

ADVISORY INFORMATION – BARN OWL



Introduction

The ghostly white form of this silent hunter is something often seen at CEMEX quarries. 15 sites in 11 different counties reported seeing barn owls in 2012 and the number of reported nests was more than double the 2011 results. They are most likely to be seen at dusk hunting for rodents in open country or alongside field margins and riverbanks.

Key Points

- Intentional or reckless disturbance of barn owls when they are nesting or when they have dependant young is illegal (Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981).
- Offences against barn owls can attract fines up to £5,000 per offence and/or a custodial sentence of up to 6 months.
- If barn owls are known to be nesting on site then a management plan should be written if they are in an operational area. However, only licensed individuals (such as consultant ecologists and raptor workers) should attempt to locate and assess nesting status. Contact the Hawk & Owl trust for specific advice on 0844 984 2824.
- Quarry staff should be vigilant to illegal killing of barn owls and the increasing problem of the theft of their young. **Please be on the lookout for any suspicious activity and if you see anything contact the RSPB immediately on 01767 680551 or 07803 241452.**

Ecology

Barn owls can nest at any time of year. They commonly nest in barns but will also use tree holes and nest boxes, sometimes producing more than one clutch of 5-6 chicks in a season. The success of the brood is hugely dependant on food availability. Pellets containing the undigested parts of their food are a give away of their presence.

Threats

The main threats to barn owls come from collision with road traffic, lack of good prey habitat and secondary poisoning (e.g. from eating poisoned rats).

Managing your site

Provide good habitat for prey such as voles, with areas of uninterrupted rough, 'tussocky' grass (ideally non-grazed) where they can tunnel and nest amongst collapsed new growth and old leaf litter. If grassland on the site is grazed then try to leave strips of 2-6m width alongside hedges. These strips can be cut every 2-3 years but not shorter than 10cm (4") and if possible, not all in the same year.

Nestboxes should be erected on suitable trees or poles at least 1km from main roads to help reduce the risk of road deaths. If possible, a second box can be built nearby (within 500m) as the male and female roost apart

For advice on constructing and installing nest boxes go to the following web pages:-

- http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/Barnowlinteriornestbox_tcm9-226158.jpg
- <http://shopping.rspb.org.uk/barn-owl-nestbox-advice>

Remember, all wild birds are protected by legislation making it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird, its eggs or nests whilst in use or being built.