

Shropshire
Barn Owl
Group



Providing nestboxes for Barn Owls and promoting their conservation



2024

This report summarises the breeding results and activities of the Shropshire Barn Owl Group in 2024. SBOG is a voluntary group which has been working since 2002 to increase the breeding population of Barn Owls in Shropshire by providing nestboxes and working with farmers and other landowners to retain and improve their habitat. When we started out the Shropshire Barn Owl population had been in decline for over half a century, and we estimated it to comprise around 140 breeding pairs. Now, there are 220 pairs.

Our aim is to ensure that the Barn Owl population remains stable and to work to establish new breeding pairs each year.



SOME OF OUR ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR

- 542 nestboxes installed
- 3841 nestbox and natural nest sites monitored
- 1070 successful broods in nestboxes & natural sites
- 2829 Barn Owl chicks produced in nestboxes, 334 in natural nest sites
- 469 site surveys

The 2024 Breeding Season

Although breeding productivity remained relatively high, the number of chicks produced was the lowest since 2020. Ten nests produced eggs but failed to produce chicks and forty-one dead chicks noted on the initial or subsequent site visits suggested potential difficulties in prey provisioning, consistent with our earlier expectations that 2024 would show a decline in breeding activity and productivity.



Two-hundred and eighteen sites were monitored, 83 of them successfully producing 203 young, 197 in nestboxes and 6 in natural sites. Table 1. Breeding (at least one egg laid) occurred in 89 (40.8%) of the sites. Broods ranged from one to four chicks and averaged 2.4: this compares to a mean of 2.78 reported in the Barn Owl Trust's 'State of the UK Barn Owl Population 2024'. No second broods were recorded. Seventeen new pairs were established, that is 63 in recent years. One tree nestbox was used for the first time since it was installed in 2006, producing three chicks.

Table 1. Number of chicks produced according to type of nest site in 2024

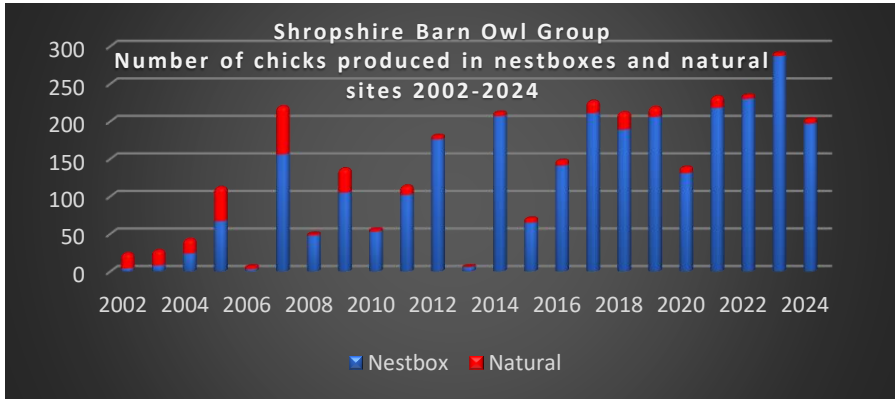
Figures in brackets refer to number of broods

Tree nestbox		Building nestbox		Pole nestbox		Tree cavity natural		Building natural		Other natural		Total No. chicks	Mean No. chicks
No. chicks	Mean	No. chicks	Mean	No. chicks	Mean	No. chicks	Mean	No. chicks	Mean	No. chicks	Mean		
135 (57)	2.3	62 (23)	2.6	0	0	6 (3)	2.0	0	0	0	0	203 (83)	2.4

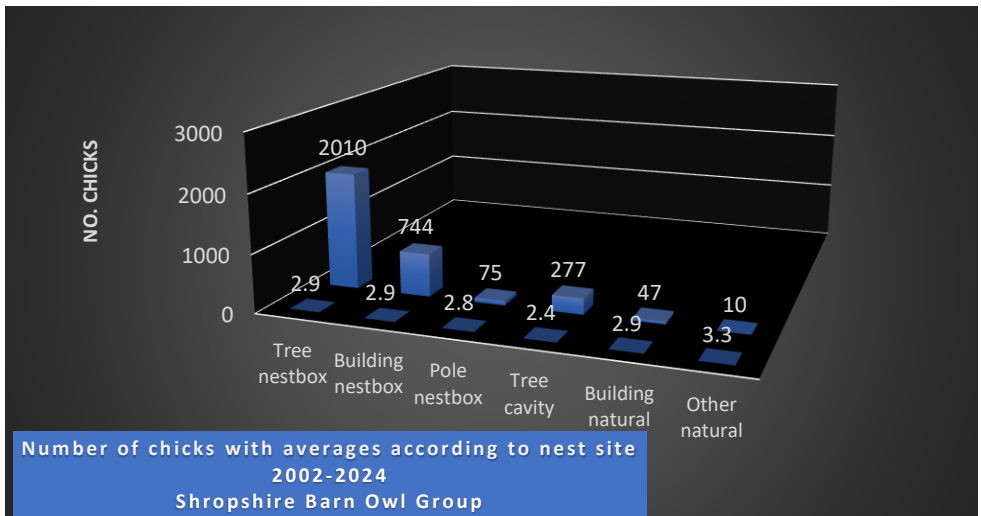


Breeding Summary 2002-2024

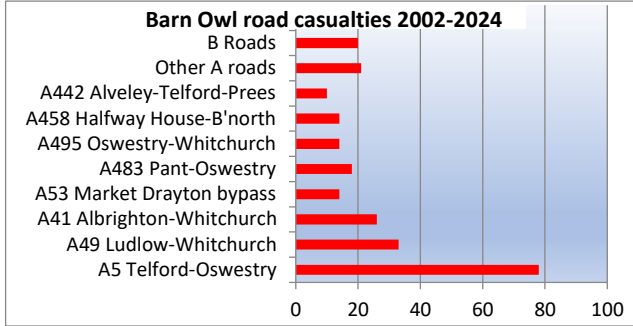
3163 Barn Owl chicks have been produced in nest sites monitored by SBOG since 2002, 2829 in nestboxes and 334 in natural sites. 89% of Barn Owls have been produced in nestboxes and, although data on the location and number of natural nest sites is limited, it is highly probable that nestboxes, particularly tree nestboxes, are now the predominant nest site for breeding Barn Owls in Shropshire.



The mean number of chicks produced per successful brood in Shropshire is 2.9. This compares with studies elsewhere which suggest that a long-term average productivity of about 3.2 young per pair is required to maintain viable populations. The mean of 2.4 chicks per nest for 2024 was therefore low, and in fact the lowest since 2015 when it was 2.2. Periodic variations are to be expected and are consistent with the population cycle of the Field Vole, the Barn Owls primary prey.

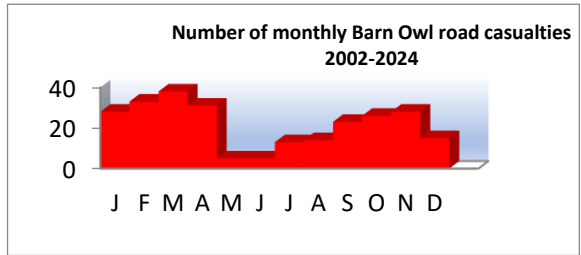


Barn Owl Road Casualties



Barn Owls are very susceptible to collisions with vehicles and road traffic casualties account for most recorded deaths in Shropshire. Ten road casualties were recorded in 2024. 92% of casualties between 2002 and 2024 have occurred on 'A' roads with relatively few casualties on 'B' roads. The A5 is the most serious threat to Barn Owls accounting for 78 (31%) casualties.


64% of road victims occur in the winter period October–March, peaking in March and probably arise predominantly from juvenile dispersal. Adult Barn Owls are site faithful and highly sedentary, but juveniles in Shropshire make short-distance dispersal movements of round 6 to 9 km from their natal areas soon after fledging. By the end of November most juveniles have settled in their home range. SBOG's strict policy of not installing nestboxes within 1km of a major road is possibly the most prudent option at present.



Thank you to the farmers and landowners across

Shropshire who share our aims and passion to see more Barn Owls in Shropshire and who provide invaluable support in allowing SBOG to install nestboxes. To photographers Steve Sankey (cover), Geoff Hall (top, page 1), Steve Dawes (bottom, page 1), Ed Peenan (page 3), Tim Preston (page 4); Edward Jones for storage of our mobile aviary; Cooper & Williams for roofing felt; Barn Owl Trust for the donation of a ladder safety harness; Colin & Manda Sansom and Edward & Sonia Swain for their help in releasing Barn Owls. Thank you to all who shared their photos and encounters with Barn Owls to our Facebook site. For financial support we are most grateful and indebted to the William Dean Countryside & Educational Trust, David Collin Greeting Cards, and the many landowners who contribute to the nestbox costs: without this financial support we could not do what we do for Barn Owls.



For more information on how you can help the Shropshire Barn Owl Group and encourage breeding Barn Owls see our website www.shropshirebarnowlgroup.org.uk or Facebook. 
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