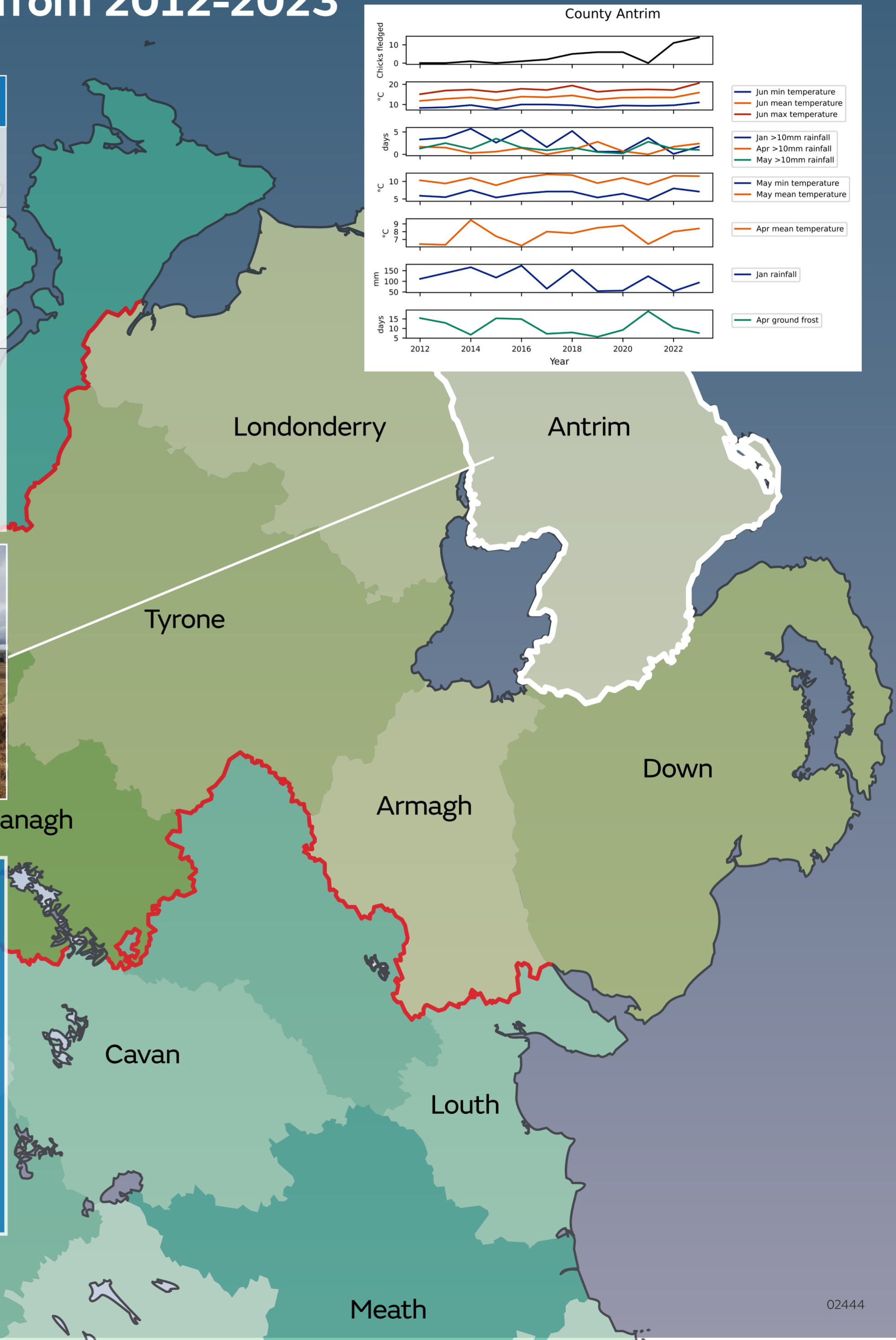
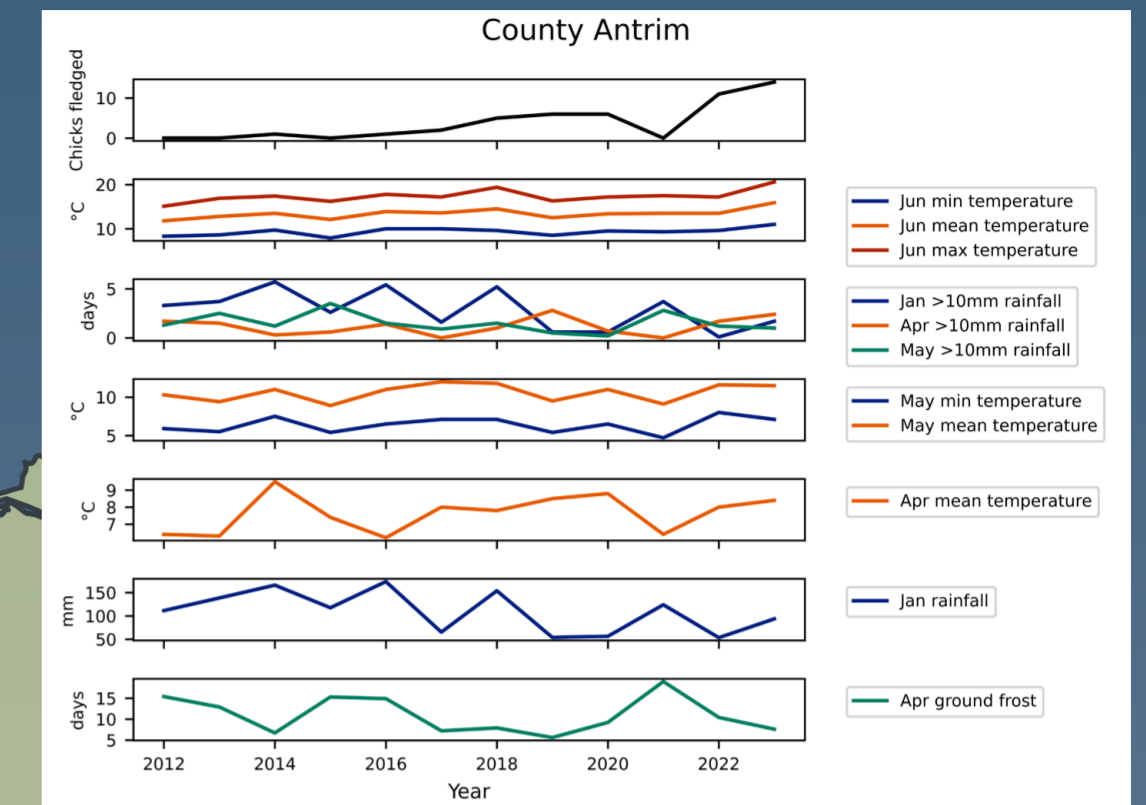


Barn Owl populations in County Antrim, Northern Ireland and alignment to weather from 2012-2023

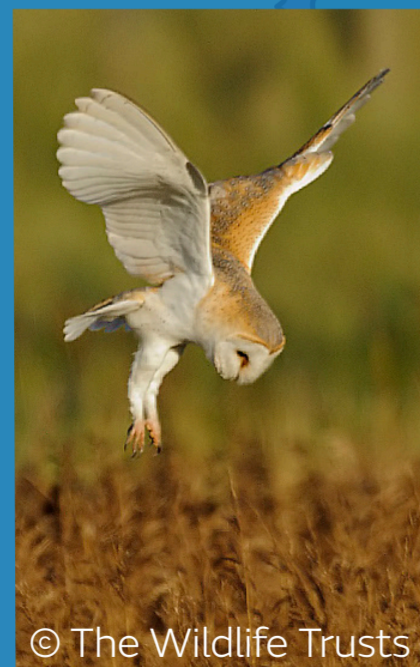
County Antrim

Site description	This county varies from the hilly areas of the Glens of Antrim to the Causeway Coast and down to the lowlands around the shores of Lough Neagh. There are a number of pairs of barns owls in old buildings or nest boxes, mainly in the lowland farmland areas of the county.
Change in weather	Overall, June temperatures have increased and January rainfall has decreased in County Antrim since 2012, with interannual fluctuations. Climate conditions to note include: 2014 – high levels of rainfall in January and a warm and dry April with a few days of ground frost 2016 - wet January and cold April 2021 – cold April and May, with a peak in number of April ground frost days
Impact on barn owl populations	The graphs show time series of climate variables that have the strongest relationship with the number of chicks fledged. The number of chicks fledged increases with April, May and June temperatures and decreases when there are many days of ground frost in April. High rainfall and many heavy rainfall days in January are associated with fewer chicks fledging. There has been an overall increase in number of chicks fledging since 2012, associated with warming temperatures and reducing rainfall. This was interrupted by the cold spring of 2021 where no chicks were recorded as fledging in County Antrim. The number of fledglings then rapidly increased in number (passing 10 chicks) with two consecutive warm years from 2022, featuring a few heavy rainfall days in the January months.



About Barn Owls

Barn owls are one of the three species of owl found in Ireland, and one of the five species we get across the UK. They are the most easily recognisable species and are well loved as the 'farmers friend'. The barn owl is heavily linked to the Irish folklore of the Banshee and its name in Irish translates to 'the graveyard screecher'. There are now fewer than 30 pairs across Northern Ireland and they have faced declines for a number of reasons. Agricultural intensification, loss of roosting, nesting and foraging habitats, use of rodenticides, road mortality and our changing weather have all led to the barn owl's decline.



What does Ulster Wildlife do?

As an important part of our natural and cultural heritage, our barn owl work aims to develop and advance barn owl conservation throughout Northern Ireland. This work feeds into Ulster Wildlife's vision of a wilder future where nature is in recovery and wildlife is thriving across Northern Ireland. A range of conservation actions are undertaken, such as raising awareness, the management of sightings, the construction and the erection of nest boxes, carrying out our annual survey, and offering advice and support to landowners to improve their habitat for barn owls.

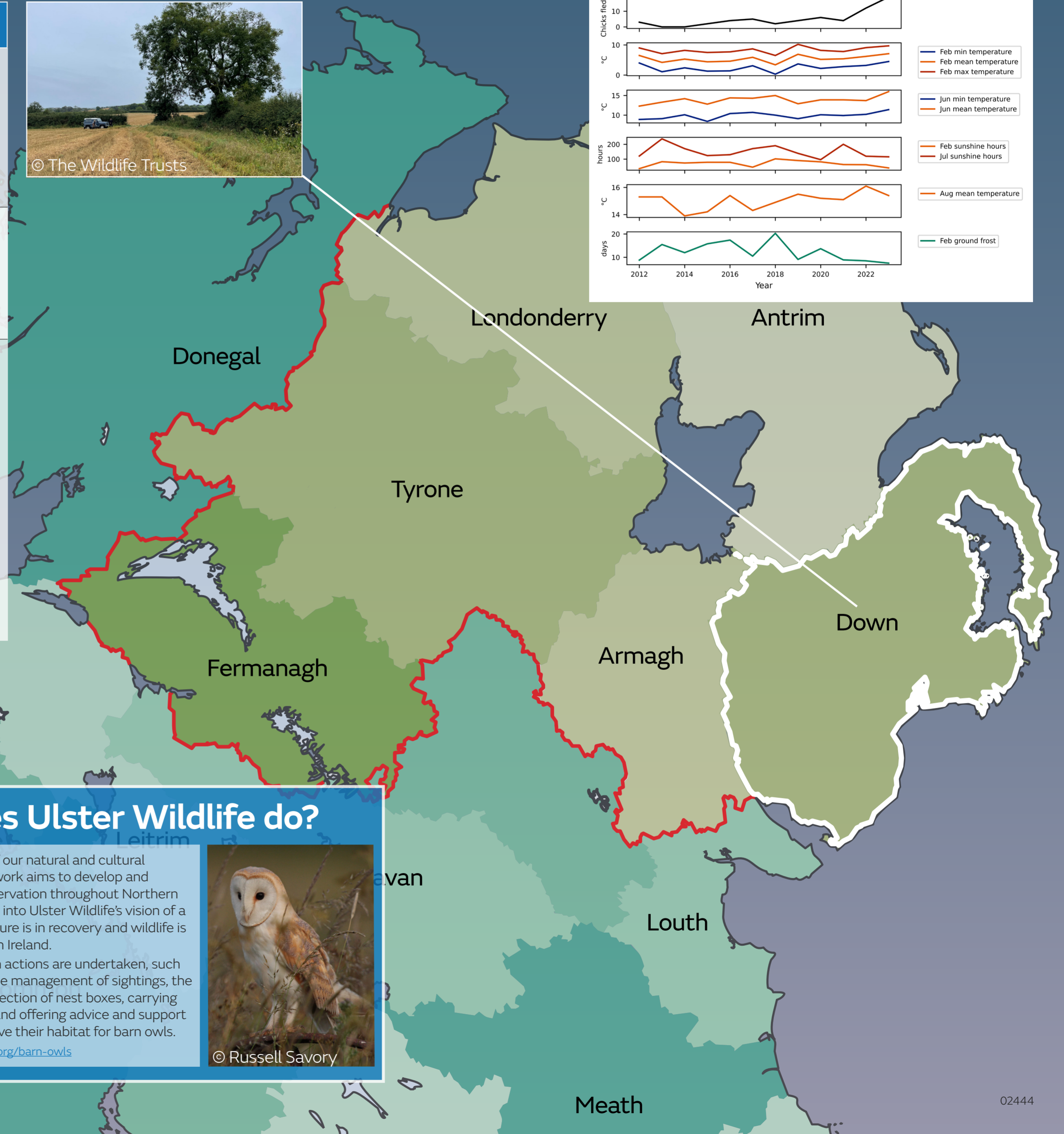
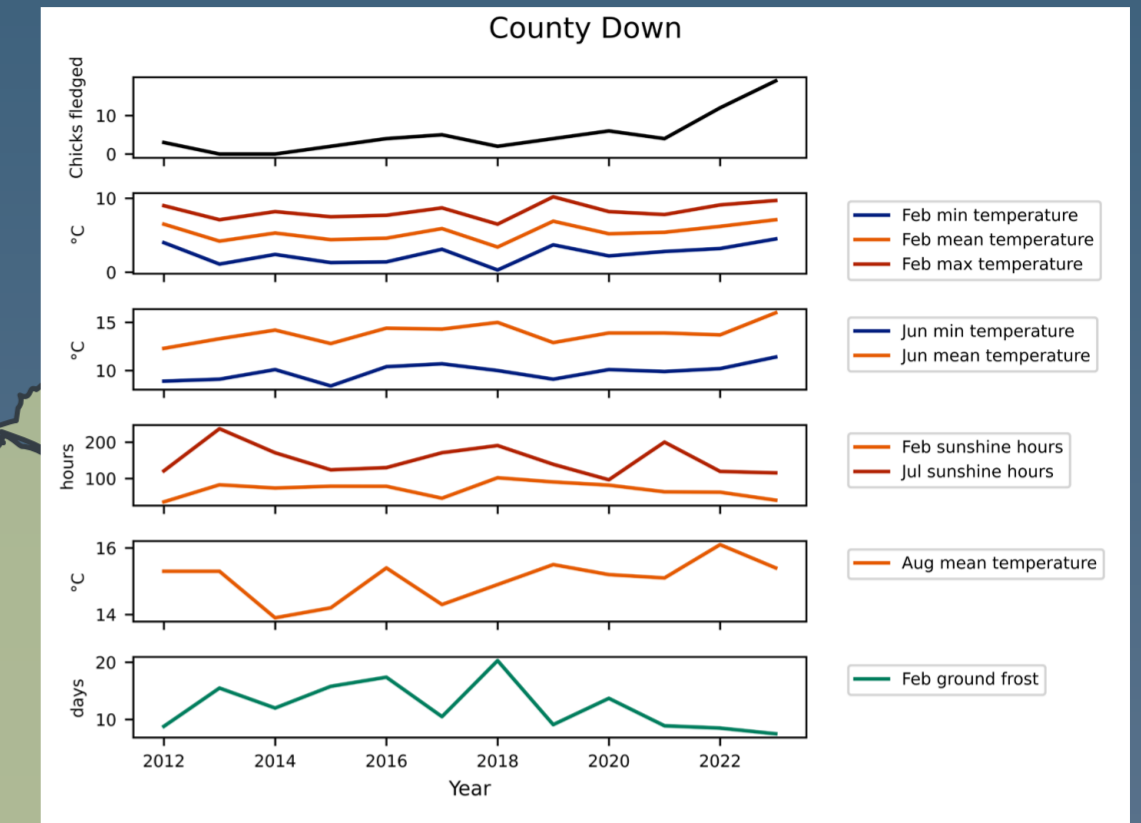
<https://www.ulsterwildlife.org/barn-owls>



Barn Owl populations in County Down, Northern Ireland and alignment to weather from 2012-2023

County Down

Site description	There are a number of barn owl sites in County Down and this is the county with the least amount of rainfall and the most arable land. The barn owls have settled on wildlife-friendly farms with management options such as wild bird cover and the retention of winter stubble. The county has a coastline along Belfast Lough to the north and Strangford Lough lies to the east between the Ards Peninsula and the mainland. Farmland size in Northern Ireland is generally small and the countryside is made up of a network of small farms.
Change in weather	Overall, February, June and August temperatures have increased since 2012, with interannual fluctuations. Climate conditions to note include: 2018 - cold February with many days of ground frost 2019 - warm February 2022 and 2023 - particularly warm August
Impact on barn owl populations	The graphs show time series of climate variables that have the strongest relationship with the number of chicks fledged. The number of chicks fledged increases with February, June and August temperatures and decreases when there are many days of ground frost in February. More sunshine hours in February and July are associated with fewer chicks fledging. There has been an overall increase in the number of chicks fledging in County Down since 2012. Following the cold February of 2013, increasing temperatures over subsequent years coincided with a steady increase in fledging activity. This upward trend was interrupted in 2018, accompanied by a notably cold February with a high number of ground frost days. Milder Februarys and warmer summers in 2022 and 2023 saw a higher number of chicks fledge, a marked increase from 2021.



Barn Owls in Northern Ireland

Barn owls are perfectly adapted for silent flight; their feathers having a comb edge so the air flows through so they can surprise their prey. This unfortunately makes them unsuitable for flying in the rain.

The majority of our barn owls are in the east of Northern Ireland, and this is no surprise as this is the driest part of the country with less rainfall on average. Barn owls in Northern Ireland feed mainly on three food sources; wood mice, rats and pygmy shrews. There are no native voles present and so barn owls are more nocturnal across Ireland.



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