

In this issue...

- *Walk-in with red squirrels - a work in progress*
- *We welcome otters from Scotland*
- *Farewell to Honey*
- *The latest on our Nature Reserve*
- *Heather & Giles Angel Photographic Workshop*

And more....

We're wild about badgers



Our new wild badger sett located on the Nature Reserve is now inhabited. This artificial sett was designed and constructed in 2005 by badger expert Adrian Coward, from The Somerset Badger Group.



The sett, built to replicate those found in nature, used large drainage pipes to create a network of underground tunnels linking the sleeping chambers. The structure was then covered with a mound of earth, leaving four entrance holes clear.

Six badgers, from Secret World Wildlife Rescue in Somerset, were moved in during December and are making themselves quite at home, already excavating to enlarge the sett. The area has been electric fenced for security and we provide food daily to ensure the badgers continue to thrive.

Our specially constructed on-site hide means we're well equipped for badger watching, so look out for news of events later this year.



Walk-in with red squirrels



*“...a unique experience,
the only one of its kind
in the country”*

Visitors to the Centre may have noticed work being carried out on the Copse including new fencing and tree planting. Currently under construction is an exciting new venture - a Walk-Through Red Squirrel Enclosure. When complete it will provide an entirely unique experience, being the only one of its kind in the country!

Visitors will be able to enter the Copse enclosure and walk amongst the red squirrels. Such an opportunity will present the ideal

conditions for some wonderful close-up wildlife photography. We will of course provide seating so that the energetic activities of this appealing creature can be enjoyed at a leisurely pace.

We're aiming to complete the work by the end of 2009 and hope to populate the enclosure with the year's red squirrel kittens. If all goes as planned we'll be launching the enclosure early in 2010 and will be sure to keep you up to date with our progress.

Did you know...?

- In the south the red squirrel is only found on Brownsea Island, off the Dorset coast, and on the Isle of Wight.
- **On the mainland it is only found in the far north of England and in Scotland.**
- Red squirrels have peaks of activity, 2-3 hours after dawn and before dusk in the summer, but just a single morning peak in the winter.
- **They do not hibernate but do suffer from the cold and damp.**
- Population: recent pre-breeding estimates are in excess of 145,000.



Oscar venturing out on the ice

Scottish otters makes six!

We were delighted to welcome two new residents in December - a pair of otters arrived all the way from Camperdown Country Park, Dundee's largest park. Stirling, a 9 year old male, and Thistle, a 6 year old female, moved into their own pond at the Centre and spent Christmas settling into their new abode.

Their arrival is something of a family reunion as Stirling and Thistle's daughter Lily is already a resident, where she shares the neighbouring pond with her mate Ollie. Along with Oscar and Minnie in our third pond we now have six lively, healthy otters at the Centre. The latest arrivals are a successful breeding pair so we may well be adding to that tally later in the year.

The new arrivals, though initially shy and a little reclusive, now appear to feel quite at home, exploring their enclosure and responding to the keepers. But if they thought winters would be warmer down south they were in for a disappointment, as their ponds were frozen over much of the time.



Minnie preferring the island

NOTE! Members' Evening 2009 ~ Sat 4th July 5.30 pm...

Heather Angel Workshop

Photographic experts back by popular demand



Last year we hosted two successful photographic workshops led by top professional wildlife photographer Heather Angel and her son Giles, a commercial photographer and digital re-toucher. As we've come to expect places at these events went fast, so we're pleased to announce a date for 2009:

*Wednesday 1st April
9.45am - 5pm*

The workshop combines tuition and photography, plus some excellent opportunities to get images of the animals at the Centre. The day includes a presentation from Heather, with expert advice on composition and lighting, with sessions inside some of the animal enclosures.

Giles will explore the use of Photoshop with practical advice on making the most of your images. It promises to be an exciting, varied day. A great package for anyone wanting to improve their skills.

Numbers are limited so advance booking is essential. For more details please check our website or call us at the Centre for availability.



Attracting Wildlife *Tips for Spring*

As our countryside has changed private gardens are now a vital lifeline for wildlife, becoming the UK's largest 'nature reserve'. Providing food sources in spring is particularly crucial, ensuring newly emerging life survives and thrives.

❖ Plant a variety of brightly coloured, nectar-rich flowering plants in large groupings to attract insects - essential food for birds and their chicks.

❖ Include early bloomers, such as primrose, celandine, aubrietia and berberis.

❖ Avoid whole peanuts, fat and bread as these are not suitable foods for chicks.

❖ Consider providing 'live food' such as mealworms, as well as seeds suitable for wild birds (available from garden centres or by mail order).

❖ Place nest boxes in sheltered spots out of the reach of cats and other predators.

❖ Love your weeds! Set aside a corner of your garden and let it run wild; grasses, nettles, dandelions and daisies will provide food and shelter for insects and small mammals.

A fond farewell to Honey

Our very first and most popular resident Honey sadly died of old age at the end of January. Thankfully, she passed away peacefully in her sleep. At 13 Honey was an impressive age and probably the oldest fox in captivity.

Honey was taken in as a six week old orphaned cub back in April 1996, by owner David Mills. She was hand-reared in his home and became a much loved member of the family. Her ease around humans made her very popular with our visitors

and a particular favourite with photographers. Honey also featured in a number of wildlife programmes and became our very own star of the small screen.

Her last litter of cubs in March 2008 was unexpected given her years but reflected the excellent health she enjoyed throughout her life. The good news is that her bloodline continues with five year old dog fox Frodo and one year old vixen Pickles, who share her friendly, lively character.

Honey will be sadly missed by all of us here at the Centre, as well as her many regular visitors.



...the evening's activities will be on our website from June.

WANTED!

Do you have any unwanted:

- FISH TANKS
- REPTILE TANKS
- RODENT CAGES
- PET CARRY CASES
- TINNED PET FOOD

Please consider donating them to us. We would be able to put these items to very good use.

Thank you

In the bleak mid-winter

It has been a cold, bleak winter when temperatures regularly dropped well below zero, as well as the heaviest snow fall for 18 years. As you'll see from page two, all our ponds remained iced over much of time, though the otters didn't seem to mind! Being native all the wildlife here are hardy British stock, well equipped to cope with the occasional harsh winter. Our keepers had their work cut out, ensuring that our outdoor residents were kept regularly topped up with fresh drinking water as it re-froze so quickly.



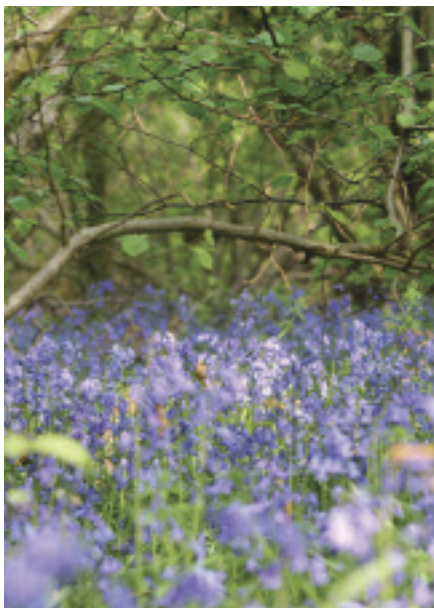
The Nature Reserve - cold but Christmassy!

Nature Reserve Review

Improvements to the nature reserve continue apace. We are extending the area by 10 acres by using redundant farmland. This new land will be carefully landscaped to provide a mixture of wetland and woodland habitat attractive to a variety of species. Fifty crab apple trees have been planted around the ponds to provide a future food supply for insects, birds and animals, especially our wild water vole population.



This latest planting, and indeed all the vegetation on the reserve, will become more established through the summer months and will provide increased shelter and food to support a wider variety of species. Insects attracted by the wild flowers will attract birds and small mammals, who in their turn will attract larger predatory mammals and birds into the area. The reserve will soon develop into an ideal environment in which an eco-system will grow.



British Wildlife Centre

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We're open every Saturday, Sunday and public holiday from March to October and daily during all school holidays.

Spring/summer school holidays:

Easter holiday

Sat 4 April to Sun 19 April

Summer half term

Sat 23 May to Sun 31 May

Summer holiday

Sat 18 July to Sun 6 September

Please call us or go online for information on membership, animal adoptions, school visits, private tours and special access for photography and film.

We would like to thank all our members and supporters.

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