

Press Release

The beauty of Barn Owls showcased in a new children's book

'Golden Wings' will reveal the secret world of Irish Barn Owls to all school children in County Galway

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Working with BirdWatch Ireland, author Susan O'Donohoe has created a magical book on Irish Barn Owls, offering an insight into the secret world of one of our most mysterious and beloved birds. Galway County Council with the support of the Heritage Council are now delighted to announce that *'Golden Wings'* is being available to all National Schools and libraries in Galway and will bring the wonders of Irish wildlife to the imaginations of children everywhere in the County.

'Golden Wings' follows the journey of a female Barn Owl from hatching to starting her own family, and all her encounters and experiences in between. The reader views the world through the eyes of *'Golden Wings'*, which provides a unique understanding of the lives of Barn Owls and the challenges they face in the modern Irish countryside.

Susan's intimate knowledge of Barn Owls, and the fact the story is based on the latest research on Irish Barn Owls by BirdWatch Ireland, makes the book as informative as it is engrossing. The story is brought to vivid life by the illustrations of renowned wildlife artist Robert Vaughan and further enhanced with the graphic design by Sara Sirtoli.

John Lusby, of BirdWatch Ireland, commented *"The Barn Owl is revered in Ireland. Its ghostly form and eerie calls are embedded in our folklore and the source of many legends and enchanting tales. However, the real natural world is often more magical and alluring than the fiction that surrounds it. This is the case with Golden Wings which beautifully portrays the bird behind the myths"*.

He added, *"Any child with a passion for the natural world will be enthralled by the journey of Golden Wings, and for those that don't yet know it, this is the perfect book to ignite that interest. I would have loved this book when I was young and it is wonderful that so many children will now get to experience it."*

Like many other farmland birds in Ireland, the changing agricultural landscape has resulted in dwindling resources and suitable habitats available to the Barn Owl. Barn Owl populations have declined and although most people have never seen a Barn Owl in the wild, they remain one of our best-known and loved birds. *'Golden Wings'* captures the innate interest that children have for Barn Owls and explores some of the reasons why they are so rare in the Irish countryside in a way that is accessible and appealing to children.

Susan O'Donohoe described how her interest in owls developed and why she wants to give children the opportunity to learn more about these wonderful birds, *"The first day I saw an owl in the wild I fell in love. I saw a group of three Short-eared Owls one winter and my life has never been the same since. From that point on I began reading as much as I could about owls. Then I got a job as a wildlife biologist and got to survey owls and study their behaviour and also to help BirdWatch Ireland with their research and conservation of owls. I love to teach about owls which is why I wrote this story. I would have loved a book like this when I was a child and I hope that children enjoy it! I wanted to ignite a spark of interest in our native Irish Barn Owls as it's only when we are aware of something that we can understand and care for it."*

Rosina Joyce, Galway County Council who coordinated the printing and distribution of *'Golden Wings'* to schools and libraries commented *"we are simply delighted that Golden Wings will now be in every school and library in the County, this is such an important book and will help children develop an understanding*

and appreciation of how magical our countryside is and the wildlife that inhabits it.” Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer, Galway County Council said “Golden Wings’ will bring children on a journey of discovery of the world of the Irish Barn Owl, and how important the Barn Owl is and the threats and difficulties that they encounter just trying to survive. It is hoped that this story helps to increase awareness, knowledge and protection of this magical bird.” She also paid tribute to the author Susan O’Donohoe, illustrator, Robert Vaughan, graphic designer, Sara Sirtoli and John Lusby, BirdWatch Ireland for producing the beautifully written, designed and illustrated book.

‘Golden Wings’ will be freely available in all National Schools and libraries in County Galway from the end of October 2022. Copies of the book may also be requested from the Heritage Office of Galway County Council. A digital version of Golden Wings is available for free through the Galway Community Heritage website and BirdWatch Ireland website: <https://birdwatchireland.ie/golden-wings/> and <https://heritage.galwaycommunityheritage.org/content/topics/barn-owls/the-barn-owl-project-2> It is suitable for a reading age of nine years and older but can be read to younger children also.

The book was produced by BirdWatch Ireland and Galway County Heritage and Biodiversity Plan 2017-2022, and the Galway County Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018-2022. This initiative was funded by Creative Ireland and Galway County Council. The printing of ‘Golden Wings’ and distribution to schools and libraries was supported by the Heritage Council under the Heritage Stewardship Fund 2022 and Galway County Council.

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Notes for editors

1. **BirdWatch Ireland** is the largest independent conservation organisation in Ireland. Established in 1968, it currently has over 15,000 members and supporters and a local network of 30 branches nationwide. It is the Irish partner of BirdLife International, a worldwide partnership of nature conservation organisations. www.birdwatchireland.ie

2. Author: **Susan O’Donohoe**
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3. **For a selection of images which can be used with this piece, please see attached:**
For more information or to obtain additional specific images, please contact:
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4. **For more details about Barn Owls in Ireland, visit:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YESLEPyNPK8&t=167s>
and
[https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2021/01/Barn-Owl-information-and-conservation-advice-booklet- For-Web.pdf](https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2021/01/Barn-Owl-information-and-conservation-advice-booklet-For-Web.pdf)