

## Action for BARN OWLS

**W**atching barn owls from the Iron Age hill fort at Wall Farm, Kynnersley, as they effortlessly glide over the waving grass in the warm glow of a summer's evening remains one of those timeless images in the mind of the seasoned birdwatcher. Secure in the knowledge that these barn owls have several roosting and nesting places to choose from and an abundance of small mammal prey on hand, you could be forgiven for forgetting that barn owls elsewhere are in trouble.

The breeding population of barn owls in England and Wales declined from 12000 pairs in 1932 to 4500 today. We estimate that there are 121 breeding pairs in Shropshire, down from 140 pairs reported in the Shropshire Breeding Bird Atlas in 1992. The conversion of outbuildings for homes, the loss of old tree nest sites and prey-rich feeding habitat and changing farming practices have all contributed to the decline. However, we are regularly discovering 'new' barn owl pairs.

The barn owl's preferred habitat is permanent rank or rough grassland with a dense sward and a deep litter. If the grass is short and green it is unlikely to support voles - the barn owl's favoured food. It is fruitless to put up nest

boxes for them unless the habitat is right; barn owls are unlikely to breed successfully without a ready supply of food and probably won't be enticed to stay in the first place. So Shropshire Barn Owl Group carries out field surveys to find out whether



A tea chest nest box

voles and other small mammals are present before putting up nest boxes. We are also collecting and analysing barn owl pellets to find out exactly what they eat (thanks to Shropshire Wildlife Trust's Leighton Fund, who have supported this work).

There are now 90 nest boxes in Shropshire and early results are encouraging. In one 'cold' site, where barn owls have not been seen for many years, if at all, we have

managed to attract roosting barn owls to a nest box within six months.

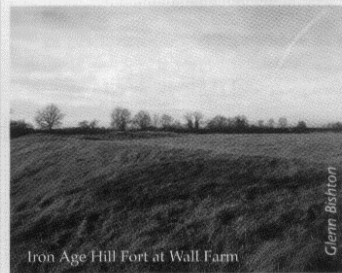
Please help by sending records of barn owls, particularly during the breeding season (March to August) to the Shropshire Ornithological Society or contact us if your land contains suitable habitat and you wish to attract barn owls.

**Glenn Bishton  
and John Lightfoot**

Shropshire Barn Owl Group  
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### Wall Farm

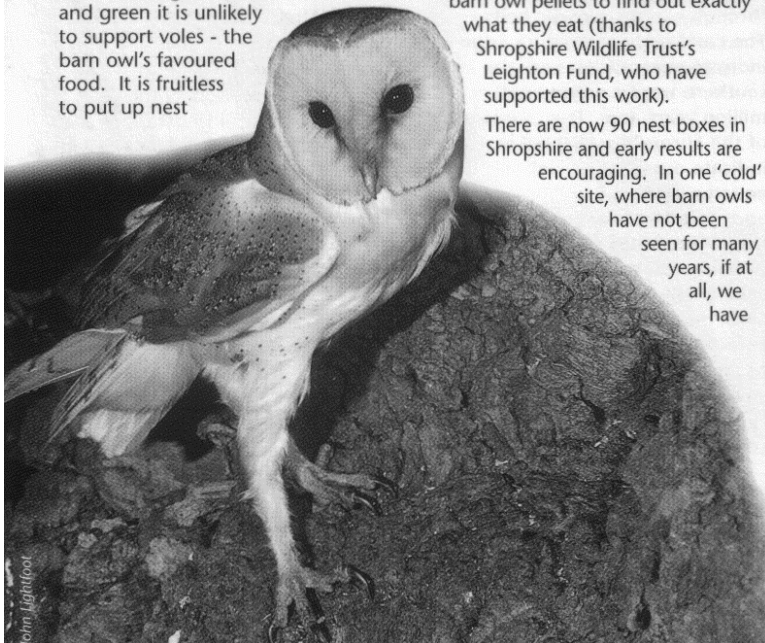
**W**all farm is situated on the Weald Moors near Kynnersley, Telford at grid reference SJ 680 179. It is a working farm operating within the Countryside Stewardship scheme to a plan set out by the RSPB.



Iron Age Hill Fort at Wall Farm

Its aims are to encourage wetland breeding birds such as lapwing, redshank, curlew and snipe. A hide has been built overlooking a marsh and pools created by reversing the pumps. Previously used to dry the land, water is now pumped from the Strine Brook onto the marsh, transforming the land into ideal habitat for many birds. More than 130 species have been recorded at Wall Farm since November 1998 including occasional rarities such as spoonbill and little egret and breeding pairs of water rail, tufted duck, tree sparrow and little grebe.

Access to the site is by kind permission of the owners, Neil and Stephanie Dobson. For further information visit the Wall Farm web site [www.btinet.com/~jllloyd](http://www.btinet.com/~jllloyd)



John Lightfoot

Glenn Bishton