

WE STILL WANT YOUR BARN OWL SIGHTINGS!

The survey postcards designed and distributed through libraries, council offices, rangers stations and other public buildings during the BOOLS project will still be made available while stocks last. However, if you see a Barn Owl, wherever you are in Scotland and you don't have a postcard handy, please notify your local BOOLS contact (all details are given at the bottom of this page) and they will make sure that the record gets to the right person. Hopefully this won't be the end of Barn Owl Projects in the areas where BOOLS has proved so successful and we can use this further information when thinking about future work.

SO CARRY ON LOOKING OUT FOR BARN OWLS!

BACK TO THE CLASSROOM

RSPB field teachers (Maggie Gay and Kathryn Green) are taking the BOOLS project into 3 new schools this year following the success of the two schools projects last year. They are working with Forfar Academy (Angus), Glenrothes High School (Fife) and Stirling High School (Stirling). Pupils will be making nest boxes and learning many interesting facts about conservation of Barn Owls. The project also offers the children a chance to have an outdoor education visit, either to RSPB Vane Farm Nature Reserve, or to a site nearer their school. RSPB has received match funding from the Russell Trust for this work.

BOOLS ON THE RADIO

In August journalists from Radio Scotland's 'Out of Doors' programme visited Clackmannanshire to find out more about the BOOLS project. The interview took place on site, at one of the locations where a BOOLS nestbox had been installed and was being used by Barn Owls. Obliging, the Barn Owls put in an appearance and I'm glad to say managed to rear 6 healthy chicks. Out of Doors broadcast much of what was said during the interview, covering the decline in Barn Owl numbers and some of the causes of this decline including lack of nesting sites, intensive agriculture and rodenticides, as well as the simple steps that can be taken to help this species.

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



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Barn Owls of Lowland Scotland

BOOLS ROUND UP - BARN OWL SUCCESSES!



FEELING BROODY? - Euan (Head Ranger) & Guy (Biodiversity Officer) holding a brood of Clackmannanshire Barn Owls ready for Mike to ring.

Now at the end of the two year BOOLS Project funding it doesn't seem possible when we look at what has been achieved in such a short time. The BOOLS project has not only seen 68 visits delivered and over 71 nest boxes put up, but more importantly we know some of the boxes are already being used by Barn Owls, both as nest sites and winter roosts and none of those involved foresaw this level of success in such a short time when the project began.

Thanks to all involved, particularly volunteer ringers, farmers and landowners who have taken the project on with such enthusiasm. We look forward to news of more boxes being used in the future!

TOP THREE TIPS FOR HELPING BARN OWLS

- Leave rough margins along field boundaries, tracks and around other habitats such as ponds and woodlands.
- Leave dead trees standing as long as it is safe to do so, they may have holes that could provide roosting or nesting sites.
- If converting old buildings, consider incorporating Barn Owl access, even if you don't have Barn Owls using the building at the time. See the free publication "Barn Owls on Site: A Guide to Developers and Planners" (Ref. IN74), available from www.naturalengland.com



CLACKMANNANSHIRE AND STIRLINGSHIRE

BARN OWLS BY THE BOX FULL!

The BOOLS project has had great success within Clackmannanshire and Stirlingshire, both in providing nesting opportunities for Barn Owls and in raising awareness of Barn Owls in the area.

In total 14 boxes are now in place as a result of the BOOLS Project in Clackmannanshire, ensuring good coverage of all parts of the county. Nine of these boxes were in place for last years breeding season and Barn Owls nested in three of them, with 13 owlets ringed as a result. This is an exceptional result for the first year! It is hoped some of the owlets ringed may spread out and start nesting in other BOOLS boxes. In Stirlingshire 7 BOOLS boxes have been erected but none have as yet attracted residents.



Monitoring of all these sites will continue. Mike Steward (Licensed Barn Owl Ringer for the area) has reported that because this season has been fantastic for Barn Owls, due to it being a bumper year for field voles, he has already ringed 54 owlets and expected to make it up into the 70's before the end of the breeding season. These were all from natural sites and nestboxes on private land, with nest boxes previously erected on Forestry Commission land probably producing a further 120 young birds around the area. The breeding season has been very long due to the mild weather in early 2007 and this has meant success for early broods and chicks still being found in the nest very late in the season, 4 eggs being found in one of the boxes during one of the last visits Mike made.

This is officially the best year on record for Barn Owl breeding success in Clackmannanshire and Stirlingshire.



RINGING EVENT

Following on from the very successful Barn Owl walk held in Fife in 2007, an evening ringing event was held at one of the BOOLS sites in Clackmannanshire. In all 17 people attended, including the land owner, his family and volunteer rangers.

Mike took people through the routine of checking a nest site and ringing the young birds. The six healthy chicks found in the nest were all ringed and we are very pleased to say that they have all since successfully fledged, as during a follow up visit all eight were seen sitting in the rafters of the barn!!

Mike can be seen here with the six owlets safely collected in a box while he prepares to demonstrate to his audience how he rings them.

ADDITIONAL PROJECTS

Not only has the BOOLS Project delivered a huge success for Barn Owls in its own right, but it has also led to the participants in BOOLS being able to access other sources of funding to carry out additional work to benefit this enigmatic species.

- Clackmannanshire Council have granted funds for extra visits to be carried out to erect Barn Owl nestboxes where Barn Owls are known to be present. The extra funding has also been able to supply the nest boxes.
- In Stirlingshire Mike Steward has erected a further 15 boxes with funding from the Stirling Landfill Tax Trust, which also provided an extra 5 boxes in Clackmannanshire.

TAYSIDE AND FIFE



The Fife Barn Owl Project currently monitors 42 Barn Owl sites in Fife, where there are 53 boxes and seven natural/man made hollows. During the last two years FWAG has carried out 18 BOOLS visits and an additional 18 nest boxes have been put up with Mark Oksien, a licensed Barn Owl ringer, at new sites in Fife. In future years these will also be monitored by the Fife Project. Although none of these new boxes have been taken up by Barn Owls yet as far as is known, one has been used by a pair of Stock Doves, an Amber listed species and not very common in Fife.

With voles in abundance 2007 was an extremely good year for Barn Owls breeding. In Fife five pairs were recorded as fledging three young and a sixth pair double brooded, with three chicks fledging from each brood. **Double brooding, which is a very uncommon this far north, was the first successful record of such an event in Fife, the only other recorded occurrence failing at the late chick stage.** Eighteen young were ringed out of the 21 that successfully fledged. The current Fife population is estimated to be a minimum of 19 pairs, comprising: eight confirmed, six probable and five possible, with a further eight sites listed as active but unknown.

In Perthshire the BOOLS funding allowed ten visits to be carried out, split between SAC and FWAG and 13 nestboxes have been erected. The farms visited were concentrated on the River Tay and River Isla corridors. Surveys have been quite encouraging, with sightings or signs of Barn Owls on many of the farms visited. Two BOOLS boxes are known to be in use and fledged 4 chicks out of 5 hatched. Reports back from Perthshire generally have been very encouraging, with numerous sightings of Barn Owls and nesting occurring in old steadings. In Kinross six BOOLS visits have been carried out by FWAG and nestboxes erected.

BOOLS in Angus has seen FWAG deliver a further 8 visits this year. Although there have been no records of breeding this year 5 boxes are known to have been used by Barn Owls. On one farm, a Barn Owl which originally moved into the box has now taken up residence in the farm buildings and is believed to have successfully fledged a number of young. Sightings from the whole of Tayside are being collated by Angus FWAG so a map can be produced of where in the area Barn Owls are believed to be active.

A large number of Barn Owl sightings have been received by FWAG and SAC in Tayside since the end of the breeding season, which bodes well for an increase in bird numbers next year.



ADDITIONAL PROJECTS

- In Angus, FWAG has used funding from SNH to carry out a further 10 Barn Owl visits. Through sponsorship from Guild Homes and individual landowners, 2 nest boxes have been provided to each farm visited and the farmers have erected them at sites identified by the FWAG Adviser.
- In Perthshire SAC have secured additional funds from SITA TBAF to extend the BOOLS project along the River Isla with another 10 farm visits and nest boxes supplied for the farmers to erect at sites identified by the SAC Adviser. At least one of the new nest boxes is known to have been used as a nest site.
- Fife Council have funded a further two visits which have been carried out by the FWAG Adviser and Mark Oksien, with one box being provided at each site.
- In upland Angus funding from the Cairngorms Biodiversity Grant Scheme has allowed FWAG to deliver 16 extra farm visits, supplying 2 nest boxes to each farm. These boxes have been erected by the farmers at sites identified by the FWAG Adviser.
- SAC contacted one of the main rodent control companies in the area and they have agreed to speak to farmers about reducing accidental poisoning of Barn Owls.
- SAC and FWAG met with Perth and Kinross Council to discuss the impact on Barn Owls of the conversion of farm steadings into housing.