

## A Barn Owl Rescue



Last January, whilst walking their dogs around a nearby solar farm, some friends, Paul and Amanda, noticed a commotion at the bottom of the fence and walked over to investigate. As they approached a buzzard flew off. When they got closer, they realised there was a barn owl against the fence. They think it may have been eating prey when the buzzard saw an opportunity for its own meal. It was clear that the owl would have been killed had they not been there as it had a nasty wound on its head from the attack.

They wrapped the barn owl up and took it in a cardboard box to the Cuan Wildlife Rescue Centre, fearing it would not survive. Cuan was happy to care for the owl and told them they would keep them informed of its progress. The owl proved to be a fighter and recovered well so Cuan contacted John Lightfoot of the Shropshire Barn Owl Group to discuss its future. John contacted Paul and Amanda and we arranged to meet to show him where they had found the owl and to survey the site in the hope that John would be able to release it back near

to where it was found.

John decided that a 5 acre place to release it, so a site and then collected the

The head wound had of its head and it is unlikely frozen chicks and into the aviary to provide and start with two chicks increase to three if he was increased to three as it

Paul and I studied the Trust website but decided the anticipated release. We consulted John who suggested one of the more important features was a platform round the box so that owlets could exercise safely before fledging. So we elected to buy a commercial box and erect a running track which we could drop over the roof to rest just below the entrance hole. Paul happened to have an old telephone pole which was ideal for mounting the nest box and would be a height of about four metres above the ground. A plan was formed. We bought the extra materials we needed to modify the box and decided on a stepped approach for the erection because of the weight of the box. We would make a platform to fit onto the pole as a base for the nest box and would then erect the pole with the platform mounted before lifting the box onto it and then mounting the running track over the roof onto it. We slowly and carefully transported the pole on a trailer to the field. The soil proved very easy to dig so I was delighted to take up the role of builder's assistant and watch Paul dig the whole hole. We were so pleased with his efforts that we decided to erect the pole immediately. Having done so and stood back to admire our efforts, I pointed out that we seemed to have missed one step in our process. We had forgotten to mount the platform on the pole before erecting it! We decided it would be best if we took the pole down again and mounted the platform on the ground. That was how we discovered it is much easier to erect a long, heavy telephone pole than lift it out of a hole to lay it back on the ground. We managed to do so and although quite a struggle because of the weight and the height whilst working on ladders, the rest of the construction went well.



field neighbouring the solar farm would be an ideal couple of weeks later John towed a mobile aviary to the owl from Cuan.

healed well but "Baldy" now had a bald spot on the top the feathers would grow back. John provided some instructed us how to use the feeding box incorporated Baldy his meals. He suggested we monitor his feeding per day but reduce to one if he was not eating both or eating them regularly. Within a few days, we had became clear Baldy had a good appetite.

plans for a pole mounted nest box on the Barn Owl we did not have sufficient time to build one before the anticipated release. We consulted John who suggested one of the more important features was a platform round the box so that owlets could exercise safely before fledging. So we elected to buy a commercial box and erect a running track which we could drop over the roof to rest just below the entrance hole. Paul happened to have an old telephone pole which was ideal for mounting the nest box and would be a height of about four metres above the ground. A plan was formed. We bought the extra materials we needed to modify the box and decided on a stepped approach for the erection because of the weight of the box. We would make a platform to fit onto the pole as a base for the nest box and would then erect the pole with the platform mounted before lifting the box onto it and then mounting the running track over the roof onto it. We slowly and carefully transported the pole on a trailer to the field. The soil proved very easy to dig so I was delighted to take up the role of builder's assistant and watch Paul dig the whole hole. We were so pleased with his efforts that we decided to erect the pole immediately. Having done so and stood back to admire our efforts, I pointed out that we seemed to have missed one step in our process. We had forgotten to mount the platform on the pole before erecting it! We decided it would be best if we took the pole down again and mounted the platform on the ground. That was how we discovered it is much easier to erect a long, heavy telephone pole than lift it out of a hole to lay it back on the ground. We managed to do so and although quite a struggle because of the weight and the height whilst working on ladders, the rest of the construction went well.

During a visit to bring some more meals for greedy Baldy, John saw evidence that another Owl had visited the aviary which raised our hopes that Baldy has a mate and the nestbox might be used for its prime purpose.

At the end of January, John decided it was now time aviary so that Baldy was free to go. However, we keep feeding him as it might take a while for him to himself again. Apparently, the record was some 70 become fully independent again so on 29 January the aviary and we started a regime of placing two box daily. I also mounted a wildlife camera so that movements. Baldy disappeared that night and did three days so we thought he might have gone for day he returned to take the food. From that point on he was returning to the aviary around sunset every night. He took the food up to the roosting box above the food box and it was clear that Baldy was not only greedy but liked a little luxury by partaking of breakfast in bed.



to raise the roof of the were instructed to be able to fend for days for an owl to John raised the roof of chicks in the feeding we could monitor his not feed for the first good. On the fourth it became clear that

After 29 days, John suggested we should reduce the meals to 1 chick per day to encourage Baldy to fend for himself. This became the regime for the next 59 days. On a few occasions the food was left but Baldy usually could not resist his fast food. Having smashed the previous record of 70 days, by day 99 John suggested we reduce feeding to 1 chick every other day. Baldy made his disgust known very quickly. Within a week he had given up returning to the aviary. Why keep returning to a fast food outlet that will only serve you every other day? Thus, on 1 June we gave up feeding him. By then John had taken the aviary away and left a feeding station where it had been but that was never used.

Sadly, there is no evidence that Baldy even investigated the nestbox so no records have been established for the running track. However, we think he has a home at a nearby farm and the farmer reports regularly seeing him. To my surprise my wildlife camera photographed a barn owl on my back lawn on 1 September just after sunset. Perhaps Baldy was missing his fast food. However, we have allowed the grass to grow in the field where we fed him to encourage field voles and mice so that he has plenty of food available. We hope he will have a long and happy life and avoid buzzards.

Tony Cordery