

# Wildlife News



Wildlife news and features from the British Wildlife Centre

Issue 11 - Summer 2007

## ***Welcome!***

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter covering life at the British Wildlife Centre. Read on to get right up to date with all the latest news.

## ***A new fox cub***

Born in late March, this year our vixen Honey has had just a single cub. He or she (we're not sure yet) came above ground for the first time on 30 April. The cub proved quite elusive for the next few weeks, but is now out regularly and seems very interested in what goes on in the wider world.



*Fox cub out and about on 23 May*

## ***School art competition***

We're running our School Art Competition again this year, with entry open to all primary school children visiting us during the year. Entry is simple - the theme is 'British Wildlife' and entries can use any material on a piece of A4 sized paper or card.

The judging panel will once again be headed by internationally renowned artist and conservationist David Shepherd. There are prizes for the winners in each age group and the honour of having their artwork displayed in an exhibition here right through

the summer holidays. If your school has not yet entered, there are more details on the Education pages of our web site, but do hurry as the latest date for entries is 22 June.

## ***Baby red squirrels***

A couple of litters of red squirrel kits have been born this spring. One litter of four proved so much for the mother concerned that the kits left (or were pushed) rather too early, and have been hand-reared by one of our keepers, Matt. It's a demanding job and it will be remarkable if as many as three or perhaps all four survive the crucial early months. Fingers crossed, and those that do will be back out in one of the outdoor enclosures in July.



*Hand feeding one of the young red squirrels*

## ***Stoats & weasels***

We have also had further successes breeding weasels, with a litter of 3 males and 3 females. A few will go to other zoos and wildlife parks, whilst the rest will remain with us and can currently be seen racing around their enclosure and along the runs and tunnels.

We are also hopeful that our stoats will have youngsters in the next month or so as well. Both

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stoats and weasels are relatively common, but rarely seen in the wild. Weasels are more frequently seen than stoats, but usually only as a small long creature racing across the road in front of your car!



*Weasel - only six inches long and lightning fast!*

### ***Wild heron chicks***

The previous newsletter reported on the herons nesting in our reserve and in particular on the strong winds in early March that demolished a few nests. Fortunately the herons persevered, and in two of the rebuilt nests we now have heron chicks.

The chicks are usually lying low down in the nest and somewhat obscured by the leaves, but there are at least three youngsters to swell the ranks of a dozen or so that fish here during the day.

### ***Digital photography & Photoshop day***

We are just finalising details for a special photography workshop on 11 September. This event is for anyone who loves wildlife photography and wants some tips from the experts on both photography, digital manipulation and enhancement of your images. You'll also get a chance to go inside some of our enclosures to get some really natural looking shots of the animals.

Our tutors for the day will be Heather Angel, professional photographer with over fifty published books to her name, and Giles Angel (her son), commercial photographer and digital re-toucher. Please call us or visit the web site for more details or to make a booking.

### ***Nature reserve school visits in 2008***

With our wetland nature reserve maturing and coming to life with spring and summer vegetation, there is plenty of activity out there. We are also busy devising an education programme based in the reserve itself. Completely separate to the school visits we have in the wildlife centre, we will be offering a varied programme of science and environmental activities including pond dipping, grassland and woodland topics.

We'll be taking bookings for April next year and are planning a number of days in the autumn to let teachers see the facilities and opportunities on offer for next year.

### ***Red deer calves***

The first red deer calf was born on 25 May, with several more expected from our herd of 10 adult females, called hinds. Although there are young males in the herd (three two year olds and a few youngsters from last year), they are subservient to the main stag, Eric, who will have fathered all the calves this year.



*Red deer calf about two months old*

The young calves will stay away from the herd for about a month, waiting alone and hidden in the grass for their mothers to return on occasions through the day to feed them. When they have got their strength and confidence up, they will graze with the rest of the herd. It should then be easy for visitors to see them from the observation boardwalk.

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## ***House mice on BBC Springwatch***

That wonderful feature on the house mice that aired on Bank Holiday Monday featured house mice from the British Wildlife Centre.



*Are we the house mouse's best friend?*

The house mouse is originally from Western Asia, but migrated with man across Europe thousands of years ago, and more recently by ship around the world to almost anywhere people now live. As the name might suggest, these adaptable little creatures are very good at living close to man, often making their homes inside houses, garages or sheds, and helping themselves to any food left lying around there!

## ***Evening lectures***

Our first talk this year, from zoologist, writer and wildlife photographer Mark Carwardine, was a sell-out and took place in the more comfortable surroundings of the visitor centre (better sight lines and chairs you can lean back in!)

There are still five more talks to come this year, with the next being 'All About Badgers' on Wednesday 27 June by Dave Williams, Chairman of the Badger Trust and Mammal Officer for Surrey Wildlife Trust.

Dave is Chairman of the Badger Trust, a registered charity that promotes the conservation and welfare of badgers and the protection of their setts and habitats. They are a leading voice for badgers and represent and support around 80 local voluntary badger groups.

Dave is himself a founder member of the West Surrey Badger Group and now acts as a field officer for them, and as Mammal Officer for Surrey Wildlife Trust he is also actively involved in conservation projects for badgers and other native mammals.

His talk will cover almost everything you wanted to know about badgers, from their biology, how to identify them from tracks and signs, their setts, badgers in gardens and badger watching.

Tickets for each talk are £6, or £5 for Members, and must be booked in advance. The reduced rate is also available to Surrey Wildlife Trust Members.

The remainder of the year's programme is:

Wednesday 25 July, 7.30pm - *Tales From an Animal Hospital*, Ted Burden, Founder of London Wildcare Trust.

Wednesday 29 August, 7.30pm - *The Dormouse*, by Dr Pat Morris, Mammalogist & former Senior Lecturer in Zoology, Royal Holloway, University of London.

Wednesday 26 September, 7.30pm - *Filming 'The Nature of Britain'*, by Simon Bell, Series Producer, BBC Natural History Unit.

Wednesday 31 October, 7.30pm - *British Birds of Prey*, by Yvonne Taylor, British Hawking Association.

## ***The adder dance***

Spotted during the warmer weather at the beginning of the month, our adders were busily engaged in a 'dancing' duel. This behaviour is rarely seen and was formerly believed to be a mating display. However, it is only males that engage in this activity and



*Two evenly matched adders duel in the sun*

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recent research suggests that they are competing for the chance to mate with a nearby female. Our two were certainly evenly matched and continued for about twenty minutes before one slid off, apparently defeated! We have high hopes that mating and young adders may follow later in the year.

### ***'Surrey Goes Wild' - Tuesday 21 August***

After the success of last year's event (although we hope for rather better weather this year), we welcome back Surrey Wildlife Trust's Events and Education teams for a day of family fun. On top of the usual attractions, we'll have quizzes and trails, face painting, pond dipping and lots more. There's no extra charge for admission, so it's a great opportunity to get even more out of your visit on that day.



*Tiny pond beasties up close on the big screen*

### ***Opening times 2007***

We're open every Saturday & Sunday until the end of October. We also open every day during school holidays, with the summer break running from Saturday 21 July to Sunday 2 September. We also open for a week at Autumn half-term and just after Christmas.

### ***A friend for Hermione***

In April we welcomed a second snowy owl, a male called Ulysses. Our aged female, Hermione, had been on her own since the death of her mate over a year ago. The two are getting on well, although both are likely to be too old to breed. It is debateable whether they can be considered a British species any more, as it is many years since they have bred in the wild, and only then in the far North of Scotland.



*Ulysses the snowy owl*

### ***Future plans***

This summer we hope to set up more stoat and weasel enclosures as part of a plan to bring more land into use at the Centre. This will also result in a more permanent enclosure for our family of friendly fallow deer - Bambi, Thumper and Bramble.

We also hope to expand our reptile and amphibian displays with the addition of more native species including lizards and slow worms.

Our nature reserve will also continue to develop and should provide great opportunities for viewing water birds and dragonflies over the summer.

We hope to welcome you here soon!

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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