

## ***Conservation successes continue for Rockland Wildfowlers***

It's been another busy year for the wildfowling club with a number of conservation working parties to improve the habitats of the woods and marshes owned by the club at Rockland St Mary.

Gales during the winter had caused a number of trees to fall, and this included the large oak tree that was home to one of the barn owl nest boxes. Over a number of weekends volunteers rallied together to fit a new post, frame and owl box. They also cleared all of the fallen trees, making log piles to encourage insect life with the larger timber trunks.



All of the woodland nest boxes were inspected and cleaned out in preparation for another productive year, and there were signs that nearly every one of the boxes had been used during the previous season. Whilst our woodland provides food and shelter for birds the use of the nest boxes indicates that there is a shortage of nesting sites.

### ***Barn Owl Update***

Unfortunately the barn owl nest box seen from the foot path on the way to the RSPB hide was only used for roosting despite hopeful early signs of owl activity in the spring. However when the nesting box situated on the top marsh was inspected in early June it was found to be absolutely full with four well developed chicks in residence. Since the club installed the nest boxes in 2010 seventeen chicks have been reared in them, and this is something the club is exceptionally proud of given that there are only around 3,000 to 5,000 breeding pairs of barn owls in the country.



### ***Hard work reaps rewards ....Kestrels move in***

Earlier in the year the club built a kestrel nesting box which was mounted on a telegraph pole on our top marshes. Kestrel numbers have declined in recent years possibly because of changes to agricultural practices, and they are included on the amber list of birds of conservation concern. Within a few weeks of fitting the nesting box, Kestrels were regularly being seen in the vicinity, and when the box was inspected in June it was found to have a clutch of six eggs inside. According to Sid

Batty (BTO Licenced ringer) the size of the clutch was quite unusual and was a good sign that there were plenty of mice and voles for the Kestrels to feed on. Four of the kestrel eggs hatched into very feisty youngsters, and each of the chicks were fitted with a leg ring. The ringing of birds is essential if we are to learn about how long they live and when and where they move, questions that are vital for bird conservation.



### ***The woods are buzzing***

One of our long standing members Mike Hubbard made some 'bee hotels' for mason bees which are small solitary bees who nest in holes in wood or masonry hence their name, some bees have taken moved in over the summer so more hotels will be made and hung in sunny glades in the wood.



### ***Future Horizons***

So what happens next? As a wildfowling club we are privileged to have access to some prime marshes and woodland that can potentially provide excellent habitat and our club ethos is to improve and enhance the environment where we can. We have completed a survey of the marshes that we rent or own in the Yare and Waveney valleys, and we have located some further sites with suitable habitat for Barn Owls and Kestrels. Our intention is to work in partnership with the landowners to provide further valuable nesting sites through a programme of nest box installations.

With our own woodland and marshes at Rockland we intend to increase the number of small bird nest boxes so that there is a good level of distribution across the whole of the site. We will also be opening up some glades to provide better conditions for moths, butterfly's and other insects to thrive in.

**Article produced by: David Lines (Conservation Officer) and Malcolm Huggins (Club Chairman)**