

Gwent Wildlife Trust Wildlife Winners Update for 2014



Tell me more about Barn Owls

Traditionally, in Britain, Barn Owls have been considered as a species where breeding is limited by altitude but there are a small numbers of sites in Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen where they nest successfully each year, where suitable nesting boxes have been provided. This suggests that a lack of nesting sites may be a limiting factor for this charismatic and well-loved species in upland environments. Barn Owls typically occupy sites such as agricultural



Photo, Anna Guzzo

buildings; barns, stock sheds etc, indeed any rural structure that provides shelter and a suitable perching place. These locations can further be improved however with the addition of a nesting box. The majority of recorded nest sites are now in purpose-made nestboxes.

Why do they need our help?

With heart-shaped face and pure white underparts, the Barn Owl is a distinctive and much-loved countryside bird. This bird has suffered declines through the 20th century and is thought to have been adversely affected by organochlorine pesticides such as DDT in the 1950s and '60s. Current data suggests there are 4000 UK breeding pairs, and the species has an amber conservation status. This



Photo, GWT

project will see the installation of nesting boxes for Barn Owls, with appropriate habitat management and enhancement works of neighbouring land.

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Where has your money been spent?

Wildlife Winners has helped to support GWT's work to raise awareness of the Barn Owl, working with local land owners to erect boxes and help maintain good hunting ground on surrounding land. Food supply and therefore habitat is one of the main factors governing Barn Owl numbers and breeding success. Sites have been chosen close to areas of rough, damp tussocky grassland that typically support high field vole numbers, a main food prey for Barn Owls.



Photo, Anna Guzzo

We are working closely with farmers to erect nest boxes into trees and barns, local authorities to improve nesting potential within our local nature reserves as well as other land owners such as Fairfield United AFC, engaging their young players and erecting a box onto the side of their club house. This work will continue into 2015.

Working with the local community

GWT have provided new volunteering opportunities for local people. The project recently established a new Eastern Valleys Volunteer Group as part of the People and Wildlife Project based at Ebbw Vale, that meet on the 1st and 3rd Friday of each month. Work tasks include the building and installation of nesting boxes for barn owls within Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen. This group can also carry out work on other areas of the Trusts work, thus benefiting even more wildlife. To date, 10 boxes have been made in partnership with the Business Resource Centre – a Government funded training programme for young people and adults in Blaenau Gwent. We are also collecting sightings and stories from members of the public to help us map the distribution of these special birds, and help capture the public's imagination.



Photo, Chris Hatch