

## BARN OWL *TYTO ALBA* SPECIES ACTION PLAN

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The barn owl is not afforded priority status in the UKBAP, but it is a species of national and international conservation concern and is considered important locally. The presence of barn owls is a good indicator of the health of biodiversity in lowland areas; the range of habitats required for owls are vital for a wide variety of other wildlife.

Relevant Legislation/Species Status	
priority species (P) or species of conservation concern (S)	S
EC Birds Directive 1979	-
Berne Convention 1982	App. II
Bonn Convention 1979	-
CITES 1975	Annex A
WCA 1981	Part I Section 1; Sch. 1, 3, 9
Birds of Conservation Concern List <sup>30</sup>	Amber



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### 2. CURRENT STATUS

#### 2.1 UK and Wales

The barn owl is traditionally associated with small-scale mixed farming, with nest sites in hay barns or mature hedgerow trees. It is a nocturnal predator, hunting over rough grassland, woodland edges and hedgerows.

In Wales, barn owls favour damp vole-rich grasslands and unimproved meadows, but are still found in a wide variety of farmland habitats. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century much of Wales comprised ideal habitat for this species, but the clearance of 35–50% of woodland since 1933, and the loss of around 25% of Welsh hedgerow between 1984 and 1990, has had an adverse effect on the population. The species has experienced an estimated 20–50% decline in its population over the last 20 years. The last nationwide survey (1968–1972) estimated a UK population of 4500–9000 pairs and with around 462 pairs in Wales in 1985 (reduced from 1436 pairs in 1932)<sup>33</sup>. This decline has slowed since the 1990s, and populations are now relatively steady.

#### 2.2 Caerphilly County Borough

The barn owl nests and breeds in tree cavities, old/derelict farm buildings and barns, pit shafts and quarry faces. It feeds mainly on small mammals such as voles, shrews and mice. They hunt mainly at night over areas of rough grassland, field margins, hedgerows, derelict land, parkland, roadside verges, water courses, woodland edge habitats and newly planted woodlands. Breeding barn owls have been recorded at scattered locations throughout the county borough, but further survey work is required to confirm the status of this species in the area.

#### 2.3 Links with Habitats

- **Deciduous Woodlands** (woodland edge habitats)
- **Wildlife Corridors** (open fields and hedgerows)
- **Common Land**

- *Post-Industrial Land*
- **Urban Habitats** (derelict industrial areas)
- Rough grassland

### **3. CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE SPECIES**

- Loss of hunting habitats through agricultural intensification, e.g. pasture management, development and afforestation, and the subsequent decline in prey species populations have had their impact on the barn owl population.
- Lack of long grass in field margins as shelter for small mammals has led to increased hunting on roadside verges, leading to an increase in road deaths.
- A lack of mature trees, in hedgerows and open farmland, for nesting and roosting sites.
- Over-use of toxic pesticides and rodenticides which get passed up through the food chain and poison the barn owl.
- Effects of climate: hard winters have led to many owls dying through starvation. This is due to the reduction in food supply - small field mammal populations fluctuate seasonally with the changing climate, and in very cold winters food can become scarce, for example on snow covered farmland.
- Increased road development and urbanisation: there is often localised barn owl decline in areas of expanding towns.
- Demolition or conversion of old agricultural buildings and the design of modern buildings makes them unsuitable as nesting sites; e.g. with no suitable ledges or entrances.
- Disturbance to nesting and roosting sites (often unintentionally) by human activities.

### **4. CURRENT ACTION**

- 4.1 It is illegal to release a barn owl into the wild without a licence. Incorrectly released birds are often unable to survive. Under official release schemes, however, where owls have been released under controlled conditions, barn owl survival is much greater, enhancing the wild population.
- 4.2 The Barn Owl Trust is a national organisation aiming to conserve the species and its environment. It also provides a free information and advice service.
- 4.3 CCBC Planning Division have placed conditions on some barn conversions to include barn owl surveys, and if present, barn owl mitigation, in the form of boxes and working restriction. In addition, planning applicants are encouraged to consider barn owl mitigation regardless of current useage.
- 4.4 Preservation of rough grassland sites (species-rich grasslands designated as SSSI or SINIC)<sup>8</sup>.
- 4.5 Provision of nest boxes in some areas, for example a joint scheme between the Environment Agency and The Hawk and Owl Trust.

- 4.6 The discouragement of unnecessary grass cutting and rodenticide use.
- 4.7 Environmental and biodiversity education at schools and colleges.
- 4.8 Welsh Owl and Wildlife Sanctuary (WOWLS) Barn Owl Project - monitoring nest sites, ringing and marking of nestlings.
- 4.9 The Gwent Ornithological Society and Glamorgan Bird Club bird reports<sup>17, 18, 19</sup>, and the BTO Breeding Bird Survey<sup>6</sup> all contribute to the annual monitoring and recording of barn owl populations.

## 5. OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

### 5.1 UK Objectives and Targets

Not applicable to this species.

### 5.2 Caerphilly Objectives and Targets

- 5.2.1 Determine the current status and distribution in Caerphilly county borough by 2004 and formulate a target for expansion. (Target: 2005)
- 5.2.2 Maintain current distribution and population by conserving existing foraging, nesting and breeding habitats. (Target: ongoing)
- 5.2.3 Increase numbers of breeding barn owls, by providing new foraging habitat and nesting sites. (Target: 2010 and ongoing)

## 6. ACTION AND KEY PARTNERS

Action	Key Partners		Year to be complete or in place by:								
	Lead	Partners	2003	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>6.1 Policy and Legislation</b>											
6.1.1 Ensure barn owls are protected and promoted through appropriate regional and local planning policies. Condition barn owl surveys and mitigation for all planning applications on barns and other agricultural buildings.	CCBC	NAWAD FUW	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.1.2 Ensure the needs of the barn owl are taken into account in local and national incentive schemes.	NAWAD	CCBC FUW NFU	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.1.3 Promote the legal protection afforded to barn owls among landowners and managers, contractors and planning officers.	RSPB	CCBC GWT GLWT FUW	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>6.2 Site Safeguard and Management</b>											
6.2.1 Maintain the current extent and quality of foraging habitats through appropriate management.	CCBC	GWT GLWT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Action	Key Partners		Year to be complete or in place by:								
	Lead	Partners	2003	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>6.2 Site Safeguard and Management (continued)</b>											
6.2.2 Seek to restore/re-create suitable feeding habitats/linear features, to provide a network of foraging/breeding sites, and encourage the installation of nest boxes where appropriate.	CCBC	CCW			✓						✓
6.2.3 Encourage the use of nest boxes both in new buildings and in the renovation of existing structures.	CCBC	CCW RSPB GWT GLWT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.2.4 Seek to include the needs of barn owls in the management of wildlife sites (SINCs).	CCBC	GWT GLWT RSPB			✓					✓	✓
6.2.5 Ensure the reclamation of former colliery sites incorporates barn owl requirements, for example using nest boxes and raptor perches in suitable locations where appropriate.	WDA	CCBC FC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>6.3 Species Management and Protection</b>											
6.3.1 Seek to create new nesting sites by providing nest boxes and safeguarding mature trees in suitable areas.	CCBC	BTO GOS GBC RSPB EA	✓			✓				✓	
6.3.2 Investigate the provisioning of nest boxes in council-owned buildings in the county borough.	CCBC		✓				✓				
6.3.3 Seek to encourage barn owl nest box sponsorship in the county borough.	CBP	RSPB	✓								
6.3.4 Seek to set up 'Barn Owl Projects' in communities or in the county borough as a whole	CBP	community groups		✓				✓			
6.3.5 Educate land managers of the need to reduce the use of rodenticides and pesticides through carefully targeted use, or alternative methods of pest control.	NAWAD	FUW NFU CCBC CCW	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.3.6 Continue to implement wildlife legislation.	Gwent Police	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>6.4 Advisory</b>											
6.4.1 Ensure the provision of advice to relevant organisations and land-managers on the conservation of barn owls and sympathetic management of habitats.	CBP	ADAS RSPB	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.4.2 Disseminate information regarding ringing of owlets and the monitoring of nest sites to interested organisations and relevant individuals.	WOWLS	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>6.5 Future Research and Monitoring</b>											
6.5.1 Undertake a county wide survey to determine the current status of the barn owl.	GBC GOS	BTO RSPB	✘								

✘ Survey year to be determined.

Action	Key Partners		Year to be complete or in place by:								
	Lead	Partners	2003	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>6.5 Future Research and Monitoring (continued)</b>											
6.5.2 Establish a monitoring procedure to compare the achievements of habitat and species targets, and revise the SAP as necessary.	CBP	-			✓						
6.5.3 Encourage recording of all known breeding sites and monitor on a regular basis.	WOWLS	BTO GOS GBC CCBC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>6.6 Communications and Publicity</b>											
6.6.1 Encourage membership of wildlife trusts and local ornithological societies.	CBP	GBC GOS GWT GLWT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.6.2 Provide schools and colleges in the county borough with information in order to educate children, parents and teachers about the conservation status of owls in the local area.	CBP	GGBAG GLBAG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.6.3 Raise awareness of the plight of the barn owl, and use it to promote the value of hedgerow trees, field margins, hay meadows (neutral grasslands) and other habitats to the general public. Discourage the use of insecticides and rodenticides.	CBP	RSPB	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.6.4 Aim to maximise public involvement in surveys and nest box schemes whenever appropriate.	CBP	RSPB	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6.6.5 Promote the exchange of information between relevant organisations, particularly the results of monitoring and ringing studies.	CBP	GBC GOS WOWLS BTO	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓