

Wildlife News

British
Wildlife
Centre



Wildlife news and features from the British Wildlife Centre

Issue 10 - Spring 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.

Badgers in daylight

Over the winter, we started work on some changes to the badger enclosure. The first stage, which is already completed, is a modification to their outside space, where the badgers now emerge to explore during the afternoon. Toby in particular loves to come out for our keepers and get his teeth into some tasty snacks. As a result, we are now running a 4 o'clock Keeper Talk on the badgers - a great opportunity to see these wonderful animals in daylight.

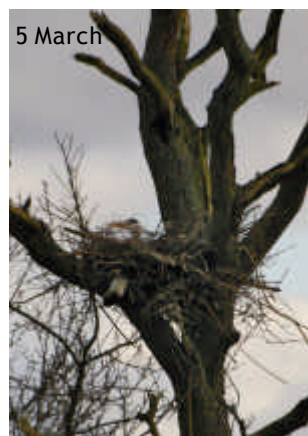
Meanwhile, we are also improving the underground observation badger sett. When this re-opens in April, there will be lots more information and even better opportunities to see the badgers during the day. Although badgers spend much of the daytime sleeping, they do move about quite a lot to get the most comfortable position. This usually means snuggling up to a partner - or pushing them out of the way if that doesn't work!



Toby out for the 4 o'clock Keeper Talk

Herons nesting in nature reserve

We've had a visiting group of herons in our nature reserve for over a year now, with as many as a dozen birds on most days. But in the past few weeks they have started to make some more positive moves towards staying here. Three nest sites have sprung up in precarious positions high in the mature oak trees overlooking the water, and their occupants are frequently stationed there watching the world go by.



One nest blew down in a storm - leaving a puzzled owner!

There's no sign of mating activity yet, but this could change very soon if they decide the area is suitable - and the signs are very good so far!

Our other resident water birds are also starting to seek out nesting sites, including mallards, moorhens and Canada geese. We've made sure there are several islands that are inaccessible to the local foxes - and we've seen plenty of those visiting the reserve as well.

Two brief snowfalls in January and February showed how much activity there can be at night, with fox tracks all over the place! Also identified from their footprints in the snow on those days were roe deer, rabbits and of course the huge prints of the herons.

Albino squirrel

A recent new arrival here is an unusual 'white' squirrel. He is actually the same as any other grey squirrel, but without the usual pigments in his fur - a phenomenon called albinism. Another feature of this is unusually pink eyes.



You can call me Snowy...

Albino grey squirrels are sometimes seen in a number of locations in Surrey and Sussex, but they are quite unusual. It's not just squirrels that can be albinos - bank voles, badgers and even white blackbirds have been sighted in this area, and the condition can also occur in humans.

This particular squirrel was cared for by the people at Folly Wildlife Rescue near Tonbridge. Albino animals sometimes have a tough time in the wild, losing any natural benefits of camouflage, or they may be rejected by others of their kind. This one is now simply too tame to release, so he has been given a permanent home here.

Evening Lectures Programme 2007

We have a great line-up of guest speakers and topics for our evening talks this year.

First up, on 22 May, is renowned zoologist, best-selling author and wildlife photographer, Mark Carwardine. An inveterate traveller, Mark has written more than 40 books - including the best-selling *Last Chance to See* with Douglas Adams - and for six years presented the weekly half-hour

programme, *Nature*, on BBC Radio 4. He has been Chairman of the Judging Panel for the prestigious BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition for the past three years and writes monthly columns in BBC Wildlife and Wanderlust magazines. In this highly entertaining and informative talk, Mark chats about his encounters with wild animals and even wilder people during more than twenty years travelling around the world.

On 27 June, Dave Williams will introduce us to the complex and mysterious world of the badger. Often in the news these days, but little understood, the badger is one of Britain's most engaging and intriguing wild mammals. As Chairman of The Badger Trust and Mammals Officer for Surrey Wildlife Trust, Dave is an interesting and knowledgeable speaker on the lives of these fascinating animals.

Tickets for each talk are £6 each, or £5 for Members, and must be booked in advance. The reduced rate is also available to Surrey Wildlife Trust Members. We'll have more details on the rest of the talks in the next newsletter, but in the mean time, here is the full line-up:

Tuesday 22 May, 7.30pm

Travels & Tribulations of a Zoologist

Mark Carwardine - Zoologist, best-selling author and wildlife photographer.

Wednesday 27 June, 7.30pm

All About Badgers

Dave Williams - Chairman, The Badger Trust

Wednesday 25 July, 7.30pm

Tales From an Animal Hospital

Ted Burden - Founder, London Wildcare Trust

Wednesday 29 August, 7.30pm

The Dormouse

Dr Pat Morris - Mammalogist & former Senior Lecturer in Zoology, Royal Holloway, Univ. of London

Wednesday 26 September, 7.30pm

Filming 'The Nature of Britain'

Simon Bell - Producer, BBC Natural History Unit

Wednesday 31 October, 7.30pm

British Birds of Prey

Yvonne Taylor - Secretary, British Hawking Association

Visitor Centre heating & Gift Shop

Spring half-term was a busy period for us, and we had many positive comments about the latest improvements we have made. Not least of these has been the installation of heating in the Visitor Centre. Although it's been a mild winter, it never seemed to be any warmer inside - until now! We're not promising tropical conditions, but it's now a good deal warmer when you come in from the cold.



Gift Shop makeover

We have also expanded the Gift Shop, which now also includes a broader selection of natural history books for all ages. More titles will be added to our range during the Spring, so if you're looking for books on British wildlife or a gift for a nature enthusiast, then do take a look when you visit.

Postcards of your favourite animals

We've also produced a range of postcards of our own animals. Featured are Frodo the fox, Thumper the fallow deer, Milo the barn owl and many others. They're on sale now at a very reasonable 20p each.

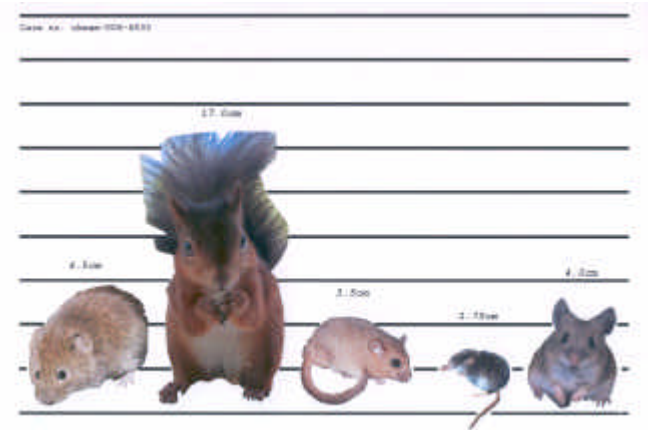


Easter Activities

If you are thinking of visiting over the Easter break, here are two extra dates for your diary:

Tuesday 3 April - *Mammal Detectives*.

Hands-on educational fun for children aged 9 - 11, run by the People's Trust for Endangered Species.



A wildlife 'whodunnit' - for youthful detectives!

Saturday 7 April - *Easter Animal Trail*.

Follow the clues around the Centre for an extra bit of fun this Easter.

Photographic Day dates

Budding (or seasoned) amateur photographers might like to check the latest list of Photographic Days this Spring and Summer. Places are still available on many dates to get fantastic wildlife shots, including access inside some of the enclosures. Our keepers will be with you all day to help, and as we will not be open to the public or to school groups when you come, peace and quiet is guaranteed!

March: Wednesday 21, Monday 26

April: Friday 27

May: Thursday 3 (fully booked), Tuesday 8, Monday 14, Monday 21 (fully booked)

June: Thursday 7, Friday 15, Thursday 28

July: Monday 9, Tuesday 17

Full details on how these days operate are on our web site, or you can ask us when you visit or give us a call for more information.

Photographic workshops

We also host a number of different workshops run by third parties - often established professional wildlife photographers, including the likes of Andy Rouse and Heather Angel. For more details of the different events, visit our web site.

East Grinstead Museum & Ashdown Forest

We've recently loaned some images and objects for a fascinating temporary exhibition at the East Grinstead Museum. Called *Ashdown Animals*, it explores the creatures on Ashdown Forest from Norman times to the present day - a fascinating story from one of the region's most attractive historic landscapes. The Museum is open Wednesday to Saturday (10 - 4) and Sundays & Bank Holidays (2 - 5). The exhibition runs from 3 March to 3 June and entry is free.



Our own fallow deer, caught in a cold snap this February.

Ashdown Forest itself is well worth a visit. A good place to start is the Forest Centre at Wych Cross. Visit www.ashdownforest.org for more information.

Opening times 2007

We're open every Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday until the end of October, and every day during school

holidays. Daily Easter opening is from Saturday 31 March to Sunday 22 April. We're also open for a week during Summer half-term, 26 May - 3 June, and then for six weeks over Summer from Saturday 21 July. We hope to welcome you here soon.

Spring highlights

Despite the wet weather, there is no doubt that Spring is well underway. It's a time of great activity for the animals, and we are hoping for new arrivals. Honey and Buster, the foxes, are both in good health, despite their considerable age (in fox terms). Last year Honey had three cubs and we are hopeful she will have more this year. The cubs are born underground and usually emerge for the first time at the very end of April or beginning of May.



Honey exploring in the snow

We may even have wild cat kittens before then, and are very likely to have young polecats and weasels in the next couple of months. Milo and Mrs Milo will also be busy rearing their first brood of young barn owls for 2007.

All in all, it's an excellent time to come and see what is going on and find out a little more about Britain's own wonderful wildlife.

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