marshes and farmland along the coasts of Yorkshire, Northumberland and East Anglia. The Rough Legged Buzzard is lighter in colour than the familiar Common Buzzard with longer wings and a paler head. It is less prone to hover over its prey than the latter and also has heavily feathered legs, hence its name.

When settled into our Raptor Hospital, the patient was fed little and often in order to build up its weight. Progress was satisfactory and the bird was then be moved out to a quiet, secluded rehabilitation aviary for just over a week. Strength and confidence returned, and the buzzard was released as close as possible to where it was found - a site which provided the best habitat for its continued health, but is likely to have been home to a lonely mate, which we often find is the case.



**Winner! SOS Photo Competition**

*The judges of our annual Photo Competition felt that this magnificent picture of an equally magnificent Red Kite deserved the winner's accolade for our 2015 event. Congratulations to Ali Alsawaf for his picture "Still Life". You'll find all the other images on our website at [www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk) in the Blog.*

## YOUR OWL ADOPTION

As we hope you can see from this newsletter, the work of S.O.S. continues with dedication & enthusiasm, and we THANK YOU for Adopting-an-Owl to support our various projects. But if you haven't done so already, PLEASE renew your adoption - your donation is vital to helping us continue with our work directly & indirectly 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.



## COBWEB GOES A-VISITIN'

Not long ago, Liz went to visit the lovely residents at a local residential care home, taking with her some of our own bird residents - everyone's favourite Cobweb the Barn Owl and Auckland the Southern Boobook Owl, native to Australia and New Zealand.

In the winter months, when it's not so busy with visitors at the Centre, we like to get out and about as much as we can, taking our story about the need for the care & conservation of Britain's wild owl species with us. Visiting residential centres like this is very rewarding - the audience is always attentive and appreciative - and often come up with a fund of their own stories about wildlife in the countryside. We had a great time speaking about what we do at the Sanctuary, as well all of the weird and wonderful things that Owls do. Everyone had a fabulous time with one resident exclaiming 'They're so cute, I could cry!'