



Suffolk Owl Sanctuary News

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Regd. Charity No. 1086565

Welcome to the new Suffolk Owl Sanctuary newsletter!

Dear Supporter,

I hope you enjoy our latest newsletter, bringing you up to date with news of the centre and some of the raptor conservation and rescue projects we've been involved in over the last few months. Our work is largely funded by the donations made by you as one of the much appreciated adopters and donors who contribute to our cause and to whom we would like to express our very grateful thanks for your continued support. Thank you! **Maz Robinson, General Manager, The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary**

Romeo and Juliet

This pair of beautiful kestrels was brought into our hospital together earlier this year - in fact, the day after Valentine's Day - having been found in an unused holiday cottage. Luckily the finders had been popping by to check up on the property, when they were greeted with these two trying to set up their love-nest in one of the bedrooms!

The theory was that they had entered via a chimney in the room, most likely looking for somewhere to start nest building together.

Although fairly dehydrated and hungry, they probably found a good place to weather the cold snap at the time! It's very unusual for us to receive an adult pair in such good condition (except for the odd scrape),

so we were pleased to be able to release the pair very soon afterwards so they could continue their nest building!



'Romeo & Juliet' obviously only eyes for each other, and the heart-shapes in Romeo's plumage made his feelings even more evident!



"It was 25 years ago today..." that the large bird aviaries were built...

The lockdown period earlier this year gave us the opportunity to start rebuilding them



Work In Progress

Besides managing the rescue and rehabilitation of the injured wild birds that pass through our hospital, and curating our resident birds, our staff are past masters at much of the building and repair work that's undertaken at the Sanctuary. The task during lockdown earlier this year was replacing one of the three original large bird aviaries which had been in service for the past quarter of a century...

The Big Hoot

S.O.S. is pleased to be helping promote a special fundraising project for a local hospice. Visitors to S.O.S. this summer were greeted by "Snowy", one of the large owl sculptures which will be decorated by local artists and dotted around Ipswich as part of the appositely called "Big Hoot" event to raise funds for St. Elizabeth Hospice in 2022.



Trainee falconer Dolly and Auckland the Bookbook Owl gather with volunteers Sarah and Cara to make "Snowy" feel at home!

Happy Ending to a Sticky Story

When birds come into our hospital, we always hope to release them back into the wild as soon as possible, providing they are fit and healthy enough to survive. However, you may remember stories from our last issue about two Barn Owls, both seriously injured, who had already

raptors this usually takes 2-3 months for them to replace 2-4 feathers at a time. Birds won't replace all their feathers at once as this would make it impossible for them to fly and find food in the wild.

"Holewing" was found in May 2020 having been caught up in barbed wire. He was so named because of the hole in his wing, which our consulting vet, Elliott,

did a marvellous job of patching up. Because of the damage, we knew that Holewing would need more time in our hospital than most birds, so we decided to put him in a large aviary to recuperate with Sticky.

The two become companions over the following few months during which we were pleased to see Sticky moulting the last of her damaged feathers and the hole disappear in Holewing's wing.

We intended to release the pair from our hack pen but just as we were planning on putting them out late in January,

we were hit by snow, and if there's one thing that knocks barn owls, it's snow!

We waited until early spring to release them, and in preparation for this, Sticky became the first of our rehab barn owls to be 'ringed' for a number of years.

Ringling wild birds is useful as it helps scientists see why populations change over time, track migratory birds which may be caught on either their breeding or wintering grounds here or abroad, and also gives an idea on the general health of birds. Barn owls are routinely ringed as chicks in nest boxes by licensed volunteers. Holewing already had a ring on, which meant we were able to find out exactly when and where he was ringed, in 2014 at a monitored nestbox 30 miles away.

By ringling our rehab birds, we hope to discover where they disperse to after release. It is possible that Sticky and Holewing may subsequently be found breeding in one of the many barn owl nest boxes found in the area as part of the wild owl nest box scheme that we run in conjunction with the Thornham Owl Project. This is funded by the generous donations of S.O.S. supporters, for which we thank you!



Sticky, showing off all her new feathers which she grew while in our rehab aviaries.

spent a significant part of their lives in our hospital as they travelled the long road back to full fitness after coming into contact with man-made threats.

"Sticky" came to us in September 2019 having been found stuck in a glue trap. Despite our best efforts to minimise the damage, the glue took hours of delicate washing to come free from her plumage, by which time it had already caused irreparable damage to her primary feathers.

All birds can moult their feathers if they get worn or damaged - in



Holewing on the left and Sticky on the right, a few days before they were successfully released

Behind the Scenes - A visit from the Vet

The privilege of working with beautiful owls and other birds of prey, and the satisfaction of helping many of those injured wild birds back to full health and ready for release, is considerable.

In these two short examples we'd like to reveal a little of the professional care and compassion our staff provide behind the scenes as a result of your generosity in supporting Suffolk Owl Sanctuary with your donations.

Here at Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, we are proud of our relationship with avian specialist vet, Elliott Simpson from Aquila Veterinary Services.

He recently came to check some of our long-term hospital patients and give us his expert opinion on their recovery chances.



Falconer Jess tenderly held the buzzard whilst the vet inspected the eye and administered drops to help it heal.

We had a buzzard come into our bird of prey hospital with a severe head trauma. We'll never know exactly how it got into this state as

it was found in the middle of a field, but our best guesses are that it was either persecuted and hit with a blunt object and then dumped, or it got into an altercation with another large bird, such as another buzzard, peregrine falcon or a crow.

When it arrived it had blood in both eyes and was displaying worrying signs it may have been blinded.

Vet Elliott recommended the medication and treatment required, which we were able to provide quickly. Overnight, the buzzard improved a little, and after a few days it was able to see food put out for it and fly to a perch.

Pleased with its progress when he next visited, Elliott suggested we continue treatment for the eye ulcer and after many weeks, we're pleased to say it was successfully released fit & free back to its natural habitat.

The young female sparrowhawk shown above was brought in after colliding with a window. Following a couple of days to recover from concussion, she was placed into a larger aviary so we could assess if there was any other damage. She appeared to be familiar with mesh and netting (which we use at the top of our recuperation aviaries to prevent escape during respite), suggesting that she was already experienced enough to hunt in urban gardens. Happy with her recovery,



Our vet Elliott carefully checks the young sparrowhawk before giving her a clean bill of health and she was soon back in her recuperation aviary and ready for release.

we decided she would be a good candidate to ring before release. As these are wild birds, we try to minimise contact and handling as much as possible, and during the process of catching her up to ring, discovered that she had a mild case of frounce, a bacterial infection which can cause issues in the throat. We delayed her release until this had been treated and on his visit Elliott checked her over and removed a few small lumps from her mouth (the remains of the infection), revealing healthy tissue underneath the bird was given a clean bill of health and released soon afterwards.

Finally, it must be said that whilst every bird we receive into our hospital is given the best possible care, sometimes their injuries are deemed to be too great to ensure a quality of life. Therefore the kindest treatment we can give is to humanely euthanise them to end unnecessary suffering. This is always performed by our vet and is never a decision taken lightly but on every occasion, with great sadness.



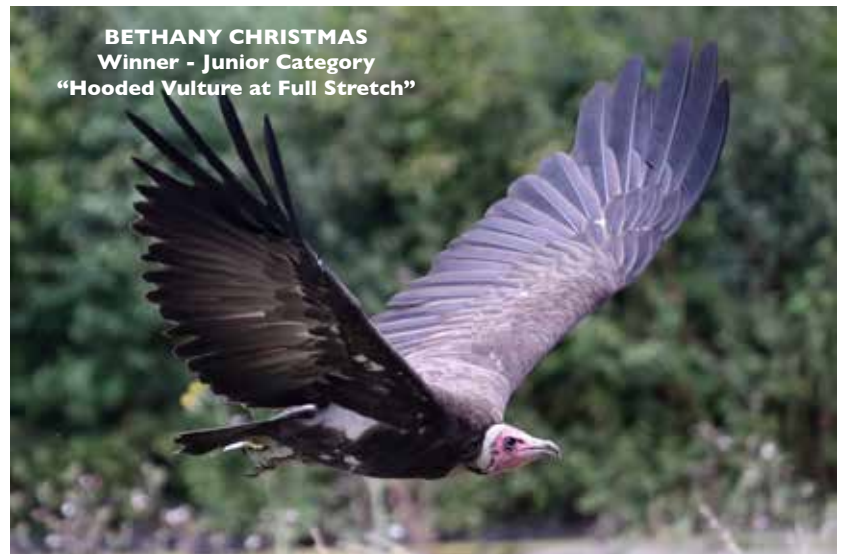
STEPHEN WHITAKER
 Winner Senior Category
 "Lincoln takes a bath"

Snap Shots

There are many wonderful birds resident at Suffolk Owl Sanctuary to help us illustrate the diversity of owls and other birds of prey as we emphasise the need for their care and conservation to visitors in this ever-threatening world. It's not surprising that the results in our 2020 Photo Competition provided some stunning shots and we're happy to share with you the work of the winners in both the senior and junior categories - congratulations and well done!



Boris the Ashy Faced Owl
 is always one for getting in the picture!



BETHANY CHRISTMAS
 Winner - Junior Category
 "Hooded Vulture at Full Stretch"

Can You Bee-lieve It?!

As conservationists, we are concerned for all species, large and small and the recent decline in the numbers of bumble bees in the U.K. is of concern.

Scientific research at the University of London is proving that although bees have a brain "the size of a poppy seed" they also have an astonishing learning capacity and are able to develop new skills by watching the actions of others.

Initially, bees were trained by Dr. Olli J. Loukola's team to tug a string to obtain a reward and this skill set was then applied to a tiny game of football!

Buff-tailed bumble bees were able to observe a trained bee rolling a ball to a goal and were then able to mimic what they had seen to take part themselves... and the goals kept coming!

Dr. Loukola claims that he could train some bees to score on one side of the arena and some on the opposite side and states that "...the idea that small brains constrain insects is kind of wrong or old fashioned".

We will be listening carefully for the tiny cheers of bee supporters in the garden next summer!!



Above: Buff tailed bumble bee - image by Gedling Conservation Trust

The Sanctuary Angels

The staff of Suffolk Owl Sanctuary salute the legion of wonderful volunteers who give freely of their time to help us keep the centre running through fair weather and foul. Never stinting, always smiling, their support is inestimable!

Thank you all for your kind help & dedication.



Cowlick the Kestrel



This is Cowlick, a young male Kestrel who was found on the floor in a barn being licked by cows! It's possible he had been living and hunting around the farm and happened to get a bit waterlogged after a bout of heavy wet weather. He must have found shelter in the barn and it seems the cows just wanted to check he was OK!

Cowlick was also suffering from a foot infection called bumblefoot. It's rare to see this condition in wild birds and suggests he could have been perching or living in the barn for a while, as they usually have a lot of flat surfaces that can cause it; or simply was an old puncture wound that became infected. We're happy to say that after receiving treatment we were able to successfully release him.

Grandad Soldiers On!

A few months back we received a call from a local vet to see if we could help with a barn owl they had received. The owl had been picked up from the side of a road, so it's likely that he'd been hit by a vehicle.

Upon arrival with us, he was assessed for injuries and thankfully there were no obvious breaks, so he was given some pain relief and time to recuperate. He was a bit wobbly on his legs for a few days but made good progress and it wasn't long before we were able to release him near where he was found.

In the process of checking for injuries, we discovered that the bird had a metal ring on his leg, so once he was settled into one of our recuperation aviaries, falconer Jess researched the ring number to the British Trust for Ornithology via their website.

The BTO's digitalisation of ringing records results in much faster reports back, and Jess soon received a reply with the original ringing details for this bird. It turns out he was ringed as a chick in May 2012, making the barn owl almost 9 years old! However, this is by no means a record breaker - the oldest barn owl recorded in the UK was over 15 years old when it was last encountered.

In the wild, the average age of barn owls is only about 4 years old. Many birds perish in their first winter, struggling to hunt in bad weather and getting into territorial disputes with other birds. When the young leave their nest, they don't usually travel very far and 'Grandad Owl' was picked up about 8 miles away from where he hatched.



Grandad was brought into S.O.S. in a pretty stunned condition but whilst he was recuperating prior to release, we investigated his ring to give us a clue as to his life story...



The Unlikely Tale of Christian Bale

This rescued young little owl was named Christian Bale after the unfortunate circumstances in which he was found, trussed up in twine and wrapped around a bale of hay! The farmer who found him had already moved the bale from the field and was about to unload the trailer

when he spotted poor Christian. Brought in to S.O.S. with a bit of a sore neck, after pain relief treatment, some tasty morsels of food and a few days rest, he was safely released with a group of four other little owls who were also ready to go.



Ringling for Research

Regular subscribers to our website at www.owl-help.org.uk will have seen that in the past 12 months we've started ringing some of the wild birds hospitalised at the Sanctuary before their release.



Jess carefully fits the BTO ring to the Kestrel. Each species has a different ring size, which are secured using specialist equipment.



The ring is the equivalent weight to wearing a bracelet. Loosely fitted, most birds don't even notice their new accessory upon release.



The Kestrel was returned to its aviary for a day or two before it was released.

The BTO coordinates the British Bird Ringing Scheme, which sees volunteers around the UK ringing wild birds to help monitor populations, migration and general health of our birds.

By ringing birds that have been taken into our care, we have a chance of assessing whether these birds survive after release.

Hugh Hanmer, who is a Research Ecologist with the BTO and a licensed bird ringer, has kindly agreed to train our falconer Jess - who plays a major part in running the hospital together with our general manager, Maz - on how to ring raptors.

Hugh says: "Bird ringing is an important part of wild bird monitoring - by adding metal leg rings with unique numbers to them, it makes each bird an individual that can be identified in the future if it is ever found again.

"This enables us to see where it goes and how long it lives. While it's with us we can also record biometrics such as wing length and weight, and get an idea of the bird's age, sex and condition. All this data together is very important for trying to monitor and protect our wild bird species and identify problems for them.

"Usually ringing is done on birds out in the wild but it is especially interesting and useful to be able to ring the injured wild birds brought into the S.O.S. Raptor Hospital after their recovery and rehabilitation and

prior to their release. This gives us a chance to see how well they do after returning to the wild as well as contributing to our wider monitoring data."

Jess says "I'm interested in learning a new skill which will hopefully lead to positive stories about our released hospital birds should they be caught up or injured again. By ringing the birds before release, it will help endorse the difference that our specialist bird of prey hospital here at Suffolk Owl Sanctuary can provide."

It's That Scruffy Time of Year

There are times of year when many of our resident team of birds start to look rather dishevelled.

All birds moult their feathers annually, with different types of birds adopting different strategies that work for them.

Waterfowl such as ducks, geese and swans will drop most of their feathers at once, which leaves them unable to fly. Most other birds will only drop a few feathers at a time, as they have to be able to fly to escape danger or find food.

Having missing feathers isn't



necessarily going to impact on their survival, but it will make it a bit harder for them to fly, and in the case of birds of prey, hunt.

Taiga and Taz, our pair of Great Grey Owls, opted for a full blow out this year. They laid some eggs earlier in the spring and their chicks successfully reared (see over the page), but now both they and their aviary look particularly scruffy. However, this is completely natural, as most birds wait until the end of the breeding season at the end of Summer to moult. No doubt it won't be long before they return to their normal pristine selves!

Conservation For The Future

An important element of our responsibilities as a Charity is the encouragement of the young to be aware of the need for the care and conservation of raptor species from around the world, now and in the future.

The focal point of this obligation is welcoming schools and home educational groups to the Sanctuary, where we can deliver a variety of engaging learning opportunities for our visitors.

Of these, the flying displays of our resident team of birds give the children the opportunity to see a wonderful array of owls and other birds of prey demonstrating their aerial prowess and natural characteristics at close quarters.

Our falconers narrate the demonstrations with insights about a range of different species from awe-inspiring eagles and fascinating vultures to fast-moving falcons and hawks, super-intelligent caracaras, iconic barn owls and diminutive burrowing owls which can prime the youngsters with a passion for the subject.



Tura the Siberian Eagle Owl swoops low over the heads of these young visitors towards falconer Rufus to demonstrate her silent flight

Complementing the flying displays our education team also involve youngsters in a selection of fun sessions about habitats, food chains, native species, climate change, conservation, nocturnal animals and other topics that embrace the curriculum.

As an alternative to visiting us at the Sanctuary, we are able to take our Wise Owl Road Show out to local schools to illustrate a presentation all about owls to classes or assemblies. These can engage pupils with practical activities such as a 'Pellet Detectives' session, as inquisitive young minds invariably relish the opportunity to dissect an owl pellet and discover what sorts of things the



Pellet Detectives engrossed in dissecting owl pellets with the help of our assistant Bethany

birds eat by studying the bones that can be found inside.

For schools beyond our travel zone of about 25 miles from the centre, the pandemic has opened up

an exciting new channel for us - virtual sessions over Zoom presented by our Education Officer, Susan.



With Susan at the helm and under the watchful supervision of Auckland the Boobook Owl, S.O.S. has reached out as far as Oman with our virtual education sessions via Zoom.

the Middle East to give 30- minute talks All About Owls and more. Even though restrictions have been lifting, we will be continuing to offer our Virtual Sessions and plan to continue to reach new audiences across the UK and beyond in the future.



Meanwhile, closer to home, many youngsters visit us with their families during holidays, week-ends and half term, and all receive our Safari Trail booklet, which includes plenty of fun activities to help them discover all there is to see at the Sanctuary!



They say that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy - no chance of that for youngsters using our Selfie Wall!

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Introducing some new members to our team of resident birds who illustrate the diversity of owls and the need for their conservation in the displays and talks we give to visitors and schools throughout the year.



Smokey and The Bandit - our two home-grown Great Grey Owls



Plop the Barn Owl shows what a difference just 3 weeks can make



Otis and Twiglet, the Long Eared Owls



Amazing grace - Ember, the Black Barn Owl

The Gift of Life



A gift in your Will can support the wildlife conservation work of Suffolk Owl Sanctuary

For more information

please contact

The Trustees

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Charity Reg. 1086565

**Suffolk Owl
Sanctuary**

Striving to Survive



Donations remain central to the survival of S.O.S.

They can be sent to

**Suffolk Owl Sanctuary,
Stonham Barns Stonham
Aspal IP14 6AT**

**Tel: 03456 807 897/ Opt. 3
www.owl-help.org.uk**

Thank you!

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Thanks to Catherine and Susan for compiling the stories for this newsletter.

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