

Medlock & Tame Valley Conservation Association Newsletter



Autumn/Winter 2015



Welcome to the Autumn/Winter 2015 edition of the MTVCA Newsletter. It has been a busy Autumn for us at the MTVCA H.Q. We've been using the best of the weather to work outside to establish our butterfly and bee garden (see later)

and come winter we will be resuming work inside the house including the upstairs box room and the kitchen.

This year MTVCA has achieved:

Lifting the old carpets throughout the house

Painting and carpeting the reception room

New furniture and pictures placed throughout the house

New kitchen tiles, replacement of wood and re-painting of the kitchen (with special thanks to David Borrell for all his help)

Two new inside fire doors

Erection of an owl box

Erection of new woodcrete bird boxes throughout the garden

A Butterfly and Bee Garden to the side and front of the HQ

Erection of a small wind turbine to the front side of the house

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Registered Charity No. 504558

ERECTION OF MTVCA's FIRST OWL BOX

The MTVCA seeks to maintain contact and support other groups who operate in the Medlock & Tame Valleys to sustain our flora and wildlife. One group is the Pennine Edge Barn Owl Group (PEBOG). This year Lee, Andrew and Susan attended their AGM in Park Bridge. PEBOG started to encourage Barn Owls back into the area, covering Oldham, Tameside, Rochdale and Stockport.



Historically there are records of Barn Owls in the Oldham and Tameside areas until about 5/10 years ago so we know they are able to live in the area but the main reason for their disappearance is believed to be the lack of nesting sites due to demolition of old buildings and barn conversions which inevitably block up any previously used roosting sites.

Since PEBOG has started they have built numerous boxes of varying shapes and sizes to be put up in trees, barns or on telegraph poles to encourage Barn Owls to nest.

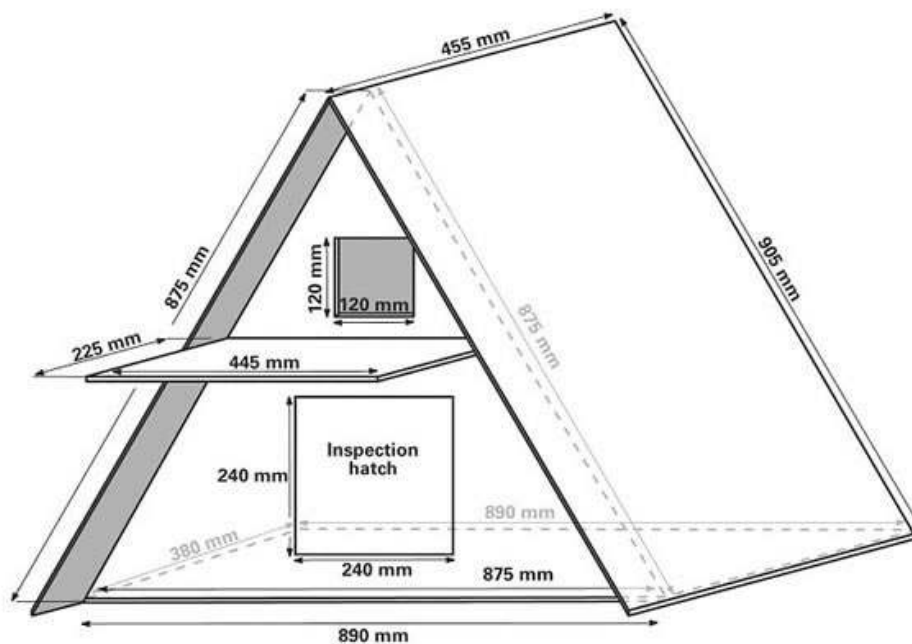
The idea is to create a corridor of suitable nest sites, close to feeding ground for the owls, along the Pennine edge to link up with known populations of Barn Owl.

The grounds of MTVCA are now part of that corridor!

In June of this year, Peter Owen of Hurst Cross Allotments came along to Burlinson House to offer his abseiling services to the MTVCA. We couldn't have managed without him!

A large hornbeam tree was identified as the site as it was on the edge of the boundary of MTVCA's land and provided a clear flight path for the owls to fly. As you can see from the diagram, these boxes are large and heavy so it was necessary once Peter abseiled to the top of a tree, to form a pulley system in order to hoist the box up to him – and it WAS heavy and wobbled a lot! Andrew, Lee, Bryan and myself took charge of the ropes and, once steadied and in place, Peter positioned the box and screwed it into the tree.

We do appreciate Peter giving his time and skills to do this – it was not an easy feat, and we hope the barn owls in the area take advantage of it! It was a good day's work with a good result. We will keep you posted.



The provision of nestboxes for use by Barn Owls is believed to be one of the most important conservation measures and one of the easiest to implement. Across the UK, a wide range of organisations and individuals have erected well over 25,500 Barn Owl nestboxes.



The Owl Box now in situ in the garden of MTVCA HQ



ABOUT THE BARN OWL

(information taken from <http://www.pebog.org.uk/barn-owl-information>)

The barn owl is an elegant looking bird with a distinctive heart shaped face and relatively small black eyes. It has a white breast with golden plumage to the back and head. It is the only owl that appears white when in flight.

Barn owls are nocturnal but can occasionally be seen in the early morning and late afternoon.



Barn owls do not hoot. Instead they have a variety of calls that sound more like screeches and snoring.

Barn owls need extensive areas of rough un-grazed or lightly grazed tussocky grassland in the form of whole fields or field margins (this is encouraged by Government grants available to farmers, DEFRA). This habitat is preferred by their favourite food source, the short-tailed vole. They are not generally found in woodland but will nest on the edges if open fields are nearby.

95% of a barn owl diet is small mammals such as voles, mice and shrews. The owl eats its prey whole and disposes of the indigestible bones and fur in a pellet which can often be found below roosting sites.

Arable landscapes often indirectly provide vole-rich habitats in the form of grassy margins along the edges of fields, woods and ditches. Grassy margins in arable landscapes may also support populations of wood mice that Barn Owls often eat.

LIFE CYCLE

Barn owls do not build nests but require a level surface on which to lay their eggs, they will create a soft layer beneath the eggs from discarded food pellets. They like to nest in quiet, sheltered holes such as those found in barns, church towers, derelict buildings and sometimes hollow trees.

The approximate timing of a typical nest cycle:

Courtship – can start in February but is mainly in March

Egg laying – first half of April

Incubation – second half of April and 1st half of May

Hatching – second half of May

Young growing in nest – June and first half of July

Fledging – second half of July (at about 10 weeks)

Young keep returning to the nest – first half of August

Dispersal – second half of August to end of November.

The barn owl is the most widely distributed owl in the world but sadly under threat in Britain. The UK population has declined by over 70% in the last 50 years.

To a large extent, Britain's Barn Owl population has become dependant on the provision and maintenance of nestboxes due to the lack of more natural sites.

THE LAW AND BARN OWLS

The barn owl was considered to be very common during the 19th century but has declined to such an extent that it is now a rare bird over much of Britain with some counties, including Greater Manchester, having only a few pairs left. As a result the barn owl is afforded special protection under the Wildlife and Countryside act 1981 and has as much legal protection as any wild bird can have in Britain. Individual birds, their eggs and young are protected at all times and nesting barn owls are protected against disturbance.

Programme of Events 2014

Our public meeting programmes commence again next March. A full list with dates and times will be included in our first Newsletter of 2015 and we will also email, write or telephone to let you know. However, I can let you know that we have some really exciting programmes lined up including: Hydroponics; Wine Tasting; Making and maintaining a garden pond and Spiders, to name a few.

WATCH THIS SPACE!

OUR RECENT FIREWORKS NIGHT ON 5 NOVEMBER

Thanks to all who attended and got first sight of our newly erected summerhouse in the side garden.

It was a great night with a good fire, good food, good company and good fun. We hope you enjoyed it!



At the beginning of this summer five new woodcrete bird boxes were purchased and erected by Paul and Jean around the garden.

These boxes are durable and once in place should remain for approximately 10 years.

Thank you to all who have provided bags of seed and fat balls for the birds in the garden. If the winter is as extreme as it has been forecast then our birds will need them!

THE MTVCA Butterfly & Bee Garden



Butterflies & moths are far less common now than they were 50 years ago and you don't have to look hard to find out why. Since the 1940s, **97 per cent** of wildflower meadows have been destroyed, along with much downland, ancient woodland and peat bogs. Many species are in serious decline, as their countryside habitat has been lost to industrial and housing developments, intensive farming and roads. As a conservation association the MTVCA felt compelled to create a butterfly and bee garden to the side and front garden of Burlinson House and provide the wildflowers and habitat to nurture and preserve these beautiful creatures.



We commenced work in August this year. Large hexagonal tiles were donated to us by a neighbour in Oaken Clough and these were used for the foundation for the summer house which would be placed on site for observation of the garden. The ground was scoured in readiness for yellow rattle (this suppresses grass) and the planting of wildflower seeds specifically for use in our area which would thrive in our winters and soil type such as Red Campion, Poppies and Cornflower.

The pathways were defined and shale was obtained from the local freecycle group in Tameside to surface the pathways. Each Sunday Bryan, Andrew, Lee, Susan and Carl prepared the ground and in September we laid the and erected the hexagonal summerhouse.



In the weeks that followed glass was inserted into the summerhouse and it was painted. A wall was built with hexagonal spaces and painted and then the flower seeds were planted and walked into the ground in readiness for the next phase in Spring – the growth of the wildflowers and visitation of many species of butterflies and bees !



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION and RENEWAL FORM. (due October)

Please tick appropriate box:

Individual: £10 each year []

Concessionary: £7.50 each year []

Household: £15 each year. [] (For 2 or more people at the same address)

Donation (Optional): £.....

Name(s):

.....
.....

Address.....

.....
Postcode..... Phone No.....

Mobile Phone No.....

Email

.....

Signature:

If you are a taxpayer and complete a simple Gift Aid declaration we can reclaim the tax paid on your donation and significantly increase the value of your gift at no extra cost to you.

I would like the MTVCA to treat all donations I make on or after the date of this declaration as Gift Aid donations until I notify you otherwise.

Signature..... Date.....

Do remember to tell us if you no longer pay an amount of income or capital gains tax equal to the tax we reclaim on your donations.

**Please either send your completed form and cheque made payable to:
"MTVCA"**

To: MTVCA, Burlinson House, 5 Oaken Clough Terrace, Ashton under Lyne OL7 9NY

OR:

Pay by Bank Transfer to our account: MTVCA Sort code: 010608 Account number: 43550452

Please type your name in "reference details" when making the transfer.

If you e-mail or scan this form to: mtvca@yahoo.co.uk with your details, we will e-mail a receipt when payment has been received.



**The Committee of the
Medlock & Tame
Conservation Association
wishes all its members**



**and a very
Happy New Year
2015!**



Committee members

Chairman: Bryan Stringer

Vice Chairman: Paul Lythgoe

Secretary: Susan Stewart
Tel: 07989147095

Treasurer: Jean Lythgoe

Newsletter: Susan Stewart
thepliedes@yahoo.co.uk

Webmaster: Lee Borrell

Other committee members: Katie Caine

Membership Fees

- Individual Adult: £10.00 per annum
- Family: £15 per annum
- Concessionary: £7.50 per annum

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