

# Wildlife News



Wildlife news and features from the British Wildlife Centre

Issue 7 - June 2006

## *Welcome!*

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter covering the goings on at the British Wildlife Centre.

Spring is a very busy time for us, and this year is the busiest yet. As well as looking after the animals and our visitors, there are several exciting projects on the go and many births and arrivals to cope with.

## *New arrivals*

Notable new arrivals this year include fox cubs, once again born to Honey. Now aged 10, she has proved a great mother to many cubs. This year there were three more, born at the end of March, and emerging from the den for the first time on 4 May.



*Fox cub with older brother, Frodo.*

Bella the buzzard is now tending young chicks. All four of her eggs hatched during the last week of May and she is now extremely busy feeding four large fluffy youngsters.

As with all birds of prey, their talons seem huge and out of proportion with their bodies at this early stage in their lives, but they will soon get a chance to use them as they leave the nest to explore.



*Buzzard chick*

Several of our polecats have also produced litters of young kits, and these will shortly be out and about exploring their enclosures. Last year we had thirteen youngsters and this year we are likely to have just as many, if not more.

Another exciting arrival was the litter of seven young born to our pair of weasels, Whistle and Buzz. Weasels are not often seen in the wild. Surprisingly small, very fast and elusive despite being relatively common, they are difficult to get a good look at. Often a brief glimpse of a slim brown creature dashing between areas of cover is all you see!

Our weasels have an extensive series of runs and plenty of hiding places, but readily appear for visitors. We hope that over the next few weeks these youngsters will also venture out to explore their surroundings.

## *School art competition*

This year we announced details of an art competition open to all primary schools visiting the Centre during the summer months. A number of schools have already submitted entries and we are looking forward to receiving more before the end of term. If

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your school has visited this summer and has not had details or want to know more about the competition, please give Steve, our Education Manager, a call.

We are delighted to have renowned wildlife artist and conservationist David Shepherd on the judging panel. The winning entries will be on display at the Centre throughout August for all visitors to see.

### ***BBC Springwatch stars***

Television wildlife fans have once again been enjoying the BBC's Springwatch programmes, but did you know that the wood mice featured in a wonderful piece at the start of the series actually came from the British Wildlife Centre?



We're hoping they will return to us shortly, although they may of course be looking to move on to bigger things after their starring roles!

### ***Otter holt construction***

Minnie the otter has a new custom-built home within her enclosure. Constructed from boards made of recycled plastic, this otter 'holt' is an experimental design put up by Surrey Wildlife Trust.



*Dave Williams and Chris Matcham of Surrey Wildlife Trust*  
We are hoping that Minnie will test it fully and give us some useful feedback before more of these are installed for wild otters. Otter numbers in the wild

have increased significantly since the 1960s and 70s when they were almost extinct in southern England due to a combination of habitat loss, pollution and hunting. Wild otter populations are now spreading and it will not be long before they once more return to Surrey's rivers.

### ***More about otters***

'Otters back in Surrey?' is the title of what will be a fascinating talk by Chris Matcham of Surrey Wildlife Trust at 7.30 pm on Friday 30 June.

This will be an interesting evening, and will include a special opportunity to see our own otters when they are at their most active in the early evening. Find out the truth about the lives of these delightful creatures in the wild and the success of recent reintroduction programmes.

Tickets for Chris' talk are available at £5 each from the Centre. Tickets must be purchased in advance, and can also be booked by credit/debit card on the phone or by posting a cheque to us (don't forget to state what your cheque is for and give your name and address).

#### ***Otters Back in Surrey?***

An illustrated talk by  
**Chris Matcham of Surrey Wildlife Trust**  
**Friday 30 June, 7.30pm**  
Tickets £5 each (advance booking only)

### ***Nature reserve boardwalk***

Our nature reserve project continues, with the completion of an extensive boardwalk into an area of pond and wetland in the reserve anticipated at the end of July.

It will take a few more years for the area to fully flourish, but wildlife moves in surprisingly fast in any area where land is set aside and managed for that purpose, especially where fresh water is present.

Aquatic insects, native fish and water birds are already resident. We have completed some preliminary planting of native water plants to give the area a start, whilst wild species will seed and establish themselves in the future.

## ***Field study centre***

Last time we reported on the arrival of an old 'portakabin' purchased for use as a field study centre for educational visits to the nature reserve. A lot has changed since this slightly tatty looking building was installed, and we are delighted to see what will soon be a fantastic educational resource nearing completion.



*The cabin is lowered into position last December*

The building has been completely clad in timber and weatherproofed, and an extensive area of decking added to provide an outdoor teaching area with commanding views of the nature reserve.



*The building nears completion*

This has, of course, cost a lot of money, but we are certain it will be a wonderful educational resource. We hope to run school visits in earnest from spring next year.

In the mean time, we'd like to appeal to people or organisations that might have any unwanted

equipment or furnishings to help complete the project. We plan to seat up to thirty children inside, with picnic benches for outdoor working on the decking. We will also need a video microscope and digital projector for displaying invertebrates from pond dipping and grassland surveys.

We'd also be delighted to talk to commercial organisations that might be willing to sponsor the purchase of equipment or the construction of additional observation hides in the reserve itself.

If you can help in any way, please contact our Education Manager, Steve Bottom.

## ***Badger cubs***

We now have two young badger cubs for visitors to see. Taz was brought in to us separated from his parents and severely distressed and dehydrated. He has made a full recovery in the care of our keepers.

His companion Toby, came to us from London Wildcare wildlife hospital in Wallington. He was nursed back to full health and fitness by their able team of volunteers, but has become so tame that the preferred option of wild release is simply no longer possible.

These two are now together and playing as boisterously and noisily as any badgers - with Toby clearly establishing himself as the dominant one! We hope to provide a home to further orphans to form the basis of a stable family unit.



*Taz the badger cub*

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## ***Surrey Goes Wild!***

On Wednesday 23 August, we play host to Surrey Wildlife Trust's education team for *Surrey Goes Wild!* - a special day of fun and educational activities for children of all ages.

There's no extra charge for admission and all the usual attractions and keeper talks will be running.

## ***Evening events***

**Heather Angel - *A Natural Eye*  
Friday 25 August at 7.30 pm**

An illustrated talk by one of Britain's best known professional wildlife photographers.

Tickets £5 each (advance booking only)

**Dr Pat Morris - *Hedgehogs!*  
Friday 29 September at 7.30 pm**

Discover the world of the hedgehog in an illustrated talk by one of the country's acknowledged experts.

Tickets £5 each (advance booking only)

## ***A long hot summer?***

If the long range forecasts are correct, we're in for another dry summer. Although a few species will find this tough, it will be good news for some of our residents - notably reptiles like the grass snake and the adder. As long as conditions for their prey species are not too bad, hot weather suits snakes as their only source of heat is basking in the sun.



*One of our adders on the move in warm weather*

## ***Gardens for wildlife***

Gardens can provide vital habitat for wildlife. There are many ways to help wildlife and enhance the beauty of our gardens at the same time, and creating a wildlife pond is one of the best. A pond of any size is an asset to a wildlife garden and this summer we will be showing visitors how easy it can be.

Our own wildlife pond will be dug in the wildflower garden at the front entrance. Its construction will be filmed by students from Nottingham University and the resulting film will play for visitors to the Centre, providing a step by step guide to digging one back home after your visit!



*Ponds attract a host of wildlife, including dragonflies*

## ***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:

### **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

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# ***British Wildlife Centre***

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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