

Overton Biodiversity Society News

Website: <http://www.overton-biodiversity.org/>

Spring/Summer 2013

The Bird of Prey Hospital

Members who attended the Annual General Meeting of the Overton Biodiversity Society enjoyed a fascinating talk on the Bird of Prey Hospital, once the formalities of the AGM were completed. Kim Kirkbride from the Hawk Conservancy (Weyhill, near Andover) gave an illustrated insight into the important work she and her colleagues do at the hospital.

The Bird of Prey Hospital is located at the Hawk Conservancy and takes in an average of 200 Birds of Prey every year. The aim of the hospital is to provide veterinary attention, care and rehabilitation of casualties, with a view to returning the birds to the wild where possible. Open 24 hours a day, the hospital receives injured and unwell birds of prey from members of the public, veterinary surgeries, charities such as the RSPCA and from the police. The hospital will only take in birds of prey and where possible, birds are released back to the area where they were found.



Photo: T. Williams

Kim explained that the most common injuries seen at the hospital include fractures, concussion, injuries sustained as a result of a road traffic accident and injuries resulting from shooting or being caught in snares, traps or barbed wire. They also find they have a lot of

young birds handed in, perhaps having fallen from the nest. A specialist vet is on hand to treat the birds, but the outcome of the treatment is very dependent on the type of injury the bird has suffered – sometimes the injury is so severe and life-changing, that the best option is to put the bird to sleep.

Birds are also brought in suffering from a range of diseases and parasites. For example, Tick infestations are particularly common and are bad news for the unlucky bird, as the high level of blood loss causes weakness. Ticks also like to target the eye and beak areas and because the area where the Tick attaches itself swells up, this severely hinders the bird's ability to feed.

Where a bird can be treated for a fracture, external pins are used to help the bone heal – these are removed before the bird is released back to the wild. Other injuries are best treated with plenty of rest, and you can see the special rehabilitation and pre-release aviaries at the Hawk Conservancy.

The hospital has a 45-50% release rate, which is an excellent figure, considering the extent of many of the injuries the birds come in with. Birds are returned to the area they were found in. The bird may have youngsters, an established territory or a partner in its 'home' area. They are released with a full stomach, so they can re-familiarise themselves with their home area first and worry about finding food later.

Kim finished her talk with a bit of advice for those of us who come across Birds of Prey seemingly in need of help. First of all and appropriate for this time of year - chicks! The hospital receives a number of apparently orphaned or abandoned chicks every year. If you come across a chick which has apparently been abandoned, don't pick it up straight away. Tawny Owl chicks, for example, commonly practice 'branching', where they jump out of the nest on to the floor. They will often climb back up to the nest, with their parents watching. The best thing to do is to leave the chick where it is but keep an eye on it. More often than not, the parents will be in the vicinity and will come and help the chick. If the chick is in a dangerous place, pop it up on a branch. Keep an eye on it and if, after a while, there is no sign of a parent bird, then it is OK to intervene. If at any stage you are at all worried or concerned about a chick and what you should do to help it, contact the Bird of Prey Hospital for advice.

Secondly, if you do find an injured bird of prey in need of help, the best way to safely pick it up is to get a towel (or similar) and drop it over the bird. Scoop the bird up in the towel, wrap it up in the towel (mind those claws!) and contact the Bird of Prey Hospital or your local vet for advice on where to take it. If you're in the car and you don't have any sort of box you can securely put the bird in, place the bird, still wrapped in the towel, in the passenger footwell and drive it to the nearest vet or to the Bird of Prey Hospital as advised.

<http://www.hawk-conservancy.org/Rehabilitation/hospital.asp>

Tel. 01264 773850

Tree/hedge cutting and nesting birds

A bit of timely advice now that Spring is showing signs of finally arriving. When planning any sort of gardening or landscape maintenance work, please, please remember to check for the presence of nests in any hedges and trees you're intending to work on.

It is an **offence** under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to **intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird** while it is in use or being built. If you know there is an active nest in your hedge or tree and you continue to cut it, damaging or destroying the nest in the process, you are committing an intentional act.

The main breeding season for nesting birds is between March and August, so it is recommended that you avoid cutting hedges and trees during this time.

However, it is recognised that overgrown or dangerous hedges and trees can become a safety or a neighbour issue, so before you undertake any necessary work during this time, please contact the RSPB on 01767 693690 for further advice.

Ash Dieback

As many readers will remember, the Ash Dieback disease hit the headlines last year as more and more trees in the UK became affected. The disease appears to have become established in the UK now and it's likely we'll see more trees affected by it as it spreads through our parks and woodlands. The disease is not harmful to people or animals, but it can kill Ash trees.

The symptoms:

- Dead branches
- Blackening of leaves, which often hang on the tree
- Discoloured stems, often in a diamond shape where the leaf was attached

If you see these symptoms, check them at the Forestry Commission website:

www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara or report them to the helpline 08456 335577. The website also contains a useful video and a Tree Alert app you can download.

You can help stop the disease from spreading by cleaning mud off your shoes, pushchairs, bicycles, cars, dogs and horses before you visit other areas and by not taking any leaves, wood or plants from the affected area.

Forthcoming events

21 April 2013 6am – Dawn Chorus Walk. Even if, like me, you're not a morning person, it's worth making the effort to get up and join us on the annual Dawn Chorus walk! We'll take an easy walk around the village listening for and identifying the various birds to be found in the area. Followed by breakfast. Meet at the Community Centre.

28 April 2013 12pm – Little Meadow May Day Event. A fun family event with plenty of wildlife-related activities to keep the children busy. Bring a picnic and something to sit on!

5 May 2013 2pm – Historic Overton Walk. Meet at the Community Centre

May 2013 – Talk on bees (tbc)

June 2013 – Chalkies Guided Walk (tbc)

2 June 2013 2pm – Fields and River Walk. Meet at Overton Hill Car Park

5 July 2013 – Creatures of the Night evening (tbc). Owls, moths, bats and glow worms!

21 July 2013 2pm – Walk around the new AONB leaflet route. Meet at Overton School

26 August 2013 – Trip to UK Wolf Conservation Trust Open Day, Beenham. OBS to facilitate car sharing only – see next article.

September 2013 – Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust Watch Group and Guides: Bioblitz at Town Meadow (tbc)

The UK Wolf Conservation Trust

What do Wolves have to do with Overton Biodiversity Society? Not a lot, admittedly. Sadly, the Wolf was eradicated from the UK during the 18th century, thanks to relentless persecution by our ancestors. However, there is a place, not very far from here, where you can meet the sort of Wolves that once roamed freely in the UK and where you can learn that they are not the evil, bloodthirsty creatures that countless fairy stories would have you believe. OBS Committee members will be visiting the UK Wolf Conservation Trust (UKWCT) on its August Bank Holiday Open Day and you are more than welcome to join us.

I always felt sorry for the Wolf in the fairy stories I was read. Little Red Riding Hood only had herself to blame if she couldn't tell the difference between her Grandmother and a big hairy animal – as the adverts say, she should have gone to SpecSavers. The Wolf was the creature used to represent evil in so many of our folk tales, fables and Biblical stories and was labelled as Public Enemy Number One in many countries. Countless shameful and barbaric actions were taken to eradicate the animal from the UK, Europe, Russia and North America. Thankfully, a few small, stubborn populations held on outside of the UK in Europe, Russia and North America. Traditional attitudes towards Wolves are slowly changing as the lives and behaviour of these populations are studied, leading to better understanding of this extremely intelligent and efficient predator.

The UKWCT aims to promote better understanding of the Wolf and to improve the animal's image in the public perception. The Trust currently has ten 'Ambassador' Wolves, who are familiarised to human company (they are not 'tame', but are happy in the company of people). These include European Wolves, which are the sort that used to roam the UK. You can also meet Arctic Wolves, North American Wolves and a European/North American crossbred wolf. Living in pairs or trios, the Wolves have large, safe enclosures with trees, water and shelter areas where they can roam around and exhibit some of their natural

behaviour. They run around and play, just like your pet dog. They squabble amongst themselves, reinforcing the pack hierarchy and they come to the front of their enclosures to be fed pieces of meat or to be scratched on their itchy spots by their handlers. The handlers are the most knowledgeable and enthusiastic people you could ever meet – no question is too silly. If you're really lucky, you might hear the Wolves howling, a beautiful, spine-tingling sound. The handlers will tell you that the Wolves like to howl at the church bells, police sirens and the ice cream van, as well as each other!

The aim of the UKWCT is not to try and reintroduce the wolf to the UK, but is to educate us about this fascinating animal and make us understand how important it is to help safeguard the remaining populations from extinction. The Wolf is an integral part of its natural ecosystem. For example, as we've recently seen in the UK with deer, the lack of a top predator results in the overpopulation of their prey animals and leads to problems such as over-grazing or conflict with human activities. This in turn leads to calls for controversial management strategies of the prey species, like the proposed large-scale cull of a large percentage of the UK deer population. Where the wolf is present, in places such as Yellowstone National Park in the USA, it is documented that the populations of deer, elk and other prey animals are kept in check and there are fewer problems with overgrazing.

The UKWCT is not a zoo and is not open to the public. Instead, you can visit on specific event days or by booking a Howl Night or Wolf Walk. The OBS Committee members are visiting the Trust on its Bank Holiday Open Day on Monday 26 August and we can assist with car sharing if you would like to come along but do not have access to transport. The UKWCT is based at Beenham, Berkshire, just off the A4. Entrance to the Open Day is £10 for adults (£8 in advance) and £5 for children (aged 3-11, children under 3 go free) and Senior Citizens. As well as seeing the Wolves and meeting their handlers, there are some great opportunities for photos of the Wolves, a Bird of Prey display, children's activities, Hug-a-Husky, Dog Agility and much more.

Tel. 771121 to request or offer assistance with transport to the UKWCT Open Day on August 26.

<http://ukwct.org.uk/>

We want your wildlife sightings!

Sighting reports from OBS members have dwindled recently so with the long-awaited Spring finally showing signs of arriving, we want to hear from you! Any sighting is of interest to us – even more so after the particularly harsh Winter our flora and fauna has just had to endure. This year we're particularly interested in Butterflies and Moths, but do keep us updated with anything you see in and around Overton. It helps us understand the variety of wildlife we've got in the area and we can also see if the poor weather has had an effect on the populations, particularly of insects and birds.

Tell us what you saw, where you saw it and the date. You can drop a note of your sightings in to the Overton Biodiversity box in the St Michael's Hospice shop or email sightings to: fieldfare@jaybry.gotadsl.co.uk

OBS Juniors

Smokey's sightings



Hi, I'm Smokey. I had a very bad start in life so I don't go outside, but I love to sit in my window and see what's going on.

Wow, what a long, cold winter we've had. I'm glad I have a furry coat to keep me warm, I did not like the look of that snow!

Much of our wildlife will have struggled to keep warm and eat enough during the winter. Some of the hibernating animals, like the Dormouse, will have slept longer than usual because it stayed so cold for so long. They will have used up every bit of their fat reserves and will be VERY hungry when they wake up (I know how they feel, I'm very hungry at 6 am every morning). Some may not have survived the winter. We need you to do two things:

1. If you fed the birds during the winter, please keep feeding them. The Spring has come late and this means there won't be so many fruits, seeds and insects for the birds to eat. When they have chicks, it is very important there is enough food for both the parents and the chicks.
2. Tell us about the wildlife you see! We can then get an idea of how badly the cold spell has affected our local birds, insects, animals and plants. Write down what you've seen, where you saw it and what date you saw it on. You can drop your notes into the Overton Biodiversity Society box in the St Michael's Hospice charity shop or email your sightings to: fieldfare@jaybry.gotadsl.co.uk.

Things to look out for

As well as birds, animals and plants, this year we really want you to look out for Butterflies, Moths and Bees. Don't worry if you're not sure what type of Butterfly, Moth or Bee you've seen, you can describe their colours and markings instead. If it stays still for long enough, you could even draw it or take a photo for us!