

Barn Owls boosted by wildlife success of Nature Friendly Farming

A new study predicts a boost of 25 per cent in Barn Owl numbers on farms growing commercial crops alongside special wildlife habitats – proving that farming can care for nature while producing the food we need.

The survey, carried out with the help of the Barn Owl Conservation Network on farms growing produce the nature-friendly 'Conservation Grade' way, used the number of Barn Owl chicks leaving the nest at the end of last season to gauge the health of wildlife in the area.

More chicks were successfully reared on Conservation Grade farms than on farms not working within the standard, and this is expected to rise again this year as the owls become more accustomed to new nesting boxes.

Conservation Grade's Tim Nevard explains that Barn Owls are an ideal indicator of the health of an ecosystem on a farm, as small mammals and insects are the mainstay of their food chain.

"The difference in fledging rate between Conservation Grade and other farms wasn't dramatic last year, but it did rise," he says. "All things being equal we anticipate a much bigger difference this year – around 25 per cent more owls – as they get used to the new boxes."

Conservation Grade farmers actively farm for wildlife by putting 10 per cent of their least productive land into specific habitats and growing premium quality food very efficiently on the remainder.

Adam West from Natural England, the government's nature conservation agency, says: "We support Conservation Grade's evidence-based approach to sustainable farming.

"By combining first-class farmland wildlife conservation with the best agricultural production standards, it achieves a win-win outcome for nature and food security. Their Barn Owl project is a great example of this."

People can choose to support Conservation Grade's sustainable way of farming by looking for the 'Nature Friendly Farming' logo with the bee in supermarkets and other outlets.

A new website detailing the study and providing more facts about owls and biodiversity, www.naturefriendlyowls.org, also carries information about the makers of Nature Friendly Farming products and their well-known brands*.

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For more information contact Amy Jackson at amy@oxtale.co.uk, 07917 773756 or 01993 880360.

Notes to Editors

***About Nature Friendly Farming licensees and products**

- **Allied Mills** – Allinson Wholemeal loaf, Allinson Sunflower & Pumpkin loaf, Allinson Malted Harvestgrain loaf, Burgen Soya & Linseed loaf, Buckwheat & Poppy Seed loaf.
- **Allinson Flour** – accredited Nature Friendly Farming plain and self-raising flours.
- **Jordans** – uses Conservation Grade cereals in 80 per cent of its products including Muesli and Crunchy Oats ranges.
- **The Vitacress Group** – Wasabi Rocket and Cooler Leaves, Peashoots and Baby Leaves, Nose Tinglingly Peppery Baby Watercress and Baby Leaves
- **European Oat Millers** – supplying ingredients to major food companies for nearly 30 years; accredited oats, wheat and barley grown for Jordans is processed at their Bedford mill.
- **Honeychop Horse Feeds** – oat straw used as an ingredient in all feeds.
- **Lordington Lavender** – a range of luxury goods, including essential oils and soaps, all from the French Provençal lavender variety Mailette grown on their own farm.

Quirky owl Facts

- The Latin name for Barn Owl is *Tyto alba* – literally meaning "white night owl".
- Barn Owls don't hoot – they screech!
- One owl ear is higher than the other, so they can hear sounds above and below while flying.
- A wild Barn Owl eats about four small animals per night – that's 1,460 every year – making them a farmer's friend as they help control crop-eating pests.
- Barn Owls often swallow small animals, like mice, whole and then regurgitate tough parts like fur and bone.
- A group of owls is called a parliament, wisdom or study. Baby owls are called owlets.
- The young owlets fly when they are about seven weeks old.
- Wild Barn Owls tend to live for two to three years, although a Barn Owl in the Netherlands was recorded as living to 18 years.
- Owls cannot move their eyeballs, but can turn their faces upside down and look behind their backs.
- Owls have been found in the fossil record up to 58 million years ago. The largest recorded owl fossil stood about three feet tall – that's about the same as a Great Dane dog!

About Conservation Grade

Conservation Grade is an independent, non-profit accreditation organisation that aims to set up commercial relationships between farmers and customers to support a farming system that optimises both crop yields and wildlife conservation.

This makes Conservation Grade a truly unique system of sustainable farming, founded on science and commercial viability. It is congruent with, but greatly out performs, government agri-environment schemes and as such is singularly recognised by The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) study. TEEB is the leading international policy initiative charged by G8, the EU, and Defra with identifying and promulgating sustainable production systems capable of making a meaningful contribution to the conservation of global biodiversity by the private sector. In return for a contracted

premium price for their grain, the Conservation Grade protocol places seven key requirements on its farmers:

1. Comply with Conservation Grade production standards.
2. Commit 10% of the farmed area to a specific range of managed wildlife habitats.
3. Hold full membership of an approved Assured Food Standards farm assurance scheme.
4. Participate in induction and annual Conservation Grade training programmes.
5. Create a whole farm environment plan.
6. Pass an annual independent CMi audit and five yearly habitat assessments.
7. Be members of the Guild of Conservation Grade Producers.

Measurable benefits to wildlife

In trials, turning 10% of land over to the protocol has resulted in a: 41% per cent increase in birds; five to eighteen fold increase in butterflies; a ten to forty fold increase in bumblebees and a thirty fold increase in small mammals such as water voles within certain habitats on-farm. In certain circumstances, bumblebee numbers have reached levels more than 600-fold over the crop.