



Barn owl (*Tyto alba*) Species Action Plan 2009-2013

Plan Lead Organisation	Teemouth Bird Club
Plan Coordinator	Vic Fairbrother
Action Group	Rural
Associated Plans	Lowland meadow, rivers and streams, arable field margins
Latest version	Draft April 2009

Description

The distinctive white heart-shaped face and strikingly white under parts ensure that the barn owl is widely recognized by the general public. Close views reveal golden buff wings exquisitely patterned with pale grey, white and black.

Barn owls are birds of low lying open farmland and woodland edge. They feed on small mammals, predominantly the short-tailed vole, but also mice, shrews and small rats. They require extensive areas of prey rich habitat, usually rough, ungrazed, or lightly grazed tussocky grassland in the form of whole fields, field margins, parkland, orchard and newly planted plantation. A breeding pair requires at least 50 hectares (120 acres) of rough grassland over which to hunt.

Temporary ley grassland, closely grazed fields and cereal crops do not provide good hunting grounds. However, the barn owl can survive well alongside modern intensive farming if linear strips of rough grassland are present in the form of wide field margins, banks of rivers and drainage ditches. Where barn owls are dependent on linear grasslands, a breeding pair will require at least 15km of 6 metres wide field margin or river bank within a 3km radius of the nest site. For example, a 100 ha farm with ten 10 ha fields each bounded by rough grassland margins. (Shawyer 1996).

Traditional nest sites included holes in trees, barns and outbuildings, church towers, cliffs and quarries. Today a significant proportion of barn owls breed in nest boxes in barns, trees and mounted on poles. Undisturbed daytime roost sites are another important requirement and trees and secluded farm buildings are commonly used.

Current factors causing loss and decline

- ◆ Loss of feeding habitat. Much rough grassland has been lost due to agricultural change and urbanization.
- ◆ Loss of nest and roost sites. Many old farm buildings have been demolished or converted and the number of old hedgerow trees has declined.

- ◆ Road casualties. Verges are good for hunting but 60% of all barn owl deaths occur on the roads.
- ◆ Second generation anticoagulant rodenticides.
- ◆ Drowning in water troughs.
- ◆ Collision with wire fences and power lines.
- ◆ Isolation of small breeding populations.

Conservation Status

Amber listed in Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man.
 Specially protected under Sections 1 & 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
 Included in Appendix 11 of the EU Birds Directive 1979, The Berne Convention.
 Included in Red Data Birds in Britain. Batten et al 1990.

The Species in the Tees Valley

In 1964 Stead noted that 2 or 3 pairs which had bred along the southern edge of the coastal plain until about 1950 had ceased to do so, contributing to a general decline in recent years. Pairs were still found around Wolviston and West Hartlepool and in 1961 a single pair bred near Graythorp. One or two birds were recorded annually in the Cowpen/Saltholme area but in fewer numbers since 1956.

Stead (1969) reported breeding at Hartburn in 1967 and at Port Clarence in 1966 and 1967. Breeding also continued at Graythorp in most years. Sightings came from Preston Park, Eston, Newport Bridge and Billingham Pond. Not all sightings are local birds and one flushed from Redcar fox covert on 6th April 1964 may have been a migrant. Blick (1978) regarded it as an uncommon resident with only 4-8 breeding pairs in most years. The rather scarce records included a high proportion of dead or dying birds by the roadside.

In 2006 at least two pairs bred successfully south of the River Tees, raising five young and breeding may also have occurred at two sites north of the river. Roosting birds were noted at two other sites and birds were found dead by the A19, at Cowpen Bewley and on Coatham Marsh. In 2007 at least two pairs bred successfully south of the Tees, one pair rearing three young. Another pair bred successfully in the west of the county. There were winter sightings at nine locations. Two were found dead by the A19 and one at the roadside near Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park and another at South Gare.

Current Activity in the Tees Valley

In separate initiatives a number of nest boxes have already been installed by Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership, RSPB, INCA and the Forestry Commission. These boxes are monitored by two British Trust for Ornithology licensed ringers.

Further Information

Blick, M.A. (1978). The Birds of Tees-side 1968-73. Teesmouth Bird Club.
 Dewar, S.M. & Shawyer, C.R. (2001). Boxes, Baskets and Platforms: Artificial nest sites for owls and other birds of prey. The Hawk and Owl Trust. London.
 Joynt, G., Parker, E.C., & Fairbrother, J.V. (2008). The Breeding Birds of Cleveland. Teesmouth Bird Club.
 Shawyer, C.R. (1998). The Barn Owl. Arlequin Press. Chelmsford.
 Stead, P.J. (1964). The Birds of Tees-side. Transactions of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle upon Tyne. New Series 15: 1-59.
 Stead, P.J. The Birds of Tees-side 1962-67. Teesmouth Bird Club.

Websites

The Hawk and Owl Trust. www.hawkandowl.org
 The Barn Owl Conservation Network (BOCN). www.bocn.org
 The Barn Owl Monitoring Programme (BOMP). www.bto.org

Vision Statement

To maintain and enhance the present population and distribution of barn owls in the Tees Valley by monitoring populations, identifying, protecting and enhancing suitable feeding habitats and providing appropriate nest boxes at these locations.

Targets

- BO.T1. Monitor existing population of barn owls.
Goal. Report annually on barn owl status.
- BO.T2. Identify suitable feeding habitat and seek support of landowners.
Goal. Two new sites per annum until full potential reached.
- BO.T3. Construct and site appropriate nest boxes in suitable feeding habitat.
Goal. Five new nest boxes per annum until full potential realized.
- BO.T4. Liaise with other owl box providers.
Goal. Share information annually.

Actions

Code	Action	Organisational lead	Action contact	Partners	End date
BO.A1	Monitor existing barn owl populations.	Teesmouth Bird Club	Vic Fairbrother	BTO Ringers	Ongoing.
BO.A2	Identify suitable feeding habitat and seek support of landowners. Identify two new sites per annum until full potential reached.	Teesmouth Bird Club	Vic Fairbrother	Natural England, Environment Agency, FWAG., Tees River Trust	Ongoing.
BO.A3	Construct and site appropriate nest boxes in suitable feeding habitat. Locate five new nest boxes per annum until full potential realized.	Stockton Borough Council	Terry Douthwaite	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, BTO Ringers, Teesmouth Bird Club	Ongoing.
BO.A4	Liaise with other owl box providers to share data on barn owl sightings, box usage.	Teesmouth Bird Club	Vic Fairbrother	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Forestry Commission.	Ongoing.