

Autumn Newsletter



Barn owl chicks fledge successfully

We are thrilled to announce that 3 barn owl chicks have successfully fledged on Trust land. Over the summer we've been monitoring their progress from tiny chicks to strong, confident fledglings, via a nest box web cam.

The female had a clutch of 5 eggs, three of which hatched. The third egg hatched six days after the other two, making that chick the smallest of the three. Normally, a chick that much smaller than its siblings would stand little chance of survival. However, the parents did such a good job of providing food that all three did extremely well.

Back in June, Schedule One licence holder Stuart Downhill and accredited wildlife agent Liam Edwards removed the chicks briefly from the nest for weighing and ringing. They were then returned to the nest box where they continued to grow and thrive. Late in the summer, they began leaving the nest for short periods while they tried out their wings and adjusted to life in the outside world, before eventually leaving for good around the end of August.

The continued success of our barn owls year on year, helped by our special habitats, has meant that this beautiful bird is now spreading further across the county and beyond.



Photos: Elaine Rushton



Calendar photo competition winners



Photo: Adam Brennan



Photo: Sarah Wingfield



Photo: Andres Terol

Thanks to all of you who entered our calendar photo competition this year.

We had almost 100 fantastic images sent in, making it very difficult to select the winners.

Our winner is Adam Brennan, for this amazing shot of a kestrel on Harding's Moor. Adam said, "it was a lovely moment. The kestrel and his partner were out hunting in the fields

opposite the station to feed their new family of chicks. He was scouting around for more food when I managed to take this."

Second place goes to Sarah Wingfield for her atmospheric image of a misty Hay Wood on a winter morning. Andres Terol is in third place

with his colourful sunset photo of the Grand Union Canal at Old Fishery, with Gadespring cress beds on the right. Congratulations to them, and to all other entrants who have won a month in our 2025 calendar. You can find it on sale in our online shop at £6.00 + p&p.

Labyrinth spider (*Agelena labyrinthica*)

This impressive construction was spotted by our Ranger, Jane, during a conservation task to remove scrub from around the junipers on Lower Roughdown during the summer.

Woe betide any hapless grasshopper or cricket who hops onto this web in the long grass! The labyrinth spider will rush out and drag its prey down into the funnel shaped tube to feed on them. Further down the funnel is a labyrinth of smaller tunnels, hence the name. Hidden right in the centre of this labyrinth is an egg sac containing the developing young. Not to be confused with the funnel web spider native to Australasia (although they are sometimes known as funnel webs here too), labyrinth spiders are up to 18mm long. The abdomen features a central pale brown stripe with a darker, more greyish band on either side. The darker bands have tiny white dashes or chevron markings running through them. Fun fact: the females will stay in the web until the young are ready to leave - sometimes she will die before they go, in which case they will eat her! The good news is that *Agelena labyrinthica* is harmless to humans.



Photo: Jane Ahern



Weather stays fair for the festival

Goats... and other livestock

Following the successful introduction of Old English goats onto the estate for the purpose of invasive scrub control, our little herd has swelled to 9 with the purchase of another 4 wethers.

At time of writing, they are going through quarantine at Howes Retreat and will be getting used to their GPS collars, a key aspect of the virtual fencing technology.

The original group of 5 goats have been at Lower Roughdown for the last few months, assisting with some intense conservation grazing. They will shortly be moved back to Bovingdon Brickworks, where all 9 will over-winter.

To keep up to date with the grazing locations of all our livestock (including the goats), please visit the stock map on our website. We would like to remind dog walkers to keep their dogs on a lead when near ANY livestock, or to avoid these areas if possible.

With torrential downpours every day in the run-up to our Autumn Festival on 28th and 29th September, we dared not even hope for good weather. We need not have worried – Saturday dawned warm and sunny, and it stayed dry for the duration of the weekend. Our brilliant Hemel Hempstead and Bovingdon community turned out in high numbers to support the event and good fun was had by all. We even had a visit from a T-Rex, courtesy of our friends at Magical Story Elves. We would like to thank all those who helped to make the festival such a success, including all the stallholders, community groups, performers, volunteers and staff. And of course, a special thanks to everyone who visited - we hope you all had a great time!



Photos: Elaine Rushton

430th anniversary

2024 marks the anniversary of a couple of significant dates in the history of Box Moor Trust. It was 450 years ago in 1574 that Queen Elizabeth 1 presented the Earl of Leicester with a gift of land in Hertfordshire, which included some pastures in Hemel Hempstead. These pastures were subsequently acquired by three local men – John Rolfe, Richard Pope and William Gladman – at a cost of £75, which appears to have been raised by public subscription. Twenty years later, in 1594, ownership was passed to 67 named locals (or 'Feoffes') in order that the land would be held in Trust in perpetuity for the local community. This marked the earliest origins of the Box Moor Trust, 430 years ago.



Photo: Penny McConnell



Photo: Elaine Rushton

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Boxmoor Good Neighbours

In the summer, we were delighted to host a Boxmoor Good Neighbours Scheme picnic at the Old Barn, Westbrook Hay.

On a fine afternoon in July, the neighbours enjoyed refreshments and beautiful views over the countryside. One of our rangers gave a talk about the work of the Trust, which prompted much interest and some insightful questions. The Boxmoor Good Neighbours team reported afterwards that they had received some lovely 'thank you' messages from neighbours, who had really enjoyed the event.

If you would like to bring a local community group to this lovely spot, please contact the office.



Photo: Bev Kirk



Photo: Mike Wallbank

Woodland volunteer task

In October, our fabulous conservation volunteers turned out to do some hard graft in the rain along Felden Lane, using saws and loppers to cut and remove some well-established holly, hazel and other scrub plants.

The clearance work was in an area being managed for Ash dieback and was necessary to prevent a vehicle access track from being overtaken by undergrowth. This daunting task, over a long stretch of track, was made much easier due to the sheer number of enthusiastic volunteers all working together. The task was completed by the end of the shift, leaving everyone drenched but with a sense of achievement.

If you'd like to be part of this amazing group of local heroes, visit our website and find out more.

Roland James Howard

31st July 1942 – 3rd July 2024

The Trust lost a good friend and supporter earlier this year with the sad passing of Roland Howard.

Roland was a valued member of the Box Moor Trust Conservation Volunteers for over 20 years – indeed he was a founder member of the group. He loved the Trust land, and over the years must have devoted his time and expertise to every inch of its 500 acres. His dry wit, extensive knowledge and commitment will be deeply missed.

Photo: Liz Warriner



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