

# **Cheshire Barn Owl Report**

**2003**

## 1 Introduction

This report collates data from the Broxton (west), Mid Cheshire, South Cheshire and Wirral Barn Owl groups. There is no data from the East of the county where such groups do not exist. Records of Barn Owl breeding data are presented.

## 2 Summary

There were 61 confirmed breeding pairs in Cheshire in 2003 with a total of 167 confirmed young. At seven of these sites the young were not counted. Using the average chicks per pair at the sites where the young were counted of 3.1 would give an estimated total of 189 young. The maximum number of young produced was 6 on one site.

The number of boxes now installed in Cheshire is approximately 320, with 30 of these being used for breeding in 2003.

There are 4 established Barn owl groups in Cheshire with a total of 70 members and 20-25 active volunteers.

## DATA

Breeding data for 2003

No of confirmed breeding pairs	61
No of breeding pairs with confirmed numbers of young	54
Average Young per pair (of the 54)	3.1
Confirmed young owls	167
Maximum no of young at one site	6
Estimated total young	189
Boxes installed	264

Comparison with previous years

Year	Breeding pairs	Young	Fledglings	Mean flgs	Mortality
1998	7	17	17	2.4	0
1999	10	32	23	2.3	9
2000	19	46	44	2.2	2
2001	29	53	53	1.8	6
2002	48	110	?	2.6	?
2003	61	167	No data		

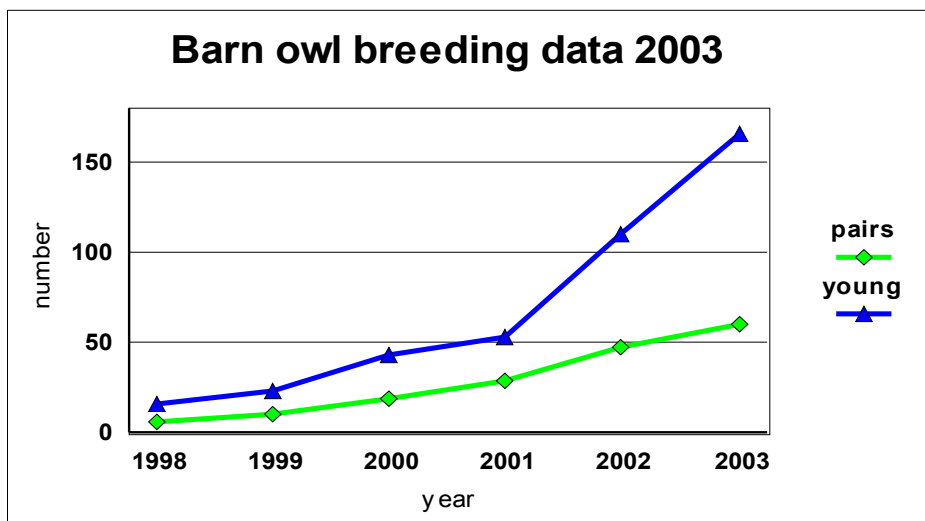
The location of breeding sites is shown below.

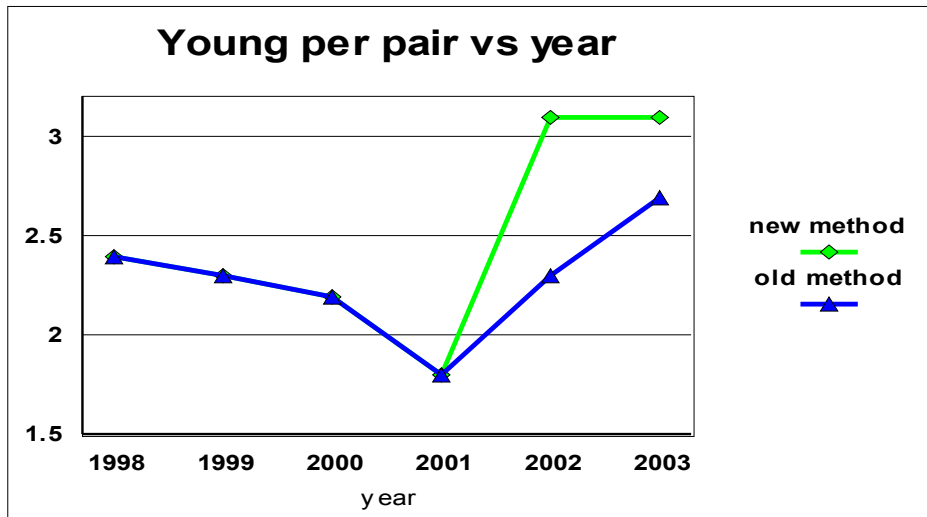
	Tree box	Barn box	Pole box	Building	Tree site	Total
West	5	1	15	0	9	31
Mid	2	0	0	8	0	10
Wirral	4	2	1	3	3	13
South	No data					7
Total	11	3	16	11	12	61
%	20	6	30	20	19	100

The number of boxes installed and the take up of boxes by Barn owls is shown below

	Boxes installed	Used by barn owl	%
West	124	21	17
Mid	82	2	2
Wirral	80	7	9
South	31	No data	
total	317	30	11

Graphs of young and number of pairs for the last six years can be found below together with the number of young per pair.

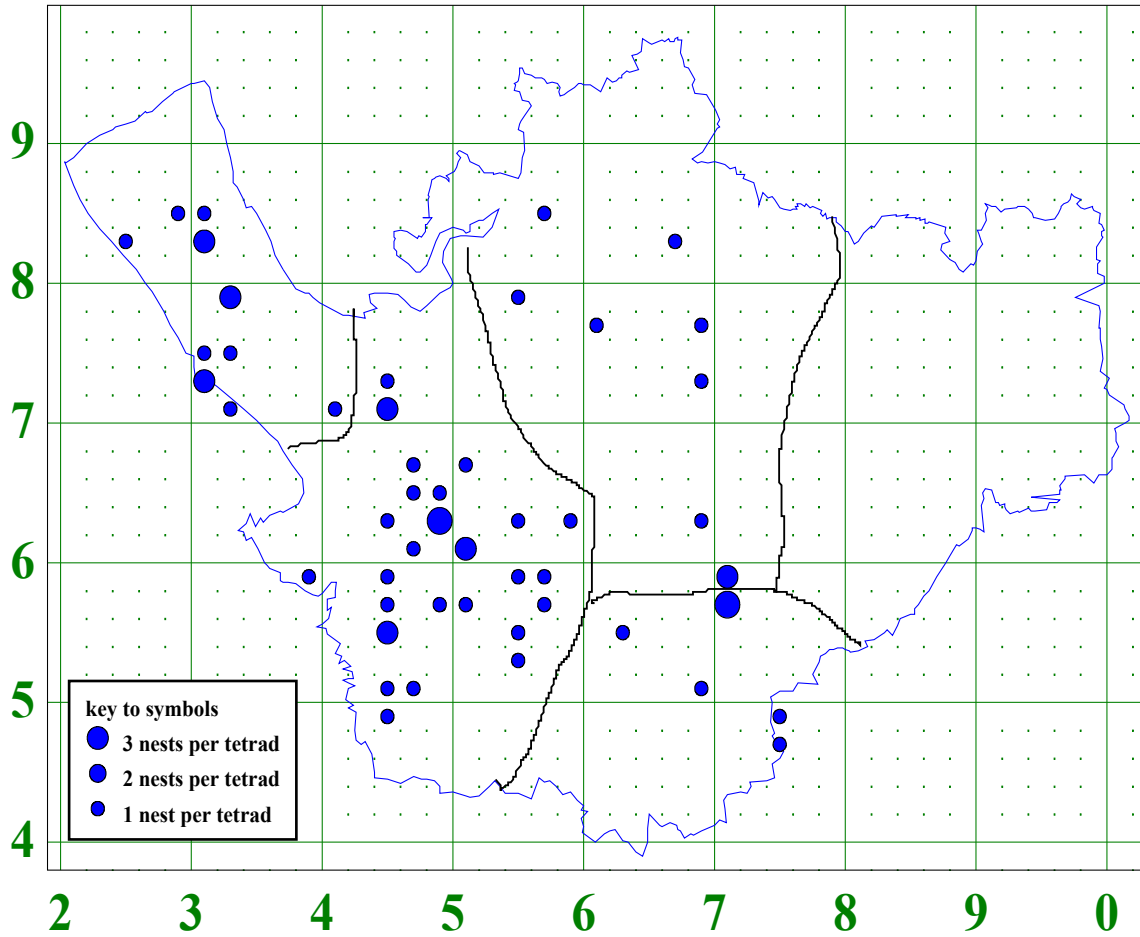




Note that the young per pair figure is far higher than in previous years. This reflects a new and more realistic method of calculation where the number of young is divided by the number of sites where the young were counted and not the total number of sites as previously. The figure of 3.1 is very close to the national average quoted by Shawyer and is above the value of 3 required to sustain the population. Either method shows a significant increase in productivity over the period 2001-3 probably reflecting higher prey populations. This may form part of the well established 3-4 year cycle quoted by Shawyer,

Distribution map

# BARN OWL distribution 2003



## **Discussion**

The number of confirmed breeding pairs has again increased from 48 in 2002 to 61 in 2003. These were distributed as follows: Wirral 13 pairs, Mid Cheshire 10 pairs, West 31 pairs, South 7 pairs.

The number of young produced was 167 confirmed and 189 estimated – the difference being due to the inaccessibility of a few –mainly natural nest sites where for example the nest was at the base of a large hole in a tree and the young could not be counted. Also at some sites data was only reported on breeding pairs and no attempt was made to count the young. . The average breeding success per pair was 3.1 chicks .The number of chicks per pair which actually left the nest is unknown but is likely to be similar to the above figure as ringing and counting of chicks was carried out late in the season when the chicks were well developed.

The number of breeding pairs has increased yet again. As discussed in the last report, it is now becoming increasingly clear that a substantial undetected population exists and has existed at least in the west of the county and nest box provision has probably increased the total population. This is evidenced by the recovery of adults at the nest site where ringed adults still only form a small proportion of the recovered adults. In 2003 9 adults were recovered at the nest site in West Cheshire and only two of those were ringed. Natural tree sites are still being discovered quite frequently..

There is evidence of competition for nest sites in certain localities particularly with Kestrels .The factors, which influence this, are not understood at this time but may involve variations in the timing of the courtship and breeding cycle of the two species.