

# Bucks Owl & Raptor Group

*Promoting owl and raptor conservation  
throughout Buckinghamshire*



[www.giveahoot.org.uk](http://www.giveahoot.org.uk)

Issue 8

February 2025



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2024 was a prodigious year for the group. It saw 12 volunteers recruited, expanded landowner liaison, linking with our local wildlife sanctuary, 41 boxes erected, 278 birds ringed, four events attended and 111 Friends of BORG subscribers.

I attempted to calculate the economic value our volunteers contribute to this great cause and came up with a figure in excess of £50,000. The group is of course more than just this financial figure and it's so much more than monitoring birds across Buckinghamshire. Having a healthy top predator population is an indication the species and habitats they rely on is functioning. With increased development pressure on the countryside it's groups like BORG that can help focus conservation projects to maintain and enhance opportunities for these species.

The group has strong links with local and national conservation groups and established new and renewed projects across the county. One of our volunteers has even secured an internship with The Rothschild Foundation and is embedding our conservation principles across their land ownership.

It's the dedication of our volunteers and the support landowners grant us that enables us to focus efforts on conserving these magnificent bird species across the county. Read on for some more in-depth details of the projects we have achieved in 2024, and we look forward to continue this success story into 2025 and beyond. Thank you all for your support.

Paul Holton Chair Bucks Owl & Raptor Group

# Social Media and Web Site News



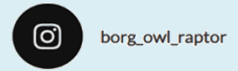
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Our re-vamped web site is working well and has led to many new enquiries, including requests for new boxes and others that have led to new volunteers who, with a variety of skill sets, are able to help us provide a more streamlined service to landowners and more importantly the birds.

Once the monitoring season starts in earnest most of our volunteers will be busy out in the field, but we will do our best to keep the feeds, including our new Bluesky account, updated with news and photos of our work and other interesting owl and raptor news, so do keep checking them for your regular fix of raptor news.



 @borgowl.bsky.social



## Friends of BORG



Since its launch in 2017 we have had 165 supporters sign up for our Friends of BORG scheme. Unfortunately, as with all such schemes, we have lost a few supporters along the way and currently have 115 active Friends. Although the scheme was originally setup as a way for the general public to support our work, we are pleased to say that a large proportion of our 'box owners' have signed up too!

Although we charge for the making of the boxes, we do not make a huge profit from this, but it is our biggest regular income stream. The additional income from the Friends scheme 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.

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!

A huge “**THANK YOU**” to all our ‘Friends’ – without you we would not be able to continue.



## BORG and the Buckinghamshire Lottery

Buckinghamshire Lottery was created in 2020 by Buckinghamshire Council and was set up to support community projects in the local area. It operates on the principle of raising money within the community, for the community, and enables people to support the causes they care most about, helping good causes to connect with their supporters.

BORG has been registered as one of the projects supported by the Buckinghamshire Lottery since 2016 and, since joining, our supporters have raised £300 for our cause – not a huge amount you might say, but every penny counts!

So, if you are looking for another way to support our work then why not consider buying a ticket for the Buckinghamshire Lottery. You can sign up for as little as £1 per week with a chance to win up to £25,000. For each ticket bought the organisation of your choice (we hope BORG - [Support Bucks Owl and Raptor Group when you play Buckinghamshire Lottery - Buckinghamshire Lottery](#)) gets 50p, with a further 10p going to other good causes. For more information visit the Buckinghamshire Lottery web site, or click on the link above.

# Thank You for your support....



Unfortunately, after many years of service, and the odd bit of windy weather, the gazebo we had been using for outdoor exhibitions was deemed unsafe and could no longer be used. So for a short while we attended such events sans gazebo, or if we were lucky with a borrowed one! This was not ideal situation, so we were delighted when one of our volunteers told us that Vale Tyre Services, Waddesdon had offered to pay for a new gazebo. After a few discussions with Chris, the owner of the company, a new, stronger and more robust, branded gazebo was purchased. The gazebo had its first outing at the

Bucks County Show in August 2024 and certainly proved that it was just what we needed. So a huge thank you from all at BORG to **Vale Tyre Services** for their generous help. Together with the new gazebo, and courtesy of funding from one of our volunteers – who wishes to remain anonymous (thank you), we were also able to purchase a new roll-up banner, displaying updated photos and contact information for the group.



After many years of checking and installing nest boxes our volunteers have found that having a set of telescopic ladders, as well as the longer two-part standard style ones, is a great help, as they are generally more manageable when having to carry equipment across fields. In order to facilitate two independent working groups it was agreed that a second set of telescopic ladders was needed. We would therefore like to thank

the **Bucks Bird Club** who, following discussions with Mike Collard about the use and advantage of these ladders, paid for two ladders; a set to be used by Mike and our volunteers in the south of the county and a set to replace an existing damaged one.



As many of you may have noticed last year, many of our volunteers are now the proud owners of practical and warm clothing bearing our BORG logo. We would like to thank **Impact Signs**, of Aylesbury, for their help in getting the order fulfilled and delivered very promptly, enabling both our existing and new volunteers to be recognised immediately as they carried out their monitoring work across the county.

During the summer of 2024 we met with the people at Wendover Shed to discuss the possibility of their members helping us to make our owl and kestrel boxes. Following a demonstration of box-making at their site in Hogtrough Lane, Wendover we subsequently delivered 3 flat-pack Barn Owl boxes and left them to it. The completed boxes were collected by our volunteers a few weeks later and very quickly distributed and installed at suitable locations. We hope to involve, John, the main box builder, in more box-making in 2025 and will take him out with us to show him how the boxes are used and what we get up to when out monitoring!



## Out and About Promoting BORG....

We have now developed a simple set of Power Point slides as the basis for future talks, which our monitors and volunteers will be able to use as a start-point, improving and updating as we go. We are also able to offer an exhibition 'stand' for local events so, if you would like a visit by BORG, please get in touch and we will see what can be done – no promises, but we will do our best to help!

We are already beginning to get requests for this year, so do look out for us at local events as the year progresses.....

# Monitoring Results & Interesting Stories 2024

Nest Record Totals:

<i>Species</i>	<i>Number of nests recorded 2023</i>	<i>Number of nests recorded 2024</i>
<i>Barn Owl</i>	68	84
<i>Tawny Owl</i>	11	11
<i>Little Owl</i>	3	6
<i>Peregrine</i>		1
<i>Kestrel</i>	14	22
<i>Stock Dove</i>	55	44
<i>Jackdaw</i>	16	13
<i>Mandarin</i>	2	
<i>Feral Pigeon</i>		2

NB Nest Records also include unsuccessful nesting attempts.



As usual the season started with Tawny Owl monitoring; they tend to lay earlier than other species. We had mixed success: a number of nests had 2 or 3 eggs but when we did a follow-up check a few weeks later there was only 1 chick left, so presumably food or hunting opportunities were scarce. The only exception was a box at the edge of a wood next to a paddock with horse pellets liberally scattered; this box had a stash of wood mice which were probably caught by the Tawny Owl as they fed on the pellets. This was our only Tawny nest that successfully fledged 4 chicks this year.

Barn Owls had their best year since 2019. We checked approximately 150 nest boxes between us and recorded barn owls at 84 sites, with 52 active nests. The most common brood size at the time of ringing this year was 3, but we had a number of boxes with 4 or 5 chicks. Claire has been covering the area west of Waddesdon and found our largest Barn Owl brood this year in a box that has been up for a few years but has only ever previously been used by Jackdaws. This year she found a female Barn Owl with six well-grown chicks in the box.

The box at Small Dean NT did well again: sited in a secure barn and surrounded by great hunting habitat it usually does well, and this year was no exception. The box is constantly monitored by a camera so we know exactly when to time the visit; we ringed 4 large chicks in July. Less than a mile away was another box with 5 chicks. On the same evening we were invited to monitor a new box put up by a landowner between these two sites and, remarkably, found another brood of 5 Barn Owls, with a Kestrel box containing 4 chicks right next to it! It goes to show that given the right habitat and enough small mammal prey Barn Owls can successfully nest really quite close to each other.



Another new nest site went on our list when we were told of noises coming from a box made out of an old piglet run in the roof space of a barn near Great Missenden. It was tricky to reach into but we succeeded in ringing and recording 2 very big chicks just before they fledged in late July.

The breeding season came to a close in October. At Small Dean the pair of Barn Owls raised a small second brood after their first brood had left, and we ringed one chick on 11<sup>th</sup> Oct.



Our last chicks for the year were in Edlesborough; the old box there was very high and difficult to access without the use of the farmer's cherry-picker and we had put a new Stokbord box lower down in the same tree. The Barn Owls took to the new box and we ringed the last chicks of the year there on 25<sup>th</sup> Oct.



<u>BORG Ringing 2024</u>					
	Adult	Adult	Pullus	Pullus	
	New	Retrap	New	Retrap	Total
Barn Owl	25	11	116	7	159
Tawny Owl	1		10		11
Little Owl	2	3	13		18
Short-eared Owl	1				1
Kestrel			61		61
Peregrine			1		1
Jackdaw			19		19
Stock Dove			8		8
Total	29	14	228	7	278
Rehabilitated birds ringed and released:					
Barn Owl	4				
Tawny Owl	10				
Red Kite	13				
Buzzard	2				
Sparrowhawk	1				
Total	30				



Little Owls continue to be few and far between these days in Bucks. One new breeding pair is being monitored by Karen after she and Steve responded to an emergency call in late December 2023, when an old willow inhabited by Little Owl came down and skewered itself on a nearby fence post, completely destroying the natural nest. The box they put up in an adjacent tree was taken by the Little Owl pair immediately and they raised two chicks.



We have another four boxes that held Little Owls and one natural site; 10 chicks were ringed in total. We also released three rescued Little Owl chicks into a safe site near Tring.

Kestrels had a good year and we ringed 61 chicks from 14 nests (at an average of 4.35 chicks per brood). The new Stokbord boxes are now well used but we also had a pair determined to nest in a decaying old Tawny Owl box.

We were told that Kestrels were going in and out of an old wooden box which was falling apart, so we quickly put up a new box right next to it. The landowner had done some temporary repairs to the old box and of course this was the one the birds used – the new box was probably still far too clean! Over winter we will take the old box down, as it is not safe, and hope the birds will return to nest in the new box next year.





Another slightly odd choice of nest site was a low Barn Owl box, this time in a churchyard. We could hear noisy chicks from the ground and were delighted to find six large Kestrel chicks looking out. The box was half full of old Jackdaw nest debris which had reduced the height of the cavity and obviously had made it appealing to the Kestrels. Remarkably, one of the chicks from this brood was found in the Isle of Wight on New Year's Day. The information on the Kestrel came from a member of the public who had seen the bird alive the previous day, but unfortunately found it dead in a nearby stable the following day. Fortunately the finder reported the circumstances and ring number to the BTO.

Peregrines nested on the County Hall Building in Aylesbury and laid 4 eggs, but sadly only one egg hatched. The chick was ringed on 24<sup>th</sup> May and given an orange colour ring with the letters XJR in black. At 18 days old it already weighed 582g and had a bill length of 15.1mm, making it probably a male (the smaller sex). If anyone spots a Peregrine, please check to see if you can see a colour ring and report it to us.



Other avian species found using our boxes were Jackdaws and Stock Doves though in lower numbers than 2023 due to the higher take-up of boxes by owls. Unfortunately, despite providing a few specially adapted boxes for Goosander we had no takers this year, so fingers crossed for 2025!



Non-target avian species were not the only inhabitants of our boxes in 2024; we had a not so delightful surprise in a very wet Tawny box, near Tring, which had become an overwintering home for the most disgusting array of slugs one could ever imagine. We found a dead Glis glis (edible Dormouse) in a box at one of the BBOWT reserves, and a very active bees' nest in a Little Owl box. Happily, we noticed the bees before we opened the box, and confirmed the presence of a nest inside the box using a thermal imaging camera. Several of our boxes had resident grey squirrels or empty dreys.



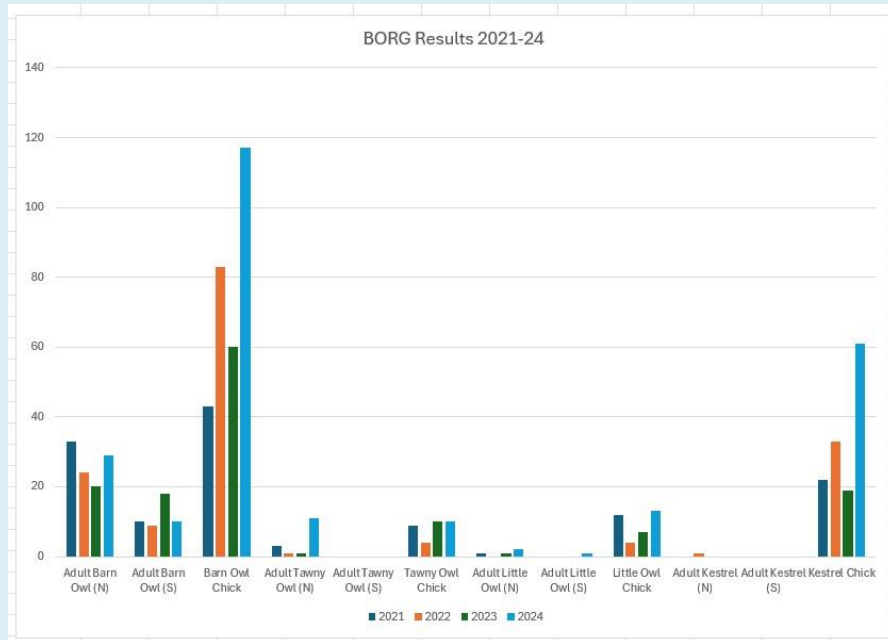
All of these non-avian residents, apart from the bees, were removed from the boxes and the boxes subsequently cleared out and filled with clean, fresh substrate ready for the return of the target species.

All the data that our group collects when we monitor the birds, on breeding success, number of eggs and chicks, survival rates etc. is sent to the BTO, who collate and provide information to the Government and other Agencies involved in the conservation of birds.

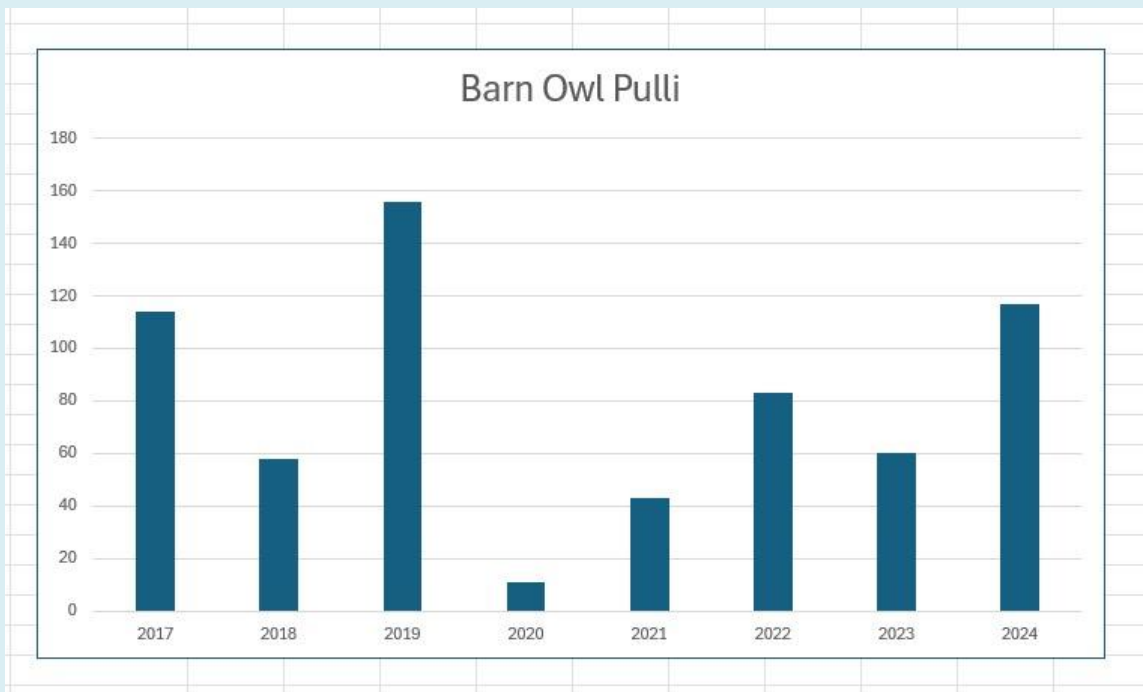
Our volunteers may already have visited you in the past few months to repair, replace or install new boxes. If you are expecting a visit and have not yet heard anything, don't be too concerned, they will continue working through our list of box requirements and will contact you when the new boxes are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

## Recoveries of Birds reported in 2024:

Barn Owls									
Ring No.	Date Ringed	Ringer	Age at ringing	Ringling Site	Date Found	Circumstance	Found by	Days	KM
GV70957	31/05/2019	P.Wilkinson	1 (chick)	Chalfont St Giles	17/05/2024	Found alive and breeding in a box in Penn.	BORG	1813	3km
FJ35623	18/07/2023	Middle Thame RG	1 (chick)	Lane End	06/03/2024	Caught by ringer in mist net near Thame and released.	BORG	232	>1km
GH85685	31/05/2017	CV Prescott	1 (chick)	Bennett End	22/12/2023	Found alive in box near Saundeton	BORG	2396	5km
GY71512	20/05/2023	BORG	4M (adult male)	Kingsey	25/03/2024	Found recently dead near nest site in Kingsey, no obvious injuries.	Member of Public (MOP)	310	2km
GY49245	28/06/2022	BORG	1 (chick)	Kingsey	28/01/2024	Found recently dead in barn, Towersey.	MOP	579	1km
GY83903	12/07/2023	BORG	1F (chick)	Chesham	01/03/2024	Found dead, road casualty, nr East Ilsley, West Berks	MOP	233	50km
GV19598	15/06/2022	BORG	1M (chick)	Waddesdon Estate	08/02/2024	Found dead in field in Bishopstone no apparent cause or injuries.	MOP	603	8km
GY83996	04/06/2024	BORG	1 (chick)	Nr Saundeton	19/12/2024	Found injured, road casualty. Taken into care and now released.	K.Hugh	198	13km
GY68441	06/06/2023	BORG	Adult female	Waddesdon Estate	28/05/2024	Found alive in a box at Burn Hill	P.Cannings	357	2km
GV19551	15/08/2023	BORG	1 (chick)	Stewkley	02/07/2024	Found alive in box near Waddesdon	P.Cannings	322	14km
Kestrels									
EM38868	20/06/2024	BORG	1 (chick)	Rycote Lake	26/09/2024	Found, recently died, after heavy rain in Little Haseley	MOP	98	6km
EM38820	23/05/2024	BORG	1 (chick)	Whitchurch	01/01/2025	Found dead on the Isle of Wight - seen alive one evening but found deceased in a stable next morning.	MOP	223	132km



(N) New ringed bird (S) Subsequent retrap



Graphs produced by Martin Routledge  
 (NB 2020 numbers are so low because we did very little ringing due to Covid restrictions.)

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

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