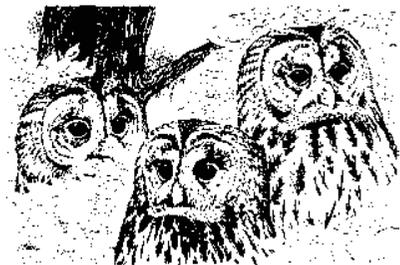


Three Owls Newsletter

Report by Nigel Fowler



Three Owls Newsletter 2022

Let's hope 2022 is the start of better times to come...

Following the pandemic years of 2020 & 2021, we all need to get to a 'new normal' and move forward in our lives – so much has had to be put 'on hold'; yet for Mother Nature the World continues to move forward.

Along with many other Wildlife Rehabilitators, we have battled on throughout, very much the Key Workers of our respective organisations. Although the various Lockdowns restricted our usual lives, where animal welfare was concerned, it was much more all systems go, and many sanctuaries have found life a real struggle due to limited numbers of volunteers, and restricted access to veterinary services. This latter point has had a knock-on effect with increased numbers of injured wildlife being held onto longer by well-meaning members of the public rather than the usual swift admittances, with the resultant injuries then proving life-limiting or fatal in many more cases than in usual times; A sad result for all.

We have also had to endure a larger number of Bird Flu cases than in recent years. Although these mainly affect the domestic poultry farms each year as the Festive Season approaches, there is also the risk to transmission to wild migratory birds – and this has sadly occurred on the Solway Firth which is just a short distance away from our Cumbria reserves; this has greatly restricted our work on those sites as the authorities have put local areas under tight restrictions. On the Solway where huge numbers of Barnacle Geese have died; the RSPB area manager Andrew Bielinski estimated that 10% of total 35,000 Solway population had passed away during this outbreak.

Now with matters looking hopefully towards the endemic stage, we hope that by the start of the baby bird season this year, both Covid and Bird Flu cases will be minimal in number.

Looking back over the past year....

In **January** we endured a cold start to the year. David reported from Tarleton to say that the pond at Three Owls Wood was frozen over completely for an entire 2-week period.



The Greater Spotted Woodpeckers have returned to the Home Reserve and the males are already busy at work hammering away in the tree-tops to create their best effort with a new nesting site to try and win the affections of the females.



This month we had the annual RSPB Birdwatch. With being in the office today, I was able to select 'an hour' of the day in which to conduct my own survey in the garden. I did contemplate doing it on the Home Reserve, but after some thought I decided that may be frowned upon as cheating!

We decided to have 8.15-9.15am this morning, soon after it got light and when 'everyone' was hungry after the frosty night. Food we used to encourage was wild bird seed / sunflower hearts / crushed peanuts / fatballs / dried mealworms.

Birds observed were;

Blackbird (m) **7**, (f) **3**

Blue Tit **2**

Coal Tit **1**

Collared Dove **10**

Dunnock **4**

Great Tit **2**

Jackdaw **17**

Long Tailed Tit **3**

Magpie **4**

Nuthatch **3**

Robin **5**

Wood pigeon **11**

Wren **1**

Total 73 birds



In **February** one of our volunteers qualified for the Volunteer of the Month award whilst working at one of the Lancashire Reserves; Matthew Tobin is pictured here in the process of planting 25 Goat Willow trees.

The Goat Willow is also known as the Pussy Willow, and is one of the small Willow varieties found in ditches, reedbeds, and wet woodland. It is also known to grow on urban waste ground. It is one of the most common of the UK's willows, and well-known for the silver-grey fluffy male catkins that appear in January and turn bright yellow in March.



We announced John Thorpe's sponsored Bike Ride total towards the end of this month; despite the pandemic pressures, he had managed to raise a total of £1066 for his 2020 ride, so only a couple of hundred off his all-time best, and in spite of pandemic conditions. More detail can be found on the 2021 Sponsored Bike Ride in the June and August sections.

In **March** we were mourning the loss of one of our stalwart supporters in Greg Townsley. A larger than life figure at around 6 feet 8" tall, he was a regular visitor to our Home Reserve throughout the years, and with it only being a couple of days since his last visit, the shock hit us all that bit harder, and he was taken from us all too soon. Even now I miss the doorbell ringing as he frequently came with gifts to share.

Our grateful thanks to his mother Lorraine who thoughtfully directed all donations in his memory to Three Owls, and over £300 was raised in this way. Rest in Peace, Greg.



Later this month I was called to assist at another Sanctuary to help a barn owl admitted with a broken top beak, having suffered a collision with a lorry. The case was urgent as the top beak had pushed right in, and was damaging the flesh inside the bottom of the lower beak (none of the local vets were able to assist); hence it was a Thursday evening dash over to Meltham Wildlife Rescue in West Yorkshire, to put my years of knowledge and experience to the test once more. The beak was successfully repaired, and the bird went to the vets for x-rays the following day. The broken wing was confirmed and we hoped to be able to pin this in due course, but alas the owl passed away overnight on Saturday – the impact of its other injuries simply too much for the fragile life to bear.



On a brighter note, following my usual Sunday visit to Meltham to advise on current treatments for those needing specialist care and to help with staff training, I was able to take a full van-load of donated foodstuffs from the Home Reserve at Rochdale up to our most northerly Reserves and the hospitals of Knoxwood Wildlife Rescue at Wigton near Carlisle. This is SO welcome to the team up there; all their charity shops have now been closed several months, and funds are very much at a premium ... and still the casualties continue to pile in.

Into **April**, and David wrote his report from the Three Owls Wood where he was thrilled to find around 15 wild Cowslips – clearly now a well-established plant. He also recorded a smart looking pair of Canada Geese on the pond, and noted that all of the frogspawn had hatched into tiny tadpoles.



That same month I also wrote a report on some of the background work that goes on at Three Owls; which few people get to see;

People often seem to be amazed when around me regarding the highly varied number of calls/emails/messages from around the globe seeking assistance for wild birds in distress. Sometimes I do surprise myself at how easily I can recollect a treatment from a similar circumstance – even when it has happened many years or even decades ago. However, given that I have been doing this for over 44 years; I should be pretty good by now! Certainly it is getting busier now and my evenings are usually speaking with other rescues and vets regarding treatments and viable operations, the weekend calls are often from the general public who have found their local rescue phone either fully engaged, or alas the rescue is temporarily full. Many times, I find these birds did not NEED admitting anyway, and I am able to advise how to care for the bird where found – and it is rewarding when people do update later to say to both our joys that the advice given/received was successful and the bird is safely back in the wild. Remember to look at the **ADVICE** pages on our website to find a wealth of information to help in the majority of cases.

The photos attached to the report below are a pair of very different scenario broken wing x-rays, sent onto me for evaluation and advice by different vets.

The first is a straight-forward break which is fairly common, and can be successfully repaired to enable 95-100% repair and it is rare that the bird cannot be returned to live a full life in the wild, even in the case of such as kestrels or barn owls which need to be able to hover.

The second is a very nasty break where the wing is completely smashed. Sadly in this case, there was no kinder option than for the bird to be put to sleep.



Some frustratingly sad news from the Home Reserve...

It has been very noticeable over the last 12 months, that mirroring the number of people flying drone aircraft on the playing fields near to the Home Reserve, there has been a marked reduction in the number of herons using the reserve as a place of safety to live in the treetops.

Even more so this Spring, when on 10th April the first of the heron chicks were heard in the nest, followed the following day by the cries of the second. Alas, this joy was short-lived, as the nest fell silent within the following five days, and clearly the chicks were no more.

This is not to say that the drone operators have directly killed the chicks (this year I suspect the continued frosts late into the year may have claimed their fragile lives), but clearly the herons airspace is no longer the place of sanctuary it once was. In 2020 alone, we found 11 drones (or parts thereof) having crashed onto the nature reserve. Stern words have been had with the operators (where known), and they each now know of the damage they have caused. This is the first year in decades that we do not currently have any heron chicks on the reserve; we can but hope that the parents will lay a fresh clutch and that people will keep their aircraft away from the wildlife - and the Reserves in general.



Into **May** now, and I noted that we had already made a further four trips in the last 7 weeks northwards to our distant reserves near Wigton in Cumbria; in order to give rescued birds the very best chance of a full and successful return to the wild. It is hoped that we can do a further trip next weekend to relocate an orphaned heron chick,

as while the rescue it resides at just now can cope with the current stage, we have to ensure that it doesn't imprint which could render a successful release non-viable in the weeks to come. The team up at Knoxwood have the facilities to complete the birds' upbringing and with our reserves alongside and their own heronry in the treetops above, it is an ideal location for this rehabilitation to complete. We do of course fully load the car with other items to help them save/raise money in the process – thank you so much for all these donations.



The weather was rather glum on the way up, but the welcome was heart-warming, and it was great to see the bird swiftly admitted into their care for what will be the final stages of its rehabilitation. People may ask “why take it all that way, when you could have reared it in Rochdale?” Yes, it could have been reared in most sanctuaries; however with any such predatory bird, there is an extra responsibility upon the rehabilitator to ensure that the orphaned bird is not imprinted (made tame) in any way, as this could prove fatal not only for the bird, but for any human/smaller animal it comes into contact with.

When we had the hospitals in Rochdale I would see a number of such imprinted birds each year; where people had found and reared birds at home and then put them back in the wild. Alas, many of these would be killed by cats/cars/people/weather or even other birds within the first 48 hours of being free, as they had no knowledge of what to do and their feathers were not weathered having been kept inside peoples' houses.

They would also have none of the necessary 'fear' of people, cats and dogs; which they need to be able to survive in the world as it is today, and do not recognise the alarm calls which similar birds make to warn of such dangers approaching.

The 'lucky' few would make it to our doors, where we would do our very best to rehabilitate – this often took months of work and even then was not successful on every occasion. Alas, Corvids (magpies/crows/jackdaws/jays) are particularly susceptible, but when released in a semi-tame state, can prove deadly to people especially infants, as the bird gets mixed-up between instinct and what it has 'learned' from its 'keeper'. The bird instinctively knows to peck its parents' beak to be fed. Alas its foster parent is a human, so upon release it flies round looking for something familiar and often finds a child. The danger then is evident and it will fly to the child and intend to peck at their beak (their nose) – hence the bird is immediately a huge danger and castigated (and often killed) for it, when in actual fact it was the 'fault' of the keeper not taking it to a qualified wildlife rescue in the first place.

The day was also filled with assisting numerous people from around the country with their own wildlife concerns; from mother duck & ducklings found in a garden, to starling chicks in the garden, to various cat attacks on numerous birds, and baby owls on forest floors. All standard enquiries at this time of year...

David was thrilled to report from Three Owls Wood later in the month;
Hurrah - the Marsh Orchids are back in force!! It looks as if the winter grazing with sheep has helped. I counted about thirty of these beauties yesterday. To think there was just one a few years ago. By helping birds we also help an entire habitat. The sheep (and their droppings) attracted hundreds of starlings, eating off the old grass left more light for wildflowers. #RegenerativeFarming



Bird survey carried out on Three Owls Wet Meadow SD400213 and Doctor's Rest, Shore Road, Banks SD403213

The breeding bird survey was carried out at 6.30am to 8.30am on Monday 31stth May 2021 in clear, but warm conditions. The main criteria for potential breeding were singing males in suitable habitat and the presence of juvenile birds. The status of each species is for the area and is based on the Lancashire Bird Report and local knowledge.

Overview

These two newly acquired parcels of land, which comprise of a two-acre low lying agricultural field and a 14-acre farm field recently sown with a wildflower mix were surveyed with the future potential mind

Observations

Site 1 – Wet Meadow

This is the lowest lying field in the area and water drains naturally into it. Reliably wet in winter but dries naturally in summer. It is current fallow and has some short grass which had two pairs of Skylark in potential breeding habitat. This small site may well be an oasis for insects and wet land plants,

Site 2 - Doctors Rest

Currently a wide-open field with field margins on two sides. The initial colonisers appear to be Northern lapwing (18 adults, 19 juv. counted), and it appeared that six distinct family groups had successfully fledged young. At he time of survey there were no predator species visible and the young had cover in the margins if threatened.

Also, present were Wood Pigeons, Shelduck and Skylark, the latter had at least 4 pairs. On the periphery of the field, and no doubt visitors to site, included Blue Tit, Common Whitethroat, Corn Bunting, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, and Pied Wagtail.

Conclusion

While the early signs are that lapwings are the success story, the future “farmland” potential for passerines should not be ignored. This area may well have more potential for winter sustainable feeding, a habitat that has seriously declined in the last 30 years in this area.

Report compiled by Rob Yates

To round off the month, we had great excitement in Three Owls Wood today, Matt Somerville of Bee Kind Hives came to install our freedom hive. The idea is you give honey bees a perfect home but DON'T steal the honey, instead leaving the bees to do their job as a normal part of nature. As both David and I are Low Carb this is particularly apt and we hope you agree it looks great. Now we have to wait for a swarm to move in!



June this year was definitely an Owl Month! Almost every other call seemed to be about a baby owl on the floor; of course for every British owl other than a barn owl, that's quite normal and they should be left well alone - unless in immediate danger and then only moved off the path/road to the rear of a broad-leaved tree where they will await their parents return at dusk.

I've used this photo to show the difference between the tawny owlet and the barn owlet; lots of misidentifications at present, but it has certainly kept WhatsApp busy with queries coming in from around the globe. Indeed, more queries now come through via this medium than through email - which is fine with us, as reception via that app for some reason often better, and photos certainly are received more quickly.



With the number of birds requiring transporting, our Ferplast carriers do get something of a hammering. I launched an ongoing appeal if anyone had any such small animal carriers to spare; these are especially ideal for the baby birds as there is no mesh for them to further injure themselves on, as they are often a bit bouncy when initially placed inside, before they settle for the journey. There is a photo below of the carriers we are seeking...



At the end of the month, John Thorpe wrote his pre-ride write-up on the Website to garner support for his sponsored efforts. Alas his choice of wording and description of his personal life was not good, and there has been a huge backlash...more of this in the August report.

At the start of **July** following a number of conversations with a veterinary practice in Sheffield who had admitted a Peregrine Falcon and kept it confined for around four weeks whilst it recovered from its injuries.

They had been in touch already with Emma at Knoxwood who had agreed to take it in - it just needed transport!

Alas, it had missed a trip northwards by one day when we were notified of its travel requirements, so it was the following weekend that we arranged for an overnight stay at Meltham Wildlife Rescue in Huddersfield from where we collected it and took it up to Knoxwood for the remainder of its recuperation.

Although the vets advised that the wing had been x-rayed and shown no breakage, it was definitely dropped so could have done with being strapped to support the wing while it healed. Alas, both Peregrines and Kestrels do have to be A1 to be fit to be released back to the wild, so we will have to see how this one fares - it will have the very best chance available at Knoxwood (no pressure Emma), so it's fingers crossed for the birds' onward care up there.



At the end of the month, I had booked a week off work to do a spot of weeding... perhaps I should have mentioned there was just under 4 acres to do!

This was on the Home Reserve at Rochdale where the site has seen a massive spread of Himalayan Balsam throughout much of the land. Although the plant itself prevents no physical danger to the reserve residents, it does crowd out all other growth on the reserve floor through blocking light to the ground and it grows very tall and densely.

A huge thank you to Andrew Evans for assisting me that day - and coming all the way over from Marsden specifically for this task too; we achieved a huge amount and he spotted one of our well-camouflaged residents too. At least we managed to finish 'this' shift before the thunderstorms and downpours arrived!

Volunteers will be welcomed for a repeat session in 2022!



Into **August** now, and John Thorpe wrote his usual account of his epic adventures in the saddle...

The 2021 Manchester to Blackpool Bike Events ride by John Thorpe.

Well, dear reader, it is that time of year again, when I regail you with tales of 'derring do' (whatever that really means), suffering and ultimate triumph on the road to Blackpool from Manchester. As always with my little literary effort, the opinions expressed are my own and not necessarily those of the Trustees of Three Owls. As you may recall, the event was cancelled twice last year, resulting in me making the trip single handed and taking a few small scenic detours (known to some as getting lost!) along the way. It should never have been cancelled in the first place, but be that as it may, this year's event was scheduled for Sunday the 4th of July, and thankfully took place. My number was 739 and my start time 7.30am, so as in every other year; it was going to be an early night on Saturday and an early morning on Sunday. The early night was not appreciated by my rabbits, who are used to staying up until after midnight, but needs must.

I had serviced my trusty bike a few days before, using the stand I bought for a very nice price from Lidl a few weeks ago. I can definitely recommend them, as they bring the cycle up to a good working height and allow all round access. The chain and gears got a good degreasing (always fun) and seemed much happier for it, which is more than I could say, since I then had to degrease my hands! As is my normal practice, I had not trained for the event and other than very regular walking exercise and a clean and blameless life, I relied on muscle memory. Not what I would recommend to anyone else, and no doubt from a medical standpoint it would be classed as virtually suicidal, but it seems to work for me and since this was my 31st official ride (plus one unofficial last year), my body, such as it is, seems to tolerate it quite well. As I'm fond of saying, my body is a temple.....ruined and full of rats and monkeys! I was a little suspicious of on road physical problems this year, since I had a nasty attack of bursitis in my left knee earlier in the year, which left it looking like a vexed tomato- red and angry! Caused, I'm sure by inadvertently kneeling on something sharp and dirty while doing a job for a friend- lesson being to be more careful and avoid kneeling on small, pointy and infected objects.

I was up at 4.00am, fed the animals and myself, in that order of course, and out of the house at 5.00am. Thankfully it was a decent day, after a night of wind and rain, and I must confess to thinking that it was not going to be good while lying in bed listening to the rain on the window. As always it is a balancing act as to how much 'stuff' to take for the trip. Such items as tools for emergency use, are a 'no brainer', but weigh heavy and therefore have to be selected with care. Food is also essential, as is fluid to avoid dehydration, but again, a balance has to be struck between weight, which slows the bike down and puts a strain on the wheels and tyres, and necessity. Even after all these years I don't always get it right, but I try!

Thankfully the roads were pretty clear and as always I use the ride into Manchester to warm up and find out if my aging body is happy to be put through it again. Slow and steady is the order of the day, no sudden moves and no pulled muscles- there's a long way to go after all! Also I thankfully had no punctures, unlike a couple of years ago when I had several before getting to Manchester -as you can imagine I was not a happy bunny and the language would have stripped paint off a wall!

I got to the starting point with plenty of time to spare, and it was at this point that I realised that the gel saddle cover, which I had taken such pains to secure to the saddle before setting off, was not there, and after internally berating myself with some more paint stripping language, I realised that it must have slid forward with the movement of riding, and slipped off somewhere along the road. Of course I had no chance of finding it at this point, and just had to accept that I would have to replace it. Given that I'm very careful and don't like to waste or lose things, this was doubly annoying, but someone found a really good condition gel saddle cover and started their day on a high!

There were already a fair number of riders at the start point in The Piazza in Salford, in the complex which now houses the BBC and other companies responsible for a lot of the rubbish that passes for entertainment now, and since I was early, I collected my route map etc and set off at 6.45. Sadly this year I was not able to have my picture taken with my yellow suited friend 'The Voice of the Ride, since he was nowhere to be seen. Upon checking with one of the Bike Events staff I found out that he might be there later, but that in any case they had had complaints about the noise made by his announcements and corny jokes (no worse than mine it has to be said!) from the people living in a block of apartments next to the BBC. Given that the event only takes place once a year I would have thought this was a bit ridiculous but then again we are perhaps dealing with 'luvvies' who are used to being pandered to.

All was going well until about ten minutes into the ride, as we crossed a raised section of road, whereupon I got the sinking feeling known to all riders when the tyre exhales sharply and runs on the rim! I could barely believe it and since it was the back tyre, it was more of a pain than the front, since one has the chain and gears to deal with too. Upending the trusty steed, I whipped the tube out and put in another(I carried several just in case), only to find, after pumping it up, that it wouldn't stay up, and therefore must have been 'nipped' when being put in place-an easy thing to do, even when one is being careful. Feeling increasingly frustrated, I put in another, which thankfully stayed up, and then had to put the contents of the pannier bag back in place before setting off. I have to thank one of the motor cycle marshals for stopping and asking if he could help-as it turned out he couldn't, but the thought was there. I would make his acquaintance later on, but more of that to come.

I set off again, probably running twenty minutes late by now, and just hoped there would be no further interruptions to the trip. It's a uneasy feeling riding while almost waiting for something to go wrong, but hoping it doesn't, and the further away from home you are, the more uneasy it gets. Thankfully the tube held, although there are quite a few stretches of road where, due to the texture of the material used on the surface, it can feel like the tyre is losing pressure. We wended our merry way through Boothstown, on to Leigh, Atherton and Westhoughton, where I once again stopped, not, thankfully for a personal mishap, but to help another rider who was on the pavement in the main street, with his bike up ended and looking very sorry for itself. He was glad to see someone stop and the problem was with the chain, which had broken a link. He could hardly believe it when I said I actually had the tool to take the link out and repair the damage, and I was looking forward to getting the job done quickly and basking in the warm, self satisfied glow that comes with being a 'Knight of the Road'!

Unfortunately fate, as it frequently does, took a hand, and as I was trying to get the link out, the projection on the chain tool snapped off, rendering it worse than useless! The same motorcycle marshal had, by this time, pulled up and recognised me from the puncture. I pointed out that we would have to stop meeting like this or people would talk!

Unfortunately he didn't have the chain splitting tool in his tool kit, so arranged for the cyclist to be picked up and taken to Haigh Hall, where Darren would be able to sort him out. He was very grateful for my help anyway, and at least he didn't have to pedal all the way there so every cloud has a silver lining! I have since bought a better quality chain splitting tool!

Thankfully I was making good progress and the knee was holding up very well, which was a great relief. The day was brightening, and the temperature was very pleasant, not too warm, and not too cold. I personally don't mind the heat but many people don't do well in it. I should have been born in a warmer climate! Soon the entrance to Haigh Hall came into view, and since I'd walked up the steep road which leads to it, I pushed the bike over the infamous cobbles at the entrance. Picturesque they may be, but they can also inflict serious damage to the nether regions if one is not careful, and there are many miles to go at this point! The long, steep inclined road which runs through the grounds is great to just coast down and save some energy, but is also a trap for the unwary, since there are leaves on the surface, sharp bends and trees and shrubbery waiting to claim those with more bravado than sense. I stopped at the refreshment point near the portaloos, to take on some nourishment and fluids, and one very needy rider, wearing the shoes with metal cleats on the soles, which engage with the pedals to lock the foot in place; walked briskly over to the loo and opened the door. As he stepped inside, he slipped on the shiny surface, flipped onto his back, and disappeared behind the door rather dramatically!

I rushed over to see if he was alright, and a disconcerted voice from the bowels of the loo (unfortunate phrase if ever there was one!) assured me he was. He emerged shortly afterwards, a lot more cautiously than he'd gone in. At this point another rider passed me and asked if there were any other toilets than the portaloos. Since I'd heard someone else ask the same question previously, and had heard the answer, I was able to direct him to some around the corner of the building.

'Will I need a mask?' he asked. 'It all depends on how bad it gets in there' I replied. Thankfully he had a sense of humour!

I'd got to Haigh Hall at 9.45 and left at 10.15- I find half an hour goes very quickly, and if I spent any more time out of the saddle I might be reluctant to get back onto it! On my way out of the park I stopped to say hello to Darren from Pilkington's cycles, who was busy repairing a bike under his gazebo by the side of the path. It was nice to meet up again since we hadn't seen one another for at least a couple of years. He sold me the bike I'm still riding after all these years, so it was good to be able to show him I'm looking after it! I pressed on through Standish, Coppull and Charnock Richard, Chorley and Leyland, getting a nice rhythm going. The cleaning of the chain and gears which I'd taken so much trouble over, was paying off, as the bike was running very smoothly, and the sun was out, giving us all a lift to the spirits.

The long haul into Preston loomed ahead, and as always down this dual carriageway it's a matter of just putting your head down and keeping going steadily, for it never seems to end. Thankfully the field and open spaces were green and sunlit so were a nice distraction to the effort.

There were a few unexpected detours, due to new roads, which definitely weren't there in 2019 and 2020, and one stretch of road which we've always gone down to get to Preston Docks, was blocked off totally. I got to the docks area at 12.05, and just as we arrived it started to rain, the first serious precipitation we'd seen so far. Although it didn't last very long, it was the sort of rain that gets you wet, to quote Peter Kay! There was a rather tatty looking telephone kiosk, minus door, close to where I'd stopped, so I availed myself of it and ate my snacks under cover until the rain stopped. Amazingly the phone was still in order, (I couldn't resist the urge to check it!) something of a rarity nowadays.

I left at 12.25, feeling somewhat refreshed, although slightly damp, and the sun soon came out again as I pressed on north and west towards Kirkham, going through some lovely little villages and groups of houses alongside the road. At Salwick I stopped at Gracemire Farm to get some fresh, cool raw milk from the honesty kiosk at the farm entrance. I must admit it tasted great and gave me an energy boost as well as some much needed hydration. On to Treales, Kirkham and Warton, taking the coast road into Lytham St. Annes, passing the famous white windmill on the extensive greens to the left, I could feel the end was not too far away. Of course, even though this is definitely the latter stage of the ride, it isn't over until the morbidly obese lady sings, to quote the phrase, and the road into Blackpool seems to go on forever, just at the time when one's energy supply is waning. The weather was lovely and couldn't have been better really, but nevertheless the nether regions were looking forward to getting off the saddle!

Head down and teeth gritted, I pressed on, and eventually saw the promenade area, cordoned off to traffic, which leads the weary riders to the finish line opposite the Giant Mirror Ball , A small but select crowd lined the route, offering claps and vocal encouragement, and as I crossed the finish line, at 2.30 pm, the commentator (not my yellow suited friend sadly) said 'Well done that man, there you are ladies and gentlemen, there goes a gentleman of a certain age proving that cycling keeps you fitter than going to the gym!'

How he knew I was a gentleman (highly debateable I would think!) and what he meant by 'a certain age' I'd rather not contemplate but since I don't get many compliments I'll take what I can get. Breaking with tradition this year, there were no young ladies handing out completion certificates as the riders crossed the line, and when I queried this, was told that they felt it too risky in terms of infection spread. We got a rather nice medal instead, but the logic of handing an envelope over at the start but not a certificate at the end is frankly, like so much over the past year or so, beyond me. I rode on to the area near the Pleasure Beach, where my friend Les was waiting, having very kindly come through for the day to bring me back. Of course a superbly fit athlete of my age could easily have ridden back but I didn't like to throw goodness in his face! To be honest I did feel pretty good this time round, and remarked to Les that if I could have had half an hour break and something to eat and drink, and a helicopter to take me up to Morecambe Bay, I could have done the eight mile Cross Bay Walk straight after the ride. Unfortunately since I'm neither rich nor famous, the helicopter wasn't an option, but I did the walk a couple of weeks later and thoroughly enjoyed it.

I covered approx.78 miles during the day, and the knee was absolutely fine, a real bonus. I thank you for your past support of my humble efforts, and hope that you will be able to support them this year once again, at a time when nature needs us more than ever. All being well I will be back next year to repeat the whole exercise once more, but for now my best wishes and appreciation for your support and encouragement.

John Thorpe

Alas John's earlier pre-ride write-up on the Website was poorly received by a large number of people, who stated they felt insulted by his poor choice of words and reported actions. Thus in reaction the vast majority of his usual supporters have withheld their sponsorship monies, and requested that their replacement donations be NOT applied to his fund. Thus, despite his valiant efforts, the total sponsorship monies raised totalled just £70, as opposed to the usual £1000-1300. I can only repeat my own apologies on behalf of the Charity, and as the above write-up states; they are John's own words and not those of the Trustees of the Charity. Nigel.

Still in August we received our latest cheque from easyfundraising.org.uk for a lovely £21.72. Now I know some of you will think “that’s not much”, but it’s all ‘free money’ simply by using their website to shop online, and now the total amount raised this way has topped an amazing £1220.43 – well done to all our supporters!!

By a long way the taking out of Home/Car Insurances through this site raises the most, and donations of £20 to £35 each time are not uncommon. Sometimes you can couple this with a comparison site and save yourself £££'s into the bargain. Many people will be switching their gas/electric suppliers soon too - many of these suppliers will also donate via this portal too, and using this referral link (<https://easyfundraising.org.uk/invite/1MTIFE/>) can raise an extra £5 for us when you reach your own first £5 raised.

Please do continue to support our charity in this way; quite literally, every penny counts!



We had been suffering with Helpline signal issues since June, but finally ‘the 3 Network’ announced that they would have it restored on 6th **September**. We waited patiently, but were let down time after time again, and had to advise callers to use WhatsApp or email for the majority of contact. The phone DID get signals on most of the other reserves – but that was no good with the majority of my sanctuary time spent on the Home Reserve.

In the middle of the month, David was finally able to announce the big news the trustees had been working on for several months....

Due to a very generous legacy from Mrs Shelagh Moorhouse we are so delighted to announce we have purchased two plots of land to develop into new reserves.

The first is 15 acres of land in Banks near to our Meadow reserve. We have a 'head start' here as for some years now we were paying the farmer to leave some of it fallow to help the field vole population build up to support the local Barn Owls. So we were absolutely delighted to actually buy the whole 15 acre field to ensure this and far more can continue! We have taken advice from the RSPB who asked us not to plant big trees here as the open aspect is needed to make it harder for crows to attack the lapwing and skylarks that nest here already. The plan is along regenerative agriculture lines: a summer wildflower meadow, a late crop of hay and sheep overwinter. The seeds are sown now and flowers appearing. The sheep arrive at the end of October. Brown hares have already moved in!

The second plot is smaller at 3.5 acres. This land is also near our Banks Meadow reserve but is very different in that it is low lying and floods a lot, so the farmer struggles to drain it. We plan to develop this as a 'marsh reserve'. The 300meter wildlife hedge is already planted as are 100 goat willow trees and some wildflower seeds. A family of English partridge have already moved in and I have seen Snipe a few times now. We hope to dig ponds next and perhaps a reed bed. Here is a photo of the first wild flowers on this land for a very long time.



"Where is my nearest Bird Rescue?" – it's a question I am asked at least half a dozen times a week, and now instead of having to carry a 'bible' of numbers around with me, I can direct enquirers to our website where I have compiled a specific link to all the current wildlife rescuers in the UK.

Many organisations direct people to us when their own facilities are full, or are simply too busy to take repeated calls - especially these last two years when staffing restrictions has meant each organisation is stretched to the limit.

I can understand that people are stressed by the time they get to us; their own local rescue may simply have an answerphone message, however we sadly don't have a magic wand to fix everything and for example this weekend's volume of calls from the South Coast simply means that one rescue is full and we urge you to travel onwards to either the next nearest sanctuary, to a wildlife-sympathetic vets, or to contact the RSPCA for assistance. Note that the RSPB are not able to assist with injured birds, it is the **RSPCA** who advertise that they are there to stop the suffering of birds and animals.

At the top of the main page of our website is a direct link to this information, and not only do callers to our Helpline use it, but I find an increasing number of other sanctuaries also refer people to our website for it;

Knowledge is best when shared, as I have always said...

Following a flood of calls for finches, doves and pigeon with canker, and the autumn weather upon us, I wrote an article to help as many people as possible (including other sanctuaries) to help the poorly birds to recover...

We are receiving a large number of requests for help from both members of the public and rescue sanctuaries for poorly pigeons/doves and finches. These are all struggling just now as the weather changes to cooler and damper conditions; due to a condition called Canker, which if caught by a bird that isn't 100% fit, can often prove deadly.

In years' gone by, it could be treated to some effect by Spartrix or Harkers tablets. Before that, we used to use Emtryl until it was banned in the 1990's for use in gamebirds. These treatments were better than nothing, but we only found approximately a 45% success rate.

Following some in-depth research, I discovered Ronivet manufactured by Vetafarm in Australia; and haven't looked back since. This has been like a wonder-drug and saved literally thousands of lives - just in our hospitals alone, and I would reckon a recovery-rate of around 96% even for some really severe cases. However please DO follow the dosage instructions carefully as it is a powerful medicine.

I know many sanctuaries repeatedly seek our advice on treatments, and both the Website and Newsletter has become a mine of information for so many people, so I am sharing this information in the hope that many more lives can be saved.

In the meantime, please can everyone ensure that the bird feeders and water dishes in our yards and gardens are thoroughly cleaned at least weekly, as it is mouldy food which causes the majority of Canker cases, which is then easily transmitted to other birds of any species at the communal drinking/bathing areas?

At the end of the month, David reported from Three Owls Wood;
Following the success of last years' experiment in regenerative agriculture that saw orchid numbers boom we have taken delivery of 11 Cheviot sheep, our Winter Workers. They will eat out much of the undergrowth over the next few months, clearing the way for the spring flowers.



In **October** we took a breather and had more of a rested month following a hectic year so far. There was a further trip up to Knoxwood to drop off a huge amount of donated items, including foodstuffs to help save the charity funds – so very much stretched these past two years.

We also gave hands-on support to another wildlife rescue locally, with the release of a rehabilitated mute swan.

In **November** David reported receiving the new recruits onto the Doctors Rest nature reserve;

We have 15 acres planted as a wild flower meadow but we need to get rid of all that growth over winter so the spring flowers can see the Sun, so pleased to have 52 volunteers to do this for me; Sheep!



Showing my age here now, but back in the early 1980's I recalled the phrase "Milk's got a lotta bottle". My thoughts on dealing with THIS bird, was that "This was a lotta beak"!!

Many people have seen an adult gannet either in person or in the media, as they dive headfirst into the ocean from heights of up to 100 feet in order to catch their food ... but not so many have seen a juvenile gannet such as this.

qually beautiful plumage; the adults have a lovely rich creamy-white body with pale yellow head and black wing-tips...not forgetting those piercing slate-blue eyes. The beak is razor-sharp - designed to hold onto a slippery fish, which forms the vast majority of their diet, though they do also eat squid and shrimp on occasion.

Here we have the juvenile which is a sooty brown mottled plumage, which becomes increasingly white over the five years it takes to mature. Although not yet full-grown, our gannet today was already a good two foot in length (24"), but when full grown can get to 36-43" in size; equivalent to that of a goose.

Today we were transporting it up to the hospitals at Carlisle, ready for release in a couple of days time; it had been found crash-landed inland in West Yorkshire, and Meltham Wildlife Rescue had looked after it and been building it up on a rich fish diet to prepare it for life back at sea.

We have cared for many gannets over the years at Three Owls, both those who have passed through our care and been released back to the wild, and occasionally those who chose not to return but to live out their lives in a large aviary with cliff feature and running pond. They eat a fair amount and would happily eat full herrings (swallowed whole, head-first), or even 'make do' with a dozen sardines or mackerel.

Our grateful thanks to both Kathy at Meltham, and George, Emma & Glen at Knoxwood for their assistance in her care and return to the wild.



Storm Arwen; Well, it's been a wild night we endured, especially the early hours of this morning.

It's now 8.30pm and the electric has finally come back on, having gone off around 1am this morning. The mobile phone signal is none-existent at present; callers are simply reporting a buzz and no dial-tone, or it just reverts to the voicemail. Please use WhatsApp in the meantime, or send a message, and I'll either collect/return your messages or we may get a signal when out of the area. Please be patient; all of the networks bar O2 are currently down.

The Home Reserve has taken quite a battering, and we have 11 trees either badly damaged or down altogether. One of the standing-dead trees that the woodpeckers nest in was so violently shaken that all of the bark has dropped off - yet still stayed standing. However others have been felled or the trunks completely snapped.

I will have a tidy-up in the New Year and sort out any repairs needed once the felled trees have dried out a little for logging-up. At least I can create some new bug shelters from some of the logs - which in turn provide food and shelter for some of the residents on the nature reserve.

Thankfully no-one connected with Three Owls was hurt - yes there is damage but this can be repaired or replaced. We still have limited reception on the Helpline, and Three Network cannot confirm when the mast repairs will be completed. We will persevere for the time being, though I have to admit it is frustrating when O2 presently offer a better service - watch this space...



Finally **December** was upon us, and once again I was saying a huge Well Done once again to our stalwart fundraisers, who shop online via the Easyfundraising website; a further cheque totalling £45.28 has just been received in the office - with the damage from the Storm last month very much in our minds, this could not have come at a more welcome time. Please do continue to bear us in mind when shopping online.



I ran an article about Bird Flu mid-December, following a number of frustrated callers reporting that their local rescue centre was not accepting casualties and blaming Bird Flu for this;

It's a subject very much in the news at present and a hot topic between all the wildlife rescues too.

Of course bird flu is around all year round, but we tend only to hear about it in the news when the poultry farms are nearing capacity with full-grown birds ready for the Festive table. While an outbreak can be catastrophic for all the birds in any one farm, there is also the risk it could spread to wild birds and then transported around the country.

All the rescue sanctuaries we work with have their own protocols in place to protect their resident birds, and some may deem in necessary to stop casualty admittances if there is a local outbreak, or perhaps restrict admittance to those solely coming from vets where the bird has been checked out before being taken to the rescue. Please be patient with these organisations - if one infected bird is admitted, it could be the death-knell for

EVERY bird on those premises; the Rescue Sanctuary is simply doing its duty by those currently in their care; to protect their welfare, and not simply obstructing an admittance.

If your local rescue is not admitting, then use the links from the top of our main website page to locate your nearest alternative wildlife rescue organisation.

"Eternally Grateful" was a phrase presented to me between Christmas and New Year - which was most unexpected...

Those were the words presented to me earlier today, when speaking for the first time to the family of two of our departed subscribers.

I had set aside the day to update with the latest donations received, both just prior to and over Christmas. There was a lovely gift received at 04.22 on Christmas morning and I mused as to whether it was after a late night out, or perhaps an early morning riser like me.

Our late supporters' relatives introduced themselves as "the family of ..."; a lovely couple who had supported Three Owls regularly for decades, then fell on harder times towards the end of the 1990's. At that time, the newsletter was obtained through an annual subscription of £10, rising to £12 a few years later as costs to the charity rose accordingly. I can still remember their letter coming to say that they still wished to support us, but could no longer afford to do so as every penny had to count. Recognising genuine hardship I thus created a concessionary rate for those I felt circumstances dictated, and thus we were still able to correspond at least twice-yearly until the end, and as always we find other ways that people can support us than in a monetary sense.

Whilst I knew they (and others) appreciated being able to keep in touch through their own level of contributions, it was pressed home today just how much this gesture had meant, and the difference it had made to the couple's lives, has left me very humbled, as I feel Three Owls is and always has been, a team effort.

At Three Owls we do not seek recognition for our work with the birds and wildlife and everything that comes with it; nor do we expect to be rewarded for such ... we are content with the wonderful way that Nature itself rewards us in taking a scrap of feathers into our care, feeding, mending, nourishing it until it is fit to fly free again once more. Any genuine rehabilitator will be able to tell you of the special feeling when releasing something back to the Wild, which having been given the correct care and treatment, is able to regain its true wild-life once more.

Furthermore our increased work on the nature reserves provides and enhances the habitat for so many endangered birds, and also gives us secure locations to release rehabilitated wildlife onto. It too is extremely rewarding to see barren land or perhaps a horse-field, or even intensively farmed land - turned into a thriving nature reserve for numerous species to dwell within.

It's been another busy day at Three Owls with requests for assistance coming in from many different quarters. As I am typing this, another mute swan has come down in a field due to the fog in West Yorkshire; it is walking well and if it doesn't take off again shortly, should be fine overnight and will get going again at first light tomorrow.

To round off the year, we reminded people to consider us for any rooted Christmas Trees – to plant out on the Home Reserve. We had a lovely response, and have two lovely healthy trees to add to the collection on the Reserve. Many thanks to Jennifer and Richard for these welcome gifts.

STOP PRESS: *early in the New Year we made the leap of faith and moved the Helpline service under the care of O2; so far so good, and with a new handset to boot, it's very much 'all systems go' once more.*

Many thanks once again for your ongoing support. Nigel.



Three Owls Bird Sanctuary and Reserve

(Affiliated to the Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust)

Wolstenholme Fold, Norden, Rochdale, Lancs. OL11 5UD

Tel: 07973 819389 (Advice Helpline)

Website: www.threeowls.co.uk

Email: info@threeowls.co.uk

Registered Charity No: 298352



ALL I NEED IS A BIT OF
UNDERSTANDING.

Trustees:

Dr David J Unwin FRCGP MbChB (1974 to present day)

Nigel S Fowler (1978 to present day)

Stewart M F Jennings BA, Vet MB, MRCVS (1979 to present day)