

S.O.S. NEWS

Catch up with all the news on the S.O.S. Weekly Blog at www.owl-help.org.uk

Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, Stonham Barns, Stonham Aspal, Suffolk IP14 6AT
Tel: 01449 711425 www.owl-help.org.uk

The Newsletter for the Friends of S.O.S.

Issue 12 Spring - Summer 2009

General Manager Andy Hulme says **WELCOME** to the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary's Spring/Summer Newsletter

Hello everyone!

First and foremost, I would like to once again say a huge thank you to all our valued supporters, donors and volunteers, who together have helped us at S.O.S. survive not only the ongoing "credit crunch" but also the fairly harsh East Anglian winter we have experienced.

Without you, we would certainly not have been able to give all our wonderful Owls & other Birds of Prey - not to mention the Red Squirrels and Siberian Chipmunks resident at the Centre - the care and attention they required, nor maintain or develop the various projects we have been working on.

So thank you once again - your help is much appreciated and we hope you will be able to visit us during the months ahead to see how we're getting on.

WINTER REFURBISHMENTS

Life is certainly never dull here at the Sanctuary and we have had a busy time since our last newsletter. Amongst many other things there has been the constant round of maintenance to be done, including the pruning of hedges and shrubs and, as Spring gets into its stride, plenty of grass to be mown.

The paint brushes have been hard at work too, giving many of the aviaries a fresh lick of paint, usually with one of us or one of the volunteers on the other end - sadly there are no Harry Potter type brushes in this vicinity to make life easier!

Together, we have finally finished the indoor area, which has been named the Pavilion. On rainy days this multifunctional building will enable us to give talks to the public, provide an area where school visitors will have the

chance to get close to the birds and give shelter for the ravishing hoards to enjoy their packed lunches in the dry



As you may remember, the Pavilion was erected courtesy of the grant we received under the B&Q One Planet Living Award Scheme last year, and we have to say an additional big thank you to B&Q for their continued support. Just recently they have provided us with a large consignment of treated wood which has enabled us to build three new creche/rehabilitation aviaries for young and recuperating injured birds of prey, add to and refurbish some security fencing which forms the perimeter of the Sanctuary, build a wendy house for the childrens play area and finally replace worn out seating for visitors to the flying ground.

We would also like to thank Eastern Concrete, who again kindly came to our rescue by donating ten tonnes of stone for the flooring of our three new aviaries.

ABSENT FRIENDS & NEW BEGINNINGS

Whilst the majority of the birds in our charge weathered the winter well, many taking the time out to moult and replenish some of their primary & secondary feathers. On a sad note we lost two of our longest serving birds over recent months.

Firstly Elder the Little Owl, whom I remember arriving here over ten years ago, just after I joined. Elder was paired with Snapdragon and they produced quite a few youngsters, including Lily who spent some time in our flying demonstration team before sharing an permanent aviary with her new mate, Pippin. Also, we bid farewell to Beech the Common Buzzard, who was eighteen years old this year. Somewhat uniquely he was a light 'phase' bird - most unusual for a Buzzard, since they tend to be dark brown in colour. Both birds died naturally of old age.

It is early Spring as I write this and we are in full swing with the breeding season, with a few of our pairs of Owls, Hawks and Falcons incubating their eggs. It will not be long before the first chicks



should start hatching and I will be able to let you all know later in the year how successful these birds have been.

Andy Hulme

POOR WOLTER - NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS

Not long ago, we posted a story about 'Poor Wolter' on our blog (at www.owl-help.org.uk) and there have been many enquiries since about his state of health.

To recap, Wolter was a Barn Owl who was brought to us last year in a rather confused state and sporting a terrific shiner, looking as though he had tackled Mike Tyson for a few rounds.

Being only a few months old, it appeared that Wolter had been caught out by some very windy weather and buffeted into something rather solid.



It was touch and go for a while but we're pleased to report that the healing benefits of time, lots of TLC and, as always, the skill and dedication of the team stood him in good stead and he was eventually successfully hacked back to his natural environment in the wild at the beginning of this year.

Ashley Costin

RAPTOR HOSPITAL REPORT

We are now four months into 2009 and we have had a fairly quiet start to the hospital year with only eight seriously injured birds being brought in which needed veterinary attention - three Tawny Owls, two Barn Owls and three Kestrels. Regrettably, all but two Tawny Owls succumbed as a result of the harsh winter weather conditions they had endured beforehand.

Before Christmas however, the winter weather was more forgiving and we were able to release three Barn Owls, two Kestrels and one Tawny Owl out of the 15 birds brought in between September & December. One of these, a Tawny Owl, is still actually pending

release, because he came in with rather a lot of feather damage and needs a good moult before he can return to the wild again. This will not impede him



when he is finally released, because he will remember how to hunt again for himself. Basically he's just having a short break to grow new, strong feathers and have easy meals before he gets back into the hustle and bustle of everyday Tawny Owl life.

Just a quick mention about Jesse the little Kestrel I released in my garden nearly two years ago! He is back once again making his presence known at every opportunity, generally with a mouse or some food in his talons, as he flies towards the nest box with his female patiently waiting for the meal he has provided.

So hopefully, fingers crossed, there will be the sound of baby Kestrels in the air once more, for a second year. I will keep you all posted on how the pair does this year.

Dean Winham

ATTACKED BY VANDALS

Most of the time we like to be able to report on the positive side of things that happen at the Sanctuary and although working with birds of prey & animals of any description can have its sad side, generally that's exactly what we're able to do!

However, there are bound to be some exceptions and last September saw one of the worst. when the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary was attacked by vandals .

The perpetrators broke in through one of the perimeter fences and then used bolt cutters and brute force to cut

off the security locks of 30 aviaries at the centre in an attempt to release the birds from their aviaries.

Andy discovered the crime when he arrived for work at 8.30am on Friday, noticing one of the Snowy Owls sitting loose on a grassed area at the centre.

A quick investigation revealed the magnitude of the damage, exacerbated



by the discovery of one of the released Eagles attacking a Harris Hawk on our flying ground, which was a distressing sight.

Naturally, the first priority was to recover the birds that had been lost, because with one exception they were hand reared, non-native species who would - without the immediate knowledge and experience of fending for themselves - have found it difficult to survive in the wild for more than a few days without nourishment.

As it happens, fortunately most of the birds stayed in their comfort zone within the confines of the Sanctuary, where they felt safe. Of the dozen which ventured further afield only one - Isis, the Pharaoh's Eagle Owl - remained at large for more than a few days.

When Matt finally retrieved him from a garden just a couple of miles from



the centre he was thankfully none the worse for wear and so the team at the Sanctuary were able to concentrate on setting everything back to rights again.

The media soon picked up on the story and it was widely reported: "Free to Die" was one newspaper headline that spoke for many as it published an article castigating the ignorance & callousness of those who committed the act, pointing out that captive-reared creatures are simply not equipped to

survive in the wild and that releasing them in such a way in most cases amounted to a sentence of death.

Now, a few months on with the sun shining (at least some of the time) and the raptors all safe and well, it's difficult to remember just how devastated the whole team at S.O.S felt back then. Natural disasters are one thing, but when it's something totally unnecessary like this, then it's very hard to understand.

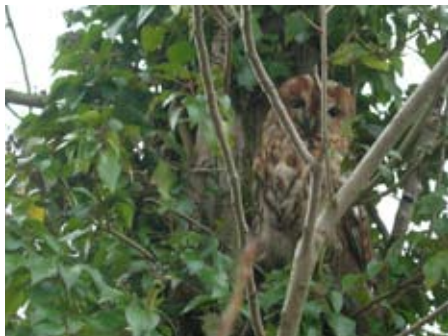
Maz Robinson

WHEN IS AN ORPHAN NOT AN ORPHAN?

Round about now at the beginning of May, we are in the throes of the wild owl breeding season and it's a time when young tawny owl fledglings who, often trying to fly before they can walk, are found apparently abandoned on the ground and so are brought into us by well-meaning members of the public mistakenly suspecting that the owlets are orphans.

But this is a normal occurrence with tawny owls and there is rarely any need for alarm. The best thing to do if you find a young bird is not to touch it, but firstly to have a good look for any obvious signs of injury or distress. If it looks quite calm and peaceful then come away and leave it to carry on its day.

This may seem contrary to our human instincts, but more often than not, just 20-40 feet above your head in the tree branches will be sitting the Tawny Owl's parents, watching your every move. They will not make their presence known until you have walked well out of sight; only then will they carry on their parental duties of feeding and encouraging the young owl to climb a tree or bush to get off the ground and potentially out of harm's way.



So if you do find a young tawny owl leave it alone unless it has obvious injuries – if it does, then pick it up carefully, wrap it in something soft and take it to a vet or local bird-of-prey centre in a closed ventilated box kept dark to minimise stress levels.

GIFT SHOP MAKEOVER

Whilst the falconers and volunteers have been working hard to give the Centre its yearly spring clean, we decided that it was high time for the famous Owl Barn Gift Shop at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary to have a makeover.



A steady flow of visitors come through the shop and adjacent reception area during the course of a year, resulting in a good deal of general wear and tear.

So come January the office, shop and falconry staff at S.O.S donned overalls and equipped with brushes and rollers, set to work.

The 18ft high ceiling and wall at one end of the shop meant a slow but steady start. However, over the course of the next week or so, after numerous trips to B&Q for supplies and trips to the kitchen for refreshing cups of tea, the job was done. There are sadly no DIY experts on our team, but we considered that we had produced a very professional job (though a huge sense of relief was felt by all, once the job was completed!)

If you haven't been to visit us before, The Owl Barn Gift Shop is a real gem. It hosts a range of countryside gift ware, an impressive selection of owl and bird-of-

prey souvenirs and a fantastic variety of children's toys! The shop is also home to the Owl Barn Catalogue SALE department, where much of the surplus catalogue stock can be found at greatly reduced prices... well worth a visit!

Andrew Farrow

COME ON YOU REDS!

The last few months have been fairly quiet on the Red Squirrel front, of which we currently have three in our small colony - one female and two young males.

The female is one of our original squirrels whilst the two males are very young and are only just reaching maturity so our plan this year is to acquire another female so that we can hopefully start breeding red squirrels again for release, as we have done in past years.

To do this, we are liaising with the East Anglian Red Squirrel Trust, who make up a network of red squirrel breeders. Their sole purpose is to provide new bloodlines of livestock for the various release programs which are already up & running.

Getting our woodlands and forests significantly re-populated with native red squirrels across the UK is not an easy job. As you are probably aware, there have been many problems facing our native populations, which have been wiped out in most of the UK mainland with only a few small ones remaining.

The introduction of the American Grey Squirrel has been cited as the main cause for the problems, as they are more versatile than the Red. They will happily live in areas which Red Squirrels find hard to colonize and also will eat a huge variety of food. The other problem is the disease 'Squirrel Pox', which is carried by greys and, if passed to red squirrels, is usually fatal.

As with Barn Owls, the other major predicament which faces the





red squirrels is large scale habitat destruction, albeit of a different nature! The Red Squirrel is designed to live in pine forests and although it can colonize other areas, pine forests are where it thrives the most. This is really the only place we can still see pockets of red squirrels today, most probably because grey squirrels find pine forests the hardest to live in.

This summer S.O.S. are still hopeful that our pair of Reds may be successful and produce young, which can then be sent to aid the Red Squirrel conservation projects. Meanwhile, do come and see them - they are charming creatures and great fun to watch.

Matt Lott

S.O.S. "RAPTOR PACKS" FOR TEACHERS ARE NOW ON-LINE

Part of our remit as a charity is to inform young people about owls and other birds of prey, to promote an understanding of wild raptors and their needs and to help raise awareness of the importance of their conservation for the future.

We already offer a variety of educational packages for schools, typically involving guided tours around the Sanctuary, informative talks about various aspects of subjects covered in the National Curriculum such as habitats and food chains, and a flying display to illustrate some of the concepts covered

in the discussion.

Throughout the year we also stage a series of Activity Days for young visitors. Each is designed to provide a creatively fun and interesting time at the Centre, where children can learn all about Owls and other Birds of Prey and their roles throughout history.

This year, the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary is proud to announce the launch of new three new "Raptor Packs" on our website www.owl-help.org.uk which comprise of a series of extensive free, downloadable teaching resources in safe .pdf formats. These aim to provide useful and interesting information about owls and other birds of prey; offer a range of stimulating, key stage-related activities; include Teachers Guidance Notes, with relevant Foundation and National Curriculum links and subject correlated objectives; help to enhance children's awareness of the importance of raptors and their environment and encourage children to be considerate, caring and responsible for their world.

For more information about this and all other aspects of life at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, please visit our website at www.owl-help.org.uk or call us on 01449 0711425. Better still, why not come and see us at the Sanctuary!

Ashley Costin

PLEASE RENEW YOUR OWL ADOPTION

As we hope you can see from this newsletter, the work of S.O.S. continues with dedication & enthusiasm. But - if you can - PLEASE renew your owl adoption as your donation is vital to our future and the well being and care of our avian friends.

Please call

01449 711425

to renew over the 'phone or adopt-an-owl for a friend or you can do it online at www.owl-help.org.uk

Thank You!

RAPTOR WORDSEARCH

r	r	r	a	p	a	b	b	c	d	e	f	k	w	a	h
a	a	i	p	r	w	d	e	x	f	g	h	i	j	k	a
f	h	p	r	j	x	e	a	y	t	y	s	p	o	l	w
a	u	u	t	k	y	f	g	z	u	v	r	q	n	m	p
i	d	j	h	o	z	g	l	a	n	r	u	t	c	o	n
n	i	k	l	t	r	h	e	h	a	w	s	w	x	y	e
c	u	l	m	n	n	i	p	a	f	e	d	c	b	a	a
u	m	a	f	o	o	j	q	b	u	z	z	a	r	d	e
b	b	n	a	p	c	k	r	z	g	k	l	m	n	o	a
a	c	o	l	q	t	l	s	r	g	c	b	a	z	p	b
t	d	p	c	r	a	m	e	y	h	d	s	z	z	l	c
e	e	q	o	s	b	t	t	x	i	e	r	t	u	k	d
l	f	r	n	t	n	u	v	j	f	g	h	i	j	y	
c	g	s	u	u	d	i	u	r	n	a	l	q	n	m	e
o	h	t	h	v	c	o	v	u	u	t	c	w	o	n	r
n	s	n	o	l	a	t	w	t	z	z	r	e	o	y	p

Can you find these words in our Raptor Wordsearch? Remember... words can go backwards as well as forwards!

- raptor
- owl
- prey
- falcon
- hawk
- incubate
- talons
- buzzard
- eagle
- diurnal
- nocturnal
- hunter