

New homes for barn owls thanks to Hampshire students & the GWCT

Thursday 31 March, 2022

Barn owls in Sparsholt near Winchester can look forward to snug new homes in which to raise their owlets, as a result of the efforts of a group of students and New Forest-based charity the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT).

The students, from the Wildlife Ecology and Conservation degrees courses and the Game and Wildlife Level 1 course at Sparsholt University Centre and Sparsholt College, have built eight new nest boxes during a recent nest box building workshop run by GWCT scientists working on the Owl Box Initiative. The nest boxes will to be sited on farmland on the college campus and on a nearby farm.

"Working with students is a great opportunity for us to share wildlife-friendly farming techniques with the next generation of conservationists and land managers," said the GWCT's Jodie Case, who ran the workshop.

The GWCT, which conducts conservation research and works with farmers and land managers to boost biodiversity in the British countryside, gave a talk to the students on the Owl Box Initiative. Through the project, funded by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, GWCT scientists are working with 100 farms over 40,000ha, to inspire farmers and communities to work for the conservation of the iconic barn owl, which can also benefit wider wildlife.

"Over the years, nesting cavities have been lost through the loss of trees, and the modernisation or loss of farm buildings," explained Jodie, "so nest boxes are a very effective way to increase cavities and to encourage barn owls to breed."

The students heard from Jodie about the initiative's conservation, research and community engagement work promoting wildlife-friendly farming, as well as practical guidance on building and siting nest boxes for barn owls.

Sparsholt College lecturer, Stuart Robertson, said: "This has been a great educational experience for the students, as they not only gained practical experience of building the owl boxes and learning about barn owl habitat and nesting requirements, but also made valuable Industry contact through working in partnership with ex-Sparsholt student Jodie and the GWCT Owl Box Initiative."

Following the talk, the students set to work building the nest boxes, with instructions from the Barn Owl Trust. The wood for some of the boxes was provided by a local farmer who gives the college's students access to land where they learn various countryside management techniques. Those boxes will be installed back on the farm, while the rest will be put to use on the college's campus. The new nest boxes will then be monitored by a licensed bird ringer.

The GWCT works with universities and agricultural education institutions around the country, including Sparsholt, to provide advice on course content from an industry perspective, as well as offering a wide range of student placements and practical conservation opportunities.

"As a research charity, we believe it is vital to share the work we do with the conservationists of the future and provide an understanding of the skills and attributes you need to work in wildlife conservation," said Jodie.

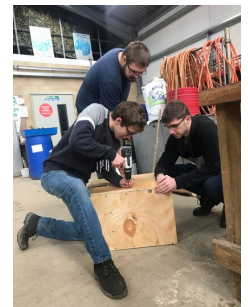
The Owl Box Initiative team also gave a talk to geography and biology students at Sparsholt's sister college, at the Andover Campus, on careers in ecological research, explaining the breadth of wildlife management research carried out by the GWCT and introducing the Owl Box Initiative.

"As an ex-Sparsholt degree student myself, it was fantastic to be back on campus witnessing the students' enthusiasm for wildlife," commented Jodie. "Their hard work and enthusiasm has resulted in eight new nest boxes to be incorporated into the local landscape, offering roosting and breeding sites to barn owls in the area."

More information on the Owl Box Initiative is available at owlboxinitiative.com

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Notes to Editors:

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust is an independent wildlife conservation charity which carries out scientific research into Britain's game and wildlife. We advise farmers and landowners on improving wildlife habitats. We employ 23 post-doctoral scientists and 50 other research staff with expertise in areas such as birds, insects, mammals, farming, fish and statistics. We undertake our own research as well as projects funded by contract and grant-aid from Government and private bodies.

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