

## **The East Anglian Nestbox Scheme established by The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary**

The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary (SOS) established the East Anglian Nestbox Scheme in 2000 and it later amalgamated with the Thornham Owl Project in order to strengthen, consolidate and extend the important work of creating a network of wild owl nesting boxes in the Suffolk & South Norfolk countryside. With natural nesting sites for the wild birds of prey decreasing (whether caused by the diminishing number of derelict barns & outbuildings or destruction of trees through storm or disease) the need to intervene by building and siting artificial nest boxes in isolated areas, is evident.

The sites selected for erecting nest boxes are painstakingly sought out by our project leaders. They liaise with farmers & landowners to encourage the provision and enhancement of headland and hedgerow in order to sustain food sources, which contribute to a successful habitat for the endangered wild birds of prey. This approach should benefit wildlife in general and owls in particular, over the years to come.

The project currently maintains and monitors approximately 300 wild owl nest boxes locally, reporting its findings to the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project and the British Trust for Ornithology. 2017 was a record year with 152 Barn Owl pulli (youngsters) ringed and 88 kestrel nestlings.

The first week of June usually marks the start of nest box checking and this continues well into September and, sometimes, October depending upon any delay in the breeding season. During this time activity is methodically recorded and thereafter follows the programme of seasonal repairing and cleaning of the nest boxes.

This project for the conservation of Britain's native wild birds of prey is on-going and new nest boxes are built and installed (or repaired) before November to give the best chance of breeding success the following year. Thanks to the generous donation from The Naturesave Trust, we are able to continue with our commitment to increase the network of roosting sites. This is the best chance we have to prevent the demise of our wild birds of prey especially those deemed to be of conservation concern.

