



WORLD OWL TRUST

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WORLD OWL TRUST

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THE DIRECTOR WRITES

I am often asked why the Trust does not go in for buying land in order to create its own nature reserves. The answer of course is simple, land these days is prohibitively expensive, even what our local farmers fondly describe as 'rubbish land'; and we simply do not have the financial resources to purchase a large enough area to make such a venture viable for attracting owls. Obviously we find this frustrating, but believe me, there is a great deal more to owning a reserve than simply putting up a sign and declaring the area safe for nature. It is more a case of putting up fencing, setting out and implementing management plans - and blisters, lots and lots of blisters - not to mention finding people crazy enough to help you with all that! Therefore, as things stand, it has to be a case of working to our budget and contenting ourselves with managing small areas in the hope of gradually extending them in the future. This invariably means working with the owners of the land and advising them how best to manage their particular holding in the interests of wildlife. We carry out this link under the banner of our 'Operation Phoenix' programme, which is a big part of Conservation Officer Jenny Holden's job, and luckily for us Jenny has proved herself very persuasive when she comes across an area which makes our mouth water - especially if we find good numbers of vole signs, or better still Barn Owl pellets!

The trouble with this sort of compromise, of course, is the fact that, as a general rule, large areas contain more species than do small ones! Unfortunately, in our case beggars can't be choosers, and at the end of the day if we have a finger hold on a small habitat we may eventually be in a position to enlarge it at a later date. This is the philosophy I have always worked under, simply because I had no choice! I have never had the financial resources available to buy and safeguard large tracts of land through ownership. As a result I have slowly (too slowly) had to learn and accept that the only sensible way forward is to work *with* the people who own or manage the land, rather than try to operate an 'exclusion'

approach - the big mistake the then Forestry Commission and Nature Conservancy both made in the past. This system has now been given the official title of 'reconciliation ecology' - which basically means working towards giving many species their geographical ranges back without taking away that of humans. Can it work? Well we can't be sure, but let me put it this way, if it *doesn't* work, they - and us - are facing the biggest extinction catastrophe in the history of life on earth, a frightening thought.

What might surprise some of you is the fact that in reality all of us *can* do something on a personal scale by way of 'reconciliation ecology' - by trying to bring a bit of nature back to our own homes, even in a small way. All this requires is a bit of effort in providing for the needs of at least some wildlife species, be it bird, mammal, invertebrate or plant. If you feed the birds in your garden, provide nest boxes, have planted berry-bearing shrubs, created a garden pond (minus goldfish please), grow bee and butterfly flowers as well as roses (don't forget our native dog rose is beautiful too), have left a patch of nettles in a neglected corner (in the sun) for Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterflies, made a log pile for frogs, toads, newts, ladybirds, lacewings and hedgehogs, etc., etc., you have already started contributing to this process. In America a group calling itself the National Wildlife Federation has started a campaign they have named the 'Backyard Wildlife Habitat Project', and believe it or not have so far recruited no less than 20,000 small private patches of 'nature' to their cause. A small start, but a start, and in case it hasn't dawned on you yet, 20,000 small plots combined make one heck of a big one! Given the fact that the UK is a much more garden-orientated country than the USA who tend to go in for the 'open plan' look, I reckon we could soon better this if we did but try. So, if you haven't yet joined the 'wilding of Britain' movement, now is your chance, for being the forgiving soul that I am, I am prepared to believe you - just this once - if you tell me you have never thought of it until now!

I am going to suggest to all you garden owners that you start this weekend – by converting your monotonous sterile lawns (no doubt the pride of your lives!) into ‘mini-meadows’ or ‘mini-cornfields’. At Muncaster we have done both and the results have been well worth the effort. In our wildflower meadow we have created the conditions that suit the Ringlet butterfly, and out of nowhere we now have a burgeoning colony as well as our more familiar Meadow Browns. As for our ‘mini-cornfield’, even in its first year this was a stunning mass of colour much loved by the butterflies and bees. Just take a look at the photograph opposite and tell me honestly which is the most attractive, your stripey lawn or our mini-cornfield? And if you say the lawn, I am seriously worried about you!!! Nor does your ‘wild patch’ have to be huge (though the bigger the better!), a few metres (yards to me!) square can be just as attractive as ours. Let the WOT members lead the way in bringing back at least a little of what we have lost in the past century by growing some wild flower species in our gardens instead of some of those ghastly infertile double monstrosities gracing most catalogues these days, they are useless for bees and butterflies – as are tea roses! But *please*, don’t dig them up from the wild, not only is it illegal and selfish, but it is also unnecessary, just collect a sample of seed instead and grow your own. *Very* satisfying.

For this Trust and other conservation organisations there is a serious side to my plea. As more and more people become divorced from ‘real’ nature in favour of ‘virtual reality’ nature, the harder it becomes to recruit and retain members – the lifeblood we all need if we are to survive and carry out our Aims and Objectives. If the vast majority live lives with little contact with wild nature, how can we expect them to care? People who ‘don’t know’ are invariably the same people who say “we don’t care”. Mind you, the WOT is luckier than most, for in three of our Trustees, David, Bill and Terry, we have ambassadors second to none who have all brought their own brand of enthusiasm for ‘wild nature’ into the comfort of our own homes via their television programmes. Armchair naturalists we might be, but I’ll bet many a viewer has caught ‘the bug’ thanks to these three worthy gentlemen. We



Muncaster Mini Cornfield

Photo: Chris Wilde

are lucky indeed to have them sanctioning our work.

Unfortunately it is a fact of life that things will not change by themselves. As the human population continues to grow, it is inevitable that as time goes by more and more wild species will be replaced by cultivated or domesticated species in order to feed us. This means that more and more natural ecosystems will be replaced by agricultural land whose conversion from ‘wild’ habitat involves the heavy use of herbicides, pesticides and nitrogenous fertilizers – often (usually) subsidised. This has already happened throughout the developed countries, and with the addition of new member states to the European Union we can rest assured that the currently pristine wild places which continued to survive in much of Eastern Europe, will soon be going the same way – with the associated loss of species. It remains to be seen whether the imminent Common Agricultural Policy reforms will bring about an eleventh-hour change in Britain, but I would advise you not to hold your breath too long! What amazes me is that it is surely obvious to any sane person that

the current situation is unsustainable, and yet we press on regardless of the consequences! Or perhaps I am wrong and most people simply haven't realised it yet. Or am I? The unpalatable truth is that in the affluent West – yes, including Britain – we are all too often content to turn a blind eye to the fact that for many indigenous people wise usage of wild species is vital to their very survival. In some countries – yes again including Britain – we currently even condone the over-exploitation of 'the wild' by accepting or ignoring such evils as the bush-meat trade – which in case you don't know, often involves the mass killing and eating of our nearest relatives, the monkeys and great apes, often by the poorly paid workers of international logging companies

who are decimating the world's lowland forests – the home of many owl species and their prey – hence my ire and reason for raising the subject in an owl-orientated newsletter.

Given the size of the problem (it has been found that we will need 50% of the world to be protected areas if we are to conserve our present global biodiversity) it is obvious that the main role of the Trust will have to remain primarily educational, practical, research orientated, and to some extent political (lobbying) rather than financial.

Tony Warburton

MUNCASTER NEWS

After the gloom and doom of the last newsletter (and I fully realise it wasn't an issue guaranteed to light up your lives, so take heart all you people who wrote to say so – it really was a 'one off' to bring

you up to date with recent events!) it is my great pleasure to tell you that once more our 'Guardian Angel' came out of hibernation, smiled upon us and brought to our portals two ladies who I feel

Heron at Muncaster

Photo: Christine Redgate, Haverigg



certain are very much the ones to take the Trust onwards and upwards into the 21st Century. Our new Administrator Barbara Powell has been with us for just three months, but her impact in that short time has been nothing short of staggering and I am finding it hard to take in that she has not been with us for three years! Already she has taken our antiquated systems by the scruff of the neck and is slowly bringing us kicking and screaming into the modern world – for which we are truly grateful, honest! She and Jenny H. have even got me familiarizing myself with some strange contraption called a computer, though I sometimes suspect they might be regretting this, as I am constantly having to be ‘rescued’. All too often with the same problem as last time, the aged Director having forgotten to write down how it was done!

Stop Press: Just as I was writing this, Barbara became an ‘official’ owl person - having been ‘speared’ by a baby Brown Wood Owl Chris Wilde has been hand-rearing for Trustee Mick Marshall who loaned us its parents a couple of years ago. Barbara’s ‘coo-ing’ “Ahs” suddenly changed into “Aaghs” as she decided to give the owlet a loving motherly cuddle. Experience comes fast at Muncaster! Quite obviously being reared by a Scouser has taken its toll! (the owl I mean, not Barbara!).

Jennifer Lewin too has settled in seamlessly and is a fund of new ideas with a great interest in education (very useful!). We quickly discovered she has a talent for sign making and we have certainly taken advantage of this – sorry Jennifer! The only snag with this appointment is that it means that we now have three ‘Jenny’s’ on the books, and at my age that causes great confusion, so we now have a Jenny, a Jennifer and a Jen – and if you can sort that lot out you are doing better than me!

Best of all, Barbara and Jennifer get on famously with Hazel and Dawn, and I can’t begin to tell you how wonderful it is to hear laughter and happy talk in the office once again. It’s now very much a nice place to be, so welcome to you all, lovely ladies, I feel very privileged to have you working with us. And incidentally, I am getting my coffees made for me again – can’t be bad!

Outside we have welcomed Trystan Williams to the Keeper team and are praying that he passes his driving test during his three-month trial period, as a car is essential in this remote neck of the woods. Trystan is another happy character who cheers up the place and is quickly getting a hang of the job; he’s even passed the ultimate test by surviving picking up our man-eating Buzzard ‘Mortimer’ – and living to tell the tale! After that Trystan, a driving test is nothing believe me!

With the onset of the breeding season I would like to pass on my thanks to Keeper Chris Wilde for taking on the role of ‘super-nanny’ to the newly hatched babies emerging in our incubators – no easy task I can assure you, as I know to my cost. Chris takes the owlets home with him each night and feeds them night and day, and to be honest he has gone somewhat ‘broody’, which is something I didn’t quite expect when we hired this ex-Ireland and Falklands army veteran – especially when this goes with a Scouse sense of humour with all that entails. Chris’s main failure is his loyalty to Liverpool F.C., which really worries me. To a ‘bright red’ Mancunian like me, this is symptomatic of madness – not a good trait in one entrusted with the care of tiny important babies! Knowing that she reads these newsletters I must also give my grateful thanks to Chris’s partner Val, for allowing Chris to bring his ‘pongy’ broods home with him each night (the computer doesn’t like the word ‘pongy’, but what the heck does it know, just ask Val whether such a word exists!).

Footnote: Conservation Officer Jenny Holden has just started trying to save the lives of two tiny orphaned Badger cubs - and I stand corrected. Owlets aren’t ‘pongy’ at all compared with them!!!

I think it would also be in order to express our grateful thanks yet again to our two very special volunteers, Dave Tyson and John Stevens who come in on Mondays and Wednesdays respectively, and have done so much to cover our backs while we were down to just three Keepers. Thank you both; your help is very much appreciated.

While Easter was OK, we didn’t get the record crowds of last year, probably because the weather was a bit ‘iffy’ and the holiday was earlier, but we

had enough people in to keep us happy. Sadly, three more Muncaster familiar faces departed at this time, namely Jonathon Stanley our Catering and Hospitality Director, Retail Manager David Ancell, and former WOT Trustee and Muncaster Marketing Director Barry Surtees. Jonathon and David have gone into business together in the nearby village of Gosforth, while Barry has gone to care for his elderly mother following the recent death of his father. Much of Muncaster's success in recent years is down to Barry's efforts and all three will be sorely missed. We wish them well for the future and thank all of them for their unfailing support for the World Owl Trust over the years.

After a succession of 'false Springs' we now await our most exciting time when the Bluebells, Rhododendrons and Azaleas burst into full

bloom. The Magnolias are already out, birds are singing, owlets are hatching and all is once more well with the world. Come and see us! Even the Herons are back on their nests despite the loss of so many trees in the January storm, and at 'Heron Happy Hour' at 4.30pm. a pair of Buzzards regularly joins these dramatic birds for free handouts – so now our eyes are firmly directed towards the Red Kite aviary. Will they lay again, and if so, will the eggs be fertile this time? And if they are, will they rear the young? And if they do, will we be able to release them here like the Buzzards in the past? And if we do, will they stay to breed and add even more interest to 'Happy Heron Hour'? Yes, this is a time of great excitement, 'ifs', 'buts', 'if only's' and 'maybe's' – but isn't it wonderful!

Tony Warburton

OBITUARY

Paul Johnson 1958 - 2005

On 12th April the Owl Conservation and Wildlife Filming worlds lost a doughty champion when Paul Johnson lost his brave year-long fight against cancer at the all-too early age of just 47. We and the Trust also lost a much-treasured friend who will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

I first met Paul when he was appointed Hawk & Owl Trust Conservation Officer in March 1989. In his own words Paul was "an ecologist with a long-standing interest in the behaviour of nocturnal wildlife, having worked on Barn Owls and Badgers in his native Yorkshire, urban Tawny Owls in Bedford, and habitat management strategies in Cambridgeshire". Much of Paul's work at that time took place in North Norfolk, and he was largely instrumental in making this county possibly *the* best place to see Barn Owls in England in the 1980's and 1990's. He also took over the running of the HOT's 'Barn Owl Conservation Network and it was this which first brought our two world's together and forged a friendship which stood the tests of time.

Not to mention more than a few 'interesting' discussions, for being friends didn't necessarily mean we agreed about everything, particularly which was Britain's premier county - Paul was very proud of his Yorkshire roots, whereas I am a dyed in the wool Lancastrian. Nuff said!!!

Nor was Paul totally convinced that Barn Owl Release Programmes were necessary to safeguard wild populations - though I was never slow to remind him that not everywhere was as good as North Norfolk! I also failed to convince him that wild Eagle Owls still existed in the Highlands of Scotland, though he was slowly coming round to this way of thinking when we last met.

Paul left the employ of the Hawk & Owl Trust in 1994 after five years of sterling work, to become Conservation Director of the Pensthorpe Wildfowl Trust in Norfolk, but more and more his thoughts and aspirations were turning towards wildlife film making, and in particular his dream of making a film about all five native owl species. The break up of his marriage gave him the incentive to "jump off the cliff" and give it a try. The rest is history, for Paul's vast experience of

wildlife meant he had an instinctive knowledge of 'what was going to happen next, and when' - a distinct advantage for any wildlife film maker! He also had an artist's eye for a picture. Something that was demonstrated fully with his first full-length lyrical documentary 'Moonpower' which was shown on BBC Two to great acclaim on 9th November 2003. It was while filming the midnight moon rising through the famed Stones of Calanish on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides for this film that Paul first felt a twinge in his back. Following a sleepless night, and thinking he had pulled a muscle he visited the doctor next day, only to be referred to a specialist who gave him the unbelievable news that he had incurable liver cancer! What a terrible shock for a man who had always lived a healthy outdoor life and seemed as fit as a fiddle - and what a shock for those of us who knew him

Such a prognosis would have floored most people, but not so Paul, who continued to commute between his new home in Prague with his new wife Barbara and their baby daughter Nathalie, and his parent's home in Askern, North Yorkshire where he bravely endured the unpleasant treatment necessary to battle for his life. It was now that his Yorkshire grit paid off, for there was no sitting back and feeling sorry for himself for Paul. Instead he continued working with his beloved Tawny Owls, studying the local population as he had for so many years in the past, and planning more filming for the future.

On 7th December 2003 his great dream was realised when his marvellous film 'Five Owl Farm' was shown in The Natural World series, again on BBC Two, which included a sequence never filmed before - a wild Tawny Owl catching fish in a stream - a marvellous testimony to the skills of a very gifted man who knew his owls better than most. We at the World Owl Trust are proud that Paul acknowledged our contribution to this film, by adding our name to the credits. Thank you Paul.

Typically, even in the week prior to his death, Paul was discussing making a film about the Yorkshire Moors with his great friend David Cobham, another talented film maker who had worked with Paul in Norfolk for many years. Several other films awaited him too, and with a new wife and child, it is hard to accept such a premature and cruel death for a man who had so much more to give the world by bringing the wonders of the natural world into our homes. No, we will never understand "why" - we just give thanks that we knew him and were given the gift of his friendship. His films have pride of place on a shelf in our living room, and we shall play them often and remember our very special friend who left us all too soon. We also think of Barbara and little Nathalie, his father Ian and his daughters from his first marriage at this sad time, and pray that time will heal their sorrow in due course, but not erase the memories.

Tony Warburton

BREEDING THE SPECTACLED OWL (*Pulsatrix perspicillata*) AT DRAYTON MANOR ZOO

On 11 March 2004 a female Spectacled Owl (WOT 13) bred at the World Owl Centre in 1999, was sent to Drayton Manor Zoo, Tamworth, for pairing up with a male bred at the Kirkleatham Owl Centre, Redcar. Drayton Bird Keeper Leanne Wilkins relates what happened next.

The female owl was introduced to the male immediately, and within a couple of weeks the pair had bonded. The male could be seen flying around the aviary with food offerings,

and by this time the food had been increased to a minimum of 14 day-old chicks per day, so plenty of food was ensured to encourage breeding. The male then began to make a food store. However, a daily routine of removal of old chick remains takes place at Drayton to be certain no rotten food remains in our aviaries.

An open-topped nest box was placed in the far back left-hand corner of the aviary, approximately

eight feet from the ground. The female sat for a couple of days before laying a week later. She laid two eggs on consecutive days and sat tight for the full incubation period. During this time the male had become very aggressive, and even more so after the eggs hatched. We estimated the eggs were due to start hatching on 5th June, but they actually hatched on 6th and 7th (*Incubation for this species is stated to be c.35 days (TW)*).

We had been informed that owlets of this species needed to be close ringed at 12 days old with a size X ring. However, at this age our largest owlet was still a little small for this, and ended up being rung at 14 days.

After a couple of weeks of both owlets being reared by their parents in the nest, a noticeable size difference had developed and it was feared that the smaller youngster was not getting enough food. After careful consideration the decision was taken to remove this individual once a day for hand feeding, as at this stage we did not want to interfere too much and wished to give the parents a chance to rear both owlets successfully.

Unfortunately, at 28 days old the smallest owlet disappeared overnight. It was suspected that it had died and had probably been eaten by either its sibling or one of the adults. (*NB. In the wild it is normal for only one owlet to survive with this species (TW)*). If the same scenario were to happen again, we would probably remove the smallest owlet for hand rearing and would use it as part of our educational talks to the public. However, this would only be done as a last resort.

At five weeks old the surviving owlet was growing well and could often be seen sitting beside the female in the nest box.

On the 30 July at seven weeks old, on a summery afternoon the owlet left the nest for the first time, staying out all day to explore his new surroundings. By mid-day the following day he was back in the nest box, perched beside the female. The following week the weather was constantly humid, but varied from hot summer days to thunderstorms. Depending on the weather the owlet could be found either in, or out of the nest box. As the owlet had started to come out of the nesting area, all three birds were wormed as an extra precaution. Whatever the position of the owlet in the aviary, the parents still fed and guarded it well.

By ten weeks old the owlet was rarely seen in the nest box, seeming to favour the thick vegetation in the centre of the aviary.

By twelve weeks old, whenever the aviary was entered, the owlet would stand his ground, clacking his bill loudly and opening his wings in threat; all the time being watched closely by his parents at the other end of the aviary.

As the owlet became older and larger in overall size, the aggression of the adult male slowly decreased and the owlet began to take chicks, mice and occasional weaner rats for himself. However, it was still occasionally fed by its parents. (*NB. Wild Spectacled owlets often remain with their parents for c. one year (TW)*)

Leanne Wilkins

OWL NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

New Owl Species Discovered

Just to reinforce the fact that many species of wildlife still remain to be discovered, we give here several exciting reports of new owl species recently found to exist. Not surprisingly these consist mainly of small, nocturnal Scops (Otus) or Hawk (Ninox) Owls inhabiting dense tropical rainforests.

SRI LANKA

On 28th February 2001 *The Straits Times* gave the news that a new species of owl had been discovered and photographed in January by a local ornithologist – the first new bird for Sri Lanka since the discovery of the Ceylon Whistling Thrush in 1868. The very clear photograph accompanying the article clearly showed the

bird to be a typical yellow eyed 'little brown job' – yes, in other words yet another 'Scops' owl! The fact it had gone un-noticed until now, says it all!

That it was discovered at all lies in the dedication and persistence of one man, Deepal Warakagoda, who first heard and tape-recorded an owl-like call he was unfamiliar with in Kitulgat Proposed Reserve, a rainforest in the wet zone of Sri Lanka. He heard the call several times more over the next six years, not only in Kitulgat, but also in the Sinharaja Forest Reserve too, but frustratingly he was unable to catch sight of the perpetrator - a regular frustration to anyone working in lush rainforests, even in the daytime, let alone after dark! Deepal compared his recordings with those of other known Asian owl species and then sent them to renowned owl expert Pamela Rasmussen at the University of Michigan, who agreed that the calls did not appear to belong to any known Sri Lankan species, though she felt they did resemble the call of another rainforest owl, the Reddish Scops Owl *Otus rufescens* which is known from the Malay Peninsula, Java, Borneo, Sumatra and the extreme south of Peninsula Thailand - but *not* Sri Lanka!

The break-through finally came in January 2001 in Sinharaja when Deepal's persistence was rewarded with his first sighting of this elusive 'mystery' bird - and it was indeed a small, rufous-coloured 'ear-less' owl unlike any other in Sri Lanka or anywhere else in South Asia. The following month the first ever photographs of the new owl were obtained. What a moment that must have been. Even better, in August 2001 a bird was mist-netted, enabling it to be closely looked at, photographed again, ringed and released. All this data was sent once again to Pamela Rasmussen and museums holding significant Sri Lankan materials were searched for possibly overlooked specimens of the bird. None were found. This in turn raised a dilemma. Science demands voucher specimens of all species to facilitate scientific study and provide reference material for the future - which meant killing a specimen of a species of which no one knew how many individuals existed, nor what its conservation status was! You will be pleased to learn that no such decision was taken! Instead,

Deepal and some colleagues decided to launch a thorough survey under the auspices of the Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Forest Department of Sri Lanka, which resulted in the discovery that the owl in fact inhabited five different forests, with 24 individuals being recorded. Therefore permission was then given for one bird to be collected as the 'type' specimen, and this was achieved in November 2002. This has enabled the following description to be made: -

Name:

Serendib Scops Owl (*Otus thilohoffmanni*)

Description: Small, short-tailed, uniform rufous Scops Owl. Eye colour ranging from yellow to orange according to sex. No ear tufts. Facial disk weakly defined. Weak tarsi feathered for less than half their length. Can only be confused with the Sri Lankan race of the Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia leggei*. Replaces the Indian Scops Owl *Otus b. bakkamoena* in the rainforests of the Sri Lankan wet zone.

The five forests inhabited by the owl are the lowland forests of Kitulgak, Kanneliya and Eratna Gimale in the south-west quarter of the island, with strongholds in the contiguous Sinharaja and Morapitiya-Runakana Reserves. All these forests are protected areas managed by the Forest Department of Sri Lanka, which is fortunate, for it has been found that this species requires a large, fairly intact area of rainforest to prosper, and is not found in forest areas of less than 8.2 km.

In January 2004 45 individuals were known, but Deepal believes that more exist. However, since the species occupies a restricted range of just 230 km.sq. within Sri Lanka, it is being proposed that the Serendib Scops Owl is officially classed as *Endangered*.

We at the World Owl Trust congratulate Deepal Warakagoda for his dogged work in confirming the existence of this new owl species. Without his single-minded persistence it is virtually certain that the bird would still remain unknown. And how refreshing it is in these days of gloom and doom over the ever-increasing list of lost

species, to be given the news that even on a heavily populated island such as Sri Lanka, a bird can still be overlooked by collectors and field naturalists. It makes me wonder how many more species remain to be discovered elsewhere.

Source: *World Birdwatch* 26.3. September 2004

BRAZIL

A new owl found in fragmented secondary forest in Pernambuco state in northeast Brazil, has been named the Pernambuco Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium mooreorum*. Measuring a mere 15cm (six inches in my language!) from beak to tail, and weighing only 57 grams (2 oz.) the bird was actually first discovered in 1990 by Prof. Galileu Coelho from the Federal University of Pernambuco, but unfortunately he failed to realize that this was a completely new species and it took another ten years before Jose Maria Cardoso da Silva of Conservation International - Brazil, spotted the specimen in a bird collection and realized it was probably completely new to science after comparing it with other similar species. Luiz Pedreira Gonzaga from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro then analyzed the bird's song against those of other Pygmy Owl species, and confirmed Cardoso da Silva's suspicions.

Worryingly, the owl has only been found in two locations in Pernambuco, making it absolutely critical that its habitat is now protected. Researchers have warned that because of its limited distribution and the now almost inevitable fragmentation of its habitat due to human activities, it is already in a state of decline and has therefore been listed as *Critically Endangered*.

The new owl is closely related to the Amazonian Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium hardyi* and the Least Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium minutissimum* from south-eastern Brazil, but differs in its plumage, size and vocalizations.

Source: *Cage & Aviary Birds*, July 19, 2003

SUMBA ISLAND

For almost 20 years arguments have raged over the identity of a mystery owl known to inhabit the 130 mile-long island of Sumba located in the Lesser Sunda Chain in southern Indonesia. Some

ornithologists claimed that it was probably a new species of Scops owl, while others believed that it was probably a new locality for the equally rare and enigmatic Flores Scops Owl *Otus alfredi* - a bird whose confirmed existence this Trust is proud to be linked with having helped to fund an expedition mounted by the University of East Anglia in 1997.

Ornithologists Jerry Olsen and Susan Trost had previously located the bird but frustratingly were at first unable to record its song. Needless to say this made the identification of the 'new' owl on Sumba doubly difficult, for without knowledge of its song, a clear sighting was necessary to see if the bird possessed the characteristic ear tufts of typical Scops owls, and if so, did it match up with the physical appearance of the Flores Scops Owl. If it did, this would represent an important extension of this highly endangered bird's range.

Just to complicate matters further, some ornithologists then began to claim the mystery bird was nothing more than the much larger Sumba Boobook Owl *Ninox rudolfi*, a very distinctive owl with heavy barring on its breast and no ear tufts. This however seemed unlikely since this Hawk Owl's song had been recorded as a series of short 'cough-like' notes, whereas Jerry Olsen and Susan Trost were ultimately successful in confirming and recording the 'new' bird's song as a single repeated flute-like hoot - though the bird itself had still remained unseen! Well known ornithologist Ben King took their recording to play at the site where the Flores Scops owl had been found during 'our' expedition in 1997, in the hope of eliciting a response from any resident owl. None did! Which only served to heighten the mystery of the 'new' bird's identity.

Jerry and Susan however were undaunted and remained determined to solve the mystery of the bird's identity once and for all; so armed with their recording they returned to Sumba with this objective in mind in December 2001. Encouragingly, they were able to hire a local guide who claimed to have actually seen the bird a few weeks earlier. Reaching this area, and with great anticipation they played their tape for half an hour. Nothing happened! After waiting

another half hour they gave up and decided to move to another area where birdwatchers had reported hearing the owl recently. They played their tape again - and once again there was no response. Disappointment. Then, suddenly, two owls began to call back at them and began to move closer to the tape recorder. Frustratingly however, they remained well concealed within the cover of the forest canopy. Every time they were approached the two birds changed trees and hid within thick cover. Imagine the feelings of Jerry and Susan, to be within earshot of a possible new species, and yet unable to see it! No wonder old-time collectors used to shoot their specimens to confirm their identity! Their ethic was "what is in the hand is history; what stays uncollected remains a mystery!

Such was the case here!

Then came the great moment. The two birds gradually settled down and one eventually came out into the open and sat directly over the researchers heads. How I wish I had been there, for indeed, it *was* a new owl! Quail sized and reddish in colour, it had bright yellow staring eyes - and it had no ear tufts. So it was *not* a Scops Owl.

During the next two weeks Terry and Susan managed to locate two more pairs in nearby forest, one of them accompanied by a still dependent juvenile. This suggests that the breeding season for this species was around October/November. A close examination of the bird was made possible when the researchers were shown a specimen which had been shot by a bird hunter four km. away. Although this was sad and worrying, it did enable them to measure and photograph the owl in minute detail. What they found seemed to suggest that this was a new species of Hawk Owl - a fact confirmed later by Prof. Michael Wink at Heidelberg University, the world's leading authority on owl DNA taxonomy, when he examined some of the bird's feathers. It was quite definitely not a Southern Boobook *Ninox boobook*, being separated from this species by over four million years, and from the cosmopolitan Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata* by over 4½ million years.

It was also smaller than either of these birds, which also ruled out the Sumba Boobook, which is larger still. Also, its single-note song was totally unlike the disyllabic calls of any other Hawk Owl.

Jerry and Susan have therefore proposed the common name of Little Sumba Hawk Owl, with the scientific name of *Ninox sumbaensis* for 'their' bird.

Worryingly, having been discovered, the bird's long-term future must now be in some doubt, for like so many Indonesian islands, Sumba is being rapidly deforested to provide land for grazing and cultivation, and only 11% of forest - the bird's habitat - remains.

Although Jerry and Susan found three pairs, one of these having obviously bred successfully, for the moment we do not know how many more exist. As its discoverers say, with so little forest habitat remaining, it is to be hoped that the Little Sumba Hawk Owl is not destined to join the Laughing Owl of New Zealand and the Norfolk Island Boobook as another extinct owl species within a few years of its discovery.

In the meantime the World Owl Trust would like to congratulate Jerry Olsen and Susan Trost on their perseverance in confirming the existence and identity of this new owl.

SULAWESI

News of another new owl species comes from Togian Island, which lies in the Gulf of Tomini, central Sulawesi, where three medium sized unidentified Hawk Owls were seen hunting from perches in a garden on Christmas night 1999. They lacked ear tufts, thus ruling out Scops owls. From these and other field observations, plus two specimens collected for Indonesia's Museum Zoologicum Bogoriense, they have now been identified as a new endemic species to be known as the Togian Hawk Owl *Ninox burhani*. Although Sulawesi itself has two Barn Owl species and four other 'typical' owls, the Togian Hawk Owl is the first owl species ever found on this archipelago. Once again, the bird's calls ("Kok-ko-ro-ok") were unidentifiable as any known species (reinforcing

the importance of calls for identifying owl species) and the sightings were at first believed to be of Brown Hawk Owls, which visit the Sulawesi sub-region in winter. However, the plumage patterns did not fit the description for this species.

Two days later, and several times between February and August 2000, similar Hawk owls were flushed from their daytime roosts, before a holotype specimen was collected in scrubby forest in April 2001. Another was collected in a sago swamp in a different area of Togian Island a year later, enabling the identification of a 'new' owl species to be confirmed. Similar calls have since been heard on the islands of Malenge, Batudaka and Walea Bahi, and conversations with local people suggest that the bird is in fact widespread in moderate numbers throughout the archipelago - an indication of how understudied these islands are. Further proof of this is the fact that researchers have since discovered a Sulawesi owl species, the Ochre-bellied Hawk Owl *Ninox ochracea* near Benteng, the same village on Togian where the first sightings of the Togian Hawk Owl were made.

Although the birds were first seen in a garden setting, it would now appear that it is more a forest species, both hill and scrubby, as well as disturbed lowland forest wherever a mosaic of evergreen forest remains. But surprise, surprise, as everywhere these days it seems, forest clearance is increasing on Togian and action is needed to halt this. One ray of hope is that many members of the Togian community are anxious to conserve the island's birds and their habitats, so we must keep our fingers crossed - there may well be other endemic vertebrate species to be discovered here.

Source: *World Birdwatch* 26. 4. December 2004.

YEMEN

Yet another probable new Scops owl has been found on the Yemeni island of Socotra, which lies in the Indian Ocean 900 km. east of Aden. Thanks to conservation project involving Birdlife International, the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, and the Royal Botanic Gardens of Edinburgh, surveys of the birds and plants

of Socotra took place in 1993, and these were followed up by more recent surveys carried out with help from the UK Government's Darwin Initiative.

Amongst the findings are a 'new' Buzzard (*Buteo spp.*), and Scops owl (*Otus spp.*), both of which having populations of less than 500 pairs. Studies of their taxonomy are still in progress, but it is virtually certain that they will be endemic to Socotra, with the owl no doubt being given the name of Socotra Scops Owl *Otus socotroensis* ???

BOLIVIA

An expedition to a relatively unexplored valley in Bolivia has discovered a population of Cloud-forest Screech Owls *Otus marshalli* 1000 miles south of its known range in eastern Peru. The team found a total of 335 bird species in the Rio Pampa Grande Valley, including 24 endemic to the Andean Mountain rainforests, two of which are globally threatened. The discovery of the Cloud-forest Screech Owl came as a big surprise, as it has never been recorded in Bolivia until now.

CANADA

In Ontario during the early months of 2005, many Great Grey Owls have been sighted further south than normal, a sure sign that in their normal range in the north, their food source of voles has become scarce. It is because of these cyclic shortages and its specialization on voles, that this magnificent owl is habitually nomadic, breeding in areas where food is currently plentiful, while vanishing in years when voles are scarce. These wandering individuals can turn up (and even breed) in areas well outside their normal range and even be sighted in gardens. Such was the case here, for this report was sent to us by Christine LePage, a resident of Beeton, in the Muskoka area of Ontario, who was lucky enough to see one perched on the deck rails (fence posts?) of her cottage. Beats my Tawny Owls! We have given Christine advice on creating an artificial nest (*Great Greys use the old nests of other birds*) in the hope of getting a pair to breed on her property. In the meantime we anxiously await signs that our own Great Grey Owl pair will 'do the honours' here at the World Owl Centre in the next few weeks.

USA - ARIZONA

Has the Elf Owl lost its title of 'The World's Smallest owl'?

The beautiful little Elf Owl *Micrathene whitneyi*, famed for nesting in woodpecker holes in the giant Saguaro Cactus of the deserts of Arizona, has long been acknowledged as the world's smallest owl, measuring a mere 13 - 14 cm (5.5 - 6 inches) in length.

However, the mysterious and somewhat bizarre Long-whiskered Owlet *Xenoglaux loweryi*, discovered as recently as 1976 and known only from three specimens collected in a high Andean forest in northern Peru, has now been claimed as the title holder by some authorities.

Having checked the facts (though without seeing the evidence!) we are sticking with the Elf Owl, since both are given the same measurements, but different weights. At 46 - 51 grams, the Long-whiskered Owlet is just a trifle heavier than the 41-gram Elf Owl, and that's good enough for us - and we like Elf Owls anyway

A short article on the Long-whiskered Owlet will appear in the next newsletter.

USA

Barred Owl threaten future of the Spotted Owl.

The Barred Owl *Strix varia* of North America has recently expanded its range into the forests of the Pacific north-west, the home of the highly endangered Spotted Owl *Strix occidentalis*. Since both are closely related 'Wood' (*Strix*) owls, this has caused a serious problem due to the two species interbreeding and producing hybrid young. The Spotted and 'Sparred' Owls are hard to tell apart and it is feared this could result in the extinction of the much less adaptable Spotted Owl in due course.

The blame is being laid at the door of commercial logging, which has decimated the old-growth forest which is the home of the specialized Spotted Owl. The more open environment left behind by the loggers suits the Barred Owl - hence its move West. Wildlife ecologists prophesy that as old-growth forests become more fragmented, there will be more and more

cases of hybrid owls, but at the moment they have no answers to the problem. We have - stop destroying the old-growth forests

Footnote: Several years ago our patron Prof. David Bellamy filmed a wonderful documentary about the Spotted Owl/old-growth forest /logging story which was shown on BBC 2. Sadly, his pleas for the conservation of this fragile and superb habitat seem to have fallen on deaf ears, and the battle between loggers and conservationists grows ever more heated. With the arch-enemy of conservation, George Bush still at the helm, I am afraid it is hard to see a happy ending to this one - and if you are beginning to think I have a 'downer' on the said 'GB', you couldn't be more right!

Tony Warburton

NEW OVERSEAS REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE TRUST

Following an email from Michelle Manhal, a Keeper at the world renowned Healesville Sanctuary in Victoria, Australia, we got into correspondence regarding their successful breeding of the Australian Barn Owl *Tyto alba delicatula* in their Nocturnal House, and it turned out that she was not only interested in owls, but was also the Victoria Area Coordinator for The Australasian Raptor Association, as well as the Editor of their newsletter 'Circus' - which I hasten to add refers to the scientific name for the Harrier family and not the Bertram Mills variety!

This called for prompt action on our part and I am now delighted to announce that Michelle has kindly agreed to serve as the Trust's Australian Representative which we hope will enable us to keep better informed of the status of Australian owls in the years to come. Thank you Michelle.

Nor has our new representative been slow to act. Winging its way via pigeon post from Oz has quickly come our first copy of 'Circus' (March 2005), which contains an article about an on-going study of the Barking Owl *Ninox connivens* by Dr Rod Kavanagh, in the Pilliga forests north of Coonabarabran in north-west New South Wales. This Hawk owl is a close relative of the familiar Southern Boobook Owl *Ninox boobook*, which can be seen here at the World Owl Centre. However,

the Barking Owl is nowhere near as common or widespread as the Boobook, being found mainly in the North and East of Australia with outposts in parts of Western Australia and New Guinea. It is also somewhat larger in size at 38 - 43 cm.

Evidently it is also very aggressive, which makes the species very easy to catch for ringing and radio tagging, and so far Rod has managed to ring 9 Barking Owls from 8 different pairs - pretty good going we would say! He has also managed to radio tag many Powerful *Ninox strenua* and Masked Owls *Tyto novaehollandiae* - with the warning that Powerful Owls, the largest of all Hawk Owls, are "not a bird to be trifled with, as an angry individual can be very intimidating when you are alone in the bush at night". I'll bet they are!!!

The main purpose of the survey is to examine the importance of forest edges and types, as nesting, roosting and hunting habitats for Barking Owls

Forestry management in the Pilliga forests so far has been strongly influenced by the perceived need for Barking Owls to have forest edges in order to prosper, so several different habitat types have been selected for comparison, including the territories of three pairs inhabiting interior forest only. It should prove a fascinating study.

CUMBRIA BARN OWL UPDATE

The Barn Owls are busy again ferrying voles and shrews across the countryside to the bottomless stomachs of their owlets. The hissing and snoring coming from a barn is the sound of spring for a Barn Owl worker and I'm just about to begin my rounds checking nest sites.

I'm really hoping for a good breeding season in 2005 to make up for a rather poor one last year. In 2004 the average number of chicks fledged from each nest was only 2.2 compared to 2.5 the year before, which itself wasn't a great figure. This

low fledging rate coupled with appalling weather conditions during September - which resulted in our hospital being flooded with recently fledged Barn Owls - meant that by the end of the year we were very concerned about the number of breeding birds that would be left this year.

However, you shouldn't count your Barn Owls before they're nesting and we already have some new nest sites this year and also some historic ones that have been vacant for some time but will soon be hearing the patter of tiny talons again.

Our Operation Barn Owl Project of 2004 was a great success and has revealed the locations of over 60 previously unknown nest sites in Cumbria, which is great for our understanding of the population in the county.

I have used this information to site 50 new owl boxes – courtesy of DEFRA – and am just waiting to hear whether any Barn Owls have taken up residence yet this year.

One interesting pattern that is emerging from the data collected last year is the importance of Industrial Parks – or Brown Field sites as Tony

tells me they are correctly termed – to Barn Owls in our increasingly urbanised world.

Between the warehouses and factories there are often patches of rough grassland that no one bothers with – perfect habitat for voles. The owls are attempting to move into the buildings and are nesting behind ceiling tiles in a depot near Whitehaven. My next step is to get boxes up around these sites and get companies to invest in the Barn Owl breeding industry!

Jenny Holden, Conservation Officer

BARN OWLS IN THE UK - 2004

Eastern England Colin Shawyer reported an initial welcome recovery from a poor 2003, with c.1000 sites occupied, but due to incessant rain and gales in the last week in June, brood depletion of well grown young was rife, so overall fledging success was little better than 2003, though many more pairs (c.650) produced young.

Kent Thirty-two boxes checked - 3prs produced 4 young. 1 = no breeding. 1 = male bird only.

East Yorkshire A 'great' year due to high vole numbers. 200 boxes checked = 69 pairs with 219 young ringed (178 in 2003, 292 in 2002)

Lower Derwent Valley A 'mixed' year. By mid-July several pairs had failed. 60 young ringed, but heavy rain in August would affect survival of these.

Northumberland Most successful year to date, with 10 breeding pairs (an increase of 2). 26 young and a few second broods.

Norfolk Worse than 2003, with 9 complete failures of hatched young (owlets dead or gone). Never known before. Small brood sizes - 2 the 'norm', with only a few with 3+. 71 occupied sites recorded + 30 'possible'. 96 sites empty. (155 young ringed in 2003).

Caerlaverock (South-West Scotland) Worse than 2003 - only an average of c.2 young per nest (3 - 4 in 2003). Some pairs did not breed.

Galloway Forest Park Vole crash, but nest site occupancy not dire. Clutch sizes down. Early breeders fared best. 36 sites checked - 23 pairs present, of which 20 produced eggs. 19 hatched. 13 sites unoccupied. 39 young in total. Breeding finished by July.

Oxfordshire & Bucks Better than 2003 with 5 pairs (3 in 2003) + 7 Tawny Owl pairs and 10 Little Owl pairs breeding.

Wiltshire (Maj. Nigel Lewis) On Salisbury Plain Training Area - now possibly the UK's premier Barn Owl area, there was a 37% drop in breeding pairs. Nigel attributes this to increasing grazing pressures being carried out to provide habitat for the new Great Bustard reintroduction scheme, coupled with grass fires, which combined have reduced the area of rough grassland hunting habitat and put added pressure on vole populations due to an increase in vole predators - including the Great Bustard itself! 159 pairs producing 328 (ringed) young is still a phenomenal result however.

Essex Twenty-eight breeding pairs with 86 young from 100 boxes checked, compares favourably

with 21 pairs producing 58 young in 2003. In 2003 11 pairs of Kestrels produced 38 young, and 3 pairs of Little Owls produced 6 young.

Lincolnshire A good year for all raptors, but a few broods lost to rain in June. Significant numbers of second broods laid in boxes adjacent to first-brood sites.

West Sussex 140 - 150 boxes available. 71 not occupied, including 9 used in 2003. 14 new sites taken up. Some nice broods of 4 - 5 young. At one nest 2 females shared the box and laid a total of 7 eggs, of which 6 young were reared.

East Sussex Very few natural sites left after the great storm of 1987 and Dutch Elm Disease control measures (removal of Elms). 100+ boxes available. 51 young ringed, compared with 32 in 2003 (10 new adults).

West Cheshire Lower number of young fledged (2+ compared with 3.5 in 2003). 31

pairs reared a total of 74 young, with 14 new adults located. 35 young Kestrels reared.

Wirral Peninsula Twenty pairs reared 64 young, but wet weather resulted in some failures.

Nottinghamshire Estimated 19 breeding pairs in 2000. No data since then.

Greater Manchester Not as good as 2003. One pair produced double broods. All others- nil.

Northamptonshire Fifty pairs produced 190 young.

Isle of Mull Poor weather in late spring/early summer. No second broods, and several complete failures.

Source: Jason Ball, HOT Barn Owl Conservation Network Coordinator - in 'Barn Owl Link', the Newsletter of the BOCN.

ONE MAN AND SIX OWLETS

Spring came early to Muncaster this year and that can only mean one thing: Surrogate Fatherhood again. I found myself at midnight on cold March nights, feeding chicks the size of my thumb. This is an extremely exacting process (one wonders how their "real" Mum's cope...) made more tedious by the fact that my body was screaming out for more sleep! To me (and all the Mummy owls out there) springtime means late nights, early mornings and lots of calling, pooping and pellets.

It was a year of mixed success for this surrogate "Mum". I began the spring with six babies: two Ashy-faced Owls, two Brown Wood Owls and two Chaco Owls. Here are their stories:

The two Ashy-faced Owls unfortunately did not survive. The first one died before it reached the all-important 12-day mark. The second seemed to be a little fighter and I was hopeful that he would become an adult and help to contribute to the survival of this rare species. Sadly, this one

too died after an accident. In many ways, this was harder to deal with than the first death, as it seemed so pointless.

The story of the Brown Woods Owls was better. After surviving for a few weeks, it was noticed that the smaller of the two was struggling to use its legs and feet. A deformed spine was the diagnosis and euthanasia the only humane option. The second of the two is doing now well at her new home in the North East. She will form part of an education programme much like our flying birds at Muncaster. I grew quite attached to this little girl during my time with her. She enjoyed watching the telly with me and was especially keen on the fishing programmes – which was my excuse to my partner for watching them! She left us as she was growing in leaps and bounds. I hope to be continually updated on her progress.

The two Chaco Owls are doing very well. Although I helped for a few days in the early part



Brown Wood Owlet

Photo: Chris Wilde

of their lives to raise them, Tony took over for most of their little lives and they are now living in the hospital awaiting the allocation of a new aviary.

This may prove, however, to be a year of two parts. Because of the early warmth of the spring, the owls laid their eggs early this year meaning

that second broods are a distinct possibility. With this may come more pooping, pellets and lack of sleep but, of course, its worth it considering the continued rewards when even just one owlet survives and thrives.

Chris Wilde, Keeper



THE LONG-EARED OWL PROJECT

The first time I saw a long-eared owl was magic. I'd been listening to the squeaky gate calls of the young in a forest down in Somerset with Chris Sperring. The light was fading fast when a long-winged bird glided silently overhead to deliver a vole to the squeaking tree.

Long-eared Owls are a bird that has always captivated me and I was very concerned when I learnt that they were so ignored. There are probably half the number of Long-eareds that there are Barn Owls in the UK and yet they are not listed on any biodiversity action plans and nor do they have the protection of a schedule 1 bird; no one even knows how many there are.

Luckily, I am not the only one with these concerns and Chris Sperring, who is Conservation Officer for the Hawk and Owl Trust, and I launched the Long-eared Owl Conservation Project in February in order to raise awareness and recruit survey volunteers.

Up and down the country, to the far north of Scotland and across the Irish Sea people gave up their cosy armchairs to go out in the gloom and listen out for Long-eareds. We are currently going over the results and some are coming in still, but hope to be able to produce a proper report by the next newsletter.

Long-eareds are cropping up in some odd places, surprisingly even in suburban settings where some folk are lucky enough to have them breeding in their back gardens!

This is very important information as we are learning new habitats that Long-eared are able to use. If you know of any Long-eared Owl breeding sites, or would like to become involved then please contact me at the WOT office.

Jenny Holden, UK Conservation Officer

Long-eared Owl
Photo: Ann and Steve Toon

ADMIN REPORT

Dear All,

Just a brief note from me before I hand you over to our new Administrator who will complete this section and bring you up to date with our Admin news.

Barbara Powell joined the Trust at the end of January and it must have been a confusing time for her to say the least. Barbara came fresh from a local business which she had run for the past 12 years. When I say that Barbara is a very organised person I'm sure we can all envisage that her previous office was efficient and tidy with everything in its rightful place.

Barbara had decided she needed a new challenge and working for the World Owl Trust seemed ideal, especially as she is a conservationist and keen birdwatcher. There must have been moments at the start of her employment with us when she wondered what on earth she had let herself in for!

In our wisdom we had decided that Barbara should have Tony's office so she could have her own space. Tony removed all his many books,

folders and files – no mean feat – and for those of you who have seen Tony's office you will understand. Then the decorator moved in and within days, so did Barbara looking somewhat “spaced out” and trying to make sense of the chaos, because, at the same time, I had decided we might as well have a good sort out of all the offices.

In no time at all and with Barbara's clear thinking, the offices were organised, efficient and clean. Next came you, our Members, the people we depend on to help us with our conservation work. I'm pleased to say we now feel much more confident regarding our membership lists and believe our record keeping is up to date. The knock on effect of this is that in future you should receive your newsletters on a regular basis without the 'hiccups' we had experienced in the past.

All it remains for me to say is 'Thank you' Barbara for surviving our initial teething troubles so well and now it's over to you.

Jenny Thurston, Chair

Dear Members,

As Jenny says, my short time with the Trust has been really hectic. I have been made very welcome and I am enjoying my tasks immensely.

My last job was managing a busy plumbing and heating firm and I have had to adapt my thinking. The 'stock' at the Owl Centre being living creatures not pieces of copper and plastic and my 'valuable customers' are now 'valuable members and supporters'. The best part is that I will be able to use my business and administration skills on a daily basis working for projects that I believe in.

My office supervisor, Jennifer and I have been reviewing the membership and adoptions computer records. We have made some improvements already but robust systems take time to develop so I hope you will bear with us. If we make a mistake with your membership, please let us know as soon as possible so that we can rectify it, and use your feedback to improve the system further so that the same error does not occur again.

Some of you may have emailed the Trust using 'admin@owls.org' and had your email returned. You will have been redirected to the Information web page which you will have then used to get in contact with us. We are sorry for any

enormous amounts of junk email to that address so our current email address does not appear on the website and is formulated so that it is hard to search for by spammers on the web. We will inform members who regularly contact us by email of the new address and everyone can use the Contact Us page on the website. We will be radically updating the website with a view to ensuring items are placed more logically on the site map with the front page giving important current news. Our web master has also provided a search box on each page which is proving very useful. Searches made on the website have risen from approximately 5 per day to 70. Any feedback from members on the website is very welcome.

You will find your free entrance ticket/s with this issue and I hope members who are able to visit the Centre this year will call in to the office to say hello.

Barbara Powell, Administrator

EMAIL NEWSLETTER

If you wish to receive your future newsletters by email, please log on to our website www.owls.org and you will be able to register your email address with us for this service.

*A big THANK YOU to everyone for your
donations and steadfast support!*





WORLD OWL TRUST

The World Owl Trust boasts one of the finest collections of owls in the world, ranging from tiny Pygmy Owls to gigantic Eagle Owls. All the British species are on display in the unique Laybourn Aviary the size of which tests visitors' powers of observation to the full. Snowy owls are on view and the Owl Centre is one of the few places where Fish Owls can be seen. Video cameras are installed in some nest boxes, allowing visitors to observe the private lives of these mystical birds.

MEET THE BIRDS daily at 2.30 pm (end of March – end of October) when a talk is given on the work of the Centre. This is an ideal opportunity to ask questions and take photographs. Weather permitting the birds fly.

HERON HAPPY HOUR daily at 4.30 pm (end of March – end of October) gives visitors the opportunity to see wild herons en masse when they come in for their "free lunch" supplied by Trust staff.

The World Owl Centre is Headquarters of The World Owl Trust, a charitable organisation dedicated to owl conservation world wide.