



Cyprus Barn Owl Project Report 2025



**BirdLife
Cyprus**

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Cover Photo: Zoltán Tölgyesi

Contents

Key Actions Completed	4
National Action Plan	4
GIS Database	4
Barn Owl nest boxes currently in Cyprus	5
Results of Monitoring Season 2025, carried out by BirdLife Cyprus	7
Results	7
Barn Owls in BirdLife Cyprus boxes	9
Summary	10
Additional Project Activities	10
Awareness-raising	10
International Barn Owl Conference 2025	11
Training of the NAP “working team” by Professor Alexandre Roulin	11
National Documentary finalised	12
Research	12
Tagging	13
Recaptures	14
Secondary poisoning	14
Next steps for the project in Cyprus	15
ANNEX I	16
Photos	16
Monitoring	16
Ringing	17
Tagging	18
Awareness-raising	19
International Barn Owl Conference 2025	23
Training of the NAP “working team” by Professor Alexandre Roulin	24



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Report prepared: February 2026

Suggested citation: BirdLife Cyprus (2025), Cyprus Barn Owl Project Report 2024

Key Actions Completed

This report focuses on actions carried out by BirdLife Cyprus during 2025, but it must be noted from the outset that these actions were carried out in collaboration with relevant government departments and services, as part of the Cyprus National Action Plan (see below).

National Action Plan

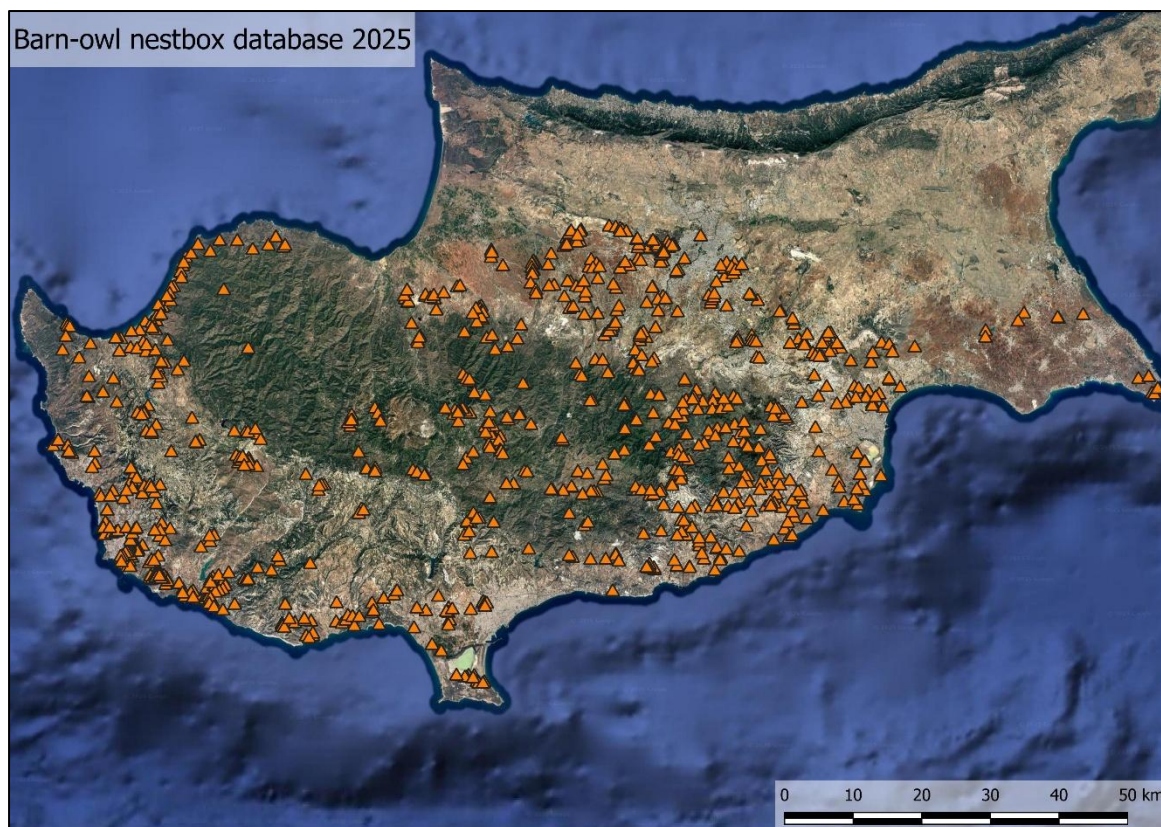
This was another successful year for the project. The ‘working group’ set up by Ex-minister Prof. Costas Kadis back in 2018, kept collaborating with experts from Israel, Greece and Switzerland, on the promotion of the National Action Plan (NAP) for the Barn Owl as a biological control for rodent populations in Cyprus. The NAP is based on the idea that through a collaborative effort, the Barn Owl can be used as an effective biological control agent, to tackle the rodent problems in certain agricultural crops and therefore reduce impacts on produce and, especially, help minimize use of rodenticides, which have negative ecological, environmental and human health impacts.

The working group consists of local experts from the Agricultural Department, the Forestry Department (FD), the Game and Fauna Service (GFS), the Veterinary Services (VS) and BirdLife Cyprus (BC). Ex-minister Prof. Kadis had dedicated a state budget -from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development- of €35,000 for 2021 to move this project forward and based on the success of the working team, this support budget almost doubled to €65,000 for 2023 from Ex-minister Mr. Petros Xenophontos. The same budget was approved by Minister Dr. Maria Panayiotou for 2025.

GIS Database

The GIS database that was created in 2023, was updated by external assistant to the NAP team, Mr Zoltán Tölgyesi this year. It now includes 964 nest boxes¹ that parties of the “working group” have installed so far (Map 1, Table 1), as well as layers of land use, crop type, water bodies, road network, national forests and Natura 2000 areas. These layers are overlaid with data from the monitoring seasons of 2022, 2023 and 2024. This is an important work and enables the team to collect all the data in one common mapping system. This also allows the team to identify gaps in coverage of installed nest boxes and expand the nest box network strategically and in a more targeted manner.

¹ The total number of nesting boxes installed is 1,328, however not all of these are digitised.



Map 1: Map showing the geographical spread of the 964 nest boxes that are currently digitized.

Table 1: Shows the number of nestboxes installed by each partner that we were able to digitise so far. The table also includes nestboxes installed by private owners and the Cyprus Hunting federation, which even though are not part of the working team; they were advised on the designs and installations by members of the working team.

Nestbox Owner	Number of Nestboxes
Game and Fauna Service	375
Department of Agriculture	303
Department of Forests	155
BirdLife Cyprus	102
Private Owners	29
Cyprus Hunting Federation	19
TOTAL	964

Barn Owl nest boxes currently in Cyprus

By December of 2025, there are over 1,328 Barn Owl boxes across the country, installed by the members of the 'Barn Owl working group' only in primarily agricultural areas, i.e. not in areas dominated by natural habitats. Out of those 1,328 boxes, Birdlife Cyprus has installed a total of 102 Barn Owl boxes and 14 Common Kestrel boxes.

Based on the previous work done by the "Barn Owl working group", installations of new boxes are done based on the geographical spread of the boxes throughout Cyprus and a list of other criteria. These criteria include "close to communities with boxes", "inside or very close to IBA/Natura 2000

areas” and “inside or very close to the buffer zone”. This helps the team target the spread and fill in any gaps in areas where not as many boxes had already been installed.

This year we saw a decrease in the use of rodenticides across Cyprus, compared to 2024 (21,6%). This could be due to a stable or a lower rodent population or tightening of rules from the Department of Agriculture as to who is given access to these chemicals (anecdotal evidence from conversations with farmers). If we compare the rodenticide use to the start of the project numbers, there is a 39% decrease since the start of this project in 2014 (Figure 1) and a 54% decrease since 2020, which is the year that the project started receiving funding through the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. When we take a closer look, it is obvious that we should still focus on Paphos and Famagusta districts, to put more pressure on organised groups, arrange more awareness events and try to get them involved in the project and thus decrease rodenticide use. It is however visible that there has been a decrease in the use of rodenticides in these districts since last year, when the team intensified their efforts in these areas. Famagusta district remains the district with the lower number of boxes (Map 1) due to very low interest and high poaching levels. Individuals and organised groups in this district are reluctant to allow environmentalists inside their orchards, as they are often used for illegal trapping or shooting.

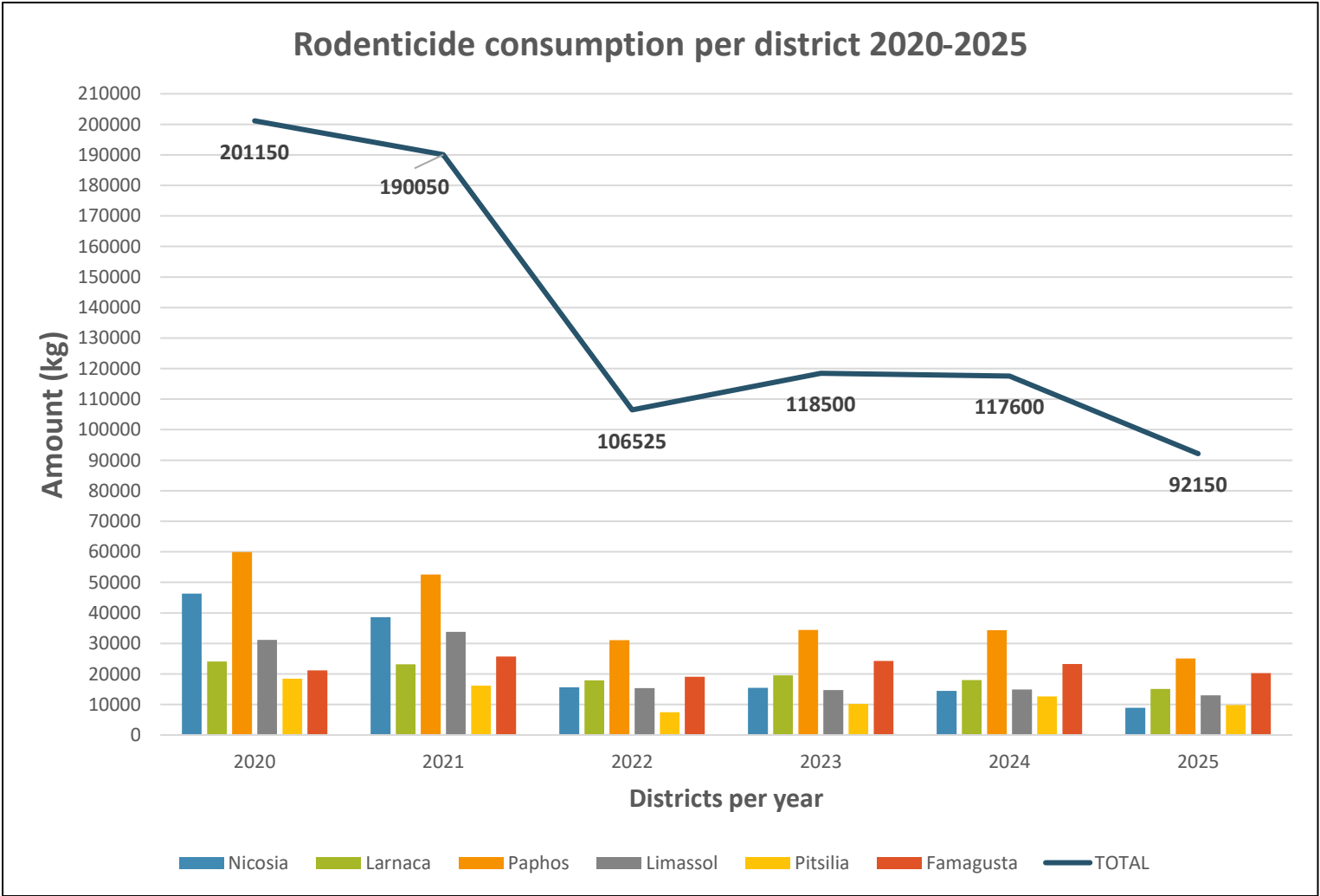
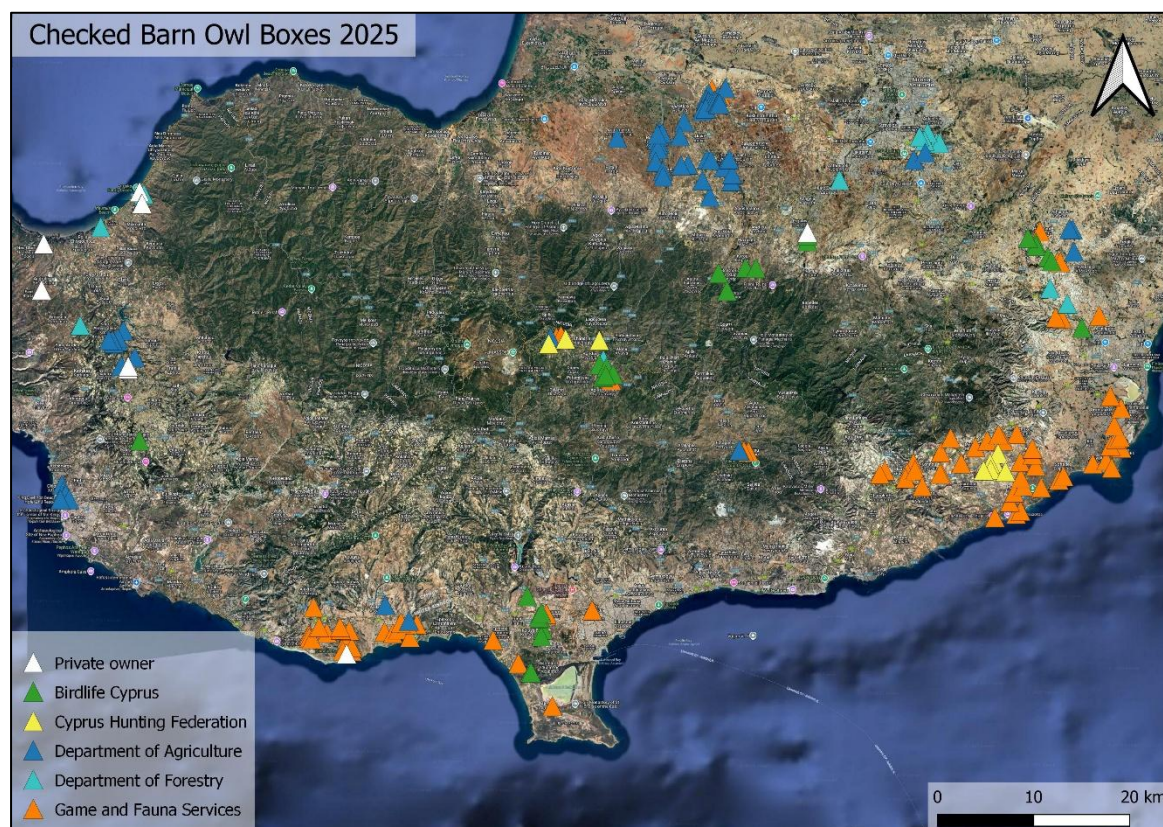


Figure 1: Bar and line graph. Line graph shows the initial fluctuation and recent decrease in the use of rodenticides. Bar graph shows the differences between districts in terms of rodenticide consumption in Cyprus.

Results of Monitoring Season 2025, carried out by BirdLife Cyprus

The monitoring season this year was done in the same manner as in 2022, 2023 and 2024. As a “working team”, we decided to monitor a sample of 206 boxes, from all four partners. This meant selecting around 50 boxes from each partner (Map 2). The checks were performed by BirdLife Cyprus staff; Antaia Christou, Markos Charalambides, and Zoltán Tölgyesi (external assistant to the NAP team), and thanks to funding by the Ministry of Agriculture.



Map 2: Map showing the geographical spread of the sample of 206 nest boxes that were checked in 2025. Those marked in Orange were installed by GFS, Green were installed by BC, Dark blue were installed by DoA, Light blue were installed by DF, Yellow were installed by the Cyprus Hunting Federation, White were installed by private owners. Credits: Zoltán Tölgyesi

Results

The checks started in mid-February and were completed by mid-July 2025. “Occupancy” / “Confirmed breeding” in this report is defined by signs such as eggshells, feathers, pellet substrate, the presence of an incubating adult bird, or the presence of chicks inside the box at the time of the monitoring. Overall, 2025 saw a decrease in the use of nest boxes by Barn Owls (39%; see Figure 3 below) in comparison to 2024. We speculate that the reason for this decrease is the extended drought period and low rainfall levels in winter 2024-2025 (anecdotal observations by “Barn Owl working team”). For comparison, signs in the boxes indicated that 46% of those boxes had been occupied by Barn Owls in 2023 and 52% in 2024.

Barn Owl Occupancy of nest boxes 2025

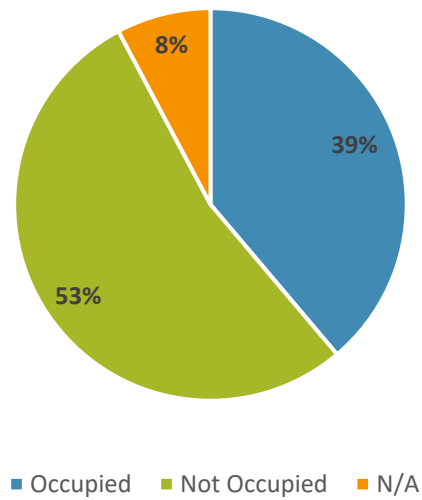


Figure 3: Pie chart showing the numbers and the percentages of boxes that were occupied or not by Barn Owls during the 2025 monitoring season. "Occupied" means confirmed breeding (i.e. eggshells, feathers, pellet substrate, the bird was incubating, or there were chicks sitting in the box) at the time of the monitoring. N/A means they were broken, lost / stolen, burned by fires or shot by hunters.

Within the sample of 206 nest boxes, we also recorded species other than Barn Owls occupying nest boxes. The chart in Figure 4 shows the variety of species that made use of nest boxes in the 2025 breeding season.

Barn Owl Nest Boxes Occupants 2025

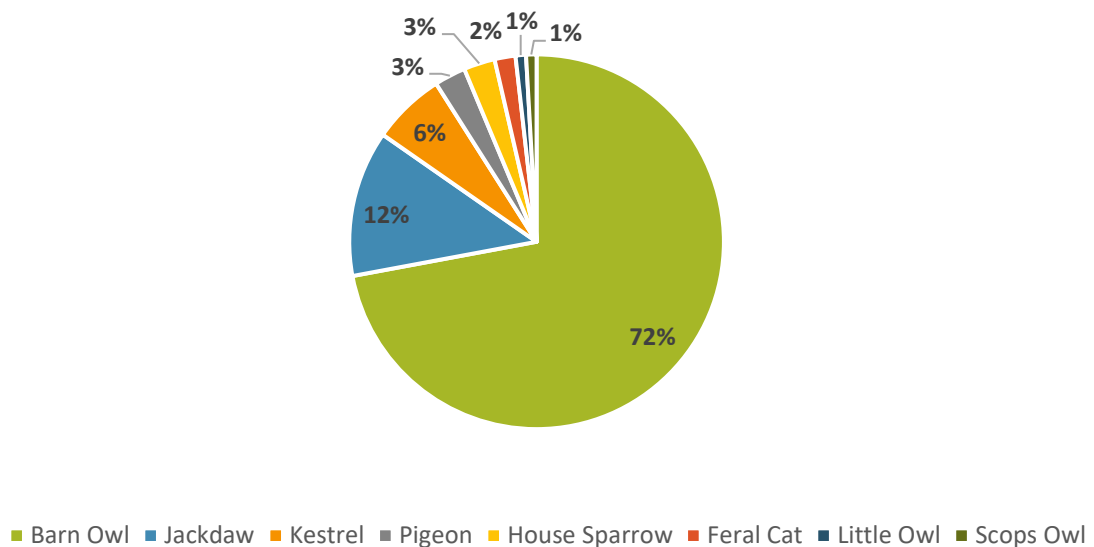


Figure 4: Pie chart showing the species of occupants inside the sample of boxes from all partners of the working team during the monitoring season of 2025. Note that "Occupants" means confirmed breeding (i.e. eggshells, feathers, pellet substrate, the bird was incubating, or there were chicks sitting in the box) at the time of the monitoring.

Barn Owls in BirdLife Cyprus boxes

As BirdLife Cyprus, we have data from monitoring efforts of nest boxes installed since 2016. As mentioned above, for all boxes, this year we observed a small decrease in the occupancy numbers in our nest boxes compared to the previous years (41% in 2024, 40% in 2023, and 36% in 2022) as shown in Figure 5. We always need to consider the monitoring effort that takes place each year and calculate the relative occupancy based on the number of boxes that were monitored, rather than calculate occupancy in relation to all boxes installed. The adjusted percentages of occupancy (when we adjust the percentages to how many boxes are installed) are 38,8% in 2025, 39,4% in 2024, 35,6% in 2023 and 29,9% in 2022. Occupancy in this report is defined by signs of breeding activity, i.e. the presence of a bird incubating, or of eggs, eggshells, feathers or thick pellet substrate in the box.

Occupancy could be related to a variety of factors, such as a decrease in rodent population that might result in the decrease of the Barn Owl population or productivity, or it could be related to climatic conditions that may have affected the owl's breeding cycle, or other factors. However, more research and more data is needed to understand the variations in occupancy levels between years. The following bar chart (Figure 5) provides an overview of the number of nest boxes that had been installed each year by BirdLife Cyprus and how many of them have shown signs of Barn Owl presence.

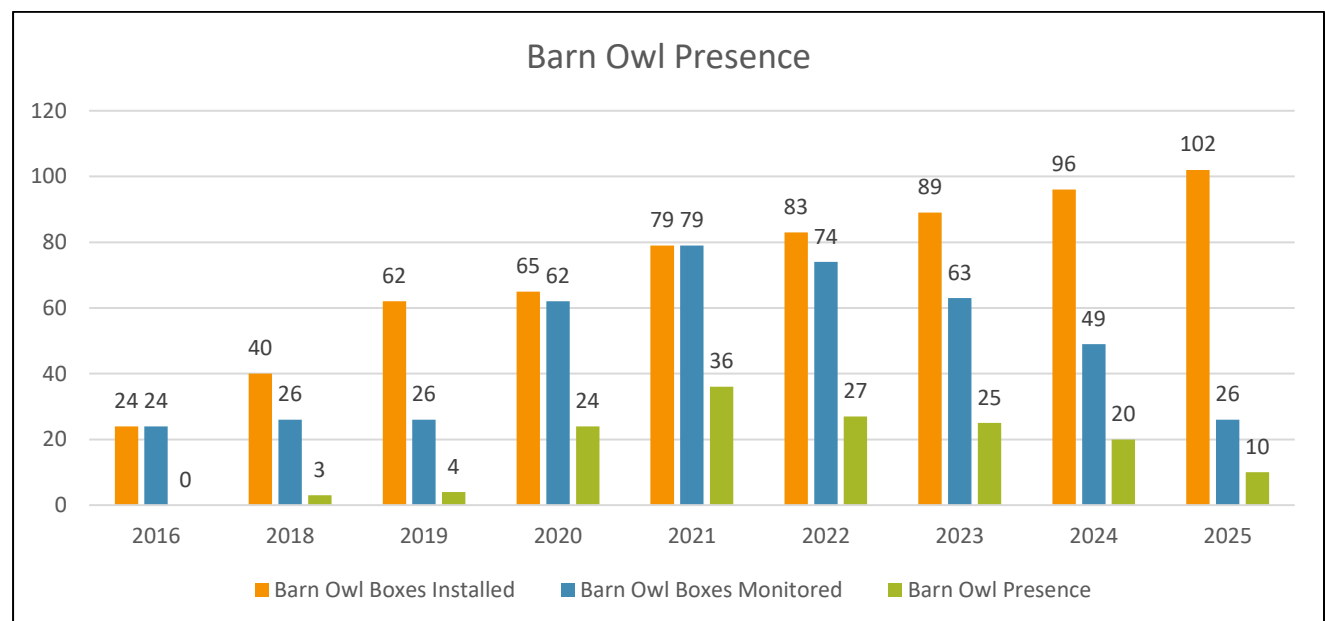


Figure 5: Bar chart illustrating Barn Owl presence and the number of nest boxes installed every year, as well as how many of them were monitored every year up to 2025 by BirdLife Cyprus only. Note that "Presence" is defined here by presence of fresh pellets, eggs, Barn Owl adult birds or chicks.

Finally yet crucially, we stress that as in the previous years, the checks and ringing efforts of owls in BirdLife Cyprus boxes, were carried out together with either the field owners / farmers or with representatives of communities (Athienou and Kyperounda hunting club, Agros forestry club, UN officials, etc). This is crucial in our efforts to keep the farmers and communities engaged. The people involved really appreciate this approach. It gives them a more tangible experience

(especially when they get to hold a bird during the ringing procedure) and therefore they are more likely to stay engaged in the efforts, as well as promote the project and spread the word to other locals and nearby communities.

Please find photos from the monitoring and ringing activities in Annex I.

Summary

In summary, the results from the monitoring season of 2025 are the following:

- Sample of 206 Barn Owl nest boxes checked, around 50 from each partner of the Barn Owl “working group” in Cyprus
- 8% of the boxes were damaged or lost
- 42,5% of the boxes were occupied by various species
- 39% of the boxes were occupied by Barn Owls
- 24 Barn Owl adults ringed
- 10 Barn Owl chicks ringed
- 3 Cyprus Scops Owl chicks ringed
- 7 Common Kestrel adults ringed
- 21,6% decrease in rodenticide use across the island in 2025 compared to 2024.
- 39% decrease in rodenticide use across the island since the beginning of the project

Additional Project Activities

Awareness-raising

With support from the A. G. Leventis Foundation, BirdLife Cyprus was able to raise awareness about the project together with communities and organised groups, by using different platforms to reach a wider audience. These included events with communities, posts on our social media pages and interviews for documentaries. The local communities still show appreciation and support for this project, and it remains popular with online and print media. This support is shown by the number of mentions in the local media about the Barn Owl project. Some of these can be found in the links below.

- <https://cyprus-mail.com/2025/03/22/barn-owls-take-on-cyprus-rodent-problem>
- https://www.ant1live.com/kypros/koinonia/642281_anthropopoyli-tis-kyproy-fylakas-toy-oikosystimatos#:~:text=%CE%A4%CE%BF%20%C2%AB%CE%91%CE%BD%CE%B8%CF%81%CF%89%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%8D%CE%BB%CE%B9%CF%82%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85%20%CE%A6%CF%8D%CE%BB%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%B1%CF%82%20%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85%20%CE%BF%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%85%CF%83%CF%84%CE%AE%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%82%20%7C%20Ant1%20Live
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s87b4UBX1V0>
- <https://www.alphanews.live/cyprus/4-1-pragmata-pou-den-ixeres-gia-to-anthropopouli/>

BirdLife Cyprus also co-organised a successful event together with the Athienou hunting club and the local nursery school on Earth Day. This was the third year we have organized this event, after requests from the locals. The participants were able to witness the successful monitoring of the Barn Owl boxes that were installed in their area. They also had the chance to see both chick and adult Barn Owls, touch them and observe them closely. A short talk was given about the National Action Plan (NAP) project, our efforts across Cyprus, as well as the Barn Owl's diet and thus their importance as a farmers ally. Additionally, a pellet dissection event was co-organized in Ypsonas with the municipality for the second year. Children showed high levels of engagement during the activity, with curiosity driving their exploration of Barn Owl pellets and the identification of prey remains.

International Barn Owl Conference 2025

BirdLife Cyprus participated in the International Barn Owl Conference (Athens–Larissa, 20–23 January 2025), organized by TYTO NGO. This was a unique global gathering that brought together experts from 12 countries: the United States, Israel, Germany, Cyprus, Jordan, Morocco, Switzerland, Greece, Ukraine, Palestine, Zimbabwe, and Georgia. The conference created an important platform for both long-established Barn Owl initiatives and newer national efforts to exchange knowledge, best practices, and research findings. For BirdLife Cyprus, this was a valuable opportunity to strengthen international networking, build new partnerships.

Beyond scientific exchange, the conference emphasized the Barn Owl's role as a practical nature-based solution for rodent control in agriculture. Discussions highlighted how the species functions not only as an ecologically important predator, but also as a powerful tool for farmers—reducing dependence on poisons and pesticides, lowering costs, and supporting healthier agroecosystems. At the same time, the meeting underscored the strong social dimension of such initiatives: the Barn Owl serves as a unifying symbol that fosters cross-border collaboration and demonstrates how biodiversity conservation can directly contribute to sustainable agriculture and community resilience.

The program of the conference is available [here](#).

Training of the NAP “working team” by Professor Alexandre Roulin

We were delighted to host in Cyprus Professor Alexandre Roulin of the University of Lausanne, an internationally recognized expert in Barn Owl ecology in April 2025. The primary objective of the visit was to build technical capacity in the deployment of tracking devices on Barn Owls, drawing on the extensive experience of Professor Roulin and his research team in Switzerland, who have worked with the species for many years. Their contribution proved invaluable in strengthening local expertise. Joint field activities were carried out with representatives from the Department of Forests, the Department of Agriculture, the Game and Fauna Service, and Bird Focus, reinforcing inter-institutional cooperation and practical knowledge exchange.

The four-day visit included nest monitoring, bird ringing, the placement of satellite transmitters (see preliminary results in section “Tagging” below), and detailed discussions on monitoring protocols and data collection standards. In addition to hands-on training in tagging techniques, the team received expert feedback on monitoring methodologies, database management, and strategic recommendations for the future development of the project. Emphasis was placed on the importance of publishing research findings to ensure accessibility to the wider scientific

community, thereby contributing to future research while also informing current policy and decision-making in Cyprus.

Professor Roulin, together with representatives from the “working team” also met with the Ambassador of Switzerland, Mr. Burgener, in a discussion that highlighted the Barn Owl’s role as a natural ally in rodent control and ecosystem restoration. We express our sincere appreciation for his scientific guidance, inspiration, and continued support to this important initiative.

The Ambassador expressed strong interest in the project and invited BirdLife Cyprus to organize a dedicated field visit for him and his team. This was arranged in the village of Agros, in collaboration with local stakeholders. Although no Barn Owls were found breeding in the nest boxes during the visit, one box was occupied by Common Kestrels, providing an excellent opportunity for engagement. The Ambassador and his team were able to observe the birds up close, learn about the bird ringing process, and gain a deeper understanding of the importance of systematic nest box monitoring and species conservation in agricultural landscapes.

National Documentary finalised

During 2025 Treehouse Films was contracted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to produce a 19-minute film to showcase the Barn Owl project, the teams’ successes so far and raises awareness. Throughout the year, we made efforts to accommodate the filmmaker (Constantinos Christou) during our regular monitoring visits as well as provide contacts of farmers and other stakeholders to ensure the filmmaker had opportunities to interview relevant people. We also provided footage from nest cameras and camera traps were relevant as well.

The national documentary showcasing the project and the efforts of the “working team” in Cyprus is available [here](#).

Thanks to these awareness-raising actions, during 2025, 11 people called, emailed, or messaged BC through Facebook to express their interest in installing Barn Owl boxes in their fields, gardens or holiday homes. The working team has already created a guide in Greek and English regarding the project, including some nest box designs and advice for people who are not “eligible” to receive a box under our project (non-farmers or organized communities). This guide was shared with everyone who expressed interest in our project.

Please find photos from the awareness raising activities, the international barn owl conference and the visit of Professor Roulin in Annex I.

Research

During the 2025 monitoring season, we had the opportunity to continue our intense ringing efforts on Barn owls, including both adults and chicks, since we had increased capacity through the funding by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the help of an external licensed ringer, Mr Zoltán Tölgyesi who also performed the monitoring efforts together with BC staff. We have managed to ring 51 birds, including Barn Owls, Common Kestrels and Cyprus Scops Owls. These data will add to the research aspect of this project in the coming years with recoveries and re-sightings of the birds. Ringing birds during this project also gives the unique tangible experience

to the community, to touch or hold the birds that are using their boxes, which helps to build a bond and appreciate these animals further.

Tagging

During Professor Roulin's visit, he provided the "working team" with the necessary guidance to program and place tags on 3 adult female Barn Owls. These tags (Technosmart, Axy-Trek model) need to be retrieved to download the data. This makes this method time consuming and challenging. However, with this method we can collect GPS fixes and acceleration. Each tag was programmed to record its location every 30 seconds from 30 minutes before dusk to 30 minutes after dawn, and record acceleration as well. This enabled us to determine when (and where) the birds were hunting, perching or flying. Out of three tags, we were only able to retrieve one, because the other two nests were vandalized, causing the birds to unfortunately abandon their nest. This clearly illustrated the challenges faced by the "working team" during the implementation of this project and highlighted the importance of carefully selecting the location of the nest boxes where we choose to place tags in the future.

Data from the only tag we could retrieve, for the first time in Cyprus revealed a site of female Barn Owl behaviour and how far they travel from the nest while raising chicks. Female Barn Owl X02071, covered 115 km in 3 nights, and travelled a maximum distance of 4,5 km from her nest. The bird avoided the riverbed, which is unexpected, but favoured agricultural fields, an illegal dumping site and an abandoned pig farm (Figures 2 and 3).

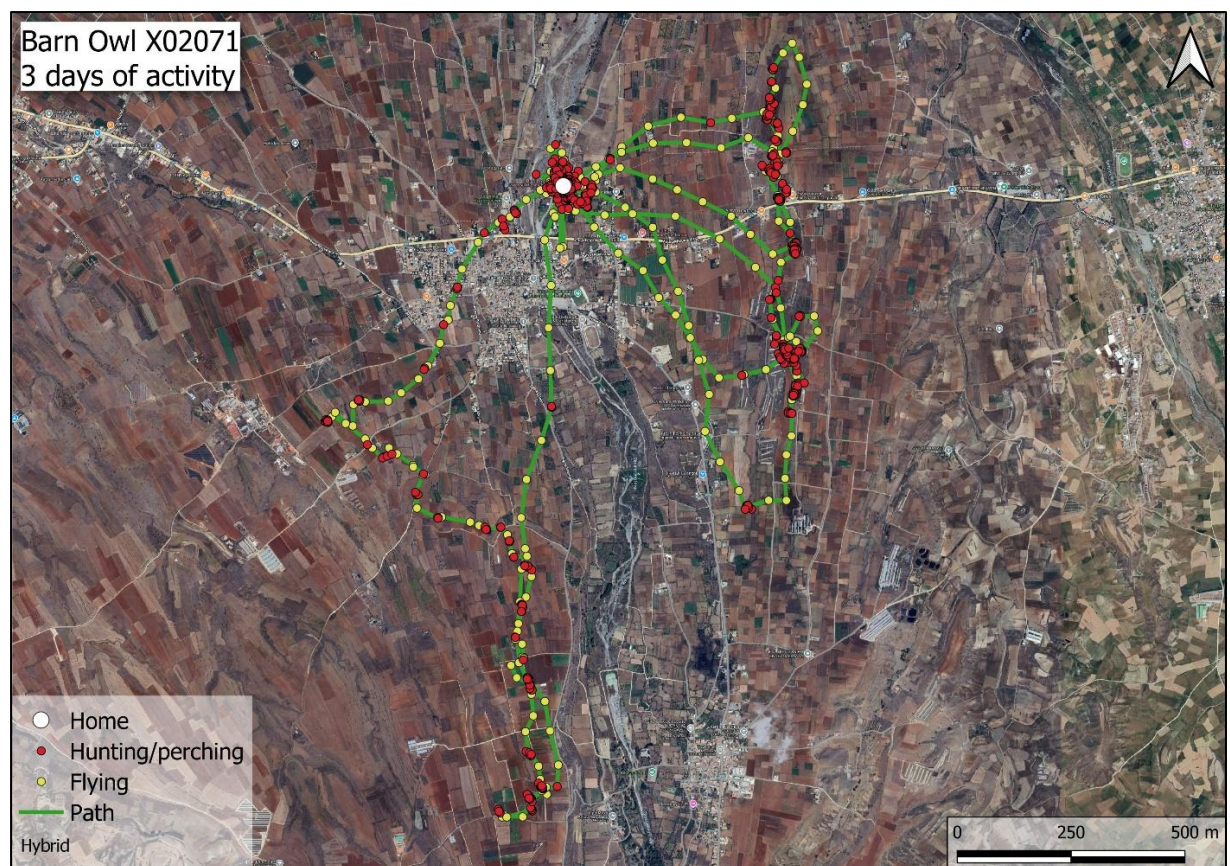


Figure 2: GPS plot of a female Barn Owl (X012071) over three days. Analysis and mapping by Zoltan Tolgyesi.



Figure 3: GPS plot of a female Barn Owl (X012071). Map shows the most frequently visited sites for hunting, that the bird visited every night. These sites included agricultural fields, an illegal dumping site and an abandoned pig farm. Analysis and mapping by Zoltan Tolgyesi.

Recaptures

We had nine recaptures of birds in 2025, which were birds that were ringed as part of this project in the last four years, all of them Barn Owls. Seven birds were ringed in 2023 and 2 in 2024. Most of the birds were found within a 7 km range of the box they were ringed at. Birds that were initially ringed as breeding males or females were recaptured either within the same box or in another box within 1km proximity. The most interesting recapture is that of a Barn Owl chick ringed close to BirdLife Cyprus office in Nicosia on the 21/04/2023, that was recaptured two years later, on the 22/04/2025 as a breeding female with 2 chicks in Pera Orinis around 6.8km away from where it hatched.

Secondary poisoning

Together with the Game and Fauna Service, BirdLife Cyprus is participating in a LIFE IP project (LIFE Pandoteira - <https://pandoteira.cy/>), where one of the actions relates to secondary poisoning of raptors. Through this action, we aim to understand the extent of secondary poisoning on the island. During 2018-2024, 130 samples (including some Barn Owls specimens) were collected and handed over to the State General Laboratory for analysis. This analysis is a qualitative one and is testing for traces of four rodenticides: Bromadiolone, Brodifacoum, Flocoumafen and Difenacoum. The preliminary results of this study were presented as a poster at the European Bird Census Council (EBCC) in April 2025. Book of abstracts is available [here](#) and the poster [here](#). A deliverable report for this study was finalised in December 2025 and will be available on the project website soon.

Next steps for the project in Cyprus

The following activities will take place before the end of 2026:

- Follow up with the relocation ²/ maintenance of installed boxes where needed.
- Installation of a nest camera to run live for the next breeding season.

² Where nestboxes have not been occupied for a few years or we observe disturbance from people (ie. boxes destroyed by illegal hunters, new houses or roads were constructed close to the nestboxes), or they are destroyed by natural processes (ie. Fires), we reassess the location and we decide whether a replacement or a relocation is needed.

ANNEX I

Photos

Monitoring



Photo 1: Young Barn Owl chicks inside a nestbox. Credit: Zoltan Tolgyesi.



Photo 2: Common Kestrels sometimes breed in Barn Owl boxes. Credit: Zoltan Tolgyesi.

Ringling



Photo 3: Jackdaws sometimes breed in Barn Owl boxes. Credits: Zoltan Tolgyesi.



Photo 4: Ringing of a Barn Owl pair. Credits: Markos Charalambides.



Photo 5: Taking measurements of a Barn Owl egg. Credits: Zoltan Tolgyesi.

Tagging



Photo 6: The first female Barn Owl that was tagged in Cyprus. The tag was retrieved 4 days later. Credits: Zoltan Tolgyesi.



Photo 7: Placing a tag on a female Barn Owl together with supervision from Game and Fauna senior officer Charis Hadjistyllis and Professor Alexandre Roulin.

Awareness-raising



Photo 8: Barn Owl pellet dissection activity at the “Kids and Environment” festival organized by Ypsonas Municipality. Credits: Melpo Apostolidou.



Photo 9: Barn Owl pellet dissection activity at the “Children and Environment” festival organized by Ypsonas Municipality.



Photo 10: Group photo with all the participants at the Earth Day event co-organized with the local school and the hunting club of Athienou. Credits: Silvio Augusto Rusmigo.



Photo 11: Children had the chance to touch an adult Barn Owl during the Earth Day event co-organized with the local school and the hunting club of Athienou. Credits: Silvio Augusto Rusmigo.



Photo 12: Photo with the organisers of the Earth Day event. Local school teacher and members of the hunting club of Athienou. Credits: Silvio Augusto Rusmigo.



Photo 13: Meeting with the Swiss Ambassador Mr. Burgener with Prof. Alexandre Roulin, Department of Ecology & Evolution and Prof. Christine Mohr of the University of Lausanne, BirdLife Cyprus representatives (Director Melpo Apostolidou and Officer Antaia Christou) and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development representative (Mr. Haris Nicolaou).



Photo 14: Group photo of the Swiss Ambassador Mr. Burgener and his team during our nest box monitoring in Agros village, holding Common Kestrel chicks that were ringed as part of our project.

International Barn Owl Conference 2025



Photo 15: Presenting the work of BirdLife Cyprus at the International Barn Owl Conference in Greece.



Photo 16: Participants at the International Barn Owl Conference in Greece.

Training of the NAP “working team” by Professor Alexandre Roulin



Photo 17: Professor Roulin demonstrates aging techniques on an Adult Barn Owl. Credits: Zoltan Tolgyesi.



Photo 18: NAP “working team” practising placing a tag on a Barn Owl. Credits: Zoltan Tolgyesi.