

## BOMP: A measure of success



Sit back and relax - Colin Shawyer ageing a young Barn Owl

all the Barn Owl monitoring that is being undertaken across the country! From time to time we come across long-time Barn Owl observers who are already undertaking monitoring at a local level, but have never contributed to BOMP. If you know of any Barn Owl enthusiasts or groups that are not aware of the Programme, please do tell us about them so that we can offer them the opportunity to get involved. Again, we're particularly keen to find more observers from Scotland and Wales, where relatively few sites are currently being monitored.

There has never been a better time to put up new boxes and set up new local projects. On page 5 you can read about the Suffolk Ornithologists' Group's new nest box scheme, the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project. The Group's efforts are an excellent example for anyone who is thinking about starting up a local project to follow. Nick Askew's article on page 6 reveals how Barn Owl conservationists now have an essential new tool at their disposal- a Barn Owl landscape suitability map of the UK. Nick has created a fantastic on-line resource for use by ornithologists across the country- now anyone can see exactly where to target conservation efforts on their local patch.

Thanks, as ever, go to all the BOMP observers and supporters, whose dedication has ensured that we have a successful annual monitoring scheme for Barn Owls. Good luck with the next season!

Carl Barimore, BOMP Co-ordinator

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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:

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

If anyone thought otherwise, the last six years of BOMP have certainly confirmed that there is no such thing as a 'regular' season for breeding Barn Owls. For some recorders, what appeared to be a very poor season at the outset turned out to be an average season overall, with seemingly inactive sites being rescued by unexpectedly late breeding. For others, the promise of birds on eggs yielded only a surprising number of abandoned full clutches. Colin Shawyer's observations on page 4 clearly demonstrate how you can never rely too much on past experience of Barn Owl activity, even when you have over 20 years worth! It seems that no two seasons are alike, emphasising the need for a long-term approach to monitoring the species, as provided by the Barn Owl Monitoring Programme.

We have now completed the latest BOMP analysis for the last six years up to the bumper 2005 season. The report on pages 2-3 identifies the major influence that winter weather has on both nest site occupancy and the timing and success of breeding the following spring. We will very shortly be turning our attention to the current season's data, so if you have not yet submitted your BOMP forms, please do endeavour to get them sent off to us as soon as possible!

As ever, the coverage for BOMP has been exceptional in 2006, with 550 sites monitored. What makes this all the more astonishing is that the Programme doesn't even represent

# Six of the best? Results from the latest BOMP analyses

Dave Leech, Humphrey Crick, Carl Barimore and Colin Shawyer report on the sixth annual analysis of the BOMP dataset.

One of the most amazing things about the Barn Owl in the UK is the amount of time and energy that has been invested in its conservation. It's difficult to think of any other species of bird (or any other taxonomic group, for that matter) for which the ratio of observer effort to population size has been as great, and the interest of conservationists and the general public alike shows no sign of abating. We were fairly hopeful, therefore, that when The Sheepdrove Trust provided the funding for the Barn Owl Monitoring Programme (BOMP) in 2000, it would be met with an enthusiastic response. Six years and 2,300 records from BOMP sites later (Table 1) our confidence was clearly justified, and we would like to thank everybody who has contributed records to this rapidly expanding dataset thus far.

**Table 1.** Occupancy rates at BOMP sites 2000-2006

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>WCP sites</b>	159	170	198	200	200	197
<b>Network sites</b>	-	1	363	386	327	353
<b>TOTAL</b>	159	171	561	586	527	550

The encouraging increase in coverage at BOMP Network sites in 2005, following a reduction of around 10% in 2004, was due both to the recruitment of new volunteers and to existing volunteers expanding their coverage. As in previous years, coverage in 2005 was good in the south, east and north of England (Figure 1). Although coverage is poorer in western England, Wales and Scotland, many of the sites new to the project in 2005 were located in these areas and we'll be continuing to liaise with local Barn Owl enthusiasts in the hope of expanding the BOMP Network still further over the coming year.

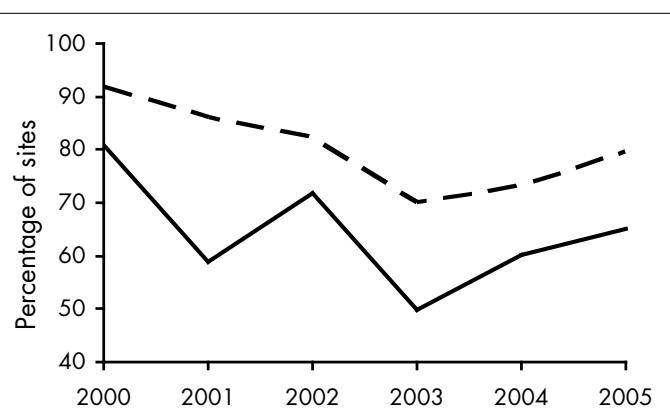
## Occupancy rates

The proportion of boxes at which Barn Owls were recorded increased again in 2005, as did the proportion containing breeding birds (Figure 2). Of the 550 sites surveyed, Barn Owls were recorded at almost 80% and breeding was recorded at 65%, the highest figures since 2002. The ability to monitor changes in the level of occupancy of sites from year to year is one of the unique things about BOMP, and so we were keen to see whether some of the relationships identified in the previous years' analyses (see Barn Owl Bulletin No. 3) had been strengthened by the addition of another year's data.

The 2005 results suggest that winter weather conditions have continued to play a major role in determining whether nest sites will be occupied during the following spring. The proportion of boxes occupied by breeding pairs was lower in years when the preceding winter had been cold and wet (Figure 3). Poor



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



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



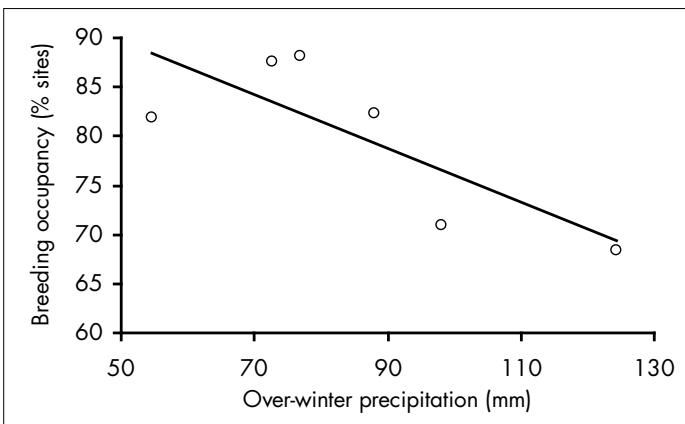
Colin Shawyer

Prey from a nest box being weighed. Poor winter conditions may influence the availability or accessibility of small mammals.

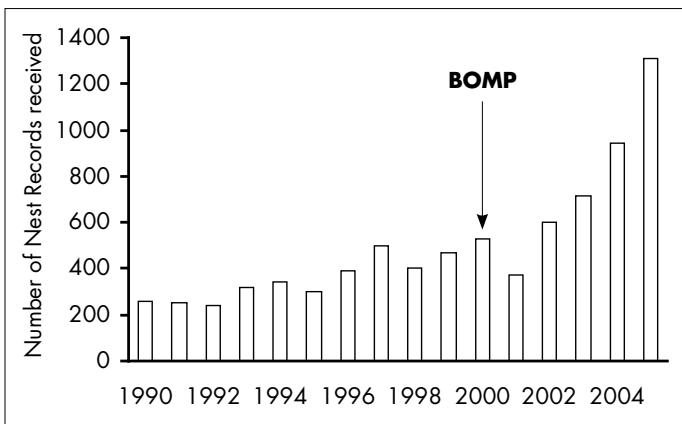
conditions during the winter could reduce the amount of food that birds are able to find, either because rain and snow make it more difficult to hunt or because rodent mortality is greater, and the prey population therefore smaller, at lower temperatures. Cold weather will also increase the amount of energy that owls have to use to maintain their core body temperature. Increased costs and decreased food intake are likely to result in a loss of body condition, which may lead to some individuals suspending breeding until the following year rather than attempting to rear chicks and failing because they are unable to invest enough energy in incubating and provisioning them. The average weight of females caught at BOMP sites monitored by the Wildlife Conservation Partnership was certainly lower in years where the preceding winter had been wetter, suggesting that they may have been in poorer condition.

## Breeding success

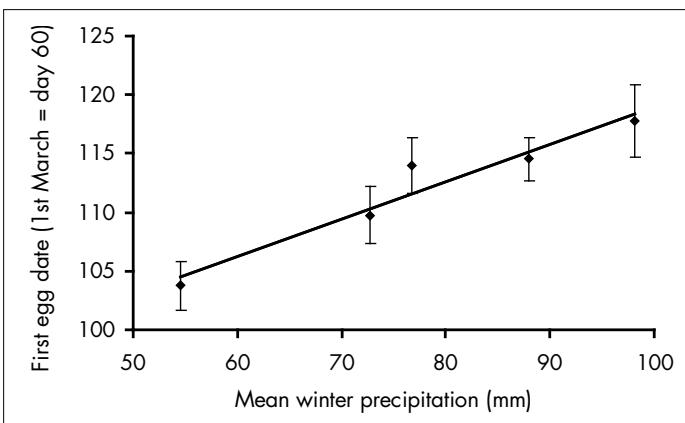
One of the great achievements of the BOMP scheme thus far has been the increase in submissions to the Nest Record Scheme (NRS) that it has generated (see Figure 4). In 2005, Barn Owl was fifth in the table of Nest Record Scheme species totals with records of over 1,200 individual nesting attempts sent to the BTO, beaten only by Blue Tit, Great Tit, Swallow and Tree Sparrow. Based on our most recent national population estimates of around 4,000 breeding pairs, we are currently receiving data for 10-20% of all breeding attempts each year (dependent on the prevalence of repeat broods), a truly remarkable figure.



**Figure 3.** High levels of winter rainfall decrease the proportion of boxes containing breeding birds during the following season.



**Figure 4.** Barn Owl nest record submissions have increased significantly since the start of BOMP in 2000.



**Figure 5.** Wet winters result in delayed laying.

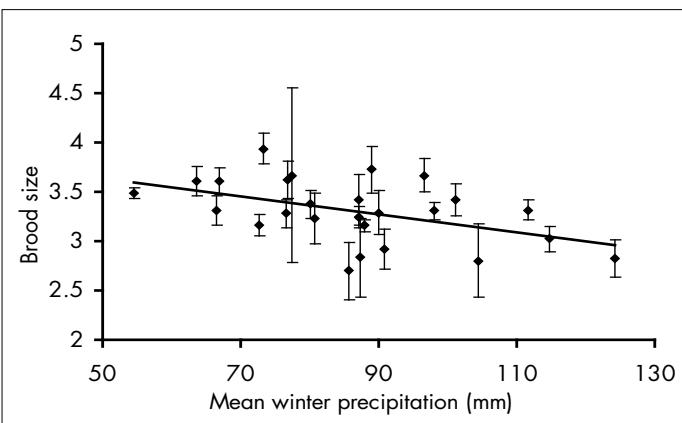
When the BOMP data are analysed, a significant relationship can be found between weather conditions and laying dates, with laying delayed after cold, wet winters (Figure 5). Brood sizes were also lower after inclement winters, although no significant relationship between clutch sizes and either winter precipitation or temperatures could be identified. The negative relationship between brood size and winter precipitation could also be found when analysing the NRS dataset between 1980 and 2005 (Figure 6). Delayed laying and small brood sizes could be due to the poor condition of parent birds, but could also occur if any reduction in the abundance of small mammals caused by harsh winter conditions persisted into the breeding season. Interestingly, there was no evidence that colder, wetter conditions during the breeding season itself had any negative effect on Barn Owl productivity at a national scale, although short periods of extremely unseasonable weather are known to cause localised breeding failures.

## Kestrels at BOMP sites

Barn Owls are not the only species of conservation interest that breed at BOMP sites. In 2005, 10% of BOMP sites were occupied by Kestrel, a species that, like the Barn Owl, is included on the Birds of Conservation Concern amber list ([www.bto.org/psob/index.htm](http://www.bto.org/psob/index.htm)) due to a UK population decline of approximately 29% over the last 25 years. Worryingly, Kestrels were also added to the NRS



Another species of conservation interest, the Kestrel, is regularly encountered by BOMP participants.  
Tommy Holden



**Figure 6.** NRS data collected between 1980 and 2005 indicate that brood sizes are smaller following wetter winters.

Concern List in 2006 after a significant decline in brood sizes over the last 15 years had been detected. Interestingly, Kestrel occupancy rates have actually increased at BOMP sites over the past six years, but we still feel that more attention needs to be focused on this species in the future.

## 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. While coverage of the UK is generally good, we would be very keen to encourage more Barn Owl enthusiasts to register sites for BOMP, particularly in Northern and South-western England, Scotland and Wales where fewer sites are currently being monitored. So if you're interested in participating or in registering additional sites, please contact us at [barnowls@bto.org](mailto:barnowls@bto.org) (Tel. 01842 750050).

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. Thanks to Mandy T Andrews for her help in collating and computerising the information.

# Deserted clutches and late broods - the story of 2006

Colin Shawyer of the Wildlife Conservation Partnership gives an account of his observations from the 200 BOMP sites covered by the WCP in 2006.

In most years the onset of the Barn Owl breeding season is relatively easy to predict, normally occurring during a three week period between mid-April and early-May, when the eggs are laid. In addition, the onset of laying in any one year appears to be highly synchronised throughout most of the country, taking place within a very narrow timescale of a just a few days. This predictability usually allows us to pre-plan our monitoring work, timing our first nest visits at the end of May when most clutches will have been completed and are undergoing incubation, and timing our second visits for mid-July, when the young are within a couple of weeks of fledging and basic biometrics and ringing can be carried out.

We can also attempt to predict whether Barn Owls will have a good breeding season by looking at the cyclic fluctuations of prey abundance. This year we anticipated that Field Voles would be in the low phase of their three-year cycle of abundance and that consequently breeding success in Barn Owls would be low in most regions of the country. The weather is far less predictable than vole cycles, however, and the cold, wet weather in the early spring of 2006 would have done little to help the already depleted vole population. Voles, like sheep and cattle, require the new spring growth of grass for food in order breed successfully.

Back in 2005 the breeding season began for most Barn Owls with egg laying almost a month earlier than usual, between the last week of March and the first week of April. In spite of the mild winter and predictably good vole numbers this very early start was quite unexpected.

In 2006 my first impressions were that this season was also going to be unusual, though this time for lateness, with a significant proportion of pairs throughout England showing no signs of any eggs well into May and June. Although the adult females (and most males) were not in as poor a body condition as they were in 2003, I judged that many were of insufficient weight to begin laying at the usual time.

However, a preliminary look at the 2006 data showed that, although a significant proportion of pairs failed to breed, over half of those that did laid their first egg at the usual time, between the last week of April and the first week of May. Subsequent visits to nests in June and July, though, revealed that some of these birds failed to complete their clutch, often laying just three eggs. Egg failure rates were uncharacteristically high, with some



Deserted clutches of eggs were a common sight in 2006. Colin Shawyer

birds deserting full clutches. Analysis of the female body weights undertaken during the first nest visit of the season suggested that most of those which failed at the early egg stage had exhibited marginal or below average breeding weight.

In previous seasons, it was usually the case with Barn Owl pairs that if egg laying had not begun by the end of May it would be unlikely to occur at all. The 2006 season showed an uncharacteristically high incidence of late breeding, with some pairs not achieving breeding condition until late June, resulting in a first egg date of mid-July and eventual fledging late in October. It later became clear, however, that a proportion of these were actually repeat clutches but, because some occurred at different sites to the first nesting attempt, they were not initially recognised as repeats.

In essence, the 2006 season could be characterised in terms of food availability; by the normal presence of shrews at the nest in the early stages of breeding, an almost complete absence of voles and shrews thereafter, and an unusually large, but nevertheless in many cases insufficient, number of young rats later on. The lack of potential prey from spring to autumn 2006 was highlighted by a number of adult males, some five years old or more, which were found dead at the nest site or close to it. The very low body weights of fresh specimens clearly demonstrated that they had succumbed from starvation early in the year whilst attempting to provide food for their incubating partners or small young.

Chick mortality in the nest was high, and in some nests it occurred unusually close to fledging. Consequently, fledging success was much lower than on average and young left the nest very late. In addition, large numbers of recently fledged young, between nine and eleven weeks of age, were found dead in fields after having left the nest. Judging by their low weights, these birds were probably unable to find food. By December I normally begin to find numerous juvenile Barn Owl casualties on our roads, but not so this season, which suggests that fewer fledglings have made it through to their first winter and recruitment this season may have been low.

With luck, it will be a better year for Barn Owls in 2007 as the vole population recovers in preparation for a peak in 2008. If adult survival over the next few months is good, successful breeding should resume both at traditional haunts and at newly installed nestboxes in 2007.



Shrew prey predominates earlier in the year.

Colin Shawyer

# Care in the conservation community

Barn Owl conservation efforts in Suffolk are being given a major boost thanks to the Suffolk Ornithologists' Group, who have set up the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project. James Cracknell reports on the ethos of the scheme.

The Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project (SOGBOP) was launched in early 2006 as a scheme run by the Suffolk Ornithologists' Group, a registered charity. SOGBOP represents an integrated approach to Barn Owl conservation, aiming to construct nest boxes, erect them at targeted sites and to monitor their contents for submission to both the BTO's Barn Owl Monitoring Programme and the Suffolk Biological Records Centre. We originally set a modest target of establishing and monitoring 90 nest boxes, in addition to those already erected, in five years. However, with box 101 already up at the time of writing, we have been able to increase the five-year target to 400!

Community involvement has been integral to the whole operation. The majority of our boxes are made by a Lowestoft-based organisation called SOLD (Special Objectives for the Local Disabled) with additional packs being assembled by MENCAP. The feedback from these two groups has been extremely positive, and the individuals building the boxes have greatly enjoyed being



Staff at SOLD with a finished Barn Owl nest box.

James Cracknell

part of the Project. In order to give people the opportunity to get involved in monitoring the boxes, we have been providing training courses, talks and workshops for the community at very little cost.

We have never known an idea develop so quickly into a Project that is involving local, countywide and national groups. The Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project has immediately gained the respect of the statutory conservation bodies and is already the lead contributor to the Suffolk BAP (Biodiversity Action Plan) for Barn Owl. If you'd like to find out more about SOGBOP, we have our own website at <http://www.sogbop.org.uk/>, on which we post regularly updated news and information on the Project and how to get involved with it.

# The Suffolk Barn Owl Seminar

On November 4th 2006, Barn Owl enthusiasts flocked to BTO Headquarters in Thetford to attend the inaugural Suffolk Barn Owl Seminar, organised by the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project (SOGBOP). Over 60 delegates attended, the majority of whom were from Suffolk, though key representatives from Norfolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire were also present, along with those involved in Barn Owl conservation at a national level. Over the course of the day, a series of ten short talks, ably chaired by Nick Carter of the BTO and Adam Gretton of Natural England, were presented in the new conference facilities at The Nunnery. The programme was designed to cover all aspects of Barn Owl conservation, from tips for monitoring nests to details about changes in agricultural policy.

The conference was kick-started with a presentation by Steve Piotrowski, Suffolk Ornithologists' Group president, about the way in which he and his associates had taken the idea of SOGBOP and turned it into reality at a staggering rate. David Wilkin presented an equally inspirational account of the NE Essex/Stour Valley Barn Owl Project that he has set up in his local area. Both talks showed just what can be achieved by the hard work and determination of interested members of the local community and Jason Ball's presentation about the Barn Owl Conservation Network, of which he is the UK co-ordinator, demonstrated ways in which this sort of information could be disseminated amongst interested amateurs and professionals at a national level.

Mary Norden, the Suffolk Biodiversity Coordinator, expanded our knowledge of Biodiversity Action Plans for Barn Owls and ways in which information on populations collected by delegates can feed back into the plans. Monica O'Donnell, from Natural England, guided us through a sea of acronyms to uncover the details of the various agri-environment schemes in which farmers are able to participate and their potential impacts on Barn Owls. The legislative aspect of Barn Owl conservation was addressed by Jez Blackburn, the BTO's Licensing Officer, who gave details of Schedule 1 Licensing and the law, while Julie Finnis outlined the process of Barn Owl rehabilitation that takes place at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary where she works.

Colin Shawyer, of the Wildlife Conservation Partnership (WCP), shared his extensive knowledge in a veritable tour de force, giving two separate talks, the first an overview of his experience of monitoring Barn Owls over the past 20 years and the second a more specific presentation on the way in which he's used the data collected to trial methods for aging and sexing individual birds. This linked nicely to Dave Leech's presentation on the latest results from the BTO's Barn Owl Monitoring Programme, now in its sixth year and in which Colin and the WCP have been heavily involved.

The whole event was an outstanding success and a testament to what can be achieved when a room full of enthusiastic, motivated, and in some cases obsessive, individuals are brought together under one roof – congratulations to all involved and let's have another one soon!

Dave Leech

# **Where to put nest-boxes? How much habitat?...**

Further to the article in the last Barn Owl Bulletin, Nick Askew (University of York) reports the results of his final years work studying Barn Owl habitat associations and landscape suitability.

**P**hew... Hopefully by the time you read this article I will have finished my PhD and will be breathing a big sigh of relief after four years of very interesting and challenging work. I have been primarily studying the habitat requirements of Barn Owls and over the last year I have worked alongside the Barn Owl Trust (BOT), Environment Agency (EA), Natural England and RSPB to study the Barn Owl at a country-wide scale to aid conservation plans. The specific aims of this work have been to:

- Produce landscape suitability maps to aid conservation targeting.
  - Compare habitat associations within different landscape types.
  - Produce a new Barn Owl advisory leaflet.
  - Publish the results on the BOT website.

In order to achieve these goals I have relied heavily upon local Barn Owl nesting data, sent to me by many enthusiastic conservationists - so without your input the project wouldn't have happened at all! Following appeals, I received details from a staggering 1,521 nest-sites so I needn't have worried. But what have I done with this information and how may it help you?

## Landscape suitability maps

I linked nest-site data with information about their location taken from national datasets. For example, for each nest-site I obtained data on the altitude, winter climate, slope, distance to major roads and amount of different habitat types available. I could then look for differences between successful Barn Owl breeding

territories and sites never used for breeding. This allowed me to better understand what determines the suitability of a location for Barn Owls. More importantly, it allowed me to then predict the suitability of all other locations for Barn Owls in Britain, producing a ‘landscape suitability map’.

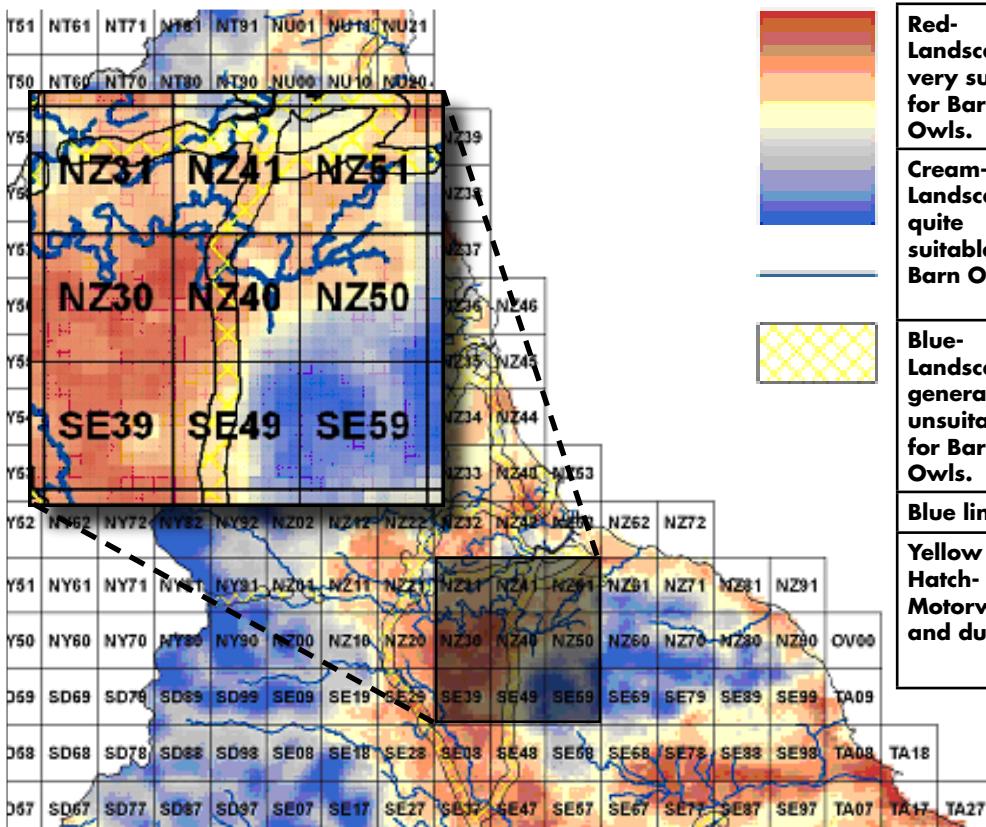
I have now produced 10 regional landscape suitability maps, covering the whole of mainland Britain. All of these maps can be downloaded (in full colour) from the BOT's new website; simply by downloading the map for your region, you can zoom in and take a look at the landscape suitability of your local patch.

An example map for the North East of England is provided in Figure 1. As shown in the inset image, each 10 km OS square is clearly labelled and each cell within represents a 1 km square. The colour of each square denotes its suitability for Barn Owls. For example, on the inset image of 10km square NZ51, the north-eastern 1 km squares are more suitable for Barn Owls than the south-eastern squares. Also shown on the maps are rivers and canals (lines) and all locations within 1 km of a major road (hatched areas). It is hoped that these maps may prove useful for Barn Owl conservation groups wishing to find the best locations to target their nest-boxes.

## Habitat associations

Also as part of the study, I split Britain into three different landscape types - Arable, Pastoral and Mixed - and then compared habitat associations of successful nest sites between different agricultural areas. So what did I find?

The results showed that successful Barn Owl nests are primarily associated with lowland areas of arable and horticultural



<b>Red- Landscape very suitable for Barn Owls.</b>	The provision of nest boxes is the main priority. Foraging habitat should be improved if nesting success is low (less than 3 young per pair).
<b>Cream- Landscape quite suitable for Barn Owls.</b>	Landscape quite suitable for Barn Owls. The provision of foraging habitat is the main priority. Nestboxes should be provided where foraging habitat is above average or being created.
<b>Blue- Landscape generally unsuitable for Barn Owls.</b>	The altitude/vegetation/winter climate determine the area to be largely unsuitable for Barn Owls. However if Barn Owls are already present, encourage as much as possible.
<b>Blue lines-</b>	Rivers and canals.
<b>Yellow Hatch- Motorways and dual</b>	No nestboxes should be erected within 1km of major roads unless the road is screened by hedges or continuous tree lines immediately adjacent to the road surface.

**Figure 1.** Barn Owl suitability map for the North East of England. Graphic is taken from the RSPB website



Margins in mixed arable landscapes provide good quality habitat.

usage and also pastoral habitats. These relationships were strongest in England and Wales. So, if you have arable or horticultural landscapes in your area they could be some of the best locations for Barn Owls. Of course, it is unlikely that Barn Owls hunt directly where crops are grown or where livestock are grazed. I suggest instead that lowland landscapes indirectly provide hunting opportunities for Barn Owls in the form of prey-rich, rough-grass-filled margins.

I then compared the quantity of rough grass available around Barn Owl breeding sites in the three different landscape types. Interestingly, estimates of rough grass availability were twice as high in pastoral landscapes than in arable or mixed agricultural regions. Perhaps, then, the earlier results are explained by the margins in mixed landscapes being better quality for small mammals than are the grazed margins in a pastoral setting.

These results help us better answer some fundamental questions relating to Barn Owl conservation. How many times have you been asked "how much habitat do Barn Owls need?". It seems that the landscape type may be an important part of the answer. As a result of this work I can provide new estimates of required habitat size that are specific to the landscape type, as follows:

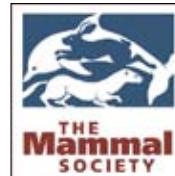
- **Pastoral Landscapes** Barn Owls require 31 - 47 ha of rough grassland
- **Arable Landscapes** Barn Owls require 14 to 21 ha of rough grassland
- **Mixed Landscapes** Barn Owls require 17 to 26 ha of rough grassland

## And finally...

The project highlighted the supreme importance of data collected by volunteers; only when larger amounts of data were analysed did the results become significant. The results of this work will soon be available as a free leaflet from the RSPB and BOT. The landscape suitability maps and more information relating to habitat requirements in different landscape types can be downloaded now from [www.barnowltrust.org.uk](http://www.barnowltrust.org.uk). If you would like to know more about the project, please email me at: nickaskew@gmail.com.

## Thank you...

I wish to thank D & F Ramsden (BOT), R Martin (EA) & R Saunders (EN) for financial support. For academic guidance I would like to thank Prof. J Searle, Dr. B Anderson & C Shawyer. For spending time collating and sending data I would like to thank: the Barn Owl Trust; J Holden; H & M Cottam; B Wright & J Wild; D Brown, R Dafydd & S Whitehead; G Ellis & H Broughton; J Lightfoot & G Bishton; D Hodgson & P Wilkinson; P Willet; J Middleton; J Smith; A Levitt & N Atkinson; R Leigh; G Shaw; S Harris; & S Huddleston.



# Show your bones

Back in the 2003 edition of Barn Owl Bulletin, Alasdair Love told us about the Mammal Society's long-running pellet survey. Following on from that article, he here gives an update on the survey's progress and findings so far...

**N**ow in its 14th year, the National Pellet Survey has been set up to investigate variations in owl diet with locality and habitat over time. We use this information to study the distribution of small mammal prey species and variations in their availability both seasonally and annually. The survey results also produce a dataset with which similar surveys can be compared. A paper has already been published comparing the results of this survey with those of an earlier survey (R.A.Love *et al*, 2000).

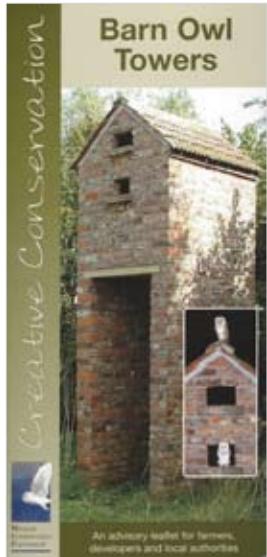
To date, pellet batches have been received from 303 locations throughout the country, including some contributions from readers of our last article in Barn Owl Bulletin. Over 39,000 pellets have now been analysed, from which over 142,000 prey items have been recovered. These include 21 identified species of small mammal, as well as bird, reptile and amphibian prey items.

So far, the survey has identified the Field Vole (*Microtus agrestis*), Common Shrew (*Sorex araneus*) and Wood Mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*) as the three main prey species in that order of importance, contributing 79.6% of the prey items. Adding the combined percentage contribution from three other small mammal prey species –Pygmy Shrew (*Sorex minutus*), Bank Vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*) and Harvest Mouse (*Micromys minutus*) – accounts for 96.5% of the total prey items.

To continue with its success, the survey needs new contributors and we are particularly keen to receive pellet batches from under-represented areas in the north of England, and in Scotland and Wales. To take part in the survey, you simply need to be able to collect owl pellets and send them in to the Mammal Society! Ideally, batches of pellets should be collected and sent to us for analysis monthly, with the site being cleared of all pellets at each inspection to ensure the period covered by a pellet batch is known. This method enables the seasonal change in the availability of the prey species to be investigated. If monthly collections are not possible then collections over any period would still be very welcome and the larger the sample size the better. Pellet batches should be placed in a polythene bag inside a jiffy pack or a suitable box and posted to the address below. A note should be placed outside the polythene bag identifying the collection date and location, including the grid reference (location details can be kept confidential if required). In exchange for your contribution, you will receive a report detailing the contents of each pellet batch together with brief comments on any findings of interest.

The National Owl Pellet Survey is a great opportunity for those of you who want to find out that little bit more about the owls you are monitoring. For further information about the survey, please contact the Mammal Society at the following address: Mr R.A.Love, 4 Laurel Way, Totteridge, London N20 8HP. Or visit the Mammal Society website at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/>

Reference: R.A.Love *et al* (2000) Changes in the food of British Barn Owls (*Tyto alba*) between 1974 and 1997. *Mammal Review*, 30, 107-129.



# Lofty ambitions?

Has your neighbour got one up on you when it comes to nest box designs? Then why not pick up a copy of the Wildlife Conservation Partnership's new leaflet, 'Barn Owl Towers'. For those with the ambition and the bricks, the Wildlife Conservation Partnership have produced an excellent leaflet on building a permanent Barn Owl nesting structure on your land. Contact the WCP for details (address below).

# Taking 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 breeding Barn Owls and recording 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 Licensing 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 Licensing 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**

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

**Registered charity number 216652**

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

## BOCN Symposium

Back in March this year, the Barn Owl Conservation Network hosted its biennial conference, the Barn Owl Symposium, at the Kindersley Centre in Berkshire. Representatives from many local and national Barn Owl organisations were present, as well as many other individual Barn Owl conservationists, researchers and enthusiasts. For a full report on the Symposium, visit the BOCN's web-pages at [www.bocn.org](http://www.bocn.org).

## IPMR update

Whilst the nest contents information collected during BOMP can be submitted electronically via the nest recording facility in IPMR, over the past few years we have received numerous requests to incorporate the occupancy and habitat recording sheet into IPMR as well. The good news is that Mark Cubitt has been busy working away on several updates to IPMR, one of which will be the inclusion of the BOMP occupancy sheet – so, those of you that wish can do away with those paper forms and send your whole submission in via email. The new version will be out in 2007 and we'll be sure to provide full instructions on inputting your BOMP data using the new system.

## Useful addresses

- **Wildlife Conservation Partnership**, 2 Mill Walk, Weathampstead, Herts, AL4 8DT. Tel. 01582 832182 Email. [colinshawyer@aol.com](mailto:colinshawyer@aol.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)