

Barn Owl Watching Code of Conduct

We are extremely lucky to have a breeding pair of Barn Owls here at Lorton. You might have heard us talking about the Barn Owls at an event or have been watching them on our webcam:

<https://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlifewebcam>

The wildlife webcam gives us a privileged view of these special birds and allows us to watch their behaviour in the nest without disturbance.

We appreciate that people like to watch the owls in person, however, you cannot see into the nest box and viewing the owls in person can cause disturbance and disrupt feeding of the chicks.

To enable the chicks to develop and fledge successfully, it is important to limit any potential disturbance to the birds and their normal feeding, roosting and nesting behaviour.

In addition, Barn owls are legally protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981). Therefore, it is illegal to disturb their roosts - disturbance during the nesting period carries higher penalties.

Please follow the guidelines below to ensure that the Barn Owls at Lorton remain unaffected by any viewing activity on the nature reserve:

- ❖ Please approach the site slowly and quietly whether on foot or by car.
- ❖ Please turn off any car lights and music/radio whilst in the car park.
- ❖ Whilst watching the birds it is best to sit or stand quietly without any lights/torches on.
- ❖ Do not stand near the Conservation Centre as this may prevent the parents returning to the nest.
- ❖ Do not stand/sit in the outdoor classroom (timber building opposite the Centre) to watch the owls. The owls regularly use this space to roost and shelter from adverse weather, hence the poo and owl pellets visible on the rafters and floor.
- ❖ Instead you can watch from a car (in the car park) or from behind the fence or wall of the picnic area.
- ❖ Please do not use the flash on your camera/phone if taking pictures or video.
- ❖ If possible, leave dogs at home as their presence/barking puts the owls on alert. All dogs should be on a lead in the car park/lane area and in the many of the meadows. (Please see our dog traffic light notices on the Lorton webpage and at the Conservation Centre).
- ❖ If you see the owls hunting in the meadows, please do not approach them as this may disturb their feeding. Owls hunt many times a night, especially when feeding the chicks (each chick & adult needs 3-4 prey items a night).
- ❖ Please be mindful of other reserve users when watching the owls or accessing the site.

Please note: Barn Owls are crepuscular birds, this means they are most active at dawn and dusk. They hunt by a combination of sight and sound, so generally avoid hunting in extreme conditions, especially when it is wet and windy.

We hope you enjoy watching the Barn Owls, if you notice any behaviour likely to cause disturbance, please contact Dorset Wildlife Trust on 01305 264620 / enquiries@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk



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