

# Three Owls Newsletter

Report by Nigel Fowler



## Three Owls Newsletter Winter 2024/5

### **Just where does the time go to??**

It's a bumper edition this time around, being 18 months since the previous edition, so there is that much more news to include.

As ever, we have been continually busy with our work throughout the year, and it has been good to reconnect with several supporters and friends of Three Owls, with whom we had lost contact over the last 15 years or so.

Times are indeed hard for ALL bird sanctuaries and wildlife rescues; it is getting harder to find and retain good volunteers, and those who can reliably attend do often require paying in order to avail their time. With all the added costs the Government has heaped onto employers recently. This means an already reduced income has to spread even more thinly – without standards dropping.

It is sad to hear/see that some of the larger rescue centres are reducing services due to this, as it's ultimately the birds and wildlife around us that bear the brunt.

Even at Three Owls, these past two years have seen the outgoings exceeding the incoming funds ... but don't unduly worry as this is something we do have to budget for, and adapt our expenditure and grants programme accordingly.

So, without further ado, let's delve into what work Three Owls has been upto during the last 24 months...

# 2023 January

I opened the year by wishing each and every one of you all the very best for 2023; may it bring health and happiness, peace and prosperity to all those throughout the world who really need it. Also to thank you for caring about the wild birds around us.



By the 22 January, I was pleased to report that the last of the 'known' missing Christmas Cards had arrived – having been caught up in the Postal Strike backlogs. Those precious cheques had finally been received and were now winging their way off to the bank.

“A final three have come in this weekend, and the cheques swiftly paid in (over £100 worth). If you have sent us a cheque by post which has still not been cashed, then we cannot have received it yet - please let us know, and I can chase it up at the sorting office”.

Finally a huge Thank You to ALL our supporters, who have ensured our resident birds do not go hungry. Not only have we received very welcome monetary donations, but also those of wild bird seed, fatballs, and mealworms - all very gratefully received.

I hope you have all come through the extended cold snap unscathed, the days are getting longer now (dark at 5pm rather than 3.30pm), and with buds forming on some of the smaller plants and shrubs; a new season of life and growth is only just around the corner.

## It's certainly an 'early bird'!



This was a bit of a surprise we were asked to help with; a tawny owlet out of the nest and on the floor ... and well developed too.

Thankfully after a quick check-over, it was able to be returned to where it was found, and has been successfully accepted back by its parents to continue growing up in the wild.

Back in the 1980's, it was a common thing to have the owlets out and about from Christmas Day onwards, then through the 1990's and into the Noughties they tended to slip back and not hatch out until March-time.

Hopefully it's a sign of a good Spring ... time will indeed tell!

## February Hibernacula

David reports from Southport;

I am so grateful to our new volunteer Mr Nick Archer. With his help we have planted 600 wild daffodil bulbs and constructed these splendid 'hibernacula' by the pond in The Meadow reserve. What actually is a hibernaculum I hear you ask?

Well it's a safe hiding place for reptiles or amphibians to hide away from all the animals that hope to eat them! In this case we are expecting either toads or maybe newts. I have already trialled this in the Three Owls Wood where the combination of hiding places and a pond has built a population of hundreds of toads where there were about ten before. So fingers crossed & thanks Nick!



## Safety First

We were very pleased to receive a huge amount of donated PPE left over from surplus Covid stocks. We were able to share this out with a number of wildlife rescues as well as ourselves.

Thus the boxes of aprons, gloves, masks, face-shields, and hand-wash have gone a long way in helping Three Owls, Meltham Wildlife Rescue, Knoxwood Wildlife Rescue, and Lower Moss Wood Wildlife Rescue.

The photo shows the last delivery heading out to Knutsford, where Lower Moss Wood were awaiting its arrival to put it to good use.



## Crash Casualty

Sadly a common occurrence for injured Kingfishers, is concussion from flying into windows. They simply cannot see the glass, and often hit with such force, that they are completely knocked out and then fall prey to other predators.

Other injuries are broken necks, broken wings and legs, and occasionally (as with this bird) permanent blindness.



Despite our best efforts, this beautiful bird never recovered and passed away. I have included it in the reports, as often people are surprised at how small they are, compared to the images portrayed on our tv screens in wildlife documentaries. In this photo, we can see how small it truly is in the lady's hand.

Alas this year we have NO herons at the heronry in Rochdale. With no babies being reared for the past four years, the adults seem now to have abandoned the site, and are rarely seen in the area. There has however been an increase in adult birds at the Queens Park heronry in Heywood - which is only 2 miles away as the heron flies - so there is a chance they have relocated there.

As ever, when one predator vacates an area, another one moves in; and there has been an increase in sightings of the ravens in the treetops - a majestic sight indeed, though I am saddened to lose the herons, which have nested here since the early 1990's.



## March

Shooting yes; but not what you would think...

You might be surprised to hear that I was heartened to receive two phone calls from members of the public, reporting that they had heard 'shooting' on the Home Reserve at Rochdale today??



Thankfully, it was 'only me' with the cordless nail-gun repairing the boundary fences after the winter storms ... but I was grateful to both callers for caring so much to bring it to my attention - Thank You both.

The only shooting we allow, is either repairs with the nailgun, or with a camera!

## So far, so good...

This is a tawny owl found on the floor, initially reported to us as being a baby. However, on viewing the footage, it is clearly an adult, and I suspected either a broken leg or wing due to its prone position.

Thankfully it was neither, but it WAS a badly dislocated leg, which thankfully is responding well to treatment, and I am hopeful of a full recovery. It is still unable to feed itself, but that one thing does not concern me at this time - I have nursed Tawnies for upto 3 months before they were able to self-feed, and then built them back up for a successful return to the wild.



Time and patience is what works best in these situations.

## **Spring is here – so Mother Nature tells us**

I was over at Three Owls Wood today for the first of this years' releases - a number of birds which had overwintered with us, were now ready to return fully to the wild from their aviaries, just in time to pair up for this years' breeding season, now there is ample new-growth cover on this reserve to herald the end of winter.

Whilst organising the release, I was having a walk around this 7.5 acre reserve and noticed the large pond was filling up with frogspawn. Hopefully the mallards which I came across in another part of the reserve will not gobble it all up!

I didn't see the hares today, but the pheasants were strutting around in abundance! The fruit trees are now blossoming lovely, so fingers crossed for another fruitful year on this reserve...

## **April**

On my maintenance tour of the Home Reserve today, I was surprised and pleased to spot a juvenile male heron fishing in one of the ponds, obviously a visitor as none were reared here last year.

As mentioned in another report, we have NO herons nesting on the Home Reserve this year, but of course the 'meals' are on offer to all just the same - so I should not have been surprised to see 'someone' making the most of what there is to offer.

The Reserve is really coming back to life now; the floor of the woodland has a deep cover of wild garlic now, and numerous songbirds are gathering their mouthfuls of nesting materials in order to get on with this year's nest construction. The buds on the trees and bushes are bursting forth, and my eyes tell me there is lots of pollen around! We do have a number of large mature trees which need safely reducing this month that were damaged in the winter storms; so if we have any local tree surgeons with a few hours to spare, we'd be very grateful (I can arrange

moving the logs once on the ground, but my days of climbing trees to prune damaged branches 40 feet up are long gone).

This year we ARE able to do these works later, as the herons are not nesting - they would have laid eggs in January, and thus halted any such works from going ahead.



## **Reserve access updates**

I have been asked a number of times if 'we' are open this Easter weekend to visitors? On most occasions, people are referring to the Reserve at Rochdale, which previously permitted visitors to learn about looking after wild birds at certain times of the year with a short guided tour around some of the long-term resident birds, or those which could be seen from the roadside. This however ceased back in 2009/10, when Rochdale Council decided that after doing such for 41 years in the borough we would have to operate as a zoo in order to continue this educational line of work.

In 2010, we were thus forced to close down the hospitals at that site, and they were relocated to Wigton (where we have two further nature reserves), and we amalgamated our hospital facilities with those of Knoxwood Wildlife Rescue in order to enhance and update their facilities and permit them to help even more wild bird casualties which may then come their way. Other equipment was shared out, and provided both advanced medical, housing and ancillary care facilities to a number of other rescues/organisations based in Devon, Norfolk, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and Cheshire. The resident birds were relocated to sanctuaries with the best facilities to look after them long-term, then the buildings and land where the aviaries once stood were sold off to further our sanctuary work on a new site. The 'Home Reserve' at Rochdale is still very much ongoing with its work, and has a huge number of residents living within it.

In the years following 2010, we have established a network of nature reserves totalling eight in number, catering for numerous different species of birds and wild animals. Each reserve is different and we have brought in expert help from a variety of professional bodies to ensure continued and sustainable ecology and biodiversity throughout each reserve.

As a consequence of these factors, and in addition to the recent bird flu pandemic; none of the reserves are currently open to the public. We do have volunteer weekends on different sites at different parts of the years when we have projects underway, but these are not light work and are often physically demanding. Although the birds and wildlife will be all around you while you work; it is up to them as to whether they make themselves known, or stay out of the way. Often if I am working alone some of the birds will come out to me, but if 'strangers' are on the reserves, we may see only a few birds/animals or nothing at all.

Although we have not had a case of bird flu on any of our sites, there have been outbreaks in local areas which have brought restrictions upon us and meant that movements of certain birds have had to cease for a defined period.

The goose featured in the photo accompanying this article was displaying symptoms similar to bird flu, and thus the finder was directed to contact DEFRA or the RSPCA for assistance, rather than taking it directly to a wildlife rescue.



## David reported from the Marsh Reserve in Southport...

Our new marsh reserve is coming on nicely Here are some very bright Marsh Marigolds like giant Buttercups but growing in over a foot of water! Happy to see a pair of English Partridge there this morning too. A pair of small waders are nesting there but not sure what they are? Snipe also present.



Finally, David also reported on our four new ponds which had been dug on the new reserves at Banks; these are so vital for the wildlife habitat, as quite literally EVERYTHING needs to take on fluids to survive, and many need a plentiful supply during those summer months – even if not hot and sunny.



## May

We had a couple of weeks of Helpline Woes this month; the fault we were told of our local transmitter.

We managed to get by with repeated use of text and WhatsApp, as answering a standard voicecall simply cut you off. Technology is great when it works, but shows how reliant we have become on it when it fails... The syrup tins and a taught length of string never failed as a child!

David reported an interesting sight from Three Owls Wood at the end of the month to say that he was greeted by a swarm of honey bees upon entering this reserve at Tarleton. They were very calm and non-threatening.



## June

Most calls/messages coming in at present are for young birds found on the floor.

The vast majority can be safely left, as rather than being injured, are simply in the stage of development where they leave the nest, but can't yet fly.

A few birds, such as the tit families should be flying well after just 24 hours. However, blackbirds, wrens, robins and thrushes will take 4-5 days before they are able to fly well. The more time they spend on the floor and in the small bushes or on garden furniture, flapping their wings to attract the attention of mum and dad,, the quicker they will reach the skies.

Jackdaws and mappies are usually flying within 5 days, but occasionally take a little longer - especially if nested in a chimney where the feathers have not gained much sunlight as they have developed. The larger fledgling corvids such as crows and rooks, may also spend between 4-7 days on the floor before flying well.

If troubled with cats, you can obviously keep your own inside, and then cut up any citrus fruit (such as oranges/lemons/limes/grapefruit into 6 or 7 pieces, and scatter around the part of the garden you want to be cat-free. The pieces will 'work' for upto 3 weeks, the birds should be flying in 5 days.

Exceptions to this would be tawny owlets such as the one pictured; you will often find them on the floor, either lying on their fronts looking like a fluffy slug, or stood upright like the one pictured. These birds leave the nest 3 weeks before they can fly properly, but unless covered in flies or on a road/footpath can be left where they are. If you feel they are likely to be sighted by children or dogs, simply move them to the far side of the tree trunk to be out of sight. They can, and often do climb back into the tree the following evening, tempted by mum and dad with a tasty mouse or vole. They do this by using their incredibly strong beak and talons to climb vertically up the tree (like a little 3-wheeler) to a maximum height of around 30 feet. Sometimes however they decide to stay on the floor, and mum and dad will feed them there.



## July

John Thorpe undertook his annual sponsored Bike Ride from Manchester to Blackpool for us this month; his 34th consecutive time in doing so.

Alas we do not have the space in this bumper edition to print all his exploits, but please do head over to our website where you can read the Report in its full glory.



## **The first of two reports from David this month; It looks like a Hornet; it's Huge**

So I found this very large insect on the Hemp Agrimony I planted on the Meadow reserve. It looks like a Hornet and that is exactly what it wants you to think, particularly if you are a hungry bird!

In fact it's an imposter The Hornet Hoverfly it has no sting The largest of our Hoverflies it lays its eggs in wasp nests and the babies gorge on wasp grubs unmolested by the wasps themselves. Isn't nature amazing!



## **David's second report comes from the Marsh Reserve at Banks;**



One of our most recent developments 'The Marsh Reserve' has come of age with all the recent heavy rain. I was so excited to find it flooded and so beautiful. The Bullrushes are romping away! This year a pair of Whitethroat nested there too.

Earlier this year we dug out three new ponds in the heavy clay exposed when we removed the topsoil. A perfect home for the baby sedge plants grown for us by Helen Jennings , thanks Helen!

# AUGUST

## Another bumper harvest at Three Owls Wood...

Another bumper harvest here at our fruit tree plantation at Three Owls Wood in Tarleton. The apples are so tasty ... not too sweet ... and are weighing down the boughs. The plums (as pictured) are extremely plentiful, and I have shared with the resident butterflies and insects - as some will be coming back with me to be refined into jam and wine!

It was last year when attending the wood for a bird release that I had remarked to David that some of the fruit was going mouldy on the trees and going to 'waste'. "Not a bit of it" he had informed me, "as the resident butterflies and insects would feast on these fruits which would give them a real helping-hand towards the back end of Summer." Sure enough, we can see on the plum featured, the insects look in fine fettle - and they in turn provide food for the birds on the reserve. Any fallen fruits also provide nourishment for the varied wildlife also living on this 7.5 acre reserve.



## Helping us...helping you...helping wildlife

Through your wonderful donations and legacies, we are able to provide our services and help people and wildlife throughout the UK, and on occasion around the globe as we do receive requests for assistance from other countries too.

We also acknowledge the assistance we receive by food donations; from surplus bread at bakeries, to the individual gifts from the Too Good To Go scheme, and generous discounts from suppliers where the purchase of bird feeds is a necessity.

The photos accompanying this report are from an independent rescue faced with rearing nearly 30 nestling pigeons; these were rescued from a building due for demolition, and they were given a limited amount of time to 'rescue what they could'.

Having no knowledge of rearing this age of birds - some of which were under a week old - we guided them through the process and are pleased to report of great success. The 2nd photo shows some of the birds grown up and preparing for release back to the wild ... everyone benefits!



## September

Here is a sunset view of our brand new marsh reserve. I'm so proud of this peaceful place! David



## These birds need YOUR help

Please can you keep a look out for any fluffed-up birds such as the wood pigeon featured - they are unable to feed or look after themselves, and would otherwise succumb to predation or attack.

This time of year is difficult for many birds, as they moult out the summer feathers and get the thicker ones through ready for the coming winter season. This process puts them under huge strain, and sadly there will be the older birds for whom it is too much, and the late babies who haven't grown up enough to be able to cope.

Most can be helped along with some extra care at your local rescue sanctuary, though sadly some may be beyond saving, and the kindest thing would be for a vet or the RSPCA to painlessly put them to sleep.

Thank you for caring about the wild birds around us.



## October

### Fifty years at Three Owls

I was just 12 years old, an odd child I was really quite obsessed with ducks. They were all I thought or talked about. At last my parents gave in to my pleading and I obtained two adorable, fluffy day-old mallard ducklings; Donald and Pippin. I took them everywhere with me, they slept in my bedroom and sat on my knee at night to watch TV. I loved those ducklings and very soon they loved me, following me everywhere.



The practical amongst you will wonder about their rather messy droppings. My Mother was a saint and would trail round after us with bleach and a cloth! Then one terrible day Donald and Pippin started walking backwards and falling over! Although only 12 I knew this was not good. Everyday it got worse, something bad was happening to my beloved pets. My heart ached, would they die?? As I loved them so my Mother loved me and suggested I take them to a local wild bird centre, The Three Owls Bird Sanctuary in Rochdale. There I met an old lady, Mrs Eileen Watkinson (I realise now she was less than 55!). She invited me into her lounge with my box of ducklings what a sight met my eyes. A Tawny owl was sitting on top of a grandfather clock, a woodpecker flew round the room while a starling sat on my shoulder and explored my ear! I was offered a mug of hot chocolate and as I sat there a lot of tame house mice sat round my feet wondering if I might share the biscuit she gave me. This I did and immediately a tiny black pekin bantam rushed up to join in. What a place, I was in heaven!

Mrs Watkinson prodded the ducklings and questioned me closely about their diet. Well that was simple, I gave them what I liked -porridge! They liked it too so that is all I gave them. They were growing well so it seemed OK to me. The 'old lady' explained about vitamins and the normal duck diet. I needed to add earthworms and some green leaves. To my huge relief they absolutely loved the worms and were both walking normally in a few days. Donald and Pippin were cured and went on to have many more adventures. I was so fascinated by the sanctuary I asked if I could volunteer and help at weekends or after school. Mrs Watkinson said I was too small but to come back when I was bigger. So, I waited a few years and was taken on.

Fifty years has gone by and now I am a Trustee of the charity managing five small bird reserves what a lot the sanctuary has taught me!

Cheers David (aged 65!)

## **Our Golden moment**

We were pleased to assist with a number of rescues of goldfinches this year; they are notoriously the most difficult of the finches to rear from scratch, yet this time we seem to have beaten the odds and managed to return a good number to the wild.

The photo accompanying this report shows the just-fledged chick upon admittance, having been found and saved by kindly souls outside St Ann's Church in Manchester city centre.

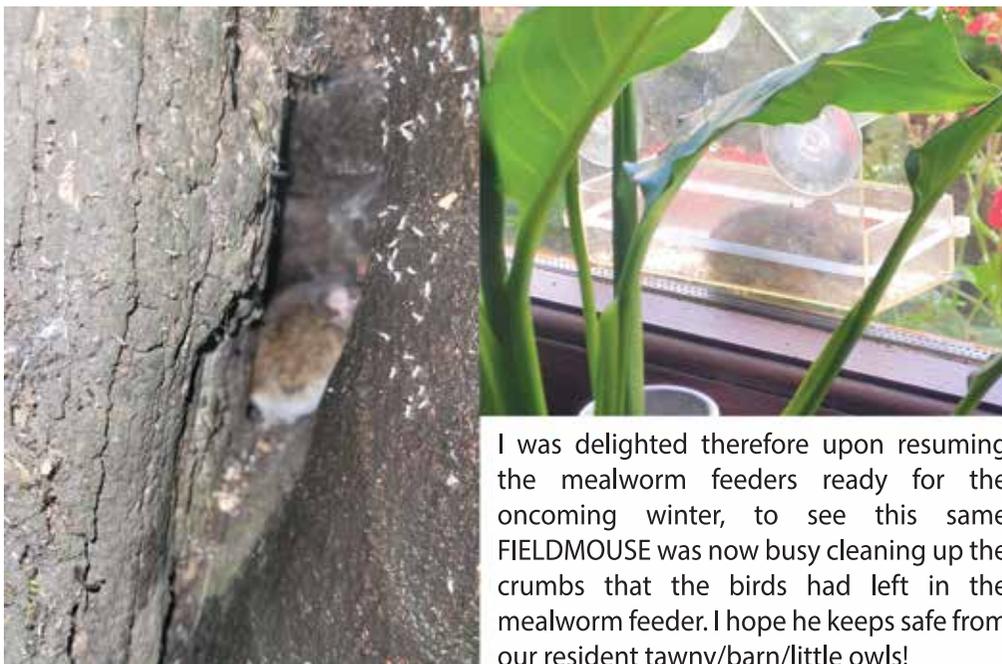
Fast forward some weeks and we now have a very healthy juvenile being prepared in an aviary ready for release on our Three Owls Wood nature reserve in Tarleton ... which plays host to hundreds of goldfinch every year as they come to feed on the thistle-seeds.

Many thanks as always to Kathy at Meltham Wildlife Rescue for her time and patience in rearing these birds for us to return to the wild. Pictured is just one of the four birds released on this occasion.



### **A cheeky visitor from the Home Reserve**

Earlier this year, late into the evening one of the dogs took a great interest in the fissure at the bottom of our Tree of Life adjacent to the Home Reserve at Rochdale. I couldn't see why at first, but at shining a torch inside I could see a small mammal tucked up tight inside. I was at this point unsure if it was a sleeping bat (we have lots here, and they don't all hang upside-down to sleep!), or indeed a type of mouse.



I was delighted therefore upon resuming the mealworm feeders ready for the oncoming winter, to see this same FIELD MOUSE was now busy cleaning up the crumbs that the birds had left in the mealworm feeder. I hope he keeps safe from our resident tawny/barn/little owls!

# November

## Farewell Joan

was deeply saddened to hear the news that Mrs Watkinson's cousin Joan Minnitt had passed away last month at the wonderful age of 99 years old.

We have always kept in touch from when I started here in 1978 and Three Owls founder; Eileen Watkinson MBE was admirably running the sanctuary with just a handful of volunteers and a couple of staff, and whom herself sadly passed away in 1995 and is buried here on the Home Reserve.

Joan and I would regularly exchange letters, and keep each other abreast of what was going on both in the charity and family circles, and of her own life in Winscombe, and it will be especially poignant this year being so close to Christmas.

She will be very sadly missed not only by everyone at Three Owls, but also by the whole community of which she was very much an active resident (and organiser!) and devout member of her local church. It was a privilege to be able to travel down for her funeral and say my final goodbyes.

My grateful thanks to Pauline for her wonderful help over the years, and especially today. Also to the staff and residents of both Dewdown House and formerly Sewell House who were each excellent in their service.



## One less than three...

Yes, we are talking two owls, not the usual three!

These were from two different rescues needing onward care, and as I was travelling up to our two reserves at Wigton near Carlisle today, I had offered to take them with me to receive ongoing care and rehabilitation at the hospitals there - ably managed by our colleagues at Knoxwood Wildlife Rescue.

The Little Owl you see pictured had been found in a barn unable to fly, and was admitted to Meltham Wildlife Rescue in West Yorkshire where he had improved rapidly, but still not at a stage where fit to return to the wild. In the wild they often live in dry stone walls and disused rabbit burrows - he seemed very happy with the house I had built for him!

The other was a Tawny Owl, found in a very disheveled state and all tangled up in netting. This owl also had a foot condition (similar to bumblefoot) which left it unable to grip either perch or prey, and whilst the sanctuary it came from had persevered and got it self-feeding, it still has quite some way to go, and may need an operation on that foot.

Many thanks to Knoxwood for taking these two into their care, and we wish them all the best for their futures.



## **December Donations come in many forms...**

We are SO grateful to every one of our supporters; and that support comes to us in many different ways...

We recently had a huge sack of wild bird seed gifted to us - very much in use now the wintery weather is upon us. We were able to collect as it was close to one of our Trustees homes, and even if not, we do endeavour to find a way of getting such gifts collected through our network of supporters countrywide. It will help eke out the three sacks of seed and three tubs of fatballs I purchased yesterday to keep our feathered friends alive.

We have also recently been gifted a full pallet of poppy seeds by a company in Trafford Manchester; these are going down a treat with the seed-eaters, and who knows - those that get missed by hungry mouths may indeed give a further treat next year if they germinate! We have shared this gift with Knoxwood Wildlife Rescue, who as you know look after a number of our resident birds for us.

We have a bakery who provides both us and Meltham Wildlife Sanctuary with all the left-over bread specifically to help the birds and reduce our costs; this is VERY much appreciated by both sanctuaries and the feathered friends we care for.

Of course, monetary gifts are always welcome, as we can apportion them exactly where needed; just as you have found your own costs going up, ours very much have risen too, and there are only so many cuts you can make but still provide the service that our feathered friends require. Please do continue to support both Three Owls and your own respective charities during this difficult period in our lives. It is through this support that we can bring you the insight into the work we do through these very pages.

## **A Winter Marsh**

David reports from Southport...

I love this photo of our new Marsh Reserve full of ice and bright Winter light. The Goat Willows are eight foot tall now. There are four main ponds so far, as you see one already colonised by Bullrushes! These days I cheer myself up during heavy rain thinking 'at least the ponds are filling up, I will walk round later and see'



# 2024 January

A New Year, and a New Dawn – what will the year bring?

Well, here we are once again - another year has ended and a New Year begins. I do hope that all our supporters have enjoyed a good festive season, and can look forward to enjoying the wild birds around us for the coming year.

Our website has recently reached another milestone ... Five Million visits to it since the last upgrade in 2012. I often think back to when we were first getting set up with a website and email back in the 1990's ... how far have we come in that very short time - now our lives seem ruled by computers and so much can be accomplished on a wireless device!

Thank you to each and every one of you for your continued support of Three Owls. We have no intention of stopping our work, and from all of those people worldwide contacting us for help - it is very much needed each and every day.

As I write, it's -8 degrees C outside, and the water starts to freeze soon after it's refreshed, yet is needed to keep our wild birds hydrated. PLEASE never put salt or antifreeze into the water – both of these are toxic to wildlife. Instead, a small rubber ball bouncing in the water will greatly lengthen the time it takes to freeze. Equally, always use cold water, as hot water actually freezes quicker for two reasons; the steam evaporates and reduces the mass, leaving less liquid in the container. Also, cold water contains more oxygen than hot, and this too prolongs its liquid state.



## Storm Jocelyn

Well, the weather forecasters weren't wrong; we really did feel the force of Storm Jocelyn last night, and this time more than the last we have sustained significant damage on some of the Reserves.

The perimeter fence at the Home Reserve has been flattened in several places, and 3" and 4" posts snapped like matchsticks. There are a few trees down, and a shed lifted off its base, but to be honest I had expected worse as the whole building groaned and shook in the 70-80mph gusts. Even the old apple tree which the herons first nested in when moving from the sanctuary to the reserve ... has been blown down and ended up across one of the ponds.

Our Cumbrian reserves also suffered trees and fences down, as they too are exposed to the winter storms on those sites.

Thankfully the Southport reserves have come off relatively unscathed due to their position and design; Three Owls Wood is relatively young and so the trees remain flexible and relatively short in stature at just 12 years old. The

Meadow, Marsh, and Doctors Rest reserves do not have tall trees onsite, and Old Beech Wood is so densely populated and part of a much larger woodland, that it is self-preserving and the only trees to fall there were ones which were 'due' to come down, and will be left where they lie to provide food and shelter to the myriad of wild birds and animals that reside there.



A huge Thank You to our super fundraisers at Knitting Nan's in Rochdale.

At this lean time of year, we have been boosted by a wonderful cheque of £50 which Knitting Nan's have raised with their fundraising efforts.

With the next lot of seed due to be paid for this weekend; it really could not have come at a better time.

Once again, many thanks to the team "Clare, Ann, Margaret, Karen, Ann"; the birds really do appreciate your efforts...as do I.



David sent in this photo of the new snowdrops from the Marsh Reserve at Banks;

Every year I post a photo like this! Let's celebrate the last day of January 2024 with these fragrant Snowdrops The detail I enjoy most is the green markings on the inner petals. These were taken on the Marsh Reserve today. I also saw four Brown Hares a pair of Stonechats and a Snipe. #HOPE !!



# February

## This proved to be a busy and VERY expensive month

Following on from the two winter storms, which caused so much damage at our Rochdale Home Reserve site, the fencers have been in every weekend this month to rebuild and strengthen the entire perimeter of our nature reserve.

This is no mean feat as a fair portion of this is steeply banked that you wouldn't like to climb down - let alone take a pile of fencing materials down and have to work in non-hospitable weathers! But plough-on they have, and we now have the security of a solid fence for the next 15-20 years. Huge sections of fencing needed complete replacement, and every single post had to be renewed.

This fence was originally installed by Redrow housing in 2007, when they were applying to build the housing development at Blackpits Factory site. So all-in-all, at 17 years old it has not done bad, and some of it still remains where in good order and just needed strengthening-up.

Although the work was coming up in my 'jobs list', it's only when your defences are literally blown down that you are galvanised into action; I am so grateful for Andy Lazaruik and his team at AL Fencing for giving up their weekends this month to ensure the security of our nature reserve is complete once more.

We have taken a hit with the cost, and been grateful for Andrews generosity in keeping the cost to us far lower than its true cost. He has also been able to extend the life of some of the original fencing rather than needlessly renew everything, which has

reduced the cost by some 40%. It has been just over £26,000 though, and this has markedly reduced the bank account having already paid out £35,000 in grants this year in order for other charities to continue their own life-saving works with wild birds. ... if you find a pot of gold, please let us know!



## March

For such a short distance, we've come a long way...

As I was sat in the office before starting work earlier today, I remembered the founder of Three Owls; Mrs Eileen Watkinson MBE and how she, too would have been sat here in this very office at this time of day (6.50am) all those years ago.

I recalled my first day of volunteering at the charity; waaay back to Easter 1978. I had visited a number of times over the years as two of my elder brothers also helped here. I had stood in the same doorway, with Mrs W sitting where I was now and was welcomed in to come and 'do my bit' to help the wild birds needing our assistance to get better, with the aim to get them back into the wild.....and I never left!

I was very privileged to have 1-to-1 training with Mrs W for the next 17 years, which has stood me in good stead for handover of the reigns to help keep Three Owls going for approaching 30 years since we lost her, and looking well into the future.



Today is the anniversary of her passing; now 29 years since, and I think that looking down she would be pleased with all that we have achieved since she left us, and indeed all we continue to do, and have planned going forwards.

The photo accompanying this report is Mrs Watkinson and Guzzler - one of our permanent tawny owl residents. The aviary the owls lived in stood only about 12 yards from where I sit now. They had a very close bond throughout their years living at Three Owls.

Thank you all for your continued support of Three Owls Bird Sanctuary & Reserve.

## **That sinking feeling...**

Well, it just goes to show that we all make mistakes! The photo below shows a rather unfortunate incident following a successful release of rehabilitated birds back to the wild. The van was fine on the long grass...until I attempted a 3-point turn and the front wheels went onto the rich soil and promptly sank to the axle.

Many thanks to David and Josh for coming to my rescue!



## **April**

### **Please check before you touch**

Please, please do think before picking up a flightless bird from the floor.

Although we tend to automatically think that a bird should be able to fly, there are lots of times when this is not the case - but not always needing our help.

We have been taking lots of calls already regarding baby tawny owls on the floor, and this will dramatically increase as we head towards summer. Tawny Owlets (like the one pictured in this article) are often found on the floor of a woodland, often at the base of a tree or alongside a dry stone wall; this is normal, and unless covered in flies or being attacked by a predator they should be left alone. Occasionally you may find them on a footpath, and then you may gently relocate them to behind the nearest broad-leaf tree, where mum and dad will then quickly locate and feed them after dark.

The owlet does not return to the nest once it has left - but that can be a good couple of weeks before it can fly. It would usually sit in one of the branches of the tree where the nest was, and await mum or dad returning with some food. Often however they get rather exuberant when it's feeding time, and will tumble to the floor. It is VERY rare however that they are injured, and the parents will encourage them to climb back into the tree using their very strong beak and talons (like a little 3-wheeler). Sometimes they return to the tree the same night or the following evening, however it is not unusual for them to remain on the floor upto a week, with mum and dad continuing to support-feed until they do get back into the branches.



## Our own Baby Bobbins

While we help so many people all over the globe at this time of year with their own baby bird queries; just now and again I get to see the 'home grown' ones which our resident birds share with us.

This photo is taken of the dashboard of an old Series Land Rover I have awaiting restoration, and I am particularly pleased that our very own Mr Bobbin has found himself a new wife this year and started another family. They are of course a family of three robin chicks, and at this age are about five days from fledging. Sadly we found the original Mrs Bobbin had passed away last year soon after laying a clutch of eggs in one of the sheds, so we didn't have any youngsters reared that year.

\*\*I am pleased to advise that all three chicks fledged and left the nest 5 days after this photo was taken.

We had a big push on Gift Aid donations this month, and recontacted many supporters for whom we did not hold a current form. This came to fruition later in the year with a bumper payout from HMRC.



# May

## A duck, almost

I had an interesting query come in one evening this week; a duckling 'almost' had been found alone, with no sign of it's mother.

This does unfortunately occur quite a lot, and is why the mother duck has such a large number of babies - she sadly does expect to lose quite a few along the way. Some simply will get left behind, or wander the wrong way when being taken to water for the very first time. Others will fall prey to crows/magpies/herons/cats. Then of course there are often our busy roads to cross with all the dangers therein.

Hence, the single 'duckling' was not unusual, but the breed of bird itself was less common;



This, is a baby Goosander, which is a fish-eating type of duck, and a member of the sawbill family - named for their serrated beaks. While these birds are not rare, and are on the green conservation list, it IS uncommon for them to be brought into the rescue, and I have only had probably a dozen in the past 46 years of being at Three Owls

This one was rescued in Yorkshire, and I understand was transported over to Whitby Wildlife Rescue for its onward care and return to the wild.

## Easyfundraising pays out again

I am pleased to let you know that we have received yet another bumper payout from the Easyfundraising scheme. This time we have received a payout of £59.06, which will drop straight into our bank account as we have opted for this method rather than await cheques in the post which is often delayed.

A huge Thank You to everyone who has contributed this way; although none of us likes the way everything has gone up in price, it does often mean that donations made in this way do also rise in line with these rising prices.

The total raised for Three Owls to date in this way is £1435.46; I'm sure you will agree a wonderful amount - when none of it has cost you a penny extra. If you have not yet registered or are new to Three Owls, then please do consider this method of raising funds for us when shopping online.



## Nice weather = lots of requests for help

It's been a busy weekend (as expected) with calls pouring in from around the UK. Just today we have had calls from as far apart as Edinburgh and Portsmouth, and numerous calls from the London area; which at this time of year is a fair indication that a local rescue is full, and unable to admit further casualties at this time - hence people hit the Internet, and find our Helpline service is happy to help

Very few birds this weekend needed more than supportive assistance; lots of issues with cat attacks - but rescuers with uninjured birds were content to simply give a sugared water drink to help with the shock, and re-release back into the garden having removed the predatory cat, and using the "citrus fruit method" to create a safe zone for the young bird to continue its development within the garden.

Just occasionally however, the bird IS out of the nest too early (such as with the two magpie nestlings I was asked about today); these are only about 2 1/2 - 3 weeks old and need another 10-14 days in the nest, so unless they were able to be returned to the nest, then they WOULD have had to go to a wildlife rescue centre.

It is very important for ALL baby birds (but especially Corvids - the crow family) that you do not try to rear at home on their own. They will rapidly imprint upon you, which means they will become tame very quickly which in many cases will prove fatal when trying to return them to the wild later on. With crows/magpies there is an added danger as they associate humans with food, and the crossover of tapping the parents beak to be fed, and pecking people's faces for the same outcome does not bear thinking about. Every year I hear of children and babies being attacked in this way - but the bird is not at fault, sadly the finder did not take it to a rescue to be reared with other birds so that it stays minded in the bird-world, and doesn't see itself as a 'person'. Sadly these birds often have to be euthanised as they are too badly mentally damaged to be hacked back to the wild, and remain a danger to both people and other birds & animals.



## CITRUS FRUIT SAVES BIRDS LIVES

One of the main causes of bird injuries (especially young birds in the summer months), is being attacked by both pet and feral cats. A simple way to combat this, is to cut up an orange into about six pieces, and scatter the pieces underneath bushes/areas where you don't want the cats to go. This works in over 90% of cases as cats don't like the smell.

## Summer's here – even the bees would agree

I took this photo on the way for my tea at Millcroft Tea Gardens just up the lane from our Home Reserve at Rochdale yesterday afternoon.

Aware of the noise of a lot of insect activity, I looked amongst the tree branches until I could see there was a sizeable swarm of honeybees gathering ... which I left well-alone!

They had moved on this evening when I went to look again, so hopefully they have found a good spot to make their hive for this year - the honeybees are SUCH important pollinators for our wild flowers to continue to thrive. Nature works in cycles, so it is very important that there are no 'missing links' in the chain of life, as removing 'nuisance insects' can be removing somebody else's food-source.



## Flooding Oop North...

The photo with this report is sent in by Emma at Knoxwood Wildlife Rescue of our Watermeadow Reserve which was seriously affected by flooding earlier this week.

Now, whilst many landowners would be devastated by such news, we have developed this large reserve to benefit greatly from such events, and whilst a large section of the reserve is currently under water; this climate event will bring a new wave of life onto the reserve which may otherwise not have happened.

So, while we understand the inconvenience to local people with impassable roads for a short while, we embrace the natural rejuvenation of this part of the reserve, and look forward to new life springing forth in the weeks and months to come as the water recedes.

NB part of the reserve would normally be under water; the level of which rises and ebbs with the adjacent brook, however this is the most flooded I have seen the reserve in recent years.



## June

### New life from New levels

Following on from the earlier report regarding the flooding at our Watermeadow Reserve, Emma has sent in a couple of photos showing some of the new life which has moved onto the reserve from that event.



The benefits from allowing this reserve to both flood and recede with river-water are immense, and will benefit not only those creatures which live IN the water, but also those on the land who need them and the nutrients brought in, to flourish and survive.

## What a difference a few days makes

Just a few days on from the flooding at our Watermeadow Reserve, and the waters have receded and the beautiful wildflower meadow is resplendent in all its finery. Amongst the flowers you will spot Luna; one of the residents at Knoxwood Wildlife Rescue who manage our two most northerly nature reserves for us.

Many thanks to Emma and the team up there for keeping us updated on this event; we have travelled up to the reserves today to take a huge collection of items to resell in their charity shops; the proceeds of which all go to help the wild birds and wild animals which they admit at their site. You will recall it is now some 14 years since we relocated our hospitals from Rochdale to Wigton, and over that period so many more thousands of lives have been able to be saved.



## "Too-Wit Too-Woo ... what do I do?"

It's a popular belief that an owl should always be in a hole in a tree. However that is far from reality, and especially during the summer months, if you look into a well-leafed tree you will often spot an adult tawny owl roosted up snoozing the day away.

There's nothing you need to do; the owl will usually have chosen the spot well, in an area where the daytime birds are unlikely to disturb it. Sometimes people are surprised to find this is in a tree right next to a house or even a main road ... but these are noises which an owl is used to and will contentedly snooze the daylight hours away until dusk. The only things that would usually dislodge them from this spot would be aggressive corvids who want it away from their own families. However with sitting so still and their own natural camouflage, they are rarely spotted."

It is the female tawny that make the "too-wit" call, and the male answers with the "too-woo". So you can tell quickly if you have a pair of owls, or just a single one looking for a mate.



## Long-term rehabilitation

Many birds found at this time of year, are a relatively "quick fix". Lots will be fledglings which need bringing-on, rearing with other orphaned and injured youngsters, so they can be returned to the wild as part of a group and not suffer with imprinting as so often happens when well-meaning people rear at home and then release a tame bird which cannot cope in the wild.

Occasionally however there are some long-term casualties such as the Canada Goose in this report. It was admitted to Meltham Wildlife Rescue with severe bite wounds to its back, rump and body ... and a gammy leg.

Under initial inspection the wounds although deep, would heal swiftly and thankfully were not infected so those have healed as expected. The leg however has proved a complex challenge and has been touch and go on more than one occasion.

This weekend I have reassessed it and determined that it now needs a course of one-to-one hydrotherapy in order to get those leg muscles built up again, and to stretch those tendons once more. It is finally able to weight-bear and walk short distances normally. We have had to keep it dry until now as the skin was so damaged that going in water sooner would have risked infection setting in. Hence, a spare bath was loaded up once I got home last night, and taken back over today; and as you can see, our patient has taken to it like ... well, a goose to water!

If all goes to plan now, I would hope that we can return this casualty back to the wild during July. All credit to Kathy at Meltham for her persistence with the birds' care, and willingness to try methods which while proven to me (over the past 46 years of working at Three Owls), do produce positive results but may seem strange if you haven't used them before.



## **And then the silence descended...**

For the past 8 weeks, the Helpline has been manic during the evening and weekend hours; yet when there is a sporting event being shown on the TV ... the phone falls remarkably quiet!

Currently it is the Euro's football matches in play (Well-Done to England this evening!), and soon after it will be the Wimbledon tennis matches.

The reason our lines are so busy at these times, is due to local rescues being unable to staff their own phones out of hours, so whilst they can field their local queries during the weekdays, it is the evenings and weekends when we literally do get calls from all over the country, and on occasion from abroad too - such is the scope of the Internet searches these days.

May, June and July are the three busiest months of the year for Helpline enquiries; when the baby birds first leave their nests, and unbeknown to a large number of people; young birds often don't take to the skies straight away, and may spend a number of days or even weeks (depending on the species), flightless on the floor until they have developed enough to take to the skies.

One example of this is the waterfowl families, whose young will be taken to the relative safety of a nearby waterway - such as with the Canada Goose family in this photo. Other birds such as blackbirds, thrushes, wrens and robins will take upto 5 days to fly. Sparrows and starlings fare better and are usually in the air in 1-3 days. The Corvid families are usually flying high in 5-8 days.



## July

### David reports on our 8th pond...

I have loved ponds since I was a little boy. They have a massive effect on biodiversity. This is the 8th new clay-lined pond we have dug in the last few years and this one is a hum dinger! we are so lucky because glacial clay is never far away in this area. This is one of two new ponds in the Doctors Rest Reserve being dug out by Chris Bond, awesome work Chris, thank you!



### John Thorpe's Sponsored Bike Ride

Once again our intrepid cyclist put his pedal to the metal in order to raise funds for Three Owls. Alas due to space restrictions in this edition I cannot provide his write-up; but it can be read in full on our website – and really is quite a read...enjoy!



## August

### Helpline Woes – yet again! (and continued into September)

We have been having issues with the Helpline over the past week with calls cutting out or not getting through at all while based around the Home Reserve area at Rochdale. I have contacted our network provider about this, and they inform me that there is maintenance work going on locally, which is impacting our signal. They do hope to have the issue resolved by the end of next week (Friday 16 August), so please do bear with us during this difficult period, and do make full use of our website and all the information it contains.

If you have found an injured/orphaned bird; use the link at the top of the page to locate your nearest wildlife rescue centre to take it to. If your local ones are all full, then your nearest vets is the next best option to prevent the casualty suffering.

Lots of calls just now from people saying they have found a baby seagull; check it has webbed feet first, as lots of well-meaning rescuers mix-up baby wood pigeons with baby gulls, as both have seemingly long beaks and grey plumage when young.

The late good weather has produced a 3rd brood of chicks; please remember that many British birds are flightless for the first 5-8 days from leaving the nest, so do check first that it is truly abandoned, and that the parents are not popping by to feed their chick every 2-3 hours (they will only spend a few seconds with it each feed-time, so as not to attract attention to it while in the flightless stage.

Finally, if needing to keep the garden cat-free to protect flightless birds, then do use the Citrus Fruit Method as detailed in the May section of this newsletter, or towards the bottom of our main website page in the ADVICE section.

### Hospitals and Reserves – there is a BIG difference

We have had a few instances this year of people turning up at our Southport and Rochdale nature reserves with injured birds. Please note that NONE of our Lancashire sites have hospital facilities; but BOTH our Cumbria sites at Wigton do have hospitals alongside the reserves there, and are managed by the staff at Knoxwood Wildlife Rescue.

*Please* refrain from bothering our neighbours in Southport and Rochdale; they are supportive of our work with the birds, but it is distressing for them if people try to push injured birds their way, when the rescuer has not read properly where our hospitals are. Quite apart from the human distress, the trauma to the casualty from being ferried around unnecessarily can prove fatal in many cases, and is not fair on anyone.

The link at the top of our website page will help you locate the nearest wildlife rescue centre to you. If you cannot get your casualty there, or the RSPCA are unable to help, then the next best thing is your local 24hr vets; even if this means the life ending to prevent further suffering.

We do take calls from all around the UK and on occasion from abroad - so sometimes the line gets very busy, especially at weekends. Hence please do make full use of the Website and all the information it contains - especially while we have the issues with the local transmitter affecting our phone signal.



## **Juvenile Canada Geese**

We have had a flurry of calls regarding young Canada geese dropping in on people's gardens and appearing 'tame'.

We are now in the period for many young geese (and indeed swans) to be taking to the skies for their first flights. As you can imagine, the sensation of first flight can be quite overwhelming, not least tiring once you have hauled your large frame into the skies.

Although the swans will generally stay in tight family groups until the New Year, often the young geese will peel off from the skein and sometimes fall short of their destination, occasionally landing in gardens and parks, or waterways away from where the flock was aiming for.

Usually after resting for a while (usually hours, but sometimes a few days), the bird will take to the skies again to look for either their own flock or another flock to join up with. Only if the bird is trapped in an area it cannot take off from should you need to intervene. If this is the case, wrap it in a towel/coat/blanket and take it to your nearest safe waterway with other resident Canadian Geese to allow it to settle once more.

Note that if the young geese have not been used to people, they may appear tame and inquisitive - this is simply because they have not been taught the alarm calls by the parents for predators; they will quickly learn these important lessons when mixing with other geese on the waterway.

## September

### **Wildlife Hospital comes back into operation**

I was pleased to hear this week that the former *Greenmount Wild Bird Hospital*; now renamed *Kirklees Valley Wildlife Rescue* in Bury, and under all-new management; will finally be officially opening for casualties from mid-September 2024. Although we have managed to get some casualties admitted there this week – mid-September is the official opening date.

With our own hospitals in Rochdale relocating to Wigton some fifteen years ago, followed by *Greenmount Wild Bird Hospital* in Bury closing under a cloud back in 2019, then Every Feather Bird Rescue in Bolton suffering a bereavement in 2022 which meant its own temporary closure and now very limited operation .... The north Manchester area has been sadly lacking in wild bird rescue facilities for the past decade.

Unfortunately also the new *RSPCA Wildlife Centre* at Rochdale which opened in 2023 has not proved easy for the public to get casualties admitted into - we hope this will improve in the near future.

We all wish the new team at *Kirklees Valley Wildlife Rescue* all the very best with their endeavours, and hope it can be a resounding success for ALL injured/orphaned wildlife, but especially for our feathered friends.



## Helpline 'fixed', but we will look to change again

O2 have assured us that the transmitter woes are behind us, but our usual five bar signal is now a poor and intermittent 2 bars, so we will look to move suppliers again in the hope of a more reliable coverage. This will combine with a new handset, so bear with me at the year-end while I set everything up again!

## October

### Doctors Rest reserve upgrades – David reports...

So we have built two huge new ponds on The Doctor's Rest reserve and look all the recent rain has filled it up. If you look carefully you will see someone standing near the back to give an idea of scale. This brings our pond total to TEN!! We are digging two more any day now. ponds are truly transformational in terms of biodiversity. For example Kingfishers have been seen twice recently on this reserve!



## November

I was thrilled to receive our latest Gift Aid payment from HMRC to the tune of £1660.01 – thank you SO MUCH to each and every one of you for your gift aid donations.

Another wonderful sum of £101.44 has also been received from [easyfundraising.org.uk](http://easyfundraising.org.uk) – thank you so much for shopping through this site and raising extra funds for our charity at no extra cost to yourself.

If you are not yet shopping through this site, please consider signing-up to help our charity at;

<https://join.easyfundraising.org.uk/threeowls/1KGY00/at/TSX8RX7z/DM1329437/facebook/>

Using the above link will generate a bonus £5 for the charity once you raise your initial £5.

Scan me



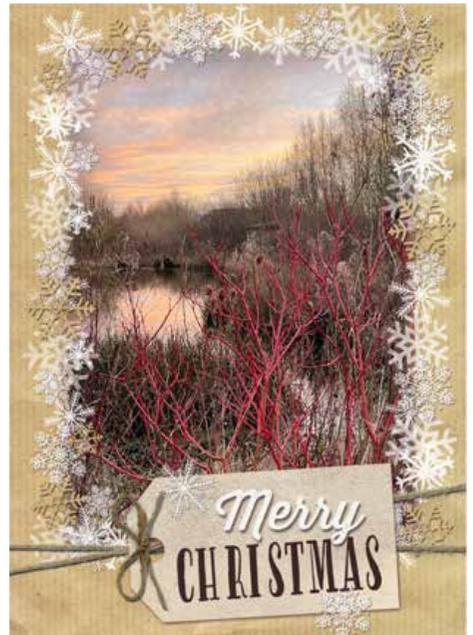
## December

Winter is often a fallow period for donations, so I was pleased to hear from our accountant that she would be submitting our next Gift Aid claim this month; already for the sum of £504.27, so hopefully that will come through soon into the New Year.

I heard only this morning as I typed this up; from a solicitors informing us that one of our late supporters legacies was ready to pay out. This will be a most welcome £19,000 unrestricted gift which we can use to continue our work with wild birds. It is especially welcome at this time, as our tenanted cottage will be undergoing its first full refresh after 25 years good service, so with a gap in the rental income and some outgoings for this project, it gives me a little more breathing space to ensure it can go back out in tip-top order.

It is through such peoples' kind legacy gifts as these, that so many bird lives can be saved, and habitat enhanced, ensuring the work of Three Owls is here to continue well into the future. Thank you all.

Finally, may I wish each and every one of you a very Merry Christmas / festive season, and looking forward to a Happy New Year.



## Charity Gift Aid Declaration – multiple donation

### Boost your donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1 you donate

Gift Aid is reclaimed by the charity from the tax you pay for the current tax year. Your address is needed to identify you as a current UK taxpayer.

In order to Gift Aid your donation you must tick the box below:

I want to Gift Aid my donation of £\_\_\_\_\_ and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years to:

**Three Owls Bird Sanctuary & Reserve**

Name of Charity \_\_\_\_\_

Registered Charity Number 298352 E: info@threeowls.co.uk  
Barclays Bank SC: 20-72-67 Acc No: 80681199

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

### My Details

Title \_\_\_\_\_ First name or initial(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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### Please notify the charity if you:

- want to cancel this declaration
- change your name or home address
- no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

# Three Owls Bird Sanctuary and Reserve

(Affiliated to the Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust)

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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)



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