

Shropshire
Barn Owl
Group



Providing nestboxes for Barn Owls and
promoting their conservation



2023

This report summarises the breeding results and activities of the Shropshire Barn Owl Group (SBOG) for 2023. SBOG is a voluntary group which has been working since 2002 to increase the breeding population of Barn Owls in Shropshire by providing nestboxes and working with farmers and other landowners to retain and improve their habitat. When we started out the Shropshire Barn Owl population had been in decline for over half a century, and we estimated it to be around 140 breeding pairs. Now, there are 220 pairs.

Our aim is to ensure that Barn Owl numbers remain stable and to work to establish new breeding pairs each year.



SOME OF OUR ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR

- 532 nestboxes installed
- 3623 nestbox and natural nest sites monitored
- 987 successful broods in nestboxes & natural sites
- 2632 Barn Owl chicks produced in nestboxes, 328 in natural nest sites
- 448 site surveys

The 2023 Breeding Season

2023 proved to be the most productive breeding season since the group was established, outperforming the previous record set in 2022. One-hundred and eighty-one sites were monitored, 91 of them successfully producing 291 young, 287 in nestboxes and 4 in natural sites. Table 1. Breeding (at least one egg laid) occurred in 94 (51.9%) of the sites. Broods ranged from one to six chicks and averaged 3.1. Two pairs produced second broods, always an indication of a successful breeding season, and one pair produced an exceptional clutch of nine eggs. Eighteen new pairs were established, that's 46 in recent years.



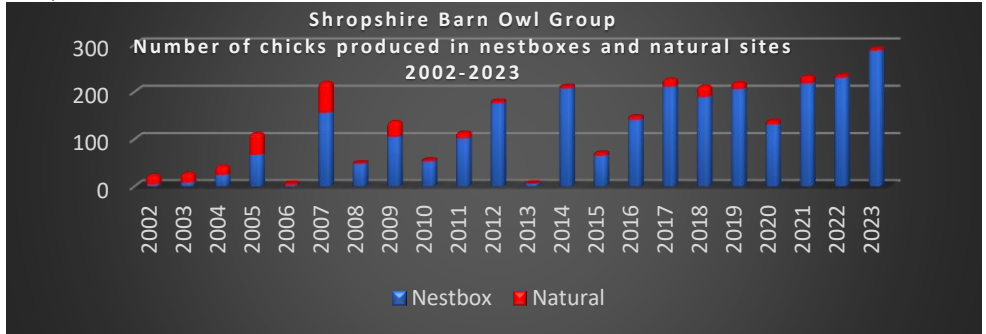
Table 1. Number of chicks produced according to type of nest site in 2023

Figures in brackets refer to number of broods

Tree nestbox		Building nestbox		Pole nestbox		Tree cavity natural		Building natural		Other natural		Total No. chicks	Mean No. chicks
No. chicks	Mean	No. chicks	Mean	No. chicks	Mean	No. chicks	Mean	No. chicks	Mean	No. chicks	Mean		
203 (67)	3.0	80 (22)	3.6	4 (1)	4.0	4 (1)	4.0	0	0	0	0	291 (91)	3.1

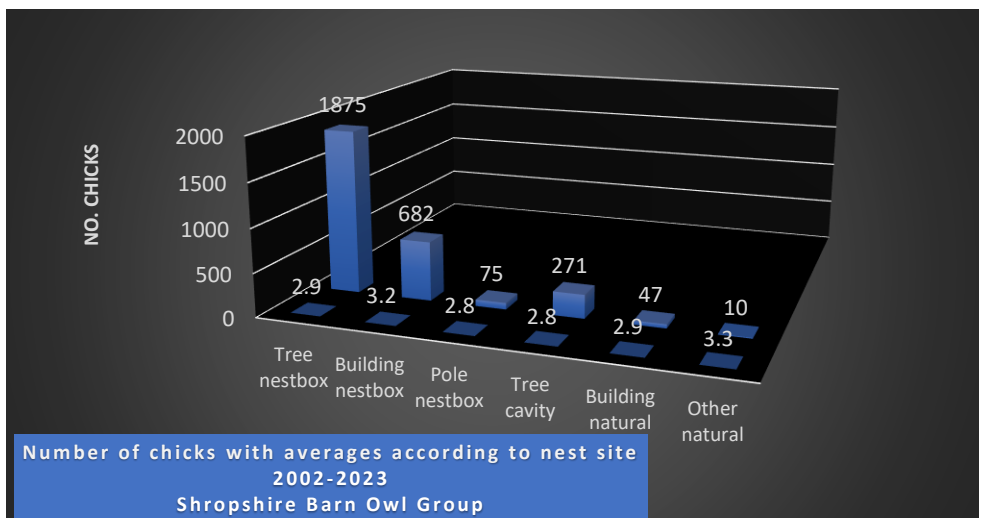
Breeding Summary 2002-2023

2960 Barn Owl chicks have been produced in nest sites monitored by SBOG since 2002, 2632 in nestboxes and 328 in natural sites. 88% of Barn Owls have been produced in nestboxes and, although data on the location and number of natural nest sites is limited, it is highly probable that nestboxes are now the predominant nest site for breeding Barn Owls in Shropshire.

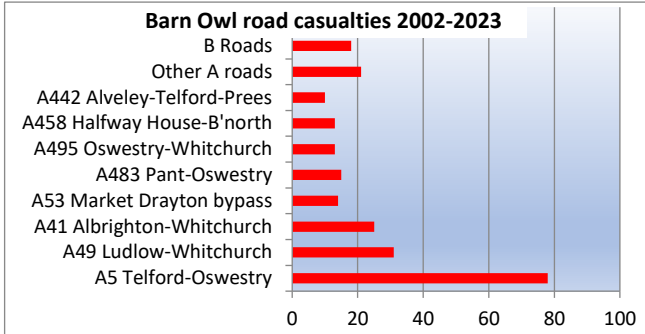


Six of the last seven years have consistently been peak years, with over 200 chicks produced in each year. Previously, the trend was a cycle of peaks and troughs in breeding productivity, generally believed to be linked to annual population changes in the Field Vole, the Barn Owls primary prey. The levelling off in recent years may be attributable to environmental factors and climatic effects on the Field Vole population, or perhaps the continued addition of new pairs to the Barn Owl breeding population is leading to an exponential rise in young produced. It will be interesting to see how this trend develops over the next few years and data from future breeding seasons might offer an insight.

The mean number of chicks produced per successful brood in Shropshire is 3.1. This is consistent with studies elsewhere which suggest that a long-term average productivity of about 3.2 young per pair is required to maintain viable populations and was higher than the UK average of 2.8 reported in the Barn Owl Trust's 'State of the UK Barn Owl Population 2023'.

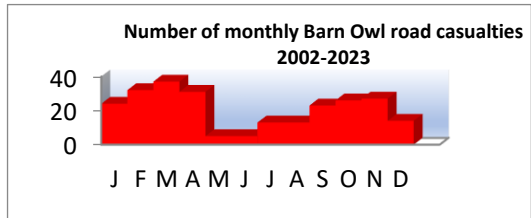


Barn Owl Road Casualties




Road traffic casualties account for most recorded Barn Owl deaths in Shropshire. Five road casualties were recorded on roads in Shropshire in 2023. 92% of casualties between 2002 and 2023 have occurred on 'A' roads with relatively few casualties on 'B' roads. The A5 is the most serious threat to Barn Owls accounting for 78 (32%) casualties.

67% of road victims occur in the winter period October–March, peaking in March and probably arise predominantly from juvenile dispersal. Adult Barn Owls are site faithful and highly sedentary, but juveniles in Shropshire make short-distance dispersal movements of round 6 to 9 km from their natal areas soon after fledging. By the end of November most juveniles have settled in their home range. Mitigation to reduce road casualties might include tree planting on some road embankments which could force Barn Owls to fly high over the roads. SBOG's strict policy of not installing nestboxes within 1km of a major road is possibly the most prudent option at present.



Thank you

Thank you to the farmers and landowners across Shropshire who share our aims and passion to see more Barn Owls in Shropshire and who provide invaluable support in allowing SBOG to install nestboxes. To Geoff Hall, Roger Clay, & Ian Littlewood for additional breeding records, photographers John Breuille (perched Barn Owl page 2) and Tim Preston (page 4) (additional photos Glenn Bishton), David & Zoe Walker for under-cover storage of our mobile aviary, Cooper & Williams for roofing felt, Paul Shearer and Clenviro for off-cuts, Paul Griffiths, for their kind hospitality John & Gaye Simister and Lesley & Andrew Moxon-Jones, and for their help in releasing Barn Owls from our mobile aviary John & Caroline Lay and John Fielding. Thank you to all who shared their photos and encounters with Barn Owls to our Facebook site. For financial support we are most grateful and indebted to the William Dean Countryside & Educational Trust, David Collin Greeting Cards, Bridgnorth Naturalists and the many landowners who contribute to the nestbox costs: without this financial support we could not do what we do for Barn Owls.

For more information on how you can help the Shropshire Barn Owl Group and encourage breeding Barn Owls see our website www.shropshirebarnowlgroup.org.uk or Facebook 

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