

NEWS

Regd. Charity
No. 1086565

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

PLEASE remember to re-adopt your owl
- every little bit helps!

Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, Stonham Barns, Stonham Aspal, Suffolk IP14 6AT
Tel: 08456 807 897 www.owl-help.org.uk

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

Issue 15 Spring - Summer 2010

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

Hello everyone!

It's been a hectic few months and we've had to struggle to decide what to leave out of this newsletter as much as what should go in it. But before we begin, I would like once again to thank all of you for your continued and invaluable support; it does mean a great deal to us!

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and remember, you can keep up-to-date with all our news, events and activities on our website at www.owl-help.org.uk

Andy Hulme

NEW KID ON THE BLOCK??



All concentration - our intrepid if camera-shy Maz tempts Pungu to the glove

Boys From The Grey Stuff



Those of you who are able to follow our blog will know that Dean, Andy, Matt & our team of volunteers have been working extremely hard throughout the bleak midwinter building the new falconers' huts, which will incorporate the mews, food preparation room, weighing room, incubator room and general office for the falconers.

This year our office manager, Maz, is set to become a fully fledged falconer. No stranger to the world of birds, she owns two European Eagles Owls of her own and an African Grey parrot. Here's her story...

My job here at S.O.S has always been a diverse one, ranging from welcoming visitors in reception, answering the phone and dealing with emails, to fundraising - the latter a fundamental role as we are always striving to offer the best possible care for our resident birds, facilities for the rehabilitation of wild injured birds and an inspirational experience for our visitors.

Regular visitors have also been used to seeing me outside with the raptors and have been known to ask me whether I'm 'in or out today?' So I'm no stranger to baby raising, visiting the vets with injured birds and flying the raptors in displays. I enjoy the interaction with the visitors when I'm around the Sanctuary handling the birds, so I'm looking forward to having more time for this in the summer.

Falconry wasn't new to me when I first came to S.O.S as it's something I was involved in a few years ago (well a few and a bit) when I was in my twenties. Now it seems what was once

a hobby is turning into my full time job! Although I've flown all the birds at the Sanctuary in the past, I must admit my lure swinging for the falcons does leave a little to be desired, so the ever patient Matt is going to give me some training. For those of you who may be new to the falconry scene, a 'swing lure' is a leather pad attached to the end of an eight foot line onto which a tasty morsel is tied, which is skillfully swung by the falconer to simulate the way that the falcon would chase its aerial prey in the wild. The falconers make it look very easy - trust me, it isn't!

One of my not so favourite falconry tasks is to fly Pungu our Bateleur Eagle. If you ever see Pungu with one of the boys, you would think 'aaahhh what an affectionate soul' but when it comes to women... well that's a different story! Of course it would have to be my job to try to convince Pungu that she really doesn't hate women, much to the great amusement of the lads. I'm hoping this season she'll decide that paying me particular attention isn't all that necessary and maybe when we do a flying display she'll fly to me rather than at me. Well there's always hope - and at least my job is never a dull one!

Great Events for 2010...

... why not come and join us?

We are always keen to make sure that everyone has a great experience at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, so this year we are offering even more in the way of exciting fund-raising events and outstanding entertainment.

Our **Mother's Day** (March 14th) & **Father's Day** (June 10th) specials are always very popular, where Mum has the opportunity to have her photograph taken with one of our beautiful owls and Dad gets to have his (slightly more macho) picture taken with one of our falcons. There's good old fashioned Punch & Judy too, to keep the youngsters entertained.

Over the **Easter Weekend** Punch & Judy will return, our Easter Egg Hunt takes place & Jenny's Pet Zoo pays a return visit - a chance to meet a whole host of weird and wonderful beasts from water dragons to guinea pigs & gerbils.

Later in the year our **Summer Sundays** throughout July and August will provide great fun for all the family. There will be hula hoops, limbo dancing, plate spinning, sports day games & much more

These examples offer just a taster of what's going on at S.O.S this year and you can find out more about all our events by visiting our website at www.owl-help.org.uk, emailing us at info@owl-help.org or calling us on 08456 807897.

But as always we will be staging our spectacular **Flying Displays from Easter to September**, providing a chance to see some of the world's most spectacular birds of prey in free flight as we aim to enthuse you with the beauty of nature and the importance we place on the care & conservation of Britain's owl species

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

08456 807 897

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!

Owly Updates

Everything that we do at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary - from every raptor rescue we make to every bird we manage to rehabilitate back to the wild, and every wild owl nestbox we erect & maintain to every school we visit - is dependent on the support of people like YOU, which is why we are so grateful for every bird you adopt and every donation you are able to give.

Currently our adoption birds are Taiga, Snapdragon, Cobweb, Snowdrop, Bug & Lanark (and this year we are also hoping to add one of our Eagles and one of our Falcons to the list) but here's an update on how your friends are faring.

Taiga



Taiga our popular Great Grey Owl is now two years old and one of the favourites in our flying displays. At the beginning

of October 2009 we welcomed a new arrival, Napoleon - a female Great Grey - to the centre. (Yes, Napoleon is a strange name for a lady but, like all birds of prey, she was difficult to sex as a nipper). She has come to S.O.S on loan from Tropical Wings in Essex and has now moved in with prospective husband Taiga to a new aviary. We try to pair all our birds for their peace of mind.

Snapdragon



Our doughty Little Owl Snapdragon came to us as a young, rescued bird. Wherever possible, our policy is to

return a wild bird to it's natural habitat but sometimes - though a raptor may recuperate to enjoy a good quality of life - in our opinion it may not be able to fend for itself in the wild. Snapdragon was one such and so we provided a secure and caring living environment for her. She recently became a grandma when daughter Lilly, who was bred here in 2004, produced two smashing chicks.

Cobweb



Cobweb the Barn Owl also came to us as a rescue case and, quite frankly, has become the darling of the Centre.

He has a whole plethora of admirers to whom he especially loves showing off his aerial skills during the flying demonstration season, which we believe Cobweb is eagerly anticipating after his lengthy moult over the winter.

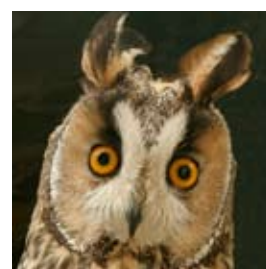
Snowdrop



As you would have guessed from the name, Snowdrop is one of our resident Snowy Owls. He's been at the Suffolk Owl

Sanctuary longer than almost anyone can remember and is probably topping twenty years old now! But he's still a young'un at heart and he and his partner 'Norse' produced five chicks in 2009. They have all gone to excellent homes as part of flying demonstration teams, even as far away as France - not under their own steam, of course!

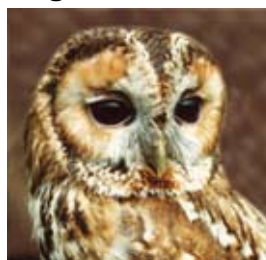
Lanark



Lanark is one of our Long Eared Owls, who again has been with us since he was quite young. He's a stunning chap who always looks

very alert with his characteristic long 'ear tufts'. Lanark also acquired a new partner, Kielder, in 2009, who came all the way from Belgium. They have settled in really well together, so here's hoping this year will produce the patter of tiny talons.

Bug



Bug is one of our beautiful Tawny Owls. Bug came to us from a chap called Mark Chester who is a local wildlife artist

and breeder. Bug and partner Beak are well established and very comfortable together. Their nest box has been situated in one of our spacious aviaries so that they feel secure and relaxed, so fingers crossed we're hoping for a happy event or two to report in our next newsletter!

Waveney Valley Raptor Conservation

When our General Manager Andy Hulme isn't looking after the raptors, flying birds in demonstrations, building new falconers' huts, repairing aviaries, gardening and generally making sure everything at the Sanctuary is ship-shape, he likes to spend his 'spare time' getting involved in other extremely worthwhile Conservation Projects. One such is the Thornham Owl Project, as Andy explains...

Now in its eighth year, the Thornham Owl Project in East Anglia has conducted an annual survey of the number of owls and other birds of prey that have successfully bred in the approximately 200 nest boxes they have strategically placed around the Waveney & Gipping Valleys in Mid Suffolk and South Norfolk.



Box Camera - three baby Barn Owls populate a Waveney Owl box

The Waveney & Gipping Valleys offer a vast region of suitable habitat for a



The team take great care when evaluating and ringing the young Barn Owl progeny

variety of raptors and other birds, having plenty of grassland and water meadows - perfect for Barn Owls - but also areas of established woodland, which provides an ideal environment for Kestrels, Tawny Owls & Little Owls.



The intrepid Roger Buxton carefully inspects one of the 200 nest boxes of the Waveney Valley Project.
Note: A Disturbance Licence is required for this strictly controlled activity

It has been widely advertised how the loss of barns and farm outbuildings has reduced the possible nesting places of some of our country's birds of prey, most particularly the Barn Owl, so the introduction of nest boxes is vital to encourage wild birds to live and breed in our local countryside.

The Thornham Owl Project is primarily run on a voluntary basis and nest boxes are sponsored by members of the general public. For the last couple of years, the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary has used some of the donations we received for our own Nest Box project to further support the worthwhile activity.

In 2009, we sponsored ten nest boxes around the Waveney Valley area and, as you may remember from our last newsletter, Gollum the Tawny Owl and I were highly chuffed to receive the Kingfisher Conservation Award from Roger Buxton of the Thornham Owl Project in recognition of your contributions to the scheme.

The results for our sponsored nest boxes over the last year were encouraging, as seven out of the ten boxes were occupied. We had one pair of Barn Owls that bred and successfully raised three chicks and also two pairs of Stock Doves that produced and raised chicks. Not so good was the fact that Barns Owls had a somewhat tough year in general in the area and their breeding numbers on average were down. However, it's projects like this that give our native raptors a fighting chance in the wild, so we'll keep our fingers crossed for 2010!

All snowed in!

The Sanctuary is open all year round apart from Christmas Day and Boxing Day, though even then staff are on hand to make sure the raptors are fed and well cared for. There are no exceptions, no matter what the weather, as Events Coordinator Andrew describes...

This year the UK has seen some of the worst winter weather our neck of the woods has experienced for many years.

The Sanctuary's location at Stonham Aspal is particularly remote (roughly 9 miles from the small market town of Stowmarket) and after a few days of continuous snow, access was particularly difficult. However, at least one member of our dedicated falconry team braved the snow and icy conditions throughout the cold snap to ensure daily care for our raptor residents.

All our falconers have at least a thirty mile trip to get to the Sanctuary, so to give praise where its due: 'good on you and thanks for all your efforts guys!'

The Centre itself lay quietly under a thick blanket of snow for a few days - and as a result of all the snow gradually turned to a thick blanket of ice, so in the interests of health and safety, we had no choice but to remain closed to the public for a few days and wait it out! That said, I'm not sure many people contemplated a visit in those temperatures anyway!



The astounding Snowy Owl can survive in temperatures of -40°C - thankfully this ability was not tested at the Sanctuary (though it sometimes felt like it!)

You may therefore ask how our avian residents stay warm and dry in such conditions? Well, like all birds they have velvety 'down' underneath their primary outer plumage and these soft and fluffy feathers act as insulation to trap a layer of warm air against the body. There is also a small gland called the 'uropygial' located at the base of the tail that produces a thin oily liquid. This gland is stimulated by the beak, which is then used to transfer the liquid to the feathers to provide them with a protective waterproof coating.

Battling the Winter Blues

As always, 2009 saw a regular influx of visitors to the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary's hospital, some just needing a little recuperation time and some with more urgent requirements. We would love to say that all the birds that come to us recover and are returned to their natural habitat, but unfortunately life isn't always like that. What we can say is that all our hospital residents receive the very best care and attention whatever the eventual outcome and it's always a source of great joy to the team when a raptor is returned fit and healthy to the wild. Well it's another new year and the work of the hospital goes on, as Conservation Officer Dean explains...

Thankfully the hospital has seen a slow start to 2010. The first Barn Owl of the New Year that came in went straight out again, having been found by the side of a road in a very sorry looking state. But looks can prove deceptive and a close examination revealed that there were no breaks or injuries, so it's most likely that the Barn Owl was caught in the slipstream of a car and was just a bit dazed. The Barn Owl was soon flight tested and given a clean bill of health, before its rescuer returned it nearby to the area where it was found and released it back into the wild.

Sadly, such happy outcomes are not always the case - another Barn Owl brought to us early during snowy January was simply a victim of the cold weather, no doubt unable to find food amongst the deep snow. Very weakened through prolonged exposure, it typically was unable to regain its strength and passed away peacefully a few days later.

A couple of weeks afterwards we received a Kestrel from a local vet, the bird having been found by a woman on her outside patio, having believably crashed into the window. Having been given a thorough examination by the



In fine fettle - hopefully the injured Kestrel we received recently will be back in the air soon

vet, it was established that the Kestrel had no breaks or injuries, the only problem being that its tail was only an inch long! Fortunately, the bird was just going through a late moult and simply needed some time to moult the tail down before being ready for release.

Now, four weeks on, the Kestrel is doing very well. Its tail is back to full length and the bird has gained a lot of weight and fitness. Hopefully in the next week or two the Kestrel will be released, but this does depend on whether the snow eventually disappears for good this season and we are reasonably confident that it's easier for her to find food.

New Arrivals

Our passion at the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary is focused on the care & well being of wild birds of prey but we also have other strings to our bow including an ardour for many British Wildlife Conservation initiatives. Head Falconer Matt tells us more...

The small red squirrel colony at S.O.S. has grown in recent times as last year we obtained a new young female squirrel from Pensthorpe Nature Reserve in Norfolk. This year we plan to renovate the squirrel enclosure as it has started to show its age by creating two or three separate enclosures linked by a tunnel system. This should help to keep the squirrels active both mentally and physically and also give us the scope to expand the colony in coming years. Having suffered a setback some years ago, our aim is to expand the colony back to a point where we can start breeding the squirrels again, the purpose being for release at suitable sites such as Anglesey. This renovation project will be very dependent on funds available, but all being well, we will start work on the project this spring.

Back in the air, as it were, this year we have plans for several new members for the flying team and are currently looking forward to the arrival of a pair of the magnificent Spectacled Owls, the acquisition the result of a very generous bequest. This Spectacled Owl originates from central & eastern areas of South America and live on a typical owl diet of small rodents, insect and birds.

We are also looking forward to the arrival of a pair of Black Kites, which are an impressive flying bird and a smaller cousin of the native Red Kite, of which three are currently resident with us. The Black Kite can be found throughout the world and is one of the most widespread birds of prey on the planet, although it doesn't natively favour our shores. These birds are predominately scavengers

and in most of their range live close to humans, where food is easier to come by. They are real survivors and can live in almost any habitat.

Hope to see YOU over this coming Spring / Summer season, as well as these new birds! We also have lots of other attractions and events planned to look forward to.

WATCH THE BIRDIE!

We are indebted to Mr Brian MacFarlane, a long-time supporter of S.O.S. for many of the beautiful photographs that grace these pages.

Brian holds fund-raising "Photo Days" at the Centre periodically, providing a chance for you to add some stunning photographs or video footage of the birds in natural surroundings to your portfolio and quiz this talented man for tips & tricks on wildlife photography. This year the courses take place on June 19th & July 17th at a cost of £50 per person for the day. If you would like to join us, please call 08456 807 897 to book a place - but don't leave it too long, as places go quickly!

