

The Congress has urged the Government to withdraw the BBMP's Sakrama 2007 before November 30. Page 5

If there is a split in the Janata Dal (S), it will be because of H.D. Deve Gowda, says M.P. Prak... Page 6

Out-of-the-box thinking to protect owls

Nest boxes made by conservation group gets its first pair

Divya Gandhi

BANGALORE: Close to midnight a few weeks ago, Mukta Nagaraj heard some terrifying screeching outside her first floor flat in Jayanagar.

As she peeped out of her kitchen window convinced it was a beastly catfight, she was startled to find, staring back at her calmly, the ghostly white, heart-shaped face of a barn owl.

Initially, rather suspicious of the owl that had so audaciously made itself at home outside her kitchen, Ms. Nagaraj has since gone on to become a reason for celebration for the Bangalore Barn Owl Conservation Group.

An experimental nest box installed in her apartment by the conservation group in October (one among eight boxes distributed in the city to give the owls a safe nesting place and to study them) has become the first one to be adopted by a pair of barn owls.

"Nest boxes are popularly used by dotting bird watchers



A SAFE HOME: A barn owl peeping out of its nest.

around the world to give barn owls a safe nesting place — the owls are increasingly looking for places to nest in apartment complexes, which

are replacing old tree hollows," says S. Subramanya, one of the founders of the 25-member Barn Owl Group, comprising teachers, doctors,

housewives, businessmen and scientists.

Ever since the pair moved in, Ms. Nagaraj, a nutritionist, watches their every move,

snapping pictures of them as they return from their nocturnal hunt to their new plywood home to roost and feed. Now she cannot wait to see them nest and rear their chicks, she says.

While the first set of eight nest boxes is essentially experimental, "phase two of the project will be more research-oriented," says Prof. Subramanya.

Helpful for a study

"We would like to study the owls closely, perhaps with the help of a web camera, to learn more about their feeding and breeding habits."

This information, he hopes, will be turned into educational material "to make people see the positive role played by barn owls — they do us all a big service by consuming a couple of rats a night".

The group recently launched its website www.bangalorebarnowl.com. For details, email Prof. Subramanya at subbus@vsnl.com.