

Darien Owl Trail revitalizes barn owl nesting boxes

Among Darien's unique residents are a community of barn owls, a medium-sized owl with a white, heart-shaped face. It's unusual to see barn owls in an urban environment, but these owls have made Darien their home. The newly completed nesting boxes on the Darien Owl Trail give residents and visitors the opportunity to view and learn about these birds.

American Barn Owls, *Tyto furcata*, are a

medium-sized owl with a distinctive heart-shaped face and white and tawny coloration. They weigh between 1-1.5 pounds and have a wingspan of about 3.5 feet. Barn owls are nocturnal, meaning they hunt at night, and they can most often be seen at dawn and dusk. They primarily hunt small mammals like squirrels and mice, helping to control

See Owls, Page 8



A pair of barn owls, one on top of the box and one peering out from inside, enjoy their stay in the nesting box safely mounted high up in a tree on the Darien Owl Trail. (Photo by Jeff Ragsdale)



The locations of eight marked trees on the Darien Owl Trail that contain nesting boxes for barn owls are shown above.

Owls

Continued from Page 1

the population, an important role in the ecosystem. A family of barn owls can consume up to 3,000 rodents in a nesting season, according to the Darien Owl Trail. Because they compete for resources with larger birds such as barred owls and great horned owls, barn owls raise their chicks later than these other owls, during the late spring.

The nesting boxes were built and placed in a collaborative project led by Susan Inman of One Hundred Miles. It all started around 2010, when a pair of barn owls that nested in the hollow of an oak tree on Brian Feeney's property on Fourth

Street were in need of new digs. When the oak tree was damaged and had to be cut down, local environmentalist Chuck Oldham constructed a nesting box which was lifted more than 50 feet into the tree by a city fire truck. The owls moved into their new home and began raising their owlets there during the spring.

City Councilman Jeff Ragsdale noticed that the boxes were deteriorating and thought that a revitalization of the trail with new nesting boxes could provide a great opportunity to attract birders and ecotourists to Darien. He began asking around the community for someone who might be interested in helping market Darien as a birding location, and Inman was enthusiastically on board.

"It was an opportunity to marry wildlife, our historical trees, our residents and ecotourism all in one bundle," Inman said. She used what was learned from the success of the Fourth Street box, which has continuously housed a pair of owls for 15 years, to select the locations



A barn owl box is pictured in a live oak tree in downtown Darien. (Provided photo from Facebook)

of the new boxes and plan their specialized construction.

In fall 2025, the Darien Owl Trail received a grant from Coastal Georgia Audubon to revitalize the trail. The funds were used to construct new nesting boxes designed for Darien's barn owls, and a partnership with Georgia Power brought in technicians with the expertise to safely attach the boxes to eight trees on the trail.

Inman hopes that the boxes will encourage visitors to walk Darien's historic squares while visiting downtown shops, restaurants, and lodging. Along with providing the owls with a safe place to nest and

encouraging generations of the birds to stay in Darien, the boxes provide an educational opportunity to learn about the owls and other wildlife in the area. The best time to view barn owls is at sunrise and sunset when the weather is not too cold.

The Darien Owl Trail provides some guidelines for owl etiquette:

- Keep the noise level low.
- No spotlights into the nest boxes or cavities.
- Be mindful of traffic and private property.

Birders visiting the nesting boxes can submit photos and follow the project at the Facebook page: Darien Owl Trail.