

We need Your Barn Owl Sightings

Survey postcards have been designed and distributed through libraries, council offices, rangers stations and other public buildings, as well as being sent out to farmers and landowners by local FWAG, SAC and RSPB offices. The data collected through the survey will be used by FWAG and SAC Farm Conservation Advisers to target farm visits through current and any future Barn Owl Projects as well as being included within regional monitoring initiatives.

SO LOOK OUT FOR THE BARN OWL SURVEY POSTCARDS AND SEND US YOUR SIGHTINGS

BACK TO THE CLASSROOM



The RSPB have been working with local schoolchildren from Alva Academy and Kinross High School making some of the nest boxes for BOOLS, as well as educating the pupils about Barn Owls and their habitats. RSPB has received match funding from the Russell Trust towards this work. Here's what some of the pupils have to say...



We are a group of 8 pupils in S3 at Kinross High School who take part in the ASDAN course and we were really happy to be involved with the RSPB project on Barn Owls. We copied the design for the boxes from the example Elspeth (RSPB) brought to the school and we were all involved with the manufacture of the boxes in our school's CDT department. We like our course because it means we can do different types of projects which we would not normally do.

The whole project took about 8 weeks, which included the research we carried out on Owls and the manufacture of the boxes. We learnt a lot of things which we did not know about Barn Owls before and also had a really good afternoon at Vane Farm where we watched the birds from the hides. Dissecting the Owl pellets in the classroom at Vane Farm was quite a new experience for us and we are going to make a display with the animal bones we found.

The project was good fun, interesting and we all agree it felt good to take part in something which may help the Owl population grow around the Kinross district. Hopefully we may be able to find out if any of the boxes have any residents in the future.



RSPB Staff Get Involved Too



Dissecting pellets



BOOLS is funded by Scottish Natural Heritage's Biodiversity Action Grant Scheme (BAGS)

To download a copy of this newsletter visit www.fwag.org.uk



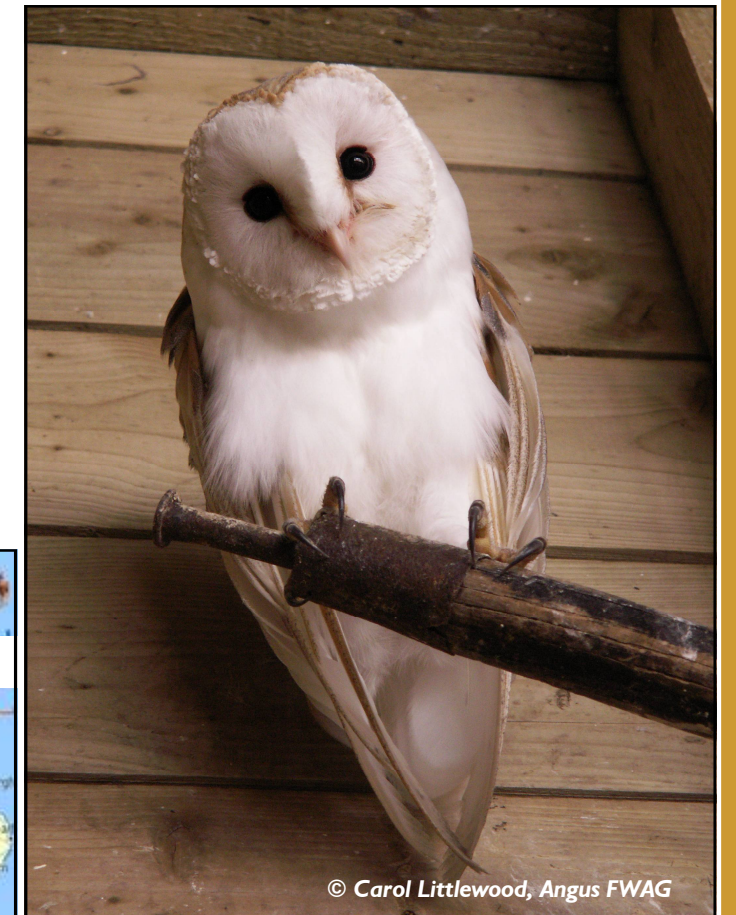
Issue 1 2007

Barn Owls of Lowland Scotland

BARN OWLS

The Barn Owl has long been known as "the farmer's friend" as it hunts for small mammals, such as voles, mice and shrews over rough grassland and in the vicinity of steadings. The loss of old barns and the birds' increasing reliance on the rough grassland along rural roadside verges has resulted in a serious decline in its population. Other known causes for the decline in Barn Owls is the use of non-specific rodenticides,

Barn Owls of Lowland Scotland (BOOLS) is a multi regional 2 year project to address the declining numbers of Barn Owls. Led by four Local Biodiversity



© Carol Littlewood, Angus FWAG



Partnerships (Fife, Tayside, Clackmannan and Stirling - see map) the principal aims of this £34,500 project are to encourage 68 farmers and landowners to manage suitable habitat for hunting and site 80 artificial nest boxes on farms.

The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) are responsible for advising farmers and identifying the location of nest boxes. The RSPB will simultaneously work with local schools in making boxes although some will be purchased and others made by local volunteers. The boxes will be monitored by local license holders to assess the success or failure of each nest box. Survey postcards, training events and demonstration farm walks will also be organised to raise awareness of Barn Owl needs. This newsletter is the first of two, reporting on the project's accomplishments.



FIFE



© Carol Littlewood, Angus FWAG
Barn Owl Evening Walk, Wormit

To date, **10** farms have been identified within Fife by FWAG and were targeted to compliment existing artificial nest box and monitoring work. For many years, volunteers have been erecting Barn Owl boxes but coverage throughout Fife is not complete. As such, in the first year of the BOOLS project, the 10 boxes have been clustered within 3 regions: NE Fife, Dunfermline and the Howe of Fife.

All 10 nest boxes, purchased from a company called Envisage, have been erected externally either on the edge of open deciduous woodland or mature tree lines along field boundaries. The local licence holder, Mark Oksien, returned with FWAG armed with ladders and hammers and after some interesting acrobatics by Mark to remove branches and lower limbs, has now secured all 10 nest boxes.

As with all the project participants, farmers involved have received a Barn Owl Management Plan identifying simple measures which could be adopted on each farm to encourage good feeding and breeding sites. Mark Oksien will monitor breeding success of the nest boxes annually. A further 8 farms will be visited, with boxes delivered, in year 2 of the project.

Fife have also hosted the first of two farm demonstration events. This short walk, held at the beginning of April 2007, was hosted by one of the participating BOOLS farms in NE Fife but who had also taken part in a previous Barn Owl project. The 34 people attending looked at Barn Owl hunting ground, reasons behind locating artificial nest boxes, what land managers can do to encourage Barn Owls on their farm and analyse Barn Owl pellets to identify what these birds of prey eat. Farmers and public alike from Fife, Kinross, Angus and Perthshire attended.

Contact Shirley Paterson, Fife and Kinross FWAG: 01738 450500

STIRLINGSHIRE



Guy Harewood (Biodiversity Coordinator), Lisa Ford (Countryside Ranger) and Mike Steward (Central Scotland Raptor Group) © The Courier

To date, FWAG have visited **5** farms in Stirlingshire. Visits have focused on farms around Flanders Moss where there is a well monitored population of breeding birds. Each farm has received a Barn Owl Management Plan and a nest box. The nest boxes have been made and erected by Mike Steward of Central Scotland Raptor Group, the local licence holder. They will be monitored for activity over the next two to three years.

Contact Richard Lockett, Perthshire FWAG: 01738 450500

CLACKMANNANSHIRE

Barn owls are being given new homes in the Wee County thanks to the BOOLS project. A combined effort between Clackmannanshire Ranger Service, Mike Steward and FWAG has seen **9** Owl boxes erected. Owls were present at 2 sites. The BOOLS project will ultimately involve 6 farms over 2 years. A further 6 nest boxes are still to be erected. Substantial work has already been done to identify ideal Barn Owl habitat and locate suitable nest box sites, with FWAG liaising with Mike Steward to identify further farms that could become involved with the project and to ensure good coverage of all parts of the county. The external A-Frame boxes were made and erected by Mike who will continue to monitor Barn Owl activity.

Contact Guy Harewood, Clackmannanshire Biodiversity Coordinator: 01259 452639

TAYSIDE

Throughout Tayside, FWAG and SAC Farm Conservation Advisers will be delivering a total of 34 farm visits. To date, **18** boxes have been erected.

PERTSHIRE

Perthshire is focusing on two river corridors, the Tay and the Isla, where there are suitable hunting areas and numerous reports of Barn Owl sightings. Five Barn Owl farm visits were allocated in the first year of the project. These have been very positive, with regular Barn Owl sightings reported by one farmer and numerous recent signs of Barn Owls in a farm building on another farm. A mix of interior and exterior boxes have been erected in Perthshire. SAC have also carried out 3 visits with additional funding from the Tayside Biodiversity Action Fund, all along the River Isla corridor. Again these visits were very positive with Barn Owls present on two of the farms and a neighbouring farmer keen to provide nesting sites. All three farmers are erecting nest boxes and considering steading management to encourage Barn Owls.

ANGUS

Angus FWAG has delivered 10 Barn visits in lowland Angus this year. In addition to the 10 boxes supplied through the BOOLS Project, another 8 have been sourced from a variety of different places. This has included farmers providing extra boxes themselves and the local RSPB volunteers and members of the public making boxes with wood left over from a previous project.

KINROSS

FWAG has allocated 3 nest boxes throughout Kinross-shire under the BOOLS project. All 3 sites happened to be trees on the edge of open woodland copses which would offer any breeding Barn Owls some shelter. After removing the lower branches, Mark Oksien, local Barn Owl licence holder, has now secured all three boxes onto selected trees. One of the farms participating already had Barn Owls roosting in nearby sheds. As these birds were previously unrecorded for monitoring purposes, it is unknown whether this pair of Barn Owls are breeding successfully. A decision was therefore made to erect an artificial nest box to offer the pair alternative roosting and possibly breeding sites either for the resident pair or any juveniles.

Contact Catherine Lloyd, Tayside Biodiversity Officer: 01382 434000



Mark Oksien, Fife Barn Owl License Holder
© Fife and Kinross FWAG

ADDITIONAL PROJECTS

Three SNH funded projects, 1 in Angus and 2 in Perthshire have involved SAC and FWAG erecting 45 Barn Owl nest boxes and delivering 20 farm surveys throughout Tayside. Donations of money and wood were received from C R Smith Home Improvements Company and Kinnordy Sawmill respectively. One Angus box already has an Owl in residence. The Tay Ringing Group will be notified of any positive sightings.

Clackmannanshire Council, working in partnership with Mike Steward, have erected an additional 5 nest boxes (and 2 kestrel boxes) with funding from the Landfill Tax Scheme. In Fife, meanwhile, the expanding Fife Barn Owl Project, centred mainly in the East Neuk areas of Fife, are also currently monitoring some 50 existing nest boxes.

