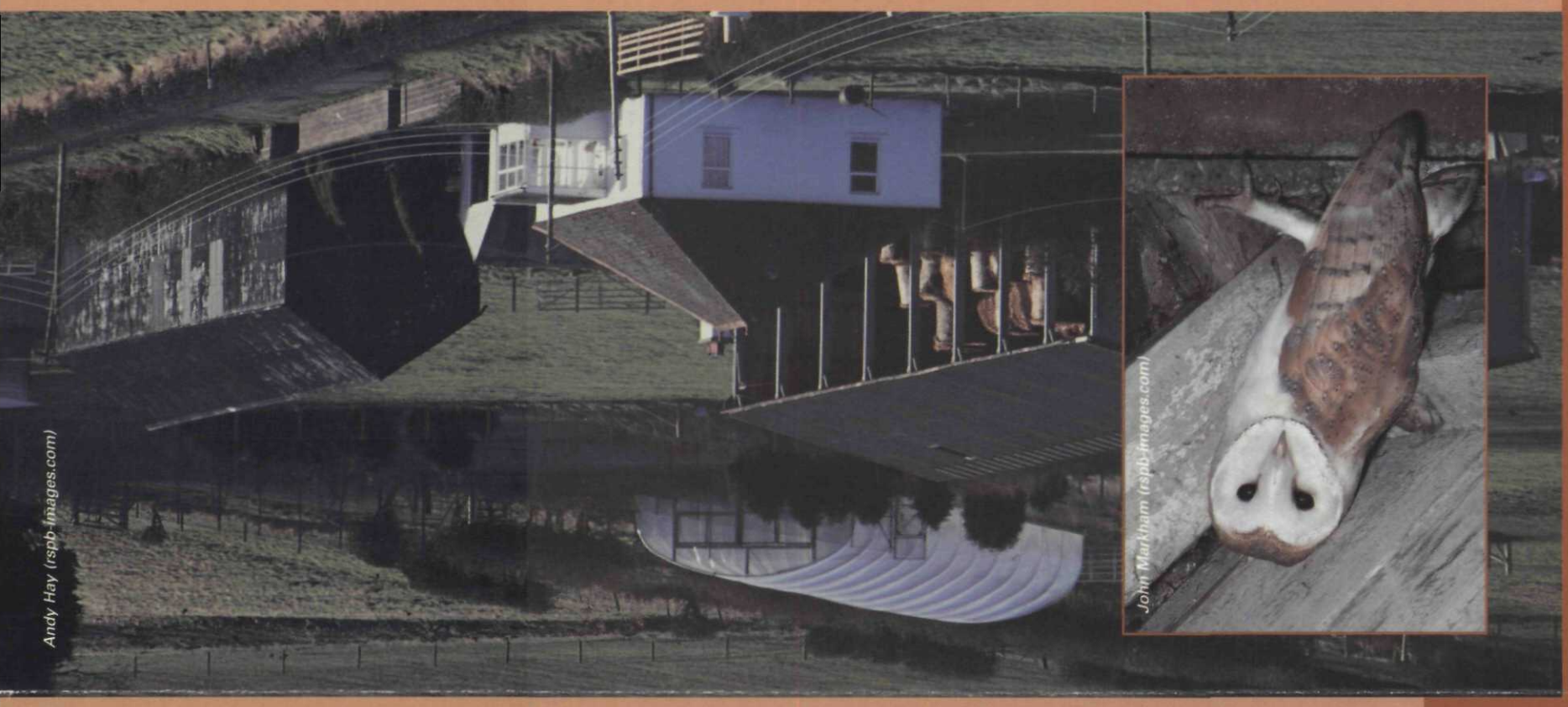
FARMING FOR WILDLIFE

Farm buildings

for birds
for people
for ever

RSPB


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Farm buildings, old or new, provide opportunities for birds to roost and nest, without harm to the building or its contents

Barn owls, swallows, sparrows and numerous other birds often nest in farm buildings. Features such as eaves, beams, ledges, crevices in walls and access to roof spaces can provide suitable nesting places. Farm buildings are also important to protected species such as some bats. Although older traditional farm buildings, made from natural materials, have the greatest wildlife value, modern buildings can incorporate space for wildlife too.

BENEFITS FOR WILDLIFE

Many **bird** species may make use of farm buildings for shelter or nesting, provided they have access to the right features. The table overleaf summarises the key features required for species of conservation concern that are most likely to use farm buildings to nest in or on.

The most important **mammals** to make use of buildings are bats. The 16 species of bat in the UK range from vulnerable to endangered and all are fully protected, as are their roost sites, even if the bats are not present at the time. It is illegal to damage or destroy a bat roost, or to obstruct the access to a roost. Less welcome mammals in farm buildings are rats. These will need to be controlled with care. New 'second generation' rodenticides, such as brodifacoum, bromadiolone and difenacoum, are much more toxic to birds of prey than 'first generation' poisons such as warfarin.

GUIDELINES OVERLEAF

Disused farm buildings require maintenance to prevent them falling into disrepair and being lost. This is best achieved by finding new uses for such buildings. It is vital, however, that wildlife is taken into consideration when traditional buildings are restored or converted to new uses. It is especially important to retain features that have attracted wildlife in the past wherever possible. Local authorities have a legal responsibility to establish the presence of barn owls, bats and other protected species before building commences and may require mitigation as part of the restoration work. If a barn proves to be a bat roost, then a Habitats Regulations licence is required before any work can be undertaken. Many old buildings are important in their own right or form an important aspect of the landscape and can attract grant aid to help carry out restoration work.

New buildings tend to provide fewer opportunities for wildlife. Even buildings where wildlife should be excluded, such as grain and feed stores, can still provide some habitat, however. Nestboxes for many bird species can be incorporated into the building or put on the outside, especially on a quiet side adjoining good cover such as a hedge or trees. Climbers such as ivy can also be planted next to buildings to improve their value to wildlife and help blend modern buildings into the landscape.

ORDER OF PRIORITY FOR MAINTAINING NESTING AND ROOSTING SITES IN BUILDINGS

1 **Leave existing nest sites alone.**

2 **Create new entrance holes.**

3 **Create new opportunities in existing buildings, such as internal ledges or boxes fitted under exposed overhanging roofs.**

4 **Use external nestboxes as a last resort.**

The area around farm buildings also makes an important contribution to the value of the farm for wildlife. Insects attracted to livestock and manure heaps are sought by bats, swallows and house martins. Spilt grains provide food for finches and nesting material is provided by straw, hay, wool and hair. Rough areas of grassland, brambles and other weeds can offer nectar for invertebrates. Water around the yard can be especially attractive during excessively cold or hot spells. Owls and other wildlife can drown in water troughs as they try to drink: floating a wooden plank or plastic tray in the trough will help prevent this.

KEY POINTS

- Make existing buildings as attractive to wildlife as possible.
- Ensure features that have attracted wildlife in the past are maintained when buildings are restored or converted to new uses.
- Establish plenty of wildlife-rich foraging habitats around the yard and in the surrounding farmland.
- Providing nest sites alone will not support local populations. Feeding habitat in the surrounding area is also vital.

You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:

RSPB

The RSPB Agricultural Adviser,
UK Headquarters, The Lodge,
Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.
Tel: 01767 680551

THE GAME CONSERVANCY TRUST

The Game Conservancy Trust,
Fordingbridge, Hampshire
SP6 1EF.
Tel: 01425 652381

FWAG

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group,
NAC, Stoneleigh, Kenilworth,
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