

NATURE NOTES

Wildlife-friendly farms fly to aid of barn owls

Dozens of farms are to take part in a scheme to measure whether wildlife-friendly farming helps barn owls.

The project will look at the fledging rates of barn owl chicks on farms managed under the Conservation Grade scheme, in which farmers turn 10 per cent of their land into wildlife habitats in return for a premium price for their crop.

The research is focusing on barn owls, which have declined in numbers since the 1930s, because they are at the top of the food chain and can indicate if other wildlife is thriving.

The project, backed by Jordans Cereals, is installing and monitoring nest boxes on 50 wildlife-friendly farms, and will compare results with other surveys to find out whether more chicks fledge where there is good habitat.

Conservation Grade estimates its farmers are managing 65,000 acres of wild flower meadows, hedgerows, grass margins, woodlands and wetlands.

Tim Nevard, chief executive of Conservation Grade, said: "We're working with Jordans on Project Barn Owl to highlight the difference Conservation Grade farming can make to the intricate world of barn owls and other wildlife."