



NORTH-EAST SCOTLAND

**BIODIVERSITY**

## **Nest Boxes for Farmland Birds**

NORTH EAST farmers are being encouraged to put up nest boxes to help two special farmland birds, **Tree Sparrows** and **Barn Owls**. The North East Farm Biodiversity Group comprises representatives from FWAG, SAC, SLF, SEERAD, NFUS, and RSPB and local farmers.

Tree sparrows are generally found on lowland farmland with arable or mixed farming systems. The North East is a stronghold for tree sparrows, which have declined in the UK by 95% between 1970 and 1998, but even here, local populations have experienced declines recently and need farmers' help. Traditionally, tree sparrows nest in holes in old trees or farm buildings and protecting these nest sites is vital.

Hywel Maggs, RSPB North East said, "Tree sparrows will readily use nest boxes as a substitute for their natural nest sites. These birds nest in colonies, so it's best to place several boxes on each tree, close together and above head height." He added, "by providing seeds throughout the winter with wild bird cover on set-aside, farmers can provide a good food resource for these birds."

Barn owls are widespread yet scarce in North East Scotland. They hunt over rough grassland, field margins and woodland edges and will not nest unless there are plenty of voles about. "Barn owls tend to return, year after year, to established roosts and breeding sites in old barns and trees. Suitably placed nest boxes in a quiet area can provide essential roosting places as well as nest sites", said Mr. Maggs.

The Farm Biodiversity Group can provide Tree Sparrow and Barn Owl box kits for a small charge (£2.50-£5.00 per box). The Group will also supply RSPB designs and guidelines for building the boxes. Contact the Biodiversity Co-ordinator on 01224 711120 for further details. For more information about the North East Farm Biodiversity Group please contact John Miskelly, Chairperson on 01224 790613.