

Wildlife News



Wildlife news and features from the British Wildlife Centre

Issue 6 - March 2006

Welcome!

This newsletter will keep you up to date with the latest news and goings on at the British Wildlife Centre.

Spring is an especially busy time - for the animals as well as the people! We hope soon to see new arrivals such as fox cubs, wild cat kittens, polecat kits and barn owl chicks.

Nature reserve project

We're also very busy at work on this major project. Several hundred metres of boardwalk are currently being laid - island hopping through a pond and wetland section of the reserve. This area will be open to all visitors, hopefully by the summer.



Work in progress on a most attractive building site!

We'll be planting reeds and other pond plants during the spring, but it may take a few years for the reserve to green up - a fascinating process to watch in itself. Wildlife, especially water and wading birds, is sure to come in early on. In fact swans, geese, moorhen and up to a dozen herons have been spotted already!

Just before Christmas we took delivery of a second hand 'portakabin' which will be used as a field

classroom within the nature reserve. As well our current schools programme based around native wildlife habitats, food chains and the local environment, we hope to start some practical based educational visits based in the reserve, especially focussing on grassland and wetland habitats.

The classroom and site need a little work before we can open for business, but it will provide a superb resource for local schools to bring their science teaching to life.



Delivering the classroom needed a very large truck and an escort vehicle along some narrow roads to reach us.

Pollyanna comes home

Before the wildlife centre, this site used to be a dairy farm with a herd of pedigree Jersey cows. The Jersey breed is renowned for its rich creamy milk - once sold in gold top milk bottles.

The cows were sold at auction in 1994 to help finance the setting up of the wildlife centre, but recently one of the last surviving members of the herd has returned home.

Now past the end of her milking life, we have bought back Pollyanna from her last owner. Born here in

1992, she will now see out her life in relative comfort on the nature reserve.

She still has a valuable role here, this time as 'Head of Management Grazing'. Low density grazing with cattle is one of the best methods of maintaining a variety of wildlife-rich wet grassland habitats.



Pollyanna (on the left) admires her new surroundings

BWC & Surrey Wildlife Trust

The British Wildlife Centre is an independent, not-for-profit organisation created to educate and inspire people about Britain's native wildlife. We are funded through visitor income and all profits are spent on improving public and schools education programmes and on species conservation.

Our readers and visitors will be aware that in recent years we have also been putting funds directly into habitat restoration through our nature reserve project. This will provide valuable wetland and wet grassland habitat for wild plants, invertebrates, birds and mammals and will be a vital contribution to local nature conservation in this part of the county.

Conservation of suitable habitat for wildlife is vital for the survival of many species, the protection of biodiversity, our enjoyment and ultimately our own existence on this planet! We are delighted to announce that we will be working closely with Surrey Wildlife Trust, one of the partnership of Wildlife Trusts, the largest organisation working on all aspects of nature conservation in the UK.

We hope the collaboration will raise the profile of both organisations - which will benefit improved understanding of British wildlife and conservation of wildlife habitats. In particular, we hope to run joint education events in the summer. Look out for more news of project soon.



BWC & SWT - partners in wildlife conservation

Captive breeding programmes

Some of Britain's native mammals are rare or threatened in the wild. This is particularly true of the wild cat and the pine marten. We have both species represented here and later this month their numbers will be boosted as part of national breeding programmes.

A female wild cat will come to us from a collection in Scotland to be mated with our Hamish. Most wild cats in captivity are hybrids, which means they are not pure wild cats, but have some domestic cat ancestry.



Hamish - a fine example of a Scottish wild cat

Hamish is one of the few males classified by the official stud book as suitable for breeding - and he is to be paired with a similarly suitable female.

Our pine marten, Buttons, will also be paired with a suitable male from another collection. Pine martens

are very elusive in the wild, but can be seen in parts of the Scottish highlands. Recent research published by the Vincent Wildlife Trust also disputes the commonly held view that they are extinct in Wales, with evidence that they are present there throughout and also in parts of northern England, though only in small numbers.



Pine marten - very elusive in the wild!

We hope to breed pine martens as part of a national effort to ensure sufficient pure bred individuals are in captivity in the UK in the event of any future wild release programmes.

We are developing plans to make improvements to the accommodation for pine martens by incorporating the two large oak trees near their enclosure. This will provide them with aerial walkways and platforms high up in the trees, just as they would live in the wild.

Museum makeover

The museum displays in our Visitor Centre will get a much needed facelift in time for the Easter holidays. Completed nearly three years ago now, the current displays explore Britain's changing wildlife and countryside since the last ice age 20,000 years ago.

It's a fascinating story and will remain the theme for the new displays, which will be aimed at both adults and children. The new displays will focus heavily on the impact humans have had on the environment in Britain, particularly through farming, but also offer an insight on how to conserve wildlife, starting in your very own back garden!

Evening lecture programme 2006

We have a fascinating line-up of lectures this year, with some interesting visiting speakers. Tickets for each lecture are £5 per person and must be purchased in advance. Numbers will be limited, so please book early to avoid disappointment!

Tickets to all lectures are on sale at the British Wildlife Centre. You can also make credit card bookings by phone or send a cheque by post, remembering to include your name, address, tphone number and which lecture you are booking!

Thursday 27 April, 7.30pm
Ashdown Forest: Managing Change
for People and Wildlife

Dr Hew Prendergast
Clerk to the Conservators and Superintendent,
Ashdown Forest

Wednesday 24 May, 7.30pm
My Life with Elephants and Engines
David Shepherd

Wildlife artist and conservationist

Friday 30 June, 7.30pm
Otters Back in Surrey?

Chris Matcham
Otters & Rivers Project Officer, Surrey Wildlife Trust

Friday 28 July, 7.30pm
From Dairy Farm to Wildlife Centre
David Mills

Founder, British Wildlife Centre

Friday 25 August, 7.30pm
A Natural Eye
Heather Angel

Wildlife Photographer

Friday 29 September, 7.30pm
Hedgehogs

Dr Pat Morris
Formerly Senior Lecturer in Zoology,
Royal Holloway College.

Wildlife on film

By now, several thousand visitors to the Centre will have seen our short wildlife films *From Ice to Our Age* and *A Day in the Life of a Vole*. These were produced by postgraduate students at Nottingham

University studying for the MSc degree of Biological Imaging and Photography. We've worked with Nottingham University for several years, and hope to make use of further film productions later in the year. We also hope to put their skills to good use in adding to our schools educational programme.

Many thanks to those students who have worked here in the past, especially Matt Hammerton, Andrew Binns and Meghan Murphy. We hope you are all now flourishing wildlife film makers!

Spring arrivals

Spring is always a great time to visit, as there are usually a few youngsters about. We are hopeful that our foxes Honey and Buster will have cubs once again this year. Although she is now ten years old (much older than any fox would live to in the wild), Honey is still in good health and condition. Last year she raised five cubs and the previous year four.

We still have Frodo, one of those cubs from 2004, and we expect he will once again help in bringing food to the young cubs.



Fox cub in 2004 - could this be a young Frodo?

We also hope to bring news of wild cat kittens, polecat kits and red squirrel kits. As for our otters, Oscar & Megan and Ollie & Minnie, we hope they are not simply too busy enjoying the space in their ponds

to produce little otter cubs! Only time will tell - and otter cubs can be born at any time of the year, so we may be kept waiting a little while longer.

The deer give birth in early summer and we hope for youngsters from three species in all; the native red deer, the introduced fallow deer (familiar to those living on or visiting Ashdown Forest), and the roe deer, common in woodlands throughout Britain.



Fern the roe deer - a very wobbly three days old in June 2003 and hopefully to be a mother herself this summer.

Opening times 2006

We are open from 10 am - 5 pm every Saturday, Sunday & Public Holiday from March to October and every day during the following school holidays:

Easter

Saturday 1 April - Sunday 23 April 2006

Summer half term

Saturday 27 May - Sunday 4 June 2006

Summer

Saturday 22 July - Sunday 3 September 2006

Autumn half term

Saturday 21 October - Sunday 29 October 2006

Christmas 2006

Wednesday 27 December - Tuesday 2 January 2007

British Wildlife Centre

Newchapel - Lingfield - Surrey - RH7 6LF
tel: 01342 834658 web: www.britishwildlifecentre.co.uk

Open to visitors every Saturday, Sunday and public holiday from March to October and during all school holidays
Call us, or go online for information on school visits, private tours and special access for photography and film
