

Wildlife News



Wildlife news and features from the British Wildlife Centre

Issue 16 - Autumn 2008

Welcome!

Welcome to the Autumn issue of our newsletter. Read on to get the latest news from the British Wildlife Centre.

Honey's fox cubs will stay

All our visitors have agreed with us (hopefully that is not too contentious) - this year's fox cubs have been the friendliest and most entertaining ever!

It was certainly unexpected when Honey gave birth this March to three cubs. As she turned 12 this year we had wondered if Honey would even be with us much longer.



Not quite as cute now, but still attractive and playful

Fortunately, she is in good health despite the extra family pressures. The cubs have been very steady so we intend to try and keep them.

Being realistic, Honey cannot have many more years left and it would be nice to continue her genetic line. This will mean a bit of rearranging to ensure there is enough space for them all, so as always seems to be the case, we are in for a busy winter getting the work done to achieve this.

Keeper changes

This year it's been all change in our keepers department. Alex has decided the world of work is too much for him and has gone back to being a student; seriously though, we wish him all the best as he starts a degree in animal behaviour at Plymouth. Meanwhile, in an even more life-changing move, Louise has started maternity leave. Her baby is due in October, so all our best wishes go to her.



Louise with Honey

These changes, on top of the increasing demands on our keepers, has made this the perfect time for a reorganisation. Consequently we are delighted to announce that Matt Binstead has been promoted to Head Keeper. Matt has been here for three years and has a wealth of knowledge of our animals and their care. The Centre will undoubtedly continue to make significant progress in future.



Matt is the one on the left

We also welcome to the permanent team Richard Ide, who has worked here part time over the past twelve months, and two new keepers, Laura Charnock and Izzy Coomber, who have recently been appointed. Welcome aboard everyone!

Steve is also leaving

Whilst on the subject of staff changes, yours truly will also be leaving soon for a total change of life and scenery down under in Tasmania. Having been here for six years I have seen the Centre grow considerably in size and prestige. I will certainly be able to depart with some satisfaction. As well as this newsletter and the web site, I have been tasked with all the marketing, print and interpretative signage during this period, along with many other aspects of the business, from schools education to planning the Wetland Boardwalk and its funding. This has surely been the broadest but most rewarding job description I've had to date!



Not sure who looks the sleepest here!

Not sure how useful my wildlife knowledge will be - there's some strange creatures creeping around in the bush!

History board

Several years ago we had a museum display including a series of panels explaining the background and development of the Centre. Due to space constraints this area was gobbled up some time ago for additional seating in the Coffee Shop. However, after answering many more enquiries from visitors, we have recently erected a huge new panel explaining the Centre's origins. In the 1970s this site was a

successful dairy farm of pedigree Jersey cows, before the owner, David Mills, sold up to create and run the wildlife centre you see today. As the display reveals, the Centre has been changing and improving ever since.



How it all started

Water voles release

Next year we plan to release a large group of water voles in the nature reserve. The bank side vegetation has now grown sufficiently to provide cover and food for them. A small number were released this summer and are occasionally spotted by visitors, although these voles are as elusive as any in the wild - and with good reason, given the number of natural predators out there. On our site the herons will prove a hazard to the voles, but like many small mammals, their survival technique is simply to breed in large numbers to survive any predation.



Not easy to spot - but they are still out there

In the wild, water voles have suffered considerably as a result of the introduction by man of an alien predator - the American mink, formerly farmed for

their fur but now flourishing after escapes into the countryside. A necessary step in establishing a viable wild population of water voles in our reserve will be controlling the numbers of mink. It's a complex and emotive subject, but sometimes human intervention is necessary in order to restore the natural balance of species - especially when we are at fault for disturbing it in the first place.

Country Lives TV show

In August we were featured on the ITV series *Country Lives* with Chris Beardshaw, shown in the Meridian and Anglia regions. It was a half hour programme all about the British Wildlife Centre and really projected the feel of the place. It also gave us quite a boost in visitors at the end of the summer holidays. The filming was completed in April - it seems like an age when we think back.



BWC owner David Mills filmed with Chris Beardshaw

If you missed it (or it wasn't on in your region), the film will probably stay on the [itvlocal](http://itvlocal.com) web site for a few more weeks. Visit our own web site for the link.

Taxidermy talk

On 29 October we welcome back long-time friend of the Centre Dr Pat Morris to give another enthralling talk, this time on taxidermy. These days it is considered a strange and macabre topic, but it is nonetheless a fascinating insight into wildlife and our attitudes towards it in the recent past. Taxidermy retains some scientific value today, both in respect of preserving new specimens and gleaning knowledge from those magnificent, if slightly creepy, ornate glass fronted cabinets of Victoriana!

Tickets are £6 each (£5 for members) and are on sale at the Centre or by card payment on the phone.

David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation

Back in July, wildlife artist and conservationist David Shepherd engaged a packed audience in his inimitable style with stories and anecdotes of his career in both painting and conservation. The tills were ringing that evening too and we are delighted to report that the event raised nearly £2000 for the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation.



Artist David Shepherd in his studio

If you don't know about the fantastic work this small but highly effective wildlife charity does, do visit their web site at www.davidshepherd.org.

Red squirrels born

We've been lucky again to have several red squirrel kittens born this summer; although just as in previous years, one has since died. In the wild it is normal for a few from each brood not to reach



Two young red squirrel kittens

adulthood. The reproductive strategy used by many small mammals is to rear large numbers of young in the expectation that a significant proportion will fall to predators, disease or cold winter weather. Ours obviously have a better chance than many wild ones, but there are risks nonetheless. Hopefully the others will continue to thrive.

Donation thanks

We have been fortunate to receive many kind donations over the years, both financial and in kind. Most recently our thanks go to three girls from Purley, who raised over £100 on a sponsored dog walk this summer and donated the proceeds.



Laura Slater and sisters Lauren & Robyn Hunt-Williams

Thanks also to Mrs Emery, a long-time adopter of our wild cats, who has made a further generous donation to fund new sleeping boxes for all our cats.

And to everyone else who has offered donations over the past twelve months - thank you very much and sorry we haven't space to mention you all by name!

Next newsletter

The next issue will probably be out in the Spring and in future we may well produce just three issues a

year. Members will also notice that we are now only sending out one copy per household.



We had snow this Easter - but what about Christmas?

Previously we ensured every child had their own copy and we hope they have gained great enjoyment and knowledge from this, but we feel that printing all these extra copies is perhaps a little wasteful on resources. If members would like an extra copy, then by all means ask when you visit, but otherwise we hope you'll appreciate the reason for this change.

Opening times 2008-09

We are open every Saturday, Sunday & Public Holiday from March to October, and daily during the following school holiday periods:

Autumn half term

Sat 25 October - Sun 2 November

Christmas & New Year

Sat 27 December - Sun 4 January 2009

Spring half term

Sat 14 February - Sun 22 February 2009

Easter holiday

Sat 4 April - Sun 19 April 2009

***Best wishes and thanks to
all our members and supporters!***

----- Text & photography: Steve Bottom, British Wildlife Centre. Next issue Spring 2009 -----

British Wildlife Centre

**Eastbourne Road - Newchapel - Lingfield - Surrey - RH7 6LF
01342 834658 www.britishwildlifecentre.co.uk**

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