

1.3 Status in Gwynedd^e

It is likely that the UK-wide decline has been reflected in Gwynedd. Available data suggests that there have been an average of approximately 20 pairs nesting each year in Gwynedd during the last quarter of the 20th century.

In this county the barn owl is a bird of low ground and of agricultural land. Its strongholds here are the Llŷn Peninsula, Eifionydd, Ardudwy and the Dyfi Valley. It also nests consistently in quarries above Penygroes and even on coastal land in Arfon. Barn owls have also nested on bleak moorland in Meirionnydd, notably within the Eden Valley above Ganllwyd and in Cwm Prysor. It is less numerous on the north coast of the county and uncommon and only occasional at the end of Gwyrfai, Seiont and Ogwen valleys.

2. FACTORS AFFECTING THIS SPECIES IN GWYNEDD^f

- Lack/loss of foraging habitat (e.g. rough pasture, hedges and ditches) largely due to changes in farming practices (such as drainage/re-seeding of old damp pastures, increases in stocking rates), afforestation.
- Lack/loss of nesting sites (old barns and tree cavities), due to dereliction or conversion of old buildings (particularly old barns and farm outbuildings) and loss of hollow trees.
- Poisoning of rats may be a problem - the use of second generation rodenticides is of particular concern.
- Roadside verges can offer excellent hunting habitat for barn owls at least until trees and undergrowth become established, however owls are occasionally killed by cars, which may have a negative effect on the local population.

3. ASSOCIATED GWYNEDD SAPS / HAPS

Veteran trees, lowland wood-pasture and parkland, Arable field margins, Cloddiau, Lowland dry acid grassland, Lowland meadows and pasture, Hedgerows, Transport corridors, Buildings, Rhos pasture

Farmland birds

4. CURRENT ACTION IN GWYNEDD

4.1 Site and habitat protection

- The leaflet *Wildlife and Buildings - guidelines for property owners*, which includes information/contacts on what to do if there are barn owls in your building, is distributed by Gwynedd Council to all relevant applicants in conjunction with planning issues such as the renovation or conversion of buildings.
- Barn owls may occur in areas of Gwynedd identified as potential Wildlife Sites, or designated as SSSI, candidate SAC or SPA.

^e Within this document the term "Gwynedd" refers to areas outside the Snowdonia National Park area, except where specified otherwise

^f See also associated HAPs for more general factors affecting this species' habitats

4.2 Management and programmes of action

- Grant Schemes for woodland management (e.g. Woodland Grant Scheme) and agri-environmental management (e.g. Tir Gofal), may contribute towards maintaining and enhancing habitat suitable for the barn owl - barn owl nestboxes can be funded as a Capital Works Option under Tir Gofal.
- Forestry Commission manages broadleaved and conifer woodlands, and forest rides to create habitat for prey items - they also put up barn owl nest/roost boxes and monitor them for occupation and breeding success.
- A project local to the Afon Gwyrfai and Y Foryd area is underway with Y Foryd Wildfowling and Conservation Association, farmers/landowners and Gwynedd Council. The aim is to install barn owl boxes in targeted areas, monitor their success, record any sightings, and provide advice on positive habitat management for barn owls.

4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

- Wales Raptor Study Group-North Wales put up boxes, produce written reports and take part in, and co-ordinate national surveys organized by the British Trust for Ornithology and Hawk and Owl Trust.
- Wales Raptor Study Group-North Wales licensed workers monitor sites, ring birds and assess breeding success.

5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

1. To establish the current status and distribution of barn owls in Gwynedd.
2. To protect and maintain existing barn owl breeding sites.
3. To restore and enhance other potentially suitable barn owl breeding sites in order to increase barn owl population and distribution.
4. To ensure that the barn owl population in Gwynedd does not diminish to less than 20 pairs.
5. To use the barn owl as a flagship species to raise awareness of the importance of appropriate management of its associated habitats.

6. PROPOSED ACTIONS

Code	Action	Partner(s) ⁹
Policy and legislation		
1	Use planning conditions (such as provision of access and nesting structures, creation of replacement habitat or nesting sites) to ensure developments in sensitive locations (including barn conversions, loss of barn owl feeding habitat) are compatible with barn owl conservation. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC , Relevant partners
Species / habitat management and protection		
2	Promote and support grant schemes (including Tir Gofal, Llŷn ESA and / or use management agreements where appropriate) to increase potential feeding areas for barn owl, by extending areas of unimproved / semi-improved grassland and providing headlands to arable fields where small mammal populations may become re-established TARGET/TIMESCALE: To be set, Ongoing	CCW , BASC , CLA , DEPC , FUW , FWAG Cymru , GC , NFU Cymru , WRSG-NW
3	Encourage the provision of suitable nesting sites (including artificial nest boxes), using grant schemes where applicable, in areas with suitable feeding habitat TARGET/TIMESCALE: To be set, Ongoing	WRSG - NW , CCW , GC
4	Seek funding for land management by developing a biodiversity grant scheme, which would include grants for appropriate management, restoration and / or creation of barn owl feeding habitat and the provision of suitable nesting sites (including artificial nest boxes) in areas with suitable feeding habitat TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2005	GC , Relevant partners
5	Ensure that the potential presence and management requirements of barn owls are considered within any relevant management plans or grant schemes (including NWMPs, WGS, Tir Gofal, ESA) by liaison (including consultation and provision of comments) between key organisations (including WRSG - NW) TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	WRSG-NW , CCW , DEPC , FC , GC
6	Ensure that potential impacts on barn owl populations are considered within any road building / highways improvement programmes, and that appropriate measures are put in place to limit these TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC , CCW , WRSG-NW
Advisory		
7	Provide advice and regular training on barn owl conservation issues, and how to recognise signs of barn owl occupation, to development control officers, highways engineers and other relevant parties, including promoting future training events organised by Roads and Otters Steering Group TARGET/TIMESCALE: To be set, Ongoing	GC , CCW , WRSG-NW
8	Provide advice on barn owls and habitat management to landowners and land managers TARGET/TIMESCALE: Response on an ad hoc basis, Ongoing	FWAG Cymru , BASC , CCW , GC , NWWT , RSPB Cymru , WRSG-NW

⁹ Lead partner for this action is indicated by bold typeface, see section 7.2 for explanation of abbreviations

Survey, research and monitoring		
9	Establish annual monitoring of barn owl nesting attempts within all known and accessible nest sites, by suitably licensed fieldworkers, to inform a local database currently held by the WRSB-NW. This to include the ringing, weighing and measuring of young and adult birds, and the monitoring of pellets at nest-sites to improve knowledge of local food preferences. TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2006	WRSB-NW, CCW, RSPB Cymru
10	Instigate a survey of all known and potential barn owl nesting sites in Gwynedd TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2005	WRSB-NW, CCW, RSPB Cymru
11	Monitor any replacement nesting sites provided under planning conditions to assess their success. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, WRSB-NW
Communications and publicity		
12	Distribute information leaflets on barn owl habitat requirements (e.g. Hawk and Owl Trust leaflets, Barn Owl Trust leaflets) to landowners and managers at local events and shows. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, FWAG Cymru, RSPB Cymru
13	In conjunction with other North Wales LBAP groups, CCW, GBG and NWWT, produce an updated version of the Wildlife and Buildings leaflet, and distribute among potential planning applicants, developers, architects and those receiving building renovation grants TARGET/TIMESCALE: By 2005	GC, CCW, GBG, NWWT
14	Raise public awareness of this species and its associated habitats through publishing articles in relevant publications and giving talks to relevant groups (e.g. publications and local meetings of farming unions) TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, BASC, CCW, DEPC, FWAG Cymru, NWWT, RSPB Cymru, WRSB-NW
15	Encourage the general public to record barn owl sightings and road casualties, to be passed to WRSB-NW for collation, through submission of press releases to local newspapers on an annual basis, and the provision of detailed advice on request. TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, RSPB Cymru, WRSB-NW
16	Ensure that road kill data is forwarded to Highways Department of GC so that any "hot-spots" can be identified and verge management issues addressed if necessary TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, CCW, RSPB Cymru, WRSB-NW

7 PARTNERS & OPPORTUNITIES

7.1 Overall Lead Partner for SAP

Gwynedd Council (GC)

7.2 Key partners

British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)

Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

Department for Environment, Planning and Countryside (Welsh Assembly Government) (DEPC)

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Cymru (FWAG Cymru)

