

## Barn Owl Monitoring *Progress*

Welcome to the third edition of the Barn Owl Bulletin and a friendly hello from two new members of staff, as Mandy T Andrews and I take on the roles of secretary and co-ordinator of the Barn Owl Monitoring Programme respectively. We are both very pleased to be working on this exciting scheme alongside such a dedicated network of observers and we look forward to becoming acquainted with you all in due course.

With five years of data from over 500 sites already analysed and information from the sixth arriving as we write, 2006 looks like being another great year for the Barn Owl Monitoring Programme, so a hearty thanks to everybody who's participated so far. As the run of data extends, we can begin to look more closely at annual variation in occupancy rates and productivity. Colin Shawyer's article in this newsletter emphasises just how much the fortunes of breeding Barn Owls can change from year to year and the report on the latest findings from our analyses of BOMP data discussed some of the factors that might be responsible.

Although the Barn Owl Monitoring Programme continues to benefit from an excellent network of participants, with an estimated 8% of the British Barn Owl population now being surveyed, the overall number of sites monitored dropped slightly in 2004. We're very keen to encourage more Barn Owl enthusiasts to participate in the scheme, particularly in Scotland and Wales

where relatively few sites are currently being monitored, and we would also welcome the registration of additional sites from existing recorders – please contact us at [barnowls@bto.org](mailto:barnowls@bto.org) (Tel. 01842 750050) if you are interested.

As far as the 2005 season is concerned, early reports suggest that much of the country has experienced a bumper year of the kind that is seen very rarely. We'd like to analyse these data as soon as possible, so if you haven't sent in your BOMP forms and records yet, please could you do so by the end of December. Remember that we are monitoring occupancy rates, so it is vital that we receive your summary sheets for all sites even if no Barn Owls were present.

Of course, the raw data are not all we like to see! Whether you are part of a local group or an individual recorder, we very much welcome your reports and observations on the season for inclusion in future editions of the Barn Owl Bulletin. Not only do they bring to life the records we receive, but they also give participants a feel for what is happening at other locations across the country.

As always, we are greatly indebted to all our observers, without whom we would not be able to track the fortunes of one of Britain's best-loved birds. Good luck with the next season!

*Carl Barimore*



Jill Pakenham

### In this issue ...

Latest results from BOMP analyses .....	2-3
BOMP Observations in 2005 .....	4-5
The Lennon Legacy Project .....	6
A study of Barn Owl foraging .....	7
News and information .....	8

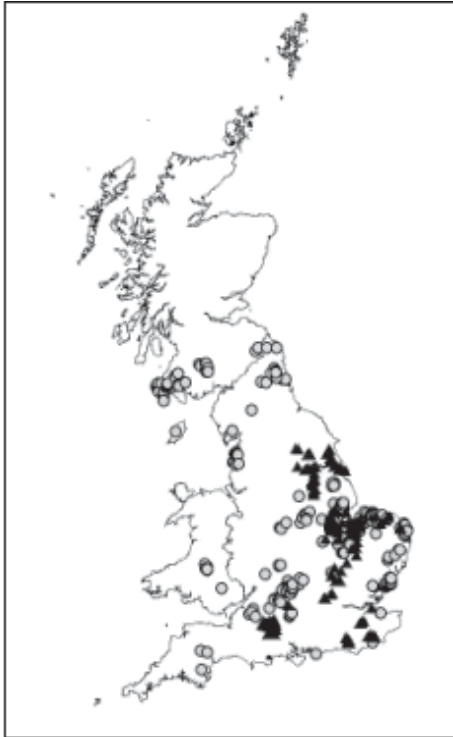
Articles for inclusion in future issues of 'Barn Owl *Bulletin*' should be sent by email to [barnowls@bto.org](mailto:barnowls@bto.org) or by post to:

Barn Owl Monitoring Programme, British Trust for Ornithology, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU

'Barn Owl *Bulletin*' edited by Carl Barimore  
Typeset by Mandy T Andrews

# BOMP results 2000-2004 – the influence of weather on breeding

Dave Leech, Humphrey Crick & Colin Shawyer discuss the findings of the first five years of the Barn Owl Monitoring Programme.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of BOMP sites monitored in 2004 (grey circles = BOMP Network sites, black triangles = WCP sites)

The 2004 breeding season saw BOMP participants heading out into the field for the fifth successive breeding season. Over the course of the year, 333 breeding sites were monitored by BOMP Network participants and a further 198 core and supplementary sites were monitored by the Wildlife Conservation Partnership (WCP), with breeding Barn Owls recorded at 322 sites in total (Figure 1). The latest estimates of Barn Owl abundance, calculated from data collected

between 1995 and 1997 by fieldworkers for the BTO/Hawk & Owl Trust *Project Barn Owl*, suggest that the size of the UK population currently stands at approximately 4,000 pairs. These figures suggest that BOMP participants are currently responsible for monitoring approximately 8% of the UK Barn Owl population – although the figures are slightly down on the previous two years (Table 1), this is still amazing coverage and we are extremely grateful to everyone who has taken part in BOMP thus far.

relatively high in 2000, 2002 and 2004 and relatively low in 2001 and 2003 (Figure 2). These results suggest that fewer pairs are attempting to breed in some years than in others, but why?

One factor previously reported in 1987 as affecting the propensity of Barn Owls to breed is the weather during the preceding winter. Low temperatures and high precipitation may cause a decline in the number or availability of small mammals, whilst also making it physically more difficult for owls to hunt and simultaneously increasing the energetic costs of maintaining body condition. Analysis of BOMP data with respect to temperature and rainfall over the winter period did indeed indicate that the proportion of boxes in which breeding Barn Owls were recorded fell following cold, wet winters, although there was no effect on the proportion of boxes at which owls were recorded as present. These results suggest that poor winters are not leading to increased mortality, but rather to a decrease in body condition that results in some individuals electing to suspend breeding until the following year.

Weather conditions were also found to influence laying dates, with owls initiating clutches later following cold, wet winters, and there was also some evidence to suggest that clutch sizes were reduced. Analysis of the BTO's Nest Record Scheme dataset over the period 1980-2002 indicated that cold, wet weather also had a negative impact on brood sizes. These results all support the hypothesis that such weather negatively influences body condition, leading to a reduction in the amount of energy that parents are able to invest in producing eggs and rearing young.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
<b>WCP sites</b>	159	170	197	200	198
<b>BOMP Network sites</b>	-	-	362	391	333
<b>TOTAL</b>	159	170	559	591	531

**Table 1.** Total number of BOMP sites surveyed annually 2000-2004.

## Could climate change affect the UK Barn Owl population?

The UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) was set up by DEFRA in 1997 to co-ordinate research into the repercussions of climate change at a national level. The UKCIP 2002 report suggests that temperatures in the UK will rise by an average of 2.0-3.5°C by 2080, with temperatures in summer and autumn likely to increase by more than those in winter and spring. However, the report also suggests that, although rainfall is likely to decrease during the summer months, it is likely to increase during the winter, with intense periods of winter rain becoming more frequent. These analyses of BOMP data suggest that increasing winter precipitation could have a pronounced effect on Barn Owl productivity, with a reduction in the proportion of pairs breeding, delays in laying and a reduction in average clutch and brood sizes, which may in turn have a negative impact on the size of the Barn Owl population in the UK.

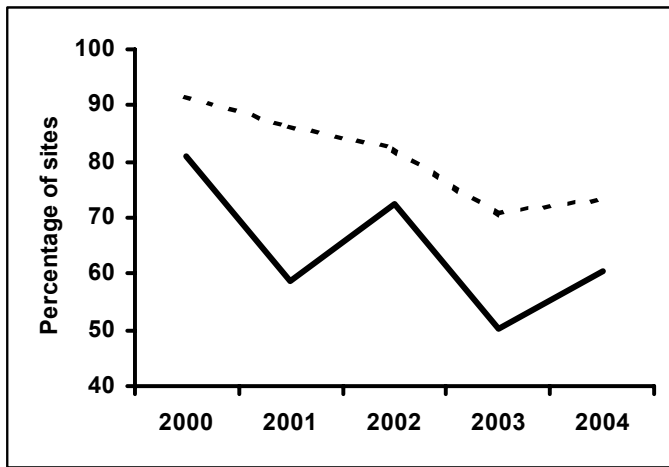
This hypothesis is also supported by research conducted as part of the Barn Owl Survey of Britain and Ireland where an investigation was undertaken by one of the authors, Colin Shawyer, into the impact of winter precipitation on Barn Owl breeding



## What causes breeding success to vary between years?

The proportion of BOMP sites at which Barn Owls were recorded as present, whether breeding or roosting, has declined steadily over the last five years. However, the proportion of sites at which breeding Barn Owls were recorded has fluctuated annually, being

productivity (in this case snow duration - a combination of low temperature and high precipitation). During the fifty-five year period from 1931 to 1986 annual Barn Owl productivity peaked and troughed on sixteen occasions (based on an index of BTO ringing). In twelve instances this corresponded with those years when snow duration was at its greatest (where it lay for 20 days or more). The effects of winter weather on both small mammal abundance and their availability to Barn Owls and the consequent impact on their breeding productivity does not seem to end here. 1958 was the wettest summer season (May to September) since 1879 and the only year in ringing history when productivity appeared so low that no Barn Owl pulli were ringed! Climatic extremes, which also include severe summer drought (like the one which occurred in 1976), also appeared to profoundly influence breeding productivity in Barn Owls. The continued collection of data by BOMP participants is vital if the potential impact of weather conditions and climatic change on this species is to be determined.



**Figure 2.** Annual variation in occupancy rates at BOMP sites (dotted line = presence of Barn Owls, whether breeding or roosting, thick line = presence of breeding Barn Owls).

### Does Barn Owl productivity vary across the country?

The proportion of BOMP sites occupied by breeding Barn Owls increased towards the west of the country. Westerly-biased occupancy rates of this species may be a response to milder winter weather, in particular higher temperatures, in the west of the country due to the proximity of the Gulf Stream, which may in turn influence survival rates and/or body condition. However, nest site densities are not necessarily standardised throughout the country and it is possible that the observed trends are driven by relative differences in nest site availability rather than by Barn Owl population sizes. Barn Owls were also significantly more likely to be present at WCP sites in areas of natural grassland and lowest in pastoral areas. Such a relationship might be predicted if less intensively managed natural grassland can support a higher density of prey species on which Barn Owl can feed, the closely cropped sward of grazing land providing less cover and less food for small mammals. However, similar habitat preferences were not observed at BOMP Network sites and further work is necessary to investigate the influence of habitat on occupancy rates. Neither geographical location nor habitat type were observed to have any effect on laying date, clutch size or brood size

### Other species breeding at BOMP sites

The additional species most commonly recorded at BOMP sites are Jackdaw (recorded as breeding at 14.9% of sites in 2004), Stock Dove (13.1%) and Kestrel (8.5%). Occupancy rates of all

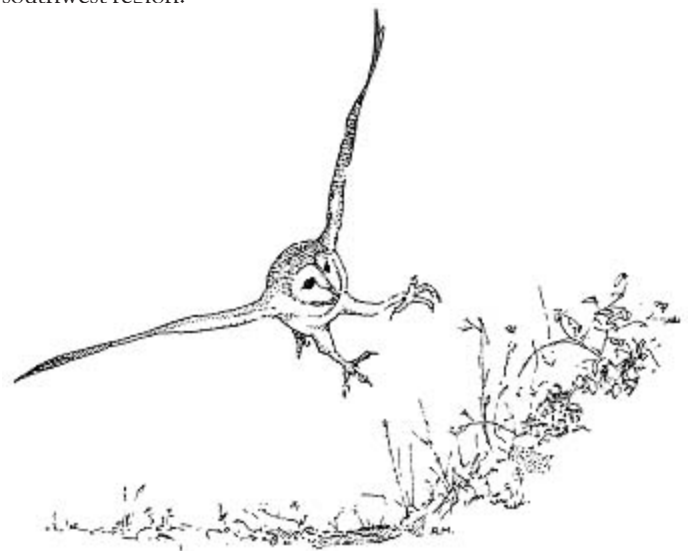
three species at BOMP sites have increased since 2000, and a corresponding increase in their population sizes has been recorded by the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey. While the increased occupancy rates of these species may reflect real population increases, it is also possible that the reduction in Barn Owl occupancy rates has led to a reduction in competition for nest cavities.

All three species were more prevalent at sites in the east of England. While this might reflect a real bias in the distribution of the population, atlas distribution data suggest that this might be true only in the case of Kestrel, and that Jackdaw is actually more abundant in the west of the country. An alternative explanation is that a greater proportion of the sites monitored in the eastern half of England consist of two-chambered pole boxes, which appear particularly suited to the three non-target species as well as Barn Owls. The southerly bias in occupancy rates of Kestrel could be due to a reduced level of competition from Barn Owls, as occupancy rates of the latter at WCP sites is highest towards the north of England, but this does not explain the northerly bias in Stock Dove and Jackdaw occupancy rates. Atlas data cannot shed any light on this result either, as populations of both species display a southerly bias. One factor that could be responsible for this relationship may be the availability of natural nest sites. If there are fewer trees and farm buildings providing nesting cavities in the north of the country, Jackdaw and Stock Dove may be more likely to nest in boxes erected for Barn Owls.

BOMP has successfully established a protocol for data collection that enables trends in population size and in breeding statistics to be calculated and is already providing valuable data for the conservation of the species. BOMP's value is shown by the inclusion of its results in the annual and widely disseminated document *The State of the UK's Birds 2003* that reports the current status and trends of bird populations in the UK, as well as in the annual report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, published in the journal *British Birds*.

### Thank you

We are very grateful to the Barn Owl observers who have visited sites for BOMP and to all the landowners who have allowed them access. We are extremely grateful to the Sheepdrove Trust for providing funding to permit the development and operation of this urgently needed programme, and to the Wildlife Conservation Partnership for their major part in the project design, fieldwork and planning. The WCP expresses special thanks to Major Nigel Lewis for assisting them and for providing much of the data for the southwest region.



Anthony Murray

# BOMP observations in 2004 and 2005

*Colin Shawyer of the Wildlife Conservation Partnership gives an account of his observations over the last three years of monitoring the 200 BOMP sites covered by the WCP and Nick Atkinson and Alan Levitt describe the fortunes of their BOMP sites in Northumberland.*

I was privileged in this the fifth year of BOMP to once again undertake the monitoring of the 125 core and 75 supplementary sites that I originally selected at the outset of the project in 2000. The core sites were selected from about 1000 I inspect annually. The sample was chosen so as to include sites which were regularly used for breeding, those used only for roosting and sites which had never been occupied. Sampling in this way enables the project, through rigorous and consistent monitoring procedures, to establish how the Barn Owl population in the UK is faring in terms of its population size and breeding success, on both an annual and long-term basis.

The statistical analyses performed by Dave Leech on the BOMP data reveals in detail what occurred in the Barn Owl population during 2004. The following is a summary of the more general observations I made during 2004 and 2005 at about 750 occupied sites widely scattered throughout England.

## 2003 - A reminder

In 2003 the first hint of anything unusual occurred during early nest monitoring in April with low occupancy by Barn Owls at traditional sites and adults in very poor condition where they were found. This was typified by female and male body weights 20%-30% below normal for this time of year, just prior to egg laying. Hopes that their condition would improve and that egg laying would begin later in the year were not fulfilled and, although some adults continued to occupy their traditional nest sites until July, most failed to put on any significant weight and moved away to roost elsewhere.

The year was characterised by a low abundance of small mammals, with fieldworkers in some areas reporting the complete absence of voles in their live traps the like of which they had never before experienced. The only real successes for Barn Owls occurred with some first-year birds which laid in July and August. I believe that these birds originated from late second broods in 2002 which required the first six months of the year to achieve sufficient weight to breed.



Weighing prey items from a small food cache.

Colin Shawyer

## Last year - 2004

Following one of the worst breeding seasons I had known in 20 years, particularly in the eastern half of England, 2004 showed a very welcome recovery.

Most pairs, some with new partners, were back at their traditional sites and perhaps surprisingly, given the poor breeding year in 2003 and potential lack of first year birds in the population, numerous newly installed nestboxes were occupied for the first time. Adult female birds were exhibiting good body weights of over 365g in April and, as a consequence, laying dates were a little earlier than usual, averaging 22nd April with good clutch sizes, averaging between five and seven and one as high as thirteen. Four to five young hatched at most sites and everything was progressing well by mid-June. All this was backed up by the presence of large and heavy prey items, mainly Field Vole and Wood Mouse, in nestboxes. Unlike 2003, the more unusual items such as Skylark and Starling, which are species taken more typically during years of food stress, were largely absent.

At the beginning of the third week of June everything changed. Three days of continuous gales and rain hit eastern England, particularly in Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Cambridgeshire and East Anglia. Nest monitoring during the last week of June revealed freshly dead young at over 30% of sites, some decapitated and partly eaten. This typically reduced brood sizes from five to two, reducing the overall average for the year.

Examination of the fresh carcasses for which the age could be determined revealed that their starvation weight at the point of death was two-thirds the typical weight of a healthy chick of the same age. Ageing from feather development in the carcasses of decaying or partly eaten young, which were found during later monitoring in July and August, provided further evidence that almost all chick mortality had occurred during the third week of June, during the last days of the storm. The inability of the adults to hunt during this period of unusual and extreme weather for the time of year was undoubtedly to blame for the deaths of large numbers of young, most of which were in their fourth-week, and in some cases it was the youngest, not the oldest of the brood which eventually survived.



Ageing and sexing - a male in its third calendar year.

Colin Shawyer

Some regions in Eastern England, such as East Yorkshire and Suffolk, seemed to have escaped the continuous nature of this three-day climatic extreme and most young appear to have received sufficient food with three to five young on average fledged successfully by mid-July. In south west and south east England, however, things did not even begin well. In some ways it mimicked what had been observed in Eastern counties in 2003 with traditional sites missing breeding pairs and others with adults present but failing to breed. I was left concluding that the vole cycle in these two regions was out of synchrony with the rest of England and southern Scotland where the season had at least begun well.

Double broods (partly aided by the pairing up of nestboxes), repeat clutches and consequent late moult occurred at about 15% of the 700 sites and whilst this was encouraging, it was not at the level seen in 2002 where, in one of our best-studied areas in eastern England, over 60% of pairs produced second broods.

## 2005

In recent years the Barn Owl data that arises from annual monitoring seems to add turmoil to the statistics and 2005 was no exception. Quite unlike the failure of many Barn Owls to breed in 2003, this year has seen quite the reverse. Average laying dates in most of England occurred in the first week of April, almost three weeks earlier than I have known in twenty years, and adult body weights and hence breeding condition were already high by late March. Consequently, clutch sizes were high and eventual breeding success was good and quite exceptional in the south west region where in 2004 it had been uncharacteristically poor. Most young in England were on the wing in mid-July.

The lack of moulted female wing and tail feathers at three quarters of sites in May and the early laying date suggested we could expect second clutches in July from a large proportion of the population. Surprisingly, they did not materialise, but the delayed moult in females which became apparent in July and August seemed to indicate that most were expecting to breed again. I predict that 2006 will be a low vole year in much of England (not Scotland and northern England) and that the decline in prey numbers came early in mid-2005, reducing the stimulus to breed a second time with females putting all their remaining energies into moult. In contrast to most of England, Scotland and parts of the North West did not seem such a good year in 2005 with low occupancy rates and relatively poor overall breeding success.

What will 2006 bring? Many thanks to all of you who have given me your support in 2005 or have sought help and advice. Do not hesitate to contact me at any time. Telephone **01582 832182** or email [colinshawyer@aol.com](mailto:colinshawyer@aol.com)

*Colin Shawyer*



Recording clutch size at a typical nest box site.

*Colin Shawyer*

Winter 2005



*Tommy Holden*

## Northumberland Barn Owls 2005

For some years now we have been hoping to see a substantial increase in Barn Owl numbers within our study areas to match the high breeding density which has been attained in one specific study area which has supported three to four pairs in 0.75 sq. km.

In 2005 this has finally happened. Another of our study areas is now supporting four breeding Barn Owls within one square kilometre of farm land managed under the Countryside Stewardship guidelines. 2005 has also seen a marked increase in the number of breeding pairs, with a number of nest boxes erected several years ago being occupied for the first time. Last year, ten breeding pairs were monitored, and this figure has now risen to 16. This is our most successful year to date, with a total of 51 owlets fledging from our artificial sites.

According to our records, the last 'vole year' in our study areas occurred in 2002. Assuming a three- to four-year vole cycle, we were anticipating 2005 would prove to be a year of increased Field Vole abundance. This has been borne out with the increase in the number of breeding pairs. We were therefore looking forward to a number of Barn Owls pressing on to raise second broods, particularly when some had laid eggs before mid-April. Unfortunately this did not occur - only one pair did so and even then they failed to complete the clutch, the solitary egg eventually being abandoned.

Two of our pairs laid replacement clutches. One pair switched to another nearby site after the failure of the first clutch while the other pair laid the replacement clutch in the same nestbox, which is usually the case. Both pairs reared broods which successfully fledged.

The year was also notable in that two young owlets in a newly occupied nestbox apparently disappeared - all that remained were two pairs of disembodied legs. The local farmer informed us that a solitary mink had been seen around the farm for a number of years and evidently the mink had found a ready source of food in the form of the three-week old owlets. This is the first instance of this kind of predation we have encountered.

*Nick Atkinson & Alan Levitt*



# Making 25 acres of Barn Owl heaven

David Ramsden, Senior Conservation Officer at the Barn Owl Trust, writes about the Trust's own experience in reserve management and the creation of Barn Owl habitat.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2001 something truly amazing happened at the Barn Owl Trust, at a time when we were completely preoccupied with the Foot and Mouth crisis and wondering if we would have to lay-off our four conservation staff. A cheque arrived out of the blue for a sum that was far in excess of any previous donation: a legacy from a lady named Vivienne Lennon.



Great Green Bush Cricket

Barn Owl Trust

*25 acres of intensively grazed sheep pasture into 25 acres of Barn Owl heaven.'*

Four years into the project, the transformation has been nothing short of amazing. Although we were always sure of the wider biodiversity benefits of Barn Owl habitat creation, seeing *really is* believing. To walk daily across a field of short grass for twenty years with no expectation that it will ever change and then to witness it being colonised by wildlife is little short of a miracle.

The field is now visited by many species of birds, including Swifts, Kestrels, Linnets and nesting Redstarts. There has been an explosion of other flora and fauna, such as Marbled White and Gatekeeper, Ringlets, Wall Brown, Dingy Skipper, Roe Deer, Musk Thistle, Field Pansy, White Campion, Dark Mullein and Oxeye Daisies, not a single individual of which was ever seen here before.

As well as new species, the pasture has seen hugely increased numbers of Swallows, House Martins, Meadow Pipits, ladybirds, Great Green Bush Crickets (pictured left), Yarrow, Great Mullein, Birds-Foot Trefoil, Field Speedwell and many other species.

Four years ago there were no Field Voles at all, now there are at least one hundred vole holes and we have already had Barn Owls nesting for the first time! Thanks to the Lennon Legacy Project, we can see, hear and even smell the benefits of Barn Owl conservation. The Barn Owl really is a fantastic flagship species for the conservation of a whole host of farmland wildlife.

So the next time you're saying to a farmer, "If you let that bit of grassland go rough it will benefit loads of other wildlife", you can *really* believe it.

To find out more or receive regular news of the project, contact the Barn Owl Trust (contact details on back page). Be sure to keep up the Barn Owl monitoring work but don't forget to do a bit of habitat advisory work on the side!

We had no idea what to do with the money, except that it had to be something very special. Only six weeks later, purely by chance, we discovered that the only field next to the Trust's base on the edge of Dartmoor was coming up for sale for the first time in 50 years. And so, to cut a long story short, in October 2001 the Barn Owl Trust became a landowner for the first time.

The field consisted of 25 acres of intensively grazed sheep pasture along with a small amount of woodland, a section of fast-flowing stream and some boundary hedges. The site used to comprise eight fields, but in 1970 all the internal hedges were grubbed out and most of the pasture became the usual ryegrass and white clover. As Barn Owl habitat, the field was virtually useless and no Barn Owls had nested in the area since the early 1960s.

Since 1985, the Trust had been encouraging landowners to create rough 'tussocky' grassland that would benefit Barn Owls along with a whole host of other wildlife; we had been advising *others* on habitat creation. The purchase of our own field had finally given the Trust a chance to do it ourselves, to practice what we preach! Thus became the Lennon Legacy Project: *'transforming*



The reserve as it is now

Barn Owl Trust

# A study of Barn Owl foraging

**Nick Askew** reports on the findings of his PhD on Barn Owl foraging ecology undertaken at the University of York, in association with CSL and English Nature, and details the plans for his new project to be conducted alongside the Barn Owl Trust, the Environment Agency and English Nature.






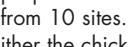
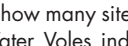
In October 2002 I began studying the foraging ecology of Barn Owls at York University, as was reported in the last Barn Owl Bulletin. Since then, things have been hectic. I've watched Barn Owls hunting for over 160 hours, captured 779 small mammals from 7680 trap nights, logged 1987 deliveries to nest sites, identified 1496 prey items from pellets, undertaken 1620 grassland surveys and found exactly 108 piles of Field Vole poo... So what has been discovered?

## Habitat

One aim of the project was to study the habitat requirements of Barn Owls and to assess the usefulness of the many agri-environmental schemes for their conservation. By linking observation of owls to data collected on their prey, we found that the sward height of the grass was most important for maintaining suitable conditions. By cutting grassy areas every two or three years, swards of 20-30 cm were maintained, which allowed prey densities to be maximised. We also studied the diet of Field Vole to aid management decisions when establishing new areas for hunting owls. The results showed that although the voles loved a grass-dominated diet, they weren't too fussy when it came to the grass species, and consumed different grasses in proportion to their availability. We are now working with the RSPB, FWAG and Barn Owl Trust to produce a series of leaflets that offer advice on the new Environmental Stewardship Schemes.

## Diet

We analysed pellet samples collected from nest (chick) and roost (adult) sites to study the decisions made by adult owls when hunting. We found a clear difference between the samples, with adult diets being dominated by smaller prey species in comparison to that of the chicks (see Figure 1). It seems adults keep the smaller prey for themselves rather than expending energy flying back to the nest for such a low return. This highlights the importance of understanding from where a pellet sample was collected when analysing future studies.

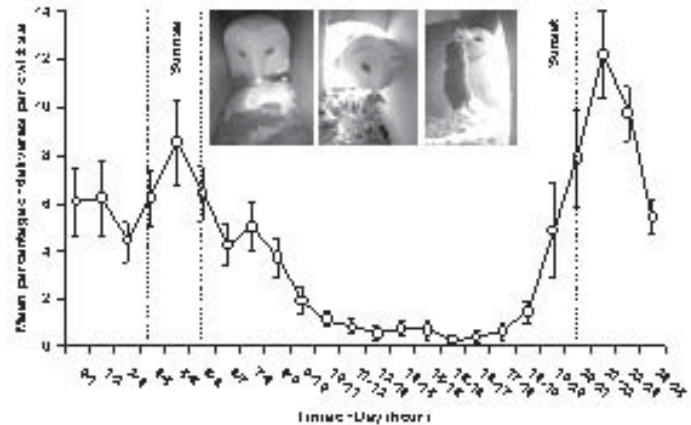
		Mass (g)	Adult	Chick
Water Vole		100		oo
Brown Rat		60		oooooo
Field Vole		21	o	ooooooo
Wood Mouse		18	oo	oooooo
Bank Vole		16	oo	oooo
Common Shrew		8	oooooooo	
Pygmy Shrew		4	oooooooo	

**Figure 1.** The proportion of seven small mammal species found in adult and chick diets from 10 sites. Each dot represents if the prey species was found more in either the chick or adult sample from each site. The number of dots displays how many sites the prey species was found in the diet, e.g. two dots for Water Voles indicates that two sites were found to contain Water Voles, and in each case they were both found more frequently in the chick samples.

## Hunting Patterns

We studied the Barn Owls' hunting patterns using equipment that recorded prey deliveries at nest sites. The owls were making up to

34 deliveries a day, with 54% during dawn and dusk, and the main peak following sunset (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The daily patterns of prey deliveries made by 10 pairs of Barn Owls using automated recording equipment. The pictures show examples of different prey species: mouse, shrew and vole respectively.

This study also showed some surprising results. By relating the timing and frequency of prey deliveries to climatic data, it appeared to show that owls were responding to changes in air pressure and were predicting when bad weather was on the way. This has been found in some bat species, which use their sensitive ears to detect air pressure changes. Could a Barn Owl's highly sensitive ear-drum do the same? Watch this space...

Through our observations we have also found Barn Owls to be very efficient foragers, changing their hunting patterns with respect to distance from their nest site. By making repeat visits to successful locations when within 1500m of the nest, the adults increase their chances of catching more prey from short-term productive areas.

## New Collaborative Project

Now, with the generous support of the Barn Owl Trust, the Environment Agency and English Nature, we are planning further research that we hope will greatly aid our conservation goals. We aim to use nest records to produce a landscape suitability map of Great Britain for Barn Owls. This map could then be used to help local Barn Owl groups target their efforts, which will hopefully mean more owls in boxes for us all.

However, the project now needs information gathered by local enthusiasts. As well as data from known breeding sites, we need to hear about sites that have never been used by Barn Owls – your bogey-boxes! Early contributors have included Colin Shawyer, working on behalf on the Environment Agency, and the Barn Owl Trust, working throughout Devon and Cornwall. However, the project needs more data from a wider area to achieve its goals, which is where we need you! If you would like to be involved in the project, or require more information, please contact me at [npa105@york.ac.uk](mailto:npa105@york.ac.uk). We are very keen to reassure groups that information will be kept strictly confidential, that files will be deleted upon project completion, that no maps will display nest sites and that all data providers will be acknowledged properly in project reports.

# BOCN Symposium

The latest Symposium of the Barn Owl Conservation Network is coming up at the Kindersley Centre, Berkshire, on Saturday 18th March 2006.

The Barn Owl Conservation Network is a project set up by the Hawk and Owl Trust to address the sharp decline in the UK population. The BOCN is dedicated to increasing Barn Owl numbers in the wild from 4000 pairs to 6000 pairs by the year 2012. Funded by The Sheepdrove Trust, it has created a network of specialists who offer advice to landowners on creating habitat and nesting sites for Barn Owls. The Network also acts as a forum for all the Barn Owl trusts and organisations in the country to exchange ideas and knowledge on studying and conserving the species.

The BOCN Symposium is only held every other year, so it is important not to miss out! Previous Symposiums have included presentations by the British Trust for Ornithology, the Hawk and Owl Trust, the World Owl Trust, the Barn Owl Trust, Defra and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

For details of the symposium, please contact the BOCN co-ordinator, Jason Ball, on 01488 674727 or e-mail him at [jason.ball@sheepdrove.com](mailto:jason.ball@sheepdrove.com).



Jill Pakenham

## Useful addresses

- **Sheepdrove Organic Farm**, Lambourn, Berkshire. RG17 7UU.  
Website. [www.sheepdrove.com](http://www.sheepdrove.com)
- **Barn Owl Conservation Network**, Sheepdrove Organic Farm, Lambourn, Berkshire. RG17 7UU.  
Tel. 01488 674727 Email. [enquiries@bocn.org](mailto:enquiries@bocn.org)  
Website. [www.bocn.org](http://www.bocn.org)
- **Hawk & Owl Trust**, c/o Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London. NW1 4RY. Email. [hawkandowltrust@aol.com](mailto:hawkandowltrust@aol.com)  
Website. [www.hawkandowl.org](http://www.hawkandowl.org)
- **Hawk & Owl Trust** (Publications), PO Box 530, Windlesham. GU20 6XZ.  
Details of their publications are available on request.  
Email. [hawkowlpub@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:hawkowlpub@tiscali.co.uk) Website [www.hawkandowl.org](http://www.hawkandowl.org)
- **Barn Owl Trust**, Waterleat, Ashburton, Devon. TQ13 7HU.  
Tel. 01364-653026 Email. [info@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:info@barnowltrust.org.uk)  
Website. [www.barnowltrust.org.uk](http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk)

# Taking in part in BOMP

The Barn Owl Monitoring Programme is an annual survey of Barn Owl nest sites across Britain, which aims to monitor nest occupancy and breeding performance. The survey involves checking Barn Owl breeding sites for nest occupation, as well as clutch and brood size, fledgling success and other information such as the number of prey items in the nest. Bird ringers may also collect data concerning the age, size and condition of both nestlings and adults.

The survey provides an exciting and rewarding opportunity to help in the research and conservation of one of Britain's most distinctive and well-loved birds. We welcome applications from anybody who would like to participate, so please contact us at [barnowls@bto.org](mailto:barnowls@bto.org) (Tel. 01842 750050) if you are interested. Please bear in mind, however, that Barn Owls have been given protection under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act and a permit is required to examine their nests (see below).

## Applying for a Schedule 1 licence

Barn Owls are specially protected at the nest under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) and it is an offence to intentionally disturb them without a Licence. This means that all participants in BOMP must have a Schedule 1 licence to visit Barn Owl nests for the purposes of nest recording. To acquire a licence, an application must be made to the BTO's licencing officer and two written references must be supplied. The references should be from a recognised authority such as a BTO regional representative, a bird ringer, a chairman of a bird club, a county recorder or an existing Schedule 1 holder. When applying for a licence you will need to provide details of the county and 10km square for all the sites that you intend to visit - this information will be kept strictly confidential.

Licences have to be renewed each year and a condition for renewal is that observers provide a summary of the previous season's activities. If you would like further information or a Schedule 1 application form, please contact Jez Blackburn ([jez.blackburn@bto.org](mailto:jez.blackburn@bto.org)), the BTO's licencing officer.

**For further information about the Barn Owl Monitoring Programme, please contact [barnowls@bto.org](mailto:barnowls@bto.org) or telephone the Coordinator, Carl Barimore on 01842-750050**

**British Trust for Ornithology, The Nunnery,  
Thetford,  
Norfolk IP24 2PU**

**[www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)**

**Registered charity number 216652**

**The BTO Barn Owl Monitoring Programme is  
generously sponsored by the Sheepdrove Trust.**