

BARN OWLS ON TARGET



The SBOG is the lead partner in the Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for the barn owl in Shropshire. Ambitious targets set by the BAP to achieve 160 breeding pairs of barn owl in Shropshire by 2010 look set to be achieved. 311 nestboxes installed by SBOG since 2002 in areas of good barn owl hunting habitat has seen the establishment of new breeding pairs in hitherto unoccupied sites. Creating new pairs is a gradual, long-term process, requiring patience. The occupation of new nestboxes is often initially tentative, perhaps for roosting purposes only for part of the year, but over time the barn owls will stay and breed. Providing the habitat features remain stable and the barn owls are undisturbed they can be expected to occupy such sites indefinitely.

Further support for an increase in the breeding population can be found in the breeding data: 415 young from 134 broods in SBOG's nestboxes since 2002. Natural

nest sites monitored by the group have produced an additional 206 chicks. Whilst production in natural nest sites would mostly have occurred without any intervention by SBOG many additional young produced in nestboxes have been successfully recruited into the breeding population as a direct result of SBOG's nestbox scheme.



SBOG's database now holds 218 confirmed or potential breeding pairs. The database has persistently increased year-on-year since 2002, possibly as a direct consequence of SBOG's nestbox scheme and the creation of rank grassland habitat under agri-environment schemes. These factors in isolation would probably have had a reduced impact, but by siting nestboxes in ideal barn owl habitat, chances of success have been enhanced.

The Shropshire Barn Owl Group is keen to maintain the current momentum in establishing pairs of breeding barn owl on new sites and would welcome sightings by SOS members, particularly during the breeding season March to August.

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