



## The Hungry Owl Project Newsletter

[www.hungryowl.org](http://www.hungryowl.org)

### Inside this issue:

First Contact	1
HOP Education Events	2
Are You an Owl Landlord?	3
Dose of Discovery?	3

### First Contact

by Alex Godbe

What makes getting to know an individual from another species so fascinating is that it opens up a wonderful new world. A world that relies on acuity of different senses and different mediums: whether it is sliding through sparkling waters, making flying leaps through the rainforest canopy, flying high above in the endless blue of the sky or, as in the case of an owl, being most awake and alert in the darkness of the night hours.

I have always been a "Trekky" and find a similarity between the first contact with an alien and that of meeting an individual from another branch of the evolutionary tree. How do you say hello in Barn Owl?

It is hard to release a wild thing back to the wild when it has an identity crisis. It is a harsh world out there and only the supremely fit and strong survive. Wookie had three problems. He had been fed an inadequate diet that made him susceptible to metabolic bone disease. Metabolic bone disease occurs when a lack of calcium causes the bones to develop abnormally leaving them weakened and fragile. The second problem was that he appeared to be imprinted. Imprinting happens when the only contact a baby animal has, when its eyes first open, is with humans. If it grows up only seeing humans and responds to them and not its own species then it is considered imprinted and unlikely to breed with its own kind. It could even be attacked by others of its own species. Imprinting is not

the same as being habituated or tame as those can be reversed. Rehab centers, like WildCare, are able to raise orphaned owls with others of their kind, so the animals aren't imprinted.

The third problem was whether, without parental guidance, he could hunt well enough to survive in the wild. This is the nature versus nurture question and

a controversial subject. What essential skills do they learn from their parents? What had Wookie lost by being with people for four years? Though I believe hunting is instinctive with birds of prey, Barn Owls stay with their parents for 5 weeks after they fledge, honing their skills while still being fed by the parents. During this time, do they learn what to eat? Some Barn Owl families eat a lot of songbirds, normally not a large part of the diet. In other areas, where Pallid Bats co-exist, Barn Owls prey upon them. Pallid bats hunt low and are easy targets for the owls. Is this part of their opportunistic nature, or did the juveniles learn this?

(Continued on page 4)

So it was when I first met Wookie after a call from Melanie Piazza, WildCare's Animal Care Director. "We have a Barn Owl that needs evaluating for release."

Wookie had been found around 2 weeks of age having fallen from the nest. He was taken in by his rescuers with all the best intentions of eventually releasing him, but Wookie lived with the family for nearly 4 years, spending most of his time in the bathroom. He had never learned how to hunt low over open fields on a moonlit night or scream into the night sky. He grew up never knowing his own kind. Am I an Owl or am I human? He was confused.





## HOP Education Events

Our first ever educational fund raiser, An Evening With Owls, was on November 9, 2005. Our wildest hopes were exceeded when over 150 owl lovers attended our event. We raised a lot of money to fund our work, we learned a lot about how-to and how-not-to put on a big event, and we provided an evening of great entertainment and knowledge to our guests. Thanks to everyone who came to An Evening With Owls! We especially thank our speakers, Allen Fish of Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, Phil Johnson of the Marin Municipal Water District, Joe Mueller of College of Marin, and Burt Tate of Bio-Pest. Please visit the Hungry Owl web site News & Events section to see more thank you's and pictures from this great night.

We met Lisa Owens-Viani, co-founder of Keep Barn Owls in Berkeley ([www.kboib.org](http://www.kboib.org)), at the Evening with Owls and she produced our next event: An Afternoon with Owls, in Berkeley on January 28, 2006. Held at a private home, 50+ guests attended to learn more about barn owls, how to help Berkeley's barn owls continue to flourish and provide residents with their OPM (Owl Pest Management) services. Many thanks to Lisa and her volunteers for producing this great event, which also raised funds for HOP's work. In addition to our fun educational fundraisers, HOP participated in a very somber and important meeting with the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) in Sacramento. The state DPR is considering placing restrictions on second-generation anti-coagulant rodenticides due to their devastating impacts on wildlife, domestic pets, and children. At the same time the Environmental Protection Agency is also reviewing these products and considering placing restrictions on them for the same reasons. Members of HOP and WildCare attended the meeting to speak on behalf of the wildlife that we have personally seen suffer from secondary poisoning after consuming poisoned rodents. We have also been contacted in recent months by a number of people who live in HOA's where rodenticide bait stations are placed outside of the buildings. Most of these HOA's are adjacent to protected open space. We hope that concerned residents will be able to convince their community to cease the use of outdoor bait stations, and that the State of California will prohibit the use of anti-coagulant rodenticides outdoors. Fingers and wings crossed. If you need help with non-toxic rodent control, let us know and we'll try to help!

*For a presentation, please contact Hungry Owl Project at 415-454-4587.*



*Dear Trinka, Alex and Camille,  
I just walked into my house a few minutes ago and just had to write to you to thank you for a wonderful presentation. It generated so much enthusiasm and interest and was a great addition to our continuing education program! People were so full of questions! I hope they didn't keep you too long, Trinka. I am amazed that three of you have been able to accomplish so much in only 4 years!  
I am going to ask my neighbor about hanging a box on his oak tree. It's in his yard but borders ours. I think he'll go for it, so you may be hearing from me again.  
Thanks, again. I got countless positive remarks from people at the end of your program., Janet Rizzi*

## Are You an Owl Landlord Yet?

Spring is fast approaching and normally we'd tell you when to start checking your box for signs of occupancy. But this year there's a good chance that your box already has tenants! In 2005 the barn owls nested late into the season—we saw babies as late as October—and in 2006 they have started very early in the season, starting in January. All of which proves that owls don't read calendars!

So walk, don't run, out to your owl box and see if there's anyone in there. Not by climbing up and introducing yourself though! Simply stand beneath the box and look up. You should see four drainage holes in the bottom of the box. If the holes are all clogged up (and you faithfully cleaned your owl box last November if it was used) then chances are there are owls inside raising a family. Other signs include scratch marks around the box entry hole, white wash (owl poop) and/or owl pellets near the box, and strange screeching, squawking, clicking and clacking sounds in the night. If you think you've got owls, remember to call us at 415-454-4587 or email alexgodbe@aol.com so we can come round and gather information for our research. If you don't have clogged holes, don't despair, there's still plenty of time for an owl family to find your box.

*We also sell blue bird boxes bat boxes and more!*

### GOT GOPHERS?

Did you know that an adult Barn Owl can consume a thousand gophers in one year? Thomas Wittman of Gophers Limited will lead this seminar on managing gophers without chemicals. Hungry Owl will present live owls.

**Thursday, May 4th, 6:30 to 9:30 pm**  
**Marin Art and Garden Center**  
Wine and Cheese

\$25 if you reserve by April 28th/\$30 at the door  
**To reserve a seat call 415-454-4587**

**Visit [www.hungryowl.org](http://www.hungryowl.org) for details**

Co-sponsored by the  
Marin Art and Garden Center's Garden Education  
Council



Spotted Owl

## Had Your Daily Dose of Discovery?

It has been my privilege to work with volunteers and members of the Hungry Owl Project to install a Barn Owl box with a camera on the San Domenico School campus where I work. The installation was finished in the fall of 2004 and we hosted a very late nest in the spring of 2005. The clutch was so late that the eggs hatched in June after school had closed for the summer. Students did enjoy watching the period of egg-laying and incubation, but completely missed the excitement of the hatch! Not this year...

In contrast with last year, our current clutch is very early with the first egg laid during the New Year's Eve storm. Six more eggs followed. Now our community is enjoying and welcoming the chicks into the world. At this writing, three of the eggs have hatched. I'm able to watch the action on a large monitor located centrally on campus, or from the internet.

Alex Godbe and Maggie Ruffo of HOP organized volunteers and donors to create live streaming to the HOP web site from the San Domenico barn owl box. Students, families, and staff are able to observe the owls from home and school using [www.hungryowl.org](http://www.hungryowl.org). I'm receiving enthusiastic feedback from our community about the website and the experience of "sharing the nest". Teachers tell me that students have a new enthusiasm for science, especially wildlife biology. Dinner table conversations at home include owl updates and discussions about our impact on their lives. A fourth grader expressed his feelings about the owl cam in these words, "It's like a magic secret. I can see a picture of something happening right now that is hidden from me. It feels very special!"

The immediacy of this new experience also creates a sense of discovery... Let's check the owls again. Has another egg hatched? What kind

of critter is the mother owl eating now? Have the feathers dried on the youngest chick? Parents report that their human families are getting wrapped-up in the barn owl family, and their daily dose of shared discovery is addictive. Why don't you join us!

What's happening now? Excuse me, I gotta go see!  
Karlyn Strand, San Domenico School Library

*Tax deductible donations are much appreciated to keep improving the web cam and to help cover expensive running costs.*

*Please send checks, payable to "WildCare/HOP" and marked "WEB CAM" to HOP, 74 Creek Road, Fairfax CA 94930.*



Orphaned Baby Barn Owls



## The Hungry Owl Project A Project of WildCare

74 Creek Road  
Fairfax, CA 94930

Hotline: 415-518-9670  
Phone: 415-454-4587

5-12-05 24H  
14:00:57

Check our website for other events and news,  
and our LIVE Web Cam! [www.hungryowl.org](http://www.hungryowl.org)  
Donations to this project are appreciated!

### First Contact (continued)

In one case, in another state, Great Horned Owls, much to golfers' irritation, were preying on golf balls. Investigation revealed that these owls had been orphaned and raised on white mice at a local rehab center. Fortunately, the rehab center was able to re-train the owls and successfully re-released them. At WildCare we feed our patients the same food that they'll find in the wild and don't release an animal until it's demonstrated it has the skills needed to hunt well.

Do juvenile Barn Owls learn to take cover as the ominous shadow of the Great Horned Owl floats by? Great Horned Owls will hunt Barn Owls. Would Wookie instinctively know his enemy, or would he be a Great Horned Owl's easy dinner? So much we have yet to learn. I have a theory that Barn Owls born in palm trees might choose to make nests in palm trees themselves, in spite of their not being the best choice. Do they learn a preference for nest sites also? It is thought that 60%-80% of Barn Owls, like most other raptors, die in their first year under the best natural circumstances, so how would our orphaned, confused and compromised Barn Owl fare?

When an animal is being evaluated for release, there is much serious thought, discussion and research. In Wookie's case, after several medical evaluations, he was unfortunately deemed unreleasable. So, he has been welcomed into

NEWS FLASH NEWS FLASH NEWS FLASH NEWS FLASH  
WE RECENTLY GOT INFORMATION ON A BAND RETURN FROM  
AN OWL FROM ONE OF OUR BOXES IN MCINISS PARK,  
BANDED LAST YEAR, THAT WAS HIT BY A CAR IN NOVATO.

WildCare's Hungry Owl Project as an ambassador for his species. After training him to accept falconry equipment and traveling in a carrier, he now visits schools for HOP and WildCare presentations, and attends events. Wookie is now a much-loved, wonderful, charismatic ambassador. I have learned so much from working with him.

So how do you speak Barn Owl? I am still learning, but I know if I deliberately look into his eyes and blink he will blink back. Perhaps he is saying, "We're cool." If Wookie could speak to me would he say, "Show me the mouse," or would he tell me about his longing to know the thrill of the hunt? Would he describe sights and sounds I can never perceive? Would he tell me what it means when he screams into the night? I just don't know. He is not of my world and yet in some small precious ways we meet.

In Spring, you may find a baby raptor fallen from the nest. PLEASE NOTE ALL DETAILS about it and its location and call WildCare or the Humane society, giving them as much information as possible.

Only handle the bird if it is in danger or obviously injured. Use leather gloves or a thick towel and hold the wings into its body firmly but gently, being very aware of the talons. Place in a cardboard box with a towel, make sure the bird can not escape and take to nearest Wildlife Center such as WildCare in Marin.