

# Bucks Owl and Raptor Group

*Promoting owl and raptor conservation*

*throughout Buckinghamshire*



Issue 4

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## AN EXTRAORDINARY SEASON SO FAR

Due to a combination of a cold, wet spring (the beast from the east), followed by the long, hot, dry summer last year was very disappointing for the owls and kestrels across Buckinghamshire. Many of the birds did not even try to breed and those that did deserted eggs and chicks because they could not find enough voles and other small mammals to feed either themselves or their offspring.

However, in 2019 the birds are really proving to be in the mood to make up for lost time. BORG volunteers have been busy for the last few weeks checking the 700 + boxes located across the whole county and with very pleasing results.

This is the time of year that our volunteers most look forward to; the time of monitoring and being surprised and, often, delighted at what we find in the boxes.



Although we are only half-way through the season it is already clear that tawny owls (the earliest breeders) are doing exceptionally well, as can be seen by the great pictures on our Twitter feed. Tawnies generally have two chicks, but this year we have found many nests with 3, even 4, good sized chicks – a sign that food is plentiful. To date we have ringed twice as many tawny chicks than in any previous year!

Barn owls and Kestrels are also doing well, with high occupancy rates and many boxes containing good clutches of eggs and small chicks. This suggests that, providing the weather remains reasonably dry and warm and food supplies do not dwindle, we will be recording good numbers of fledglings in the weeks ahead.



## SURPRISES AND UNUSUAL HOUSE-MATES.....



On a recent site visit, one of our volunteers was checking a pole mounted box, located near water, and was initially confused at what he saw. It transpired that he had discovered, what we believe, is the first recorded GOOSANDER sitting on a clutch of 8 eggs, in a Barn owl box! All successfully fledged

These birds are very rare in the south of England and we feel very privileged that they should choose one of our boxes. We hope they will become a regular user of our boxes and should be better prepared next year if they return.

Early May saw our second unusual find of the year – a box containing 5 Duck eggs and 5 Kestrel eggs! Someone's going to be in for a surprise if these all hatch!!



But trumping them both is the Barn Owl box containing 4 Duck eggs, 3 Barn Owl eggs and 5 Kestrel eggs one of which is pipping (hatching). There was also one very small chick, possibly a Barn Owl.

What's going on here then? The most likely scenario is that the duck laid first and was ejected by the Barn Owl, who then laid her own eggs. For some reason she may then have deserted, possibly because her mate, who has the responsibility of feeding her has been killed. She in turn deserted and the Kestrel took the opportunity to lay her eggs next to the others and is now incubating and hatching some, or even all, of them! We will have to wait and see...

It is all very interesting. However, what is clear is that there is a severe housing shortage for birds in that area.

All in all this year has been amazing and who knows what is yet to come! Do keep an eye on our Twitter feed for more updates on this year's work – you never know what you'll see....

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT.

From all at BORG, take care and stay safe!