

# Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project

## *Barn Owl News*

August 2009

**A brood of 4 barn owl chicks in Suffolk was given a helping hand by Roger Buxton, Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project Monitor and Ringer.**

An orphaned barn owl chick, aptly named 'Hissing Sid' was left on the doorstep of the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary. With no knowledge of the chick's origins, after consultation with national barn owl expert Colin Shawyer of the Barn Owl Conservation Network, Roger placed Hissing Sid inside another nestbox with three chicks of a similar age. The good news is that all four chicks are doing well and are about to fledge!



Anthony Drake

### 2009 results so far

Many of the Project's nest boxes (now over 900 boxes) have been checked at least once this year, with further checks due later in 2009. Barn owl breeding has been shown in 82 nest boxes. Brood sizes are generally low, one or two chicks, and it is looking to be a tough breeding season for Suffolk's barn owl. The main reason for this is the crash in the short-tailed vole population which should begin to recover by the end of the year, so there is still hope for later broods. Vole numbers are perhaps already on the up and some voles found in nest box caches this year weighed above average. A normal vole weight is around 25g but three voles found in a box in the Waveney Valley weighed in at 29g, 40g and a monstrous 43g! The latter was a pregnant female.



Alec Hillier

### Summary showing barn owl brood sizes in Suffolk during 2009

Number of Barn Owl nests with chicks ringed	56
Total number of Barn Owl chicks ringed	113
Average number of ringed chicks per nest	2
Number of nests with 5 chicks ringed	1 (wow! - news just in from Lakenheath!)
Number of nests with 4 chicks ringed	4
Number of nests with 3 chicks ringed	15
Number of nests with 2 chicks ringed	24
Number of nests with 1 chicks ringed	16



barn owl sculpture at the Suffolk Show  
Martha Cowell

### Suffolk Show

The Suffolk Wildlife Trust conservation area at the Suffolk Show was alive with visitors finding out about the success of the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project and the new and exciting Harvest Mouse Project. The barn owl diet was being discovered by children analysing barn owl pellets. Local artist Paul Richardson created a stunning steel sculpture of a barn owl which was perched on a pole box (built by The Hen House Company) outside drawing people to the conservation area. Thank you to Carillion for their help with the installation of the pole and pole box and Essex & Suffolk Water and the Broads Authority for sponsoring the barn owl sculpture. The barn owl sculpture is now permanently residing at the Essex & Suffolk Water site at Lound which is managed by the Broads Authority.

### Community News

*The Project involves the whole community; parish councils can play a leading role; interested farmers and land owners are being advised, businesses, schools, community groups and others with an interest in wildlife can contribute and benefit.*

#### Pakenham update...

Following last year's inspirational fundraising for barn owl nest boxes by Sandy Jackson and the parish of Pakenham, a barn owl pair nesting in one of the Pakenham boxes has produced one of the highest number of successful chicks recorded in one nest box in Suffolk so far this year. The brood of 4 chicks were ringed and successfully fledged.

To date the Project has worked closely with Parish Councils and local wildlife groups at Beccles, Ilketshall St Andrew, Kessingland, Reydon, Wenhaston, Waldringfield, Elmswell and Pakenham. These parishes have championed the project by raising funds, erecting barn owl boxes and generally creating feeding opportunities for barn owls by managing grassland to encourage voles.

### Clare

Following an enquiry at this year's Suffolk Show and in conjunction with our partnership work with The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project, Steve Piotrowski (SWT) and Neil Catchpole (The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project) visited Clare in southwest Suffolk to look at a Parish Council project at The Nuttery. This is a superb little wood with a recently renovated pond at its centre. The surrounding grassland is ideal for breeding barn owls. Steve and Neil met Parish Council's representative, Keith Mison, who has personally carried out a tremendous amount of work to restore this wood into a leafy paradise. The pathways that Keith has so painstakingly created meander through the wood to master an atmosphere to be savored. Two ideal sites were chosen for barn owl nest boxes, and Keith, from a pattern provided, plans to make the boxes himself and install them this autumn.



## Suffolk Wildlife Trust Harvest Mouse Project

The harvest mouse (*Micromys minutus*) was once common in lowland England. Its name is developed from the times when many were seen at harvest as a result of disturbance. It has suffered a 70% decline in numbers since the 1970s due to land use changes and habitat loss, and is now listed as a UK biodiversity action plan species.

**This new and exciting project has been launched to find out the distribution and population hotspots of harvest mice in Suffolk. It is one of the first projects of its kind and is only made possible due to the great success of the Barn Owl Project.**



Terry Longley

Barn Owl Monitors are in the process of collecting owl pellets from their boxes, which will be analysed by volunteers to look for harvest mice remains. The results of this will be used to locate harvest mouse hotspots and record whether particular land use benefits the mice.

The final phase of the project will be to deliver pro-active, site-based landowner advice and training on how to encourage the mice.

As well as finding harvest mice, the project will help identify the presence and distribution of other mammals (eg. water shrew) and also to learn in detail the diet of barn owl at different times of year and in different habitats.

### A look back at 2008...

- 185 barn owl pairs used Project nest boxes
- Range expansion into Central & Western Suffolk – barn owl are now seen in places in Suffolk where they have been absent for generations
- Over 130 additional boxes were installed by the Project
- On target to install the 1000<sup>th</sup> barn owl nest box by 2010
- 806 Barn owl nest boxes being monitored by over 100 trained Barn Owl Monitors
- Over 150 landowners advised on grassland management and nest boxes for barn owl



Bill Stevenson

### How can you help?

- Have you seen a barn owl? - Let us know
- Manage land for barn owl and install nest boxes
- Adopt a box

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