

Bucks Owl & Raptor Group

*Promoting owl and raptor conservation
throughout Buckinghamshire*



Issue 7

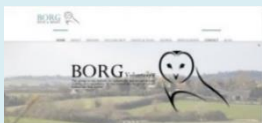
October 2024



A BORG nest box amid a view of ideal foraging habitat for owls and kestrels in Aston Abbots

We look forward to continuing our journey of Barn Owl and Raptor conservation across Buckinghamshire.

Social Media and Web Site News



www.giveahoot.org.uk

topical and relevant.

Our new webmaster, Grant Morgan, has now been given our web site a thorough overhaul; the new version went live on Monday 26 August. Although it looks pretty much the same, apart from some minor tweaks to make it easier to read, it is on a completely new software platform, which will make it much easier to keep up to date. This makes a significant difference to our ability to keep the information on the site



Mark Ritson is now managing our **Twitter** (X) feed (@Borg_Owl_Raptor), which continues to provide information to the wider public of our activities. At the time of writing we have 944 followers and the numbers continue to grow. We hope to reach the milestone of 1,000 followers before too long!



[borg_owl_raptor](https://www.instagram.com/borg_owl_raptor)

Huge thanks to Kate Lyes, one of our landowners, for her kind offer to take on the running of our Instagram account (borg_owl_raptor). Luke Marriner did great work in originally setting it up for us but his full-time commitment as assistant warden on Fair Isle have made it impossible for him to continue. Do look out for future postings of photos and videos showing our volunteers at work throughout the county.

Friends of BORG



We launched Friends of BORG in 2017; the initial thinking was to provide a means by which people who did not have our boxes with an alternative way to support us. After a couple of years we realised it needed more impetus, so we began offering a discount on box purchases if a subscription to our ‘Friends’ scheme were taken out at the same time. It proved very successful and continues to this day; most of our ‘Friends’ have signed up to the scheme as a consequence. Thank you!

The majority of Friends pay their subscriptions via the Go Cardless direct debit scheme ([BECOME A FRIEND | Give a Hoot](#)), with a few still preferring to pay either by cheque, cash or direct bank transfer. If you are among those few, we will send you an annual reminder. If you are not sure whether you are still up to date with your subscription, please do get in touch!

As we do not make much from the sale of the boxes, the Friends income helps cover our ongoing operational costs in particular the running costs for our faithful Land Rover – without which we would find it very difficult to access many of our box locations.

So, we would like to say a huge **“THANK YOU”** to all our Friends – without you we would not be able to continue.

Box Building Extravaganza....

During a very full box-monitoring season this year we have received what must be approaching a record number of requests for new boxes – well over 50 at the last count and still growing. So we decided to run a “box-building” day in mid-August at our base at Haydon Mill to get the process started.

The design of our boxes needs to meet a few criteria. Obviously, they have to be attractive enough for the target species – deep for a tawny owl, wide for a barn owl and so on – but they also need to be easy to build, easy to erect and, crucially, easy for our monitors to access. Our designs continue to evolve based on experience in building and using the boxes, with the access doors perhaps going through the most iterations.



Our approach now is to cut out templates so we have “kits” which our box-builders can simply assemble, using wooden battens for the frame and Stokbord panels for the box outers. For our building day we realised that the dimensions of different types of box could be made uniform in size, to ease cutting and to simplify the templates. The sides of a barn owl and tawny owl box can be the same size; so, crucially, can the sides of a kestrel box, albeit they lie with the longer side horizontal. From watching kestrel chicks exercise in a camera box,

we had come to believe that our previous design of kestrel box was a little small, and this uniformity in size will make them bigger, making this better for the birds as well as more efficient for us. We were able to time our building day with the delivery of a new load of Stokbord to the Mill, a weighty 30 sheets which the team unloaded by hand, and some of which was then immediately put to use by being cut into templates. Ironically, we didn’t complete building a single box – that was never the aim – but we did cut templates for about 30 boxes which can now be assembled individually by the team.



Thanks to Nick Payne and Mark Ritson for leading the design and doing the cutting, and to Pete Bayliss, Mike Collard, Grant Morgan and Karen & Steve Thomas for consultancy, fetching and carrying, labour, refreshments ... not to mention commitment to future box assembly.

Out and About Promoting BORG....

We are very conscious that our late lamented colleague Norman Shepherd provided the majority of the group's talks to local community groups. Sadly most of his "script" was in Norman's head, and we have found ourselves having to defer several requests for presentations. We have now developed a simple set of Power Point slides as the basis for future talks, which we hope our monitors and volunteers will be able to use as a start-point for future events, improving and updating as we go.

If you would like us to visit, please get in touch and we will do our best to help!

We also offer an exhibition 'stand' for local events; here are a few we have been able to attend recently.



Molly's Pantry, Bletchley

Following Steve and Karen's small exhibition stand at their local food market in Wing last summer they were inveigled to provide a similar display on 1st June for the market's organiser, Joe, outside his shop, Molly's Pantry, in Bletchley. The business promotes sustainable practices in its suppliers so seemed a very appropriate fit for what we do. Footfall was pretty limited on the day but it was good practice for us in readiness for

the following week...



Open Farm Day at Waddesdon

On June 9th we attended an Open Farm Day, hosted by the Waddesdon Manor Estate, as part of a wider national scheme organised by LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming).



This annual family-friendly event provides a great way to learn about how a farm works, where our food comes from and to learn first-hand how farmers are committed to sustainability, biodiversity, animal welfare, and managing the countryside. Karen's hands-on pellet dissection proved popular with some of the younger visitors!



A Day at Waddesdon Conservation Hub

Waddesdon Manor's new Conservation Hub, situated in the Gardens, was officially opened on 8th June by renowned presenter, wildlife cameraman and self-confessed 'nature-nerd', Hamza Yassin. The hub is a space where visitors can learn about Waddesdon Manor's conservation projects and engage with the rich wildlife, habitats and natural beauty the estate has to offer.

As one of the conservation groups working with them (we manage about two dozen boxes on the estate), we were invited to host a day at the hub on Monday 26th August. Visitors were predominantly families with children; Mark clearly had a lot of fun and a very attentive audience!



Bucks County Show

We were back at the County Show in August, with our brand-new gazebo (kindly sponsored by Vale Tyre Services of Waddesdon - thank you!) and our usual display of photographs, pellet dissection opportunities and box samples.

The show is a great opportunity to meet and chat with many of our existing supporters, and to explain to others in the farming and related communities in the county exactly what we do. We had many new enquiries and have received many more, via our web site, since the show; so please bear with us if you are waiting for help this autumn – we will get back to you as soon as we can!



Monitoring Results & Interesting Stories 2024

Our volunteers are currently coming to the end of this year's monitoring, so it shouldn't be too long before we can finish collating all the data and give an overview of how Buckinghamshire's owls and raptors have fared this year. We are aware of one or two late-breeding birds, but with the current weather situation will not know the outcome for about another month – fingers crossed the adults can find enough food, for themselves and their offspring, and stay reasonably dry!

There have been one or two interesting results this year too, including emergency box repairs, unwelcome inhabitants and slugs. However, we'll keep them and the final monitoring results until the next newsletter.

2024 DIARY

Our volunteers may already have visited you in the past few weeks to repair, replace or install new boxes. If you are expecting a visit and have not yet heard anything, don't be too concerned, they will continue working through our list of box requirements and will contact you when the new boxes are ready for installation. Obviously, this will be weather-dependent but we hope to get all known repairs, replacements and new boxes installed before March 2025, when monitoring will re-start with Tawny Owls.

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT.
From all at BORG, take care and stay safe!



[@Borg_Owl_Raptor](https://twitter.com/Borg_Owl_Raptor)

www.giveahoot.org.uk

[Instagram – borg_owl_raptor](https://www.instagram.com/borg_owl_raptor)