



Barn Owls In Cam Valley Area 2018

2018 has been a difficult year for Barn owls and for our survey team.

Nationally there seem to have been encouraging signs of owls pairing up earlier than usual in February. However along came the infamous 'Beast from the East' with long periods of snow cover and heavy rain. The feathers of Barn owls are not oiled like many other birds' are. As a result they cannot hunt in rain. It was inevitable that 'the Beast' would have an impact on the population. It would have also had a detrimental effect of the vole population – the main food of Barn owls. They live in holes in the ground and many would have been flooded.



The first signs of the impact of all this were reports nationally that breeding had been delayed by four or five weeks. Then at the time when chicks would have hatched we had the long blistering summer which would also have some impact.



We had been carrying out our normal early observations from April trying to determine which nest sites appeared to be occupied. That is done by inspecting the site from the ground looking for signs of splashing and pellets on the ground plus asking the site owner. After that we work out which of the occupied sites have breeding pairs. Sure signs of that are seeing the male bringing in food for the female with visits increasing when the chicks hatch. If we are lucky we also begin hearing the chicks calling from within the nest.

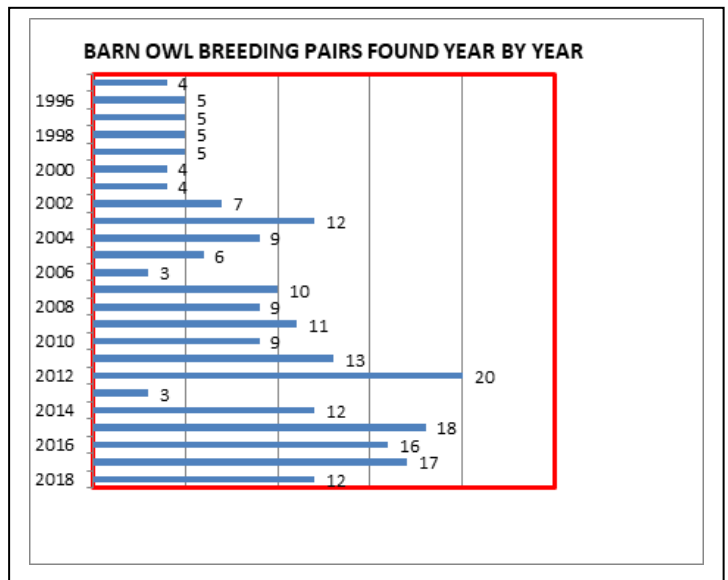
We try to inspect the nests when we estimate chicks to be about six weeks old. At that time the male and female will often be using other roosts (it can get crowded in a nest box or other cavity!) but bringing in food for the chicks in the late evening. Inspecting the nests at that time minimises any disturbance. We normally start the inspections in mid-June but knowing nesting was late we delayed it by four weeks until mid-July and completed it in two weeks.

What did we find? Well we had 17 nesting pairs in 2017. This year we were down to 12. We found:
12 sites with nesting pairs
2 sites with resident pairs which seem not to have bred
4 sites where we observed a single bird present
2 sites where birds(s) were reported being seen by owners but we did not witness.

We counted 30 chicks which is an average of 2.5 per breeding pair. It should be noted that as we inspect when the chicks are about 6 weeks old it is inevitable that some will have died previously

(especially in times of food shortage) and some may die subsequently – the number is therefore a moving target depending on timing of inspection.

In total 20 – 22 sites were occupied (compared with 28 in 2017). The population will vary naturally from year to year. All in all, although there was a decrease from last year, it was not as bad as it might have been considering the volatile weather conditions. The chart tracks the number of nesting pairs from year to year since we started the project.



I am always interested in hearing from anyone interested in getting involved in the project or reports of sightings of Barn owls in our area.

André Fournier

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Photos taken during the survey by Gary Kingman

Greener Greenways

Sustrans is a charity that promotes cycling and walking and maintains the cycle route between Radstock and Midford and the former railway line between Radstock and Great Elm, near Frome.

The railway line is a nature rich linear path and where nightingales are occasionally heard, grass snakes found near the watercourses, and one that has notable sightings of invertebrates particularly dragonflies, butterflies and bees.

Greener Greenways is a nationwide project to enhance the wildlife on this path and sixty five other sites in the United Kingdom. Sustrans has received grant aid from the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation to help fund practical training of volunteers, to purchase tools and equipment and for specialist advice and help.

There are eight volunteers who maintain the route and are mostly occupied on fence repairs, sign erection and cleaning and clearance of brambles and other vegetation that grows over the path obstructing cyclists, walkers and runners. For the most part these volunteers are cyclists and have limited knowledge of ecology and wildlife conservation but can call on support from specialists at Sustrans HQ.

The local volunteer group is preparing a Management Plan which will set out a work programme and activities for the public to join in with. Typical are citizen surveys, bat walks and moth nights, together with work days when invasive vegetation will be cut back to allow certain plants to thrive and to allow more sunlight to fall onto the path. Hazel coppicing will not only provide more light to enter copses but could also provide material for a local hurdle maker.

The most recent event was a Nature Treasure Hunt for families with children on bikes who found wildlife clues on a six mile round trip from Kilmersdon Orchard.

I am indebted to Deborah Porter for walking the whole of the six mile route with me to explain the potential for habitat improvement in different locations and for reviewing our embryonic management plan. Her help and advice has been invaluable.

For further information on Greener Greenways go to www.sustrans.org.uk/greenways.

Robert Ladd

Group Coordinator (Sustrans Radstock Volunteers)

Events Programme for October-March 2019

Goosard reserve workdays – usually on last Saturday of each month – Please contact Roger on 01761 419778 for info.

Wednesday 7 November 2018

Botany drinks 7.00-9.00pm at Palladium Electric in Midsomer Norton

(The new Wetherspoons pub in the High Street) It's a chance for Botany Walkers to socialise over the winter months. All are welcome.

Wednesday 14 November 2018

7.30pm Talk 'Standing up for Trees' by Owen Rogers of Woodland Trust

Coffee & cake from 7.30pm, talk at 8pm. Members £2, (non-members: £3)

At Swallow – see directions below.

Wednesday 5 December 2018

7.30pm AGM & Talk by Diana Walker on her wildlife year, & possibly 2nd speaker tbc

Seasonal refreshments (mulled wine/juice & mince pies) from 7.30pm, followed by short AGM, then Diana will be talking about her wildlife encounters during the year.

No charge. Please also bring along your own photos from the past year.

At Swallow – see directions below.

Thursday 13 December 2018

12.00 noon. Christmas lunch at Swallow Community Café in Radstock.

Limited places - menu choice & full payment will be needed with booking. Details nearer the time.

Wednesday 9 January 2019

Botany drinks 7-9pm at Palladium Electric in Midsomer Norton

(The new Wetherspoons pub in the High Street) It's a chance for Botany Walkers to socialise over the winter months. All are welcome.

Wednesday 6 February 2019

Botany drinks 7-9pm at Palladium Electric in Midsomer Norton

(The new Wetherspoons pub in the High Street) It's a chance for Botany Walkers to socialise over the winter months. All are welcome.

Wednesday 20 February 2019

7.30pm Talk on Stourhead's tree sparrow project

By Tamsin Holmes of National Trust

Tree Sparrows declined in the UK by 95% between 1970 and 2000. Tamsin Holmes of the National Trust will tell us about their project to encourage the revival of this endangered species.

Coffee & cake from 7.30pm, talk at 8.00pm. Members £2, (non-members: £3)
At Swallow – see directions below.

Wednesday 13 March 2019

Botany drinks 7.00-9.00pm at Palladium Electric in Midsomer Norton
(The new Wetherspoons pub in the High St) It's a chance for Botany Walkers to socialise over the winter months. All are welcome.

Wednesday 20 March 2019

7.30pm Talk 'The Swift – a life on the wing' by Peter Bright
Peter has been watching swifts nest in his Mendip house since 2006.
Coffee & cake from 7.30pm, talk at 8.00pm. Members £2 (non-members: £3)
At Swallow – see directions below.

Our venue for indoor meetings:

Swallow, Old Engine House, Old Pit Road, Midsomer Norton, BA3 4BQ.

If coming from Midsomer Norton, go up Silver Street, turn left into Charlton Road, then at the end go left onto **A367** towards Radstock. Go past the row of shops on the left: Fosse Way Co-op store & Whitstones fish & chip shop. About 300yards further, just past zebra crossing and past Buildbase on your right, **turn left at the sign for 'Sun Chemicals: opposite the children's playground/bowling club.** This is a single track road – follow the road curving round to the right and just past the bend is the entrance to Swallow (sign on notice board at entrance). Go through the gateway and the meeting room is straight ahead on the far left. There is plenty of parking. Please note that Satnav may take you astray!

If you need any more information about anything please phone Judy on 07460 278311 or email judy@swallowcharity.org.

Next Newsletter: The copy date for the next Newsletter is **15th December 2018.**

This Newsletter is published four times a year by Cam Valley Wildlife Group, an independent, volunteer-run wildlife group, covering Midsomer Norton, Radstock and surrounding villages.

To contribute articles, or provide feedback on previous articles, contact the Editor:

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