

## **SUFFOLK OWL SANCTUARY**

(A company limited by guarantee)

Report of the trustees (incorporating the directors' report)

for the year ended 31 December 2018

The trustees present their report and the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2018. The trustees, who are also directors of SUFFOLK OWL SANCTUARY for the purposes of company law and who served during the year and up to the date of this report, are set out on page 1.

### **Objectives and activities**

The principal objective and activity of the company is to educate and inform the general public about the diversity of British owls and birds of prey and their conservation status; to provide information about their habitat, nesting and breeding requirements; and to provide rescue, relief and protection for sick and injured British owls and other birds of prey by the maintenance of facilities and assistance for their treatment and rehabilitation

### **Achievements and performance**

#### **Visitors**

The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary was manned all year and open to the public on all but 5 days. Permanently staffed by a General Manager, eight full time falconers and full time and seasonal / part-time administrative and educational personnel, the Sanctuary welcomed approx. 23150 visiting members of the public during the course of the year and provided visual, verbal and written information about the care and conservation of owls and other birds of prey, of which there are an average of 80 on display.

## **Raptor Hospital, Rescue & Rehabilitation**

The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary maintains a First Aid Centre and Hospital facilities for injured wild owls and other birds of prey, which are brought in by the public or collected by members of staff from situations of distress. In addition we also took on more birds from local veterinary practices where recuperation and release facilities were prescribed, and from the RSPCA. 2018 saw a small decrease in the number of birds cared for in the hospital but with a 30% success rate of those released back to the wild after veterinary care & recuperation, the balance either dying of natural causes or being euthanised by the vet. These figures do not include the numbers of uninjured birds or branchers (young birds that have just left the nest) brought into the sanctuary in a fit state that were released or hacked back to the wild without treatment, usually after a few days in our rehab aviaries.

## **Wild Owl Nest Boxes**

Our East Anglian Nest Box Scheme is merged with the Thornham Owl Project, for which it provides equipment, storage, transport and manpower support. The purpose of the scheme is to provide, replace and refurbish wild owl nest boxes in the region and monitor wild owl and other bird of prey populations under a DEFRA Disturbance License. Volunteers & staff curated the network of approx 281 usable boxes. The Scheme plays a valuable part in providing purpose-built safe & secure nesting sites for wild raptors to replace diminishing natural habitats. Progeny numbers were monitored in boxes operated by the project and in 2018 a reduction in number of progeny were ringed comprising 42 Barn Owls, 16 Tawny Owls, 2 Little Owls and 26 Kestrels.

## **Education**

We were of course disappointed that a repeat of the 2017 Avian Flu outbreak restricted bird movement again for the early months of 2018, which are usually busy with school visits. We were however able to attend the annual School Farm Fair and made good contacts with the education fraternity which helped us maintain the number of visits to and from schools from the area right through the rest of the year. During the second half of the year we launched an "All About Owls" programme and made complimentary visits to 28 schools in the region. We continue to publish & circulate free editions of the 'Stonham Screecher', our information & conservation-based newsletter created especially for youngsters to local schools, at the centre and at outside events. Our comprehensive range of free online school / teacher packs & literature covering Foundation & Key Stages One & Two aspects of the curriculum were available throughout the year. Our free "Bees, Bugs & Butterflies" was available free to all visitors for our reception desk.

## **Information and Publicity**

During the year we distributed a newsletter by post to donors and supporters. We also maintain a website - [www.owl-help.org.uk](http://www.owl-help.org.uk) - which provides information about the care and conservation of wild owls and other birds of prey, and responds to enquiries from members of the public concerning owl and raptor welfare plus related educational matters throughout the UK and beyond. The website also includes a blog highlighting specific activities of the organisation during the year. In support we publish a series of 'help' pamphlets on specific subjects (species, breeding, nest boxes, etc.). Our comprehensive booklet on owl conservation, "Saving Britain's Owls" continues to be circulated on demand and like all SOS literature was available free on request to members of the public. Our use of social

media to communicate is flourishing, with 4097 Facebook followers and 1326 on Twitter.

We also had some BBC TV coverage when Helen McDonald, author of “H is For Hawk”, chose to launch her new book at the centre. We also featured strongly in The Owl Book by Jane Russ, who used many of our photos to illustrate it.

### **Improvements to the Sanctuary**

2018 saw some extensive repair and improvements at the Sanctuary. A new boundary fence was erected along one side the property adjacent to a roadway on the Stonham Barns complex in the interests of longevity and security. The exotic owl block comprising four new aviaries was completely rebuilt from the foundations upwards. Work on the new large bird aviary was completed as suitable housing for the likes of the Tawny Eagles and with a view to being able to accommodate a pair of Golden Eagles who we anticipate coming to the centre in 2019. After ongoing work throughout the year, we were able to open the new bird of prey hospital in December, together with the much-needed suite of nine enclosed recuperation aviaries used for wild birds prior to their release after treatment. New escape doors were fitted to the Red Squirrel pens. Sundry other repair work to aviaries and accommodations was undertaken during the year as required, and astroturf replaced on the majority of bird perches as required.

Other work included the a new laminate floor for the classroom, the refurbishment of the old hospital building as the feed room, the fitting of a new boiler, the acquisition of an incinerator to allow on-site disposal of waste and a new path, fencing, and gate to improve traffic flow.

During the course of the year part of the electrical supply was switched from the power supply of the landlords on the complex where S.O.S. is situated to a direct feed from the National Grid, made in the interests of reliability and cost. The extensive work commenced on re-wiring the centre to accommodate this and will be completed during 2019.

### **Community**

Spokespersons from the Suffolk Owl Sanctuary gave local media relevant information as to owl and other birds of prey conservation and related topics pertinent to the centre during the year. We took our information booth to the annual Open Farm event at the College of West Anglia to showcase the conservation work that we do. Visits to local rest & care homes and youth organisations were again curtailed due to the restrictions of bird movement caused by the outbreak of Avian Bird Flu early in 2018.

We also staged the second Countryside and Falconry Fair on the Mid Suffolk Showground adjacent to the Sanctuary to promote our cause alongside other wildlife conservation groups, which attracted 1500+ visitors and guests over the two-day event. In September we held our first BSL (British Sign Language) Day for the profoundly deaf and their carers, where each of the three flying demonstrations and two Q&A session was signed for visitors by a professional exponent. We also 'adopted' a local care home for regular visits.

S.O.S. worked with HMP to help integrate long-terms offenders back to the workplace by providing day release positions alongside our staff and team of volunteers.

Places for students from local schools and local agricultural colleges wanting to come to the Centre for work experience were again in heavy demand and for much of the year we were 'full' to capacity with students with us on 7 and 14-day secondment. Representatives of local veterinary practices were hosted to learn about the welfare, feeding and husbandry of raptors plus our procedures for the rescue and rehabilitation of injured wild birds including care in the raptor hospital. We also held another Falconry & Familiarity Day for Suffolk Constabulary's Wildlife Officers involved in crime cases associated with birds of prey.

### **Complementary Activities**

As part of our stated intent to develop complementary activities, visitor information and advice encompassing other species of endangered wildlife relative to Britain's raptor population is provided for visitors. We have maintained a suitable habitat for hedgerow birds throughout the centre. Our Woodland Walk area shows a woodland environment in which natural nesting sites and habitats are sited. This was further developed with conservation concerns in mind, adding butterfly feeders, bug houses and bee friendly planting to the area. These practical measures were supported our our free publication 'Bees, Bugs and Butterflies' which offers useful advice for creating wildlife friendly habitat in suburban and rural gardens. The number of red squirrels in our hitherto productive breeding colony reduced in size during the year due to demise through age-related natural causes. The colony will be replenished with livestock as soon as suitable candidates are available from other conservation groups.

### **Fundraising**

Selective print and social media have proved the most cost-effective channels for reaching as large a well-targeted audience as possible

with a complex message and limited budget. We use the Owl Barn Gift Catalogue to distribute leaflets promoting Adopt an Owl and Nest Box Sponsorship fund-raising packages because the catalogue is unique in offering a large, focussed 'owl-friendly' audience on a year-round basis, supported by Suffolk Owl Sanctuary branding and editorial in each edition of the catalogue and on their website.

Annual testing and evaluation of different media and alternative channels (magazine & catalogue inserts, parcel dispatch inserts, door-drop distribution and on-line campaigns) offering potential overage of similar demographic, interest, age and gender profiles were used. Whilst often comparing favourably in cost terms, alternative choices of promotional channel fail to deliver cost effective response levels.

### **Future Developments**

During 2018 Suffolk Owl Sanctuary gave consideration to its future in terms of activities, demands on its resources and trusteeship.

Based on feedback from the local community over recent years and involvement in pilot schemes, the Trustees feel there is the need and opportunity to extend the Objects of the Charity beyond the promotion of, and active participation in, the care and conservation of owls and other birds of prey, to extend similar services for other forms of endangered native wildlife species including hedgehogs, Scottish wildcats and red squirrels.

To this end we progressed the 15-year tenure of a property adjacent to the current site which offers the space and additional facilities to extend the resources needed to accommodate the increasing intake of injured and traumatised raptors, but also to provide the facilities

needed to manage the species under consideration and provided a large indoor space which we plan to develop to house visits by the public, schools and organised groups on a year-round basis.

Also looking forward, S.O.S. is planning to introduce new Trustees and management to S.O.S. in late 2019 / early 2020, and began the search for candidates towards the end of the year. This is in preparation to replace Trustees planning to stand down in the foreseeable future.

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### **Financial review**

The Charity has surplus income over expenditure. The Sanctuary operates all year round and income is donated on that basis: all expenditures are incurred as and when necessary. The directors do not operate a policy whereby they specifically withhold funds for a rainy day: they have examined the charity's requirements for reserves in the light of the main risks to the organisation and do not foresee any liquidity problems nor anything else that could affect its going concern.

### **Structure, governance and management**

The company is limited by guarantee. It is not part of a group. Apart from the directors, there are at any one time an additional 10 employees, including those that are part time. The three directors held four informal meetings throughout the year to review the general running of the Sanctuary and its objectives, hospital and rescue matters, activity calendar, promotional and advertising plans, staff levels, fund-raising and finances. Any extraordinary matters arising



are dealt with on an ad hoc basis. The company also holds an annual Ethics Meeting with a local veterinarian and an independent observer to review its practices. We also have two veterinary checks annually in accordance with the requirements of our Zoo License.

The Trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year were:

Mr Chris Astridge, Managing Director; Mrs Elaine Astridge, Company Secretary, Mrs Karen Diamond.

### **Employee involvement**

Key department heads & staff are regularly involved in discussions, decisions and policies about all aspects of the running of the Sanctuary in relation to wildlife management & welfare, rescue & rehabilitation procedures, visitor welfare, out shows, education procedures, Health & Safety & HR matters.

### **Related Parties**

The related parties to the Charity are listed below:-  
Owl Barn Ltd.

### **Administrative Details**

Charity number: 1086565

Company Number: 4183127

Registered Office: Suite 4, Stanmore Towers, 8-14 Church Road, Stanmore, HA7 4AW

Independent Examiner: Michael King & Co., Suite 4, Stanmore Towers, 8-14 Church Road, Stanmore, HA7 4AW

Bankers: HSBC, 1 Mount Street, Diss IP22 4Q

Key management personnel: Mr Chris Astridge, Trustee & Managing Director; Mrs Elaine Astridge, Trustee & Company Secretary, Mrs

Karen Diamond, Trustee