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Photo credit: Richard E Photography

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NATURE NOTES—BARN OWLS



Regular sightings, at dusk or dawn, and Richard Ellis' beautiful photos on Facebook, have led me to find out more about barn owls. I've seen them between Lower Tysoe and the main road and at the bottom of Tysoe Hill.

Barn owls are widely distributed across Britain but it is difficult to monitor nocturnal species and so total numbers are unknown. Various wildlife groups send information to the Barn Owl Trust, who collate an annual report on the 'State of the UK Barn Owl Population'. A wildlife group based on the Stour Valley contribute to this report. Barn owls feed on small mammals and particularly field voles, common shrews and wood mice. Permanent rough grassland is the best habitat for owls to hunt across and we have some good examples in the parish.

A barn owl's 'home range' is never circular and generally overlaps with the ranges of its mate and of other owls. It can be as large as 5,000 hectares in winter (about the size of the parish of Tysoe) but, when food is more abundant in summer, the range shrinks to under a tenth of that size. Barn owls develop a very detailed 'mind

map' of their home range and can remember the best hunting sites, 1-3 main roost sites and their nest site (possibly two). They use vision to help navigate, but hunt their prey purely on the basis of sound. They are well-known for their almost-silent flight.

The decline in barn owl numbers over the last decades is related to a decrease in the abundance of prey, due mainly to changes in farming practices. The loss of old barns and road deaths have also had an impact. Increased provision of rough grassland and artificial nesting sites can help to increase barn owl numbers.

Rosemary Collier

Richard Ellis has been photographing our local barn owls as they fly over the fields hunting for prey, on his way to and from work. You can see more of his work visit: richardephotography.com or you can follow him on Facebook or Instagram. You will be pleased to hear his beautiful images are available to purchase.

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MAKING SPACE FOR NATURE IN TYSOE



There have been several pieces of good news for nature in the last couple of weeks. Firstly, Tysoe Parish Council have won a grant from the Cotswolds AONB 'Caring for the Cotswolds Scheme' to help us support wildlife in the parish. The application was supported by a number of stakeholders, some of whom pledged matched funding. We're very grateful to everyone who helped us win the grant, which will cover 50% of the costs of the planned activities. The funding will be used to purchase information boards to go in key locations, and the development of a 'nature map' and 'nature trail' for Tysoe, which will provide the content for a leaflet. This all fits in with the AONB theme of 'education and interpretation'. I think this is the most 'northerly' project this scheme has ever funded! We have approximately £450 left to raise to cover the costs of the project, so look out for fund raising activities over the coming months or speak to me about a one-off donation.

Secondly, the Parish Council are supporting the development of further small wildflower areas in the village, in addition to the area in School Lane. These are likely to be in Baldwin's Lane, Badger's Lane, the playing fields area and Saddledon Street. These areas won't be large and they will be marked by tent pegs and string to

protect them. Thomas Fox's team will mow the areas once in March and we will then mark them out temporarily, so that they are not mown subsequently, and sow them with wildflower seeds collected last summer. These will be allowed to grow, flower and set seed, before the areas are mown at the end of the summer.

In addition, the Parish Council has agreed that most of the regularly-mown verges within the parish will take part in 'No Mow May' to allow low-growing species to flower and provide pollen and nectar for visiting insects. The most prominent areas of grass in the centre of the village will continue to be mown during this period. The wildlife area in St Mary's Churchyard will also take part in 'No Mow May'.

If you have any comments or ideas about these proposals please direct them to Beverley Thorpe, parish.clerk@tysoe.org.uk.



Rosemary Collier



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