

Farmer wins Barn Owl Conservation Grade award from David Bellamy

Eminent environmentalist Professor David Bellamy OBE has honoured Gloucestershire farmer Mark Tufnell for his exceptional contribution to Barn Owl conservation as part of a 'Nature Friendly Farming' programme.

Mark, who runs Calmsden Farms near Cirencester, and grows oats for Jordans Cereals and wheat for Allinson Bread under the Conservation Grade Nature Friendly Farming scheme, reared five Barn Owl chicks last year from a nest box near a redundant barn - the largest brood to hatch from one box across the 50 farms involved in the project, and a significant achievement proving that farming can work in harmony with nature.

With several of Britain's birds now under threat, David Bellamy – a keen Barn Owl conservationist – says that people can choose to support Nature Friendly Farming and birds like Barn Owls by buying Conservation Grade accredited produce.

“If we are to seriously tackle the decline in farmland birds, insects and mammals, we need to encourage conservation programmes that are scientifically proven, yet practical and sustainable. The Conservation Grade way of farming does just this,” he said.

Receiving the award from Professor Bellamy, Mark Tufnell said: “I'm delighted to be the first to win this award for boosting Barn Owl numbers. We still see the mother owl flying around the nest-box. I hope she breeds again this year and that more farmers start farming this way so that her chicks can raise young on their land too.”

Conservation Grade, in which farmers cultivate specific wildlife habitats on their least productive land, follows a scientific approach that has seen a 41 per cent increase in birds and a thirty fold increase in small mammals such as water voles in trials.

Tim Nevard of Conservation Grade explains: “By measuring the fledging rate of Barn Owls – one of our peak farmland predators – we're measuring the health of all wildlife in the area, down to rodents, insects and plant life. Increasing wildlife on farms not only keeps the ecology of our countryside healthy, we see more birds and more bees and hear more buzzing and birdsong.”

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*.

-ends-

20 February 2012

For more information contact Lucy Polson at lucy@oxtale.co.uk, 07900 582839 or 01993 880360.

Photo caption: Professor David Bellamy presenting Gloucestershire farmer Mark Tufnell with his Barn Owl conservation award.

Pictures also available on request:

1. David Bellamy holding a captive-bred owl from The Barn Owl Centre of Gloucestershire.
2. David Bellamy looking at wildlife habitats.
3. David Bellamy breaking open a regurgitated owl pellet to show what the owl ate.
4. Group photo of David Bellamy, farmer Mark Tufnell and Tim Nevard of Conservation Grade.
5. David Bellamy talking to Tim Nevard of Conservation Grade

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** – Steve's Leaves product range including Pea Shoots & Baby Leaves, Baby Watercress & Little Leaves, Wasabi Rocket & Cooler Leaves and Wild Red Rocket & Milder Leaves and a range of fresh cut and potted herbs from VHB Herbs;
- **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.

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.