

# Three Owls Newsletter

**Summer 2011**

Report by Nigel Fowler



## Recollections, reflections and refocusing

It has been a much longer period than I expected, for this newsletter to come to print, but no spare minute has been lost in helping the Sanctuary through the most traumatic of times, and ensuring the continued welfare of both those birds re-homed to other sanctuaries, and those still in our care on the nature reserve.

A huge amount of time was spent liaising with other Sanctuaries, trips there with equipment and birds, and help in planning aviary layouts and ongoing bird welfare issues, to ensure that the excellent standard of care the residents had received at Three Owls was not compromised in any way .... though of course we had selected the very best homes that we could to minimise any issues in the future.

The owls were the last birds to leave, and you will read later on as to how they (and I) fared with this mammoth task, and read a report from their new Sanctuary as to how they are settling in, and the impact they have had.

I do find myself often thinking back to how things were, not just recently, but ten, twenty, thirty years ago, and often 'walk around the sanctuary' as it was then, looking into the aviaries and seeing things as they were then - memories of saving lives that no-one can take away. It is also good to remember the Reserve in its infancy, which will help in planning out our new *Three Owls Wood* nature reserve ... more of this later on.....

There have been times since that terribly sad day in February last year when I have found it very hard to keep going, especially when people who aren't apprised of the facts cause a backlash. However I am very grateful to everyone who has stood by Three Owls; and we're talking in the thousands, from subscribers and supporters, family and friends, co-workers and visitors alike.....thank you all.

Read on, and find out what we've been doing up until now, and some of our progress with new things and plans in motion for the future.

# Over the years

## How it all started

Mrs. Watkinson pictured with a baby sparrow



**Back in Oldham -**  
19 Queens Road, the  
founding place of the  
Three Owls Bird Sanctuary



**There's never a ready made sanctuary . . .**  
Three Owls took 50 years to build up -  
above was the first aviary built in Alexander Park.



**The move to Rochdale** came at the end of 1969, following trouble with break-ins into the aviaries, and quite simply a shortage of space.

Just 6 months to move everything, (lock stock and barrel) and we are fully open again.

Here we are with the opening ceremony and the famous Percy Edwards (centre right) early in 1970.



Digging the ponds, and planting the nature reserve



The Sanctuary grows and grows, (left) is a collared dove chick at just 6 hours old

(above) shows them at just 1 week old!



Taking more and more birds - Mrs. Watkinson and Stewart Jennings examine a young crow with bone deficiencies.



Well-deserved recognition - Mrs Watkinson receives her MBE in June 1991 for her work with the birds.





A devastating loss for everyone. After battling years of ill health, Mrs. Watkinson passed away in March 1995, and was buried in the nature reserve amongst all the birds she cared for over the years. Her semi-wild robin 'Lud' also passed away within a week and was buried with her.

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Living with constraints; following Mrs Watkinson's passing, money was extremely tight and we had to close one of the hospitals. We also had to drastically cut the workforce in order to save money and rebuild the Sanctuary.



Red tape again! In order to replace our dilapidated toilet block (serving both staff and visitors), our budget had to be raised from an already huge £5,000 to a massive £16,000 .....in order to meet the Councils strict criteria! We also had to install a disabled ramp to the lower end of the Sanctuary - even though we were unsuccessful in getting a grant to cover the work.

Rebuilds and upgrades ..... why we had to start at the bottom. Simply put; without an infrastructure to support the upgrades, the whole project would fail - drains, water feeds, access for all, support and facilities for the birds all had to be planned months in advance. This is why the top section of the Sanctuary always looked tired during the last decade - it was to be the pinnacle of the rejuvenation of the Sanctuary.

However, the Council had other ideas, and so forced the Trustees' hand into closing the aviary and hospital facilities; it really was D-Day for the hospitals and aviaries, and all the staff, volunteers, and of course the birds needing our care;



Making every item count - huge loads of equipment and aviaries were shipped out to help save lives elsewhere. Every penny raised, saved lives then.... and continues to do so today.

Expanding and upgrading for better communication; the Helpline has been upgraded to handle both email and text messages. Not only does this give a faster response time, but also allows on-the-spot identification of types of birds when photos are submitted, giving each individual case the best possible chance of survival. Most calls come from outside of the Rochdale borough, with many from Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire, Midlands, London and the Continent.

Solid foundations mean you can rebuild; the charity has a solid structure and devastating as this has been, it will not only survive, but also go on to do even more for wild birds in the future. Redundancy leads to reform, not retirement, and though Three Owls no longer employs anyone, many of the former employees and volunteers continue to support it's aims and objectives, and have been in regular touch as to how best to now help out.

We already have groups of Explorer Scouts scheduled to come in and help doing work on the nature reserves, and we are building on this and bringing in experienced help with future planning.

Clearing up and selling on; The site where the aviaries stood has been cleared and turfed over - a low-cost option which gives a new owner a blank canvas to work from, and ensures there are no future issues over previous use of the land.

Investing in the future. The money from the sale has immediately been put to good use. A large site has been acquired and we are taking expert advice and guidance as to how best to plant out the foundations of Three Owls Wood. In the future we will be able to make grants to other established organisations with similar aims to Three Owls, further helping wild birds in distress.

**Accipere quam facere praestat injuriam** - It is better to suffer an injustice than to do an injustice

## The 2011 Manchester to Blackpool Bike Ride

By John Thorpe

Nigel has asked me to write my usual piece on the Manchester to Blackpool bike Ride, and although, as you can possibly imagine, it is incredibly hard to be positive in the light of what has happened at Three Owls, I will do my best. The ride is on Sunday July 10th this year and is the same duration as last years' event, as far as I know, around 60 miles to and from my Bury home. This will be the 22nd consecutive year I've done, and I really must get into training well before the event this year, as I've become a bit lazy since my motorcycle came back into regular usage! It's easy to think that the muscles will automatically respond when called upon, but if there's one thing I've learned, it's that a lack of physical fitness will find you out somewhere along the way. I feel an even bigger responsibility this year, since my sons girlfriend has decided to follow my example and take part in the London to Oxford ride for the first time, as a result of the enthusiastic experiences I've had!

As we all know, the wonderful hospital and rehabilitation work is no more, and the world is so much poorer because of this. All of us who knew and loved the sanctuary will never forget the unique role it played not only in wild bird welfare but perhaps in our individual lives. I was privileged to be actively involved, albeit on a part-time basis, and the void it has left in my life will possibly never be completely filled. I can only imagine how bereaved Nigel, Len and the staff felt, and since we are now at a stage where most of the work of dismantling the sanctuary and preparing the grounds for sale has been completed, a strange silence has settled on it. No doubt this year there will be birdsong

and new life on the Reserve and surrounding area, and this is one of the few rays of hope in an otherwise dark time for everyone. The Reserve is, more than ever, an oasis in an increasingly urbanised landscape, and as such, has to be both preserved and improved over time.

We need your support and goodwill more than ever now, and I know that you won't let us down, even in the face of difficult economic times for everyone. Every penny you can spare will help keep the Reserve in existence, and if I've learned one thing from this whole sorry business, it is that we can never take anything completely for granted - nothing is immune to damage and destruction especially, it appears, things which represent decency and dedication. The charity still lives and breathes, and the same spirit that drove Mrs Watkinson to give her life to care for birds, is still alive and well. The past months have been traumatic for all concerned, and I would like to express my admiration for the way in which Nigel, his family, and Len have conducted themselves through it all. They deserve better and perhaps one-day people will realise just what an injustice has been done at Three Owls.

I will be proud to ride on the Sanctuary's behalf in July, and with your help, the day will once again prove a symbol of the Three Owls Spirit that will never die as long as we care.



Here is a Sponsor Form, which I'd be grateful if you could complete and return to the Sanctuary at the usual address (if the event precedes this newsletter - please do still sponsor John and raise those much-needed funds for Three Owls!);

### **Three Owls Bird Sanctuary and Reserve**

(For Wild Birds in Distress)

Wolstenholme Fold, Norden, Rochdale OL11 5UD

Advice Helpline: 07973 819389

Web: [www.threeowls.co.uk](http://www.threeowls.co.uk) E: [info@threeowls.co.uk](mailto:info@threeowls.co.uk)



### **SPONSORED MANCHESTER - BLACKPOOL CYCLE RIDE**

On Sunday 10th July 2011, John Thorpe will once again be undertaking the gruelling Manchester to Blackpool Cycle Ride, to raise funds for the Three Owls Bird Sanctuary & Reserve. This year, more than ever, we need your support to enable us to continue our renowned Helpline advice service, and continue our work in the established Nature Reserve at Rochdale, which provics sanctuary to hundreds of wild birds and animals. We will also be creating a new woodland from scratch in Lancashire, naming it "Three Owls Wood", which will be set into Trust therefore preserving it for future generations.

We would be grateful if you could sponsor John and return your completed form(s) with monies to the above address by Monday 8th August 2011.

| <b>Name and Address</b> | <b>Amount Sponsored</b> | <b>Paid</b> |
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Trustees:

Dr. David J. Unwin, FRCGP. MBCLB

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