

Broads Barn Owl Project



A year in the life of a barn owl

Jan - Owls hunt up to 5km from nest site

Feb to Mar - Roosting pairs at nest sites, male courts and feeds female

April to May - Egg laying and incubation by female, male hunts within 2km of nest

June to July - Rearing young, juveniles fledging, adults hunt within 2km of nest

Aug to Nov - Juveniles disperse, adults' home range increases

Dec - Barn owls hunt up to 5km from nest site



Barn Owls

Once a familiar sight in the Broads and surrounding villages, barn owls have become an increasingly rare sight. This project aims to raise the number of these wonderful birds in the Broads by providing nest boxes and habitat advice to landowners.

Primarily a farmland bird, the barn owl hunts for small mammals over rough grassland, along field and watercourse margins, and wetland edges.

Barn owl populations have suffered significant declines both nationally and in Norfolk, mainly due to the loss of roosting and nesting sites, and in particular the fragmentation of rough grassland habitat needed for hunting.

We can help barn owls by protecting existing nesting sites in old buildings or trees, providing nest boxes, and maintaining and creating prey-rich rough grassland habitat.



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Many traditional barn owl roosting and nesting sites in farm buildings and old trees have been lost over the years due to barn conversions and tree disease. Artificial nest sites close to rough grassland habitat are essential for maintaining and increasing barn owl populations. Barn owls readily use nest boxes, but it is essential that these are maintained to provide important breeding sites.

Barn owl nesting boxes - The Broads Authority is working in partnership with the Hawk and Owl Trust to provide barn owl nesting boxes to landowners with suitable habitat.

Habitat advice - Permanent rough grassland areas are vital for supporting healthy barn owl populations. The Broads Authority ecologist can provide habitat advice (also see inside this leaflet).

Monitoring - Nest boxes are monitored annually by licensed bird ringers to determine barn owl occupancy and breeding success. Juvenile birds are ringed and information gathered is passed to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). This information is vital for population monitoring, research and conservation.

Breeding barn owls are protected by law from disturbance. Please seek professional advice before any work is undertaken which may disturb a nesting site.

For more information and advice please contact the Broads Authority ecologist 01603 610734.

www.broads-authority.gov.uk

www.hawkandowl.org

www.barnowltrust.org.uk



Barn owl hunting habitat

Barn owls prefer to hunt within 2km of the nest site during the breeding season using rough or damp tussocky grassland, rough field or hedgerow margins, drainage ditches or woodland edges. Rough grassland provides a deep litter layer of horizontal grass 7-10cm deep at the base of the sward. The litter layer provides cover for small mammals including voles and shrews, which in turn supply barn owls with enough food.

Creating rough grassland

Rough grassland should ideally be provided as blocks, but can be provided as wide strips (at least 3m wide but ideally 6m), along field margins, woodland edges or watercourses.

- Allow fields and grass margins to grow unmanaged for two seasons to establish a litter layer.
- Once established top areas of rough grassland every second or third year at a height of 10-13cm, or lightly graze every second or third year.
- Cut rough grassland areas on a rotational basis (e.g. cutting strips in alternate years) to help ensure permanent barn owl hunting habitat.
- Leave field margins unsprayed to increase the number of field voles, the favourite prey of barn owls.
- Link blocks of rough grassland with hedgerows or grassland strips to increase small mammal habitat.
- The amount of rough grassland to aim for within 2km of a nest site is 31-47ha in pastoral areas, 14-21ha in arable areas or 17-26ha in mixed farming areas.

Countryside Stewardship Grants

Countryside Stewardship options can provide payments to landowners for the maintenance and creation of habitat which will benefit barn owls including:

Mid and Higher Tier and Ecological Focus Areas

- Infield grass strips (SW3) • 4-6m buffer strips (SW1)

For more information visit: www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management

Nest boxes

External box - Mount on large, isolated trees, or in a copse overlooking open areas. The box should be placed on a vertical tree trunk (or farm building) 3-5m from the ground. The front of the box should be visible to a passing owl, with a clear flight path to the entrance hole. Preferably face the box between north and east.

Internal box - Many rural buildings are suitable for a nest box provided it can be placed at least 3m above ground level, with a clear flight path to the entrance. Nest boxes erected high up in buildings provide barn owls with somewhere dark to hide, allowing them to tolerate regular activity.

Pole-mounted box - Use where no suitable trees or buildings exist (old telegraph poles are ideal). These boxes involve more work and expense, and do not allow young owls to climb back into the nest if they fall. In areas of rich habitat without trees or buildings, these boxes can significantly boost local barn owl numbers.

Action for barn owls

Maintain nest sites in buildings and trees, supplemented by nesting boxes if required.

Prevent road deaths by erecting boxes at least 1km from major roads.

Protect from secondary poisoning during rodent control - non-toxic product now available, see www.barnowltrust.org.uk/content_images/pdf/Rodent_Control_watermark.pdf

Prevent drowning by fitting a simple float in cattle drinking troughs see www.barnowltrust.org.uk/content_images/pdf/How_to_Prevent_Drowning_31.pdf