



GUILDFORD ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM *newsletter*

www.gefweb.org.uk

JUNE – AUGUST 2018

Butterfly Conservation helps Rosamund Garden

John Bannister

FOURTEEN PEOPLE turned up on Friday 11th May to help us put in seven scrapes for kidney vetch seeds, to grow the food plant for the Small Blue. This, our smallest British butterfly, is seen at The Mount, Pewley Down and Newlands Corner, and it is hoped by Butterfly Conservation to establish a strong population at Rosamund. Some specimens of the Small Blue have been seen at Rosamund but Fiona Haynes, the Small Blue Project Officer for Butterfly Conservation, is keen to boost the population by linking sites along the chalk downs. Kidney vetch is not the easiest plant to grow, especially when it has to compete with a rich sward as we have at Rosamund.

Scrapes involve removing the turf to reveal bare

soil, the chalkier the better. One small scrape was put in last year with Bill Downey and we identified five small seedlings that had taken, which was encouraging. The new scrapes are larger (3 x 5m) and are concentrated at the eastern end of the Rosamund 19 acres, well away from the nesting skylarks, which could be heard and seen. The turf and soil removed was placed downgradient of the scrapes which means the nutrients don't run back into the scrapes and a steep south-facing edge is created. which is good for invertebrates.

We saw several Green Hairstreak butterflies, which are stunning compared with the Small Blue. GEF will organise butterfly transects over the year to monitor the range of butterflies on the Rosamund site.



2 Recycling in Guildford

Report by John Bannister

CHRIS WHEELER, Waste and Fleet Services Manager at GBC, and LIZ MOCKERIDGE were kind enough to come and speak to GEF at our 2018 AGM. The subject was Guildford's current recycling performance. Given that we have been inundated with images of sea creatures and birds, large and small, choking on our plastic waste and dying as a consequence, the interest was very high and the meeting well attended with lots of questions.

Chris and Liz are responsible for the design and operation of Guildford's domestic and commercial waste collection services. For domestic customers, it is what we know as the kerbside collection service with a green wheelie bin for recyclables, a brown one for garden waste and a black one for non-recyclables.

The long list of recyclables includes paper and card (dry not wet), cans, tins and aerosols, hard plastic containers including detergent, shower and bath products, glass bottles and jars, household batteries (in a separate plastic bag supplied by the council), textiles (in a separate bag), food waste and garden waste.

It excludes certain things for good reasons and we were clearly reminded by Chris that it is very important to read the council literature on recycling, that comes through our door, backed up by the GBC website, so that unwanted materials are kept out of the recycling as these can play havoc with the quality and price GBC get paid. In addition, if you don't have a compost heap then food waste goes into a small caddy, again with clear instructions. Any small electrical items are to be put in a separate bag. All in all a pretty comprehensive list of recyclables.

So why are we only achieving a recycling rate of 59.7% (in 2016/17)?

Switching from separate recycling boxes to wheelybins was positive overall as our recycling rate went up even though the contamination rate increased slightly. Surrey has the highest recycling rate among counties in the country, and Guildford has the second highest rate in Surrey. So maybe it is a problem of success and from now on our recycling rate will only inch up.

As Chris said when asked what he would do to increase our recycling rate: "more of the same". I suspect that Guildford's recycling rate depends on which part of Guildford you live in. Every collection

round will be different. It occurs to me to query whether the best rounds could help the less good? But for that we would need more data, which GEF doesn't have.

In answer to some of our other questions we learned that:

1. The 59.7% 2016/17 recycling rate was made up of mixed recycling, recycled green waste, sweepings, food waste as well as a small contribution from various 'bring' facilities.
2. Surrey County Council (SCC) sends only a tiny amount to landfill, as residual/'black bag' waste goes to Energy from Waste (EfW) plants at Colnbrook, Mitcham and Allington. GEF were advised that none of the UK EfW plants has heat recovery because "the economics do not justify this, although Colnbrook has that potential".
3. In 2016/17 GBC took 14,970 tonnes to Biffa. Of that 945 tonnes were rejected, giving about 6% of the material sent by GBC to Biffa.
4. For some time there has been a committee comprising GBC and other Surrey councils, SCC and contractors to discuss the overall performance and to allow councils to learn from each other and share best practice.
5. At 59.7% we could do better. It remains to be seen whether this government sanctions a bottle return scheme based on the ones that have been operating in other EU countries for many years. If they do (and I have been lobbying my MP to follow this example of best practice) then it would be expected to raise UK recycling rates, but council targets would have to be adjusted.
6. GBC did well to work with Biffa as they have the technology to separate all rigid plastics and have avoided some of the issues with China no longer wanting to take our waste.
7. GBC does not want plastic film. This material however would make good feedstock for EfW plants, and on no account should be landfilled.

It's a complex issue for residents and the council to get our waste recycling right, but there is scope for improvement. We believe that Chris and Liz between them are doing a great job and have a team that's always wanting to learn and help residents. GEF wants to learn from them and help in any way we can.

No place to hide

Snow cover was thick and widespread in early March. Seen from a police helicopter, one Keighley property was conspicuous for being the only one on the road without snow on the roof, due to the large cannabis farm it concealed which needed plenty of heat.

(Source: *1 Weekend*, 3 Mar '18)

Legacy of hottest day

Dumped at Frensham Great Pond on the hottest spring day this year: 7 disposable barbecues, 143 alcoholic drinks containers, various food items and plenty of packaging.

(Source: *Surrey Advertiser*, 27 Apr '18)

FACTS & FIGURES

Carousel

Unlike most chicks, which are highly competitive when food is offered, young kingfisher chicks each enjoy fair shares. They sit in a ring in the nest-chamber, bills pointing outward, with one chick facing towards the light of the nest entrance. When a parent enters with a fish, only the latter chick begs and receives the food. Once it has eaten, the chicks all move round until the next in line faces the entrance, and so on, as each is fed in turn. This extraordinary relay continues until the young are about two weeks old, by which time it becomes more of a free-for-all.

(Source: *WWT Waterlife*, April/Jun '18)

3 GUILDFORD ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

8th May 2018

Adrian Thompson opened the 2018 AGM of the Guildford Environmental Forum (GEF) with his report of the past year. He welcomed over 30 members and potential members, who had attended the earlier talk on recycling (see separate article opposite). Adrian reported that 2018 is the 25th Anniversary year of the Guildford Environmental Forum. GEF had been founded in 1993, following the Rio Climate Change Summit, which called upon communities to take action at a local level to limit the impact of Climate Change. He went on to report how GEF had been very active over the last year in trying to realise that aim.

Adrian summarised the highlights of the year as follows:

- a. The Executive Committee had reviewed our Mission, Principles and Key Actions and these had been set out in the September edition of our quarterly newsletter.
- b. There was good news on membership. GEF had added 38 new members this year – more than treble any previous year. We expect to lose 10% of our members each year, mainly as a result of moving away or through ill health. The net growth in membership in 2018 had been 23, which will help future finances considerably. Adrian encouraged those present to pass on newsletters to their friends or relatives and to encourage them to join GEF.
- c. Adrian noted that he was very pleased that some 96 members (two thirds) are now paying by standing order, which saves a lot of time. He also noted that it was now 8 years since we last increased our subscriptions.
- d. Adrian presented the accounts for the year to March 2018, which showed that even after contributing £750 to the Rosamund Community Garden, there was a deficit of just £217 and there was some £5,300 in the bank to fund future progress. The forecast was for a similar deficit in the year to March 2019 after assuming further grants to the Rosamund Community Garden and the Swift Project.
- e. **CLIMATE CHANGE**
 1. GEF members had enjoyed excellent talks on this subject by Bill Kyte on 26th April, Tim Green on 17th July and Henrietta Stock on 22nd Jan. The enthusiasm from the latter talk led to the formation of a Core Group on Climate Change and Adrian would welcome any members who would like to join this group.
 2. GEF's 25th Anniversary event will be held on 11th October, 2018 and bookings had already been taken for 40 to attend this event. The GBC Council Chamber had been booked and GEF expected to welcome a large number of representatives from Guildford institutions and other organisations as well as GEF members. Anyone interested in attending should contact Adrian to book a place.
- f. **SWIFTS, PEREGRINES AND SMALL BLUES**
 1. John Bannister gave an excellent update on his Peregrine Falcon and Swift projects in Guildford and Woking urban areas to help re-establish peregrines and swifts in those towns.
 2. In the countryside, GEF have also been significant partners in the Small Blue Stepping Stones butterfly project. Fiona Haynes

was appointed as part time project officer by Butterfly Conservation, helped by significant funding from Veolia. Over the autumn and winter, there has been much clearance of scrub and dominant grass along the scarp slope of the North Downs. An average of 15 volunteers per session per week have helped contractors to create over 60 chalk scrapes with a view to encouraging a variety of butterflies such as grizzled and dingy skippers, silver-spotted skippers, adonis blues and, of course, small blues. Regular butterfly transects through the summer will help to monitor the progress of these species and also the many invertebrates and plants that depend on chalk grassland.

g. HEDGEROW HEROES

In addition GEF has also enjoyed excellent lectures on "Hedgerow Heroes" by Jim Jones of Surrey Wildlife Trust. The Hedgerow Heroes project is long term and is gaining momentum. GEF members are encouraging local communities to plant new hedges and to record the state of existing hedges.

h. APPLE PRESSING AND SCYTHING

Both activities jointly with Transition Guildford last year were very successful and raised a total income of over £900.

i. LOCAL PLAN

GEF continues to provide responses to the Guildford Local Plan and these were set out in our autumn newsletter. We have met with GBC's Climate Change Officer and Rural Economy Officer to see how we can help GBC's efforts to make Guildford greener.

j. BEDZED

John Bannister had arranged and led a highly successful visit to the BedZED sustainable housing development in Sutton on 5th September. This was summarised in the December newsletter. GEF were pleased that our members were joined by officers from Guildford and Woking Councils, members of the Guildford Society and the Guildford Vision Group.

k. GEF NEWSLETTER

The quarterly newsletter continues to be at the centre of GEF's mission and now attracts a readership of

over 1,000 for each edition. The Executive committee are hugely grateful to Clare Windsor, who has edited the newsletter for many years. We continue to enjoy a great range of articles from our members and partners in a range of projects.

FORMAL PROCEEDINGS

a. ELECTIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The following had offered themselves for re-election:

- Alastair Atkinson
- John Bannister
- Keith Chesterton
- John Scott
- Richard Seymour
- Adrian Thompson

Additionally, GEF member, Councillor Colin Cross had agreed to stand for election. No further nominations had been received and all seven were duly elected.

b. ADOPTION OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION

The new Constitution had been printed on page 4 of the March edition of the GEF newsletter. No suggestions for change were received and a clear majority agreed the adoption by a show of hands.

"For the majority, nature barely registers. And it does not do so for perfectly acceptable reasons. They are simply too busy... They are consumed by the need to sustain their marital or family relations... and enjoy their precious leisure moments and their surplus wealth, with a barbecue or an hour at the match on a Saturday afternoon. There is no room for the fate of the fly orchid or the pine hoverfly."

(From "Our Place: Can We Save Britain's Wildlife Before It Is Too Late?" by Mark Cocker)

ON THE PASSING OF STEPHEN HAWKING

by Michael Tanner

Sunlit morn
in this segment of the Blue Planet
spinning in black space.
Blackbird
on branch in my backyard
sings joyfully
knowing what of black holes
(other than those leading to worms)
I've not a black ink inkling –
or how that might translate to an equation.

But from that earnest orange bill
his little avian brain
sends messages to mine
I have no trouble understanding.

Talk of black holes leaking
a universal energy
could be spot-on.



The urban fox

by Forum member Michael Tanner

SURPRISINGLY, PERHAPS, no such beast as *Vulpes urbanus* exists, even if you think to have glimpsed him, her or it on the very edge of your headlights in the encroaching dusk. Yes, there are such creatures as house mice, house martins, house flies even, in Linnaeus' book, plus a virtually inexhaustible number of other birds, mammals, insects, arachnids, beetles, bugs and reptiles which have crept closer to man as he left the wilderness for the city and more dependable food supplies. Quite a few of these have, over thousands of years, modified their anatomy and their behaviour due to the marked changes entailed in diet and environment. And in our own time we see peregrine, herring gull, rock pigeon, wood pigeon, magpie, mallard, grey squirrel, rabbit, racoon and innumerable others



joining the host who have followed Man to the very heart of his cities.

Presumably 'civilised' Man himself has also undergone physiological and other changes for similar reasons, but his species name has not changed from *Homo sapiens* to *Homo urbanus* (not yet). For a start, the gut bacteria which are such an important and substantial part of his physiology and his immune systems must have significantly changed over the last five centuries alone.

But to return to our red fox, *Vulpes vulpes*, whoever, whatever and wherever he/she/it is – of all creatures this one seems to attract anthropomorphism to such a degree it continues to defy an objective approach. You can hardly be unaware of the range of contradictory emotions which it has aroused in the human breast ever since men became conscious of their own individuality in relation to the world around them and its other creatures. Long before Aesop and books, *Vulpes vulpes* was constantly endowed by humans with characteristics which wobbled between the criminal and the heroic: slyness, shyness, wanton cruelty, intelligence, persistence, endurance, independence, a supreme ability to survive, simulation, amongst others – oh! and a lust for poultry which only modern man can exceed.

At this point of my presentation a few basic facts may be reassuring. [Continued overleaf]

RED FOX, *Vulpes vulpes*

ORDER: Carnivore (though it is definitely an omnivore)

FAMILY: Canidae (which includes dogs, wolves, coyotes and jackals)

SIZE: Largest of the fox species but often looks larger than it is – mass 2.2 to 14kg, height 35 to 50cm

PAIRING: Monogamous for the life span of a particular pair

GESTATION PERIOD: 49 to 58 days (a little shorter than a dog's)

NUMBER OF CUBS: 4 to 5 cubs usually March – April

MATURITY: After 10 months the young usually have to fend for themselves

LIFESPAN: More than half of cubs die before they are 10 months old. Unusual for a fox to live as long as 5 years unless in captivity, when up to 20 years is possible

Britain's fox population

DEFRA (in 2013) suggested that Britain had a fox population of 430,000 at the beginning of the breeding season. An earlier (1999) estimate for the total adult fox population in Britain at the start of the breeding season was 258,000, of which 225,000 lived in rural areas and **33,000 in urban areas**. These figures were based on several methods of measuring over a period of time. However, the sophistication of methods is continually improving. The exact size of the red fox population, like the individual itself, would seem very difficult to pin down.

Distribution of Britain's urban foxes

Dawn Scott of Brighton University recently informed The British Ecological Society that urban fox densities in the north of England had increased while those in the south had not. Figures based on sightings between 2013 and 2015 in eight British towns or cities included the following:

Bournemouth – 23 per sq km

London – 18 per sq km

Brighton – 16 per sq km

Overall, the estimated 1999 figure of 33,000 for the urban fox was revised to **150,000** by 2015, the increase being in the north. These figures suggest that particular areas have a natural ceiling to their urban fox densities. It is certain that a local population can suffer a severe and sudden decline through disease, such as an outbreak of sarcoptic mange, but numbers seem to be restored within a comparatively short period.

When numbers reduce in a locality it is normal

for foxes who have not yet established a territory to fill the gap left. This is done with remarkably little fuss when compared with a number of other species. A young and barely mature male fox will normally have to search for a young unpaired female. This results in a continual movement of the rural fox into the city, and the converse. It does happen sometimes that two mature males disputing a territory and the protection of a particular female may fight to the death.

Life in town

A fox pathologist could distinguish between the corpse of a fox found in town and that of a fox from a rural area (unless told beforehand) only from the cause of death, stomach contents and superficial factors such as traces of distinctly urban or rural substances, though both might be present on a fox of either category. One might wonder whether there being such a short life span for the adult fox has slowed down evolution through genetic change.

It is of interest to note that wolves in some parts of Europe appear to recognize the significance of the difference between the rear light of a road vehicle and its headlight (red or white respectively) if they wish to cross a highway at night. From the high rate of road kill in both city and countryside, there seems to be little evidence of this ability being inherited by British foxes. (Curiously, domestic cats in cities seem to be less prone to being run over on the roads.)

Rural foxes first colonised urban areas of Britain in the 1930s, and they reached the centres of large cities by the 1960s. Today, suburbs of low



density semi-detached housing hold the highest fox densities. In one city, Bristol, a 1980s survey found that about 60% of their diet was available from residents' waste food, the remainder comprising what they would have consumed in rural places: earthworms, insects, small birds, small mammals such as mice and rats, some berries and fruit. About 10% of local residents regularly fed the foxes.

Rabbits are a major source of fox food in the countryside, and it seems that in the town foxes are successful predators of rats and mice. Earthworms are an important part of their diet, and the decrease of these in urban areas because of pesticides and concrete will have been detrimental to the urban fox as well as to the urban gardener.

In Guildford

My personal observation of foxes was very limited until I became a resident of suburban Guildford in the late 1960s. Before that I had glimpsed very few in my childhood on the very edge of a city in south-west England; only once was that in the back garden and after that usually from a steam train window, way off across a field. Even the solitary duck I kept as a child, in a small part of the garden with very little protection, survived. Such survival is much against the odds where I now live in Guildford, where I feel privileged to see foxes frequently even in broad daylight.

Many years ago I built a small shed at the end of the garden and, because of a slope, levelled its base on raised beams with the chalk beneath unavoidably partly excavated. I have lost count of the fox families since raised beneath that shed. This was not my

intention but I have never regretted it. What a pleasure and an education it has been for me to share the garden with these creatures who have deigned to let me share their territory!

Of course, each summer the vixen has played hide and seek with three or so cubs amongst the dahlias and let them play/learn with children's plastic toys found abandoned somewhere or other – a pink plastic piglet and a green plastic duck this year. She and they have been well aware of local dogs and



cats which were sometimes in my garden or those of my neighbours. I once watched a cat I had adopted, in touching distance of a well-formed fox cub. Neither seemed much concerned after the initial surprise.

The public view

Attitudes to these quite large, wild animals in such proximity vary. French friends of mine who live in rural France have always shown surprise at fox photos I have shown them – so many and so close to houses! In the area where they live it is normal to shoot any wild thing on four legs. There are any number of wild boars in the area.

In 2002, in a survey across Britain, a questionnaire completed by 4,000 households about the wildlife in their gardens showed that 3,409 persons expressed their views on urban foxes in the following ways: 8.5% disliked urban foxes; 25.8% had no strong views either way; 65.7% liked urban foxes. This and a number of other surveys strongly indicate that attitudes to the urban fox in Britain have remained remarkably consistent.

The whole status of *Vulpes vulpes* in Britain has over the last 20 years or so been assessed and reassessed with growing efficiency. The figures involved are of course always estimated (we are not talking about car production) but they are increasingly accurate and dependent on the latest scientific technology. It remains fair to observe, however, that there is more consistency in many of these figures than might have been expected.

Final thoughts

I should like to emphasize two aspects in particular:

(1) The economic value of the fox to the human



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population (both rural and urban) is undoubted. This conclusion takes into account a wealth of factors which include predation on rabbits and rats, poor management by some farmers and the undoubted cultural value of fox presence in urban areas, which increasingly are separating human beings from 'nature'.

(2) There is no evidence that fox hunts played any role in the control of fox populations. Shooting is

likely to remain the most effective and practicable method for culling foxes, should this be necessary in the foreseeable future. Of course, shooting should be done only by trained persons with certificated skills, something not yet required by law in this country.

The fox is certainly one of the best studied mammals in Britain. In particular, with regard to this article, I must acknowledge my debt to the excellent work done by Philip Baker, Stephen Harris and Piran Whire of Bristol and York Universities who, with the assistance of IFAW.org., were funded by at least 15 highly reputable organisations mostly based in Great Britain. Although I have concentrated on the so-called urban fox, I hope I have made it clear that *Vulpes vulpes* is quite as able to adapt him/herself to the countryside as to city streets, whether or not the roads are lit.

It has not been the intention of this article to discuss the Hunting Act of 2004, its ethics or its results. If I had been limited to a single intention it would simply have been to emphasize my huge apprehension about our city children's growing separation from things natural, and the evidence that the 'urban' fox can be a major antidote to this insidious process, so dangerous to my own species.



Surrey Wildlife Trust

Neglected Chitty's Common

by Forum
Committee
member
Richard
Seymour

A LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUP has been set up, with some help from Surrey Wildlife Trust, to manage Chitty's Common in NW Guildford. Sue Day and Pauline Searle have been responsible for establishing this group of volunteers who have been involved in a range of urgently needed conservation tasks.

Chitty's Common is a haven for wildlife with a wide range of birds as well as newts, frogs and grass snakes. The Common is located between Whitmoor Common and Rydes Hill Common and has an elongated shape with ponds towards the northern boundary. Several spring heads are on the steeper southern slopes and have resulted in much impeded drainage throughout the area.

Much of the work has involved scrub clearance as well as the removal of small trees and saplings of ash

and sycamore which have sprung up over the last 10 to 15 years. In addition, brambles and pendulous sedge have been removed. The margins of the Common have suffered from the dumping of garden waste and other rubbish and this remains a problem.

The environment of Chitty's Common is gradually improving, but there is still a huge amount of work to be done and volunteers are welcome to help with the conservation of what has become a neglected area in NW Guildford.

Thanks must go to The Guildford Dragon and Surrey University which have shown great support over the last few months in volunteering and publicising.

If you would like to help please contact Pauline Searle on 01483 825424.



RSPB

SWIFTS PROJECT about to go live

John Bannister

AS WE WAIT FOR THE OUTCOME of our funding application to the Community Foundation for Surrey we have not been idle. Firstly, we have built a team of people actively wishing to fit a box to an existing building or a swift brick into a new build.

Swifts arrive in the UK in the last week of April or early May and stay long enough to breed. Autumn migration begins in late July or early August. They feed on the "aerial plankton" of flying insects and airborne spiders, usually at 50 to 100m, but sometimes much higher in turbulent weather. They follow their food and will travel hundreds of miles in a day if necessary, and this is becoming increasingly the case.

In our project the first out of the box is likely to be Holy Trinity Church, at the top of Guildford High Street, which is an Eco Church with links to GEF. Alwyn Marriage and Angus McIntosh are on the church committee, and both are GEF members keenly aware of the swift's impending fate in the south of England.

We are steadily lining up further churches, schools and other public buildings as well as interested homeowners. There is literally no time to lose as England has seen the biggest decline, and Surrey the biggest fall, in swift numbers. Europe is not immune as many European countries have reported the loss of insects due to unsustainable farming practices.

Schools are an important location. I have visited the Royal Grammar School and Sandfield Primary very recently and there is real enthusiasm for the project. Both are very ecological and have expressed their interest, and we identified suitable

sites for nest boxes at both locations. Any nest boxes that go up before the swifts leave in July/August will hopefully be noted by this year's young swifts as suitable nest sites for the future. This is a long-term project because of that, as we will have to wait patiently until next year and maybe the year after to see if the new nest boxes and bricks are taken up. The boxes are made of a mix of concrete and wood fibre and are guaranteed for 10 years. Swifts produce practically no detectable mess inside or outside the box. When it comes to swift bricks, Guildford Borough Council is interested as it is planning to build hundreds of new homes in Guildford. The first such development to have a swift brick fitted could be in Park Barn, and Rachel Harper, GBC New Build Development Manager has taken the details and will talk to the contractors on that project.

We will keep you posted on how swift bricks are taken up once we (hopefully) get our grant. Please help by reporting any swifts you see to me. They will be around till July/August before they set off again for Africa and this is when they tear through the air screaming.

Last week I saw a pair of swifts mating in the air, as swifts do everything in the air except when they are tending their young in the nest. The male rides briefly on the back of the female – a "joy" ride. Did you know that the adults leave first and the young follow later? Amazing for a journey of thousands of miles across sometimes harsh and forbidding territory.

One last request: you can help by not using any chemical sprays in your garden or allotment because you will harm the insects on which swifts depend. Thank you.

Meat from the USA

America uses on average five times as many antibiotics per animal as the UK does. Alarm bells ring should our government agree to accept US meat post-Brexit.

(Source: Soil Association, Mar '18)

Richmond Park

A 'Citizen Science' project initiated by the Royal Parks charity found that Richmond Park is home to 400,000 anthills and 3 billion ants weighing 7.5 tonnes. The oldest anthills, created by yellow meadow ants, had been there for at least 150 years.

(Source: BBC Wildlife, Apr '18)

Our need for alcohol

Today's wine glass is seven times bigger than that of the Georgian era. The capacity has increased from 66ml to around 449ml.

Our need for plastic

Some 300 million tonnes of plastic are manufactured every year – roughly equivalent to the combined weight of every human on Earth.

(Source: BBC History, Feb '18)

FACTS & FIGURES

Quake!

On Easter Sunday this year Surrey experienced its first earthquake since records began in 1750. Centred just east of Newdigate, it measured 2.7 on the Richter scale.

(Source: Surrey Advertiser, 6 Apr '18)

Woking Peregrines doing well, and some consequences

John Bannister

AFTER RICHARD DENYER (the Woking licensed Ringer) and I cleaned out the Woking peregrine nest box of bones and feathers last November we felt confident that we were all prepared for a new season. The adult birds had stayed around, which is typical for urban peregrines in this country. In other parts of the world peregrines can make long migration flights between seasons, in North America, for example, from the Arctic to South America. 'Our peregrines' are happy to stay in our temperate, urban climate with plentiful food all year round.

The new cameras have been working well, which gives a huge improvement, and Craig Denford who manages the site from his desk in Export House can make adjustments from time to time, which is great for remote viewers in this country and around the world. It also means we can visualise by proxy what may be happening in the Guildford site, where it's impossible to look into the nest. When Jeremy Gates (the Guildford licensed Ringer), goes down on a rope he's never sure what to expect until he reaches into the nest.

The Woking pair laid 5 eggs and all 5 hatched, but sadly the weakest one died a few days after emerging from its egg. The other 4 are growing very strongly with a plentiful food supply thanks to all the pigeons in our towns. It's not just pigeons of course; although pigeons make up the largest percentage by weight of peregrine prey, a wide range of species are brought in, including in May an Arctic tern. On the webcam (wokingperegrines.com) one can see everything that's going on both inside the nest box and outside too, including the construction of two massive tower blocks in Woking – one of 24 storeys and the other of 35 storeys, which will dwarf the 13 storeys of Export House. We don't think this will faze the resident peregrines,

although peregrines prefer not to be looked down upon. I recently gave a series of talks about the peregrine project in Woking to the contractors Sir Robert McAlpine and their sub-contractors who are constructing the Woking town centre site. This greatly increased the awareness of the people spending every day beneath the nest box and also what to do if one of the youngsters were to fall to the ground. This is an eventuality we are fully prepared for.

The Woking Peregrine Project has been a huge success, but it's worth reminding ourselves that London and the suburbs have nearly 40 peregrine pairs, many in man-made trays or boxes and some with webcams.

It's a good time to be a peregrine enthusiast and the technology keeps getting better.

Further concerns

With peregrines doing really well in southern England, there's less good news from other parts of the country, especially from grouse moors, where people who enjoy killing birds pay thousands of pounds to shoot grouse. A direct consequence is that the populations of hen harriers, peregrines and merlins



in our uplands are well below levels that the habitat can support, due to illegal persecution by owners of grouse moors.

Another bird whose numbers are declining alarmingly, due regrettably to man, is the swift. So in conjunction with Woking Borough Council we have decided to turn some of our attention to



them. Swifts have declined dramatically over the past few decades and particularly so in Surrey. One reason is the unexpected consequence of sealing up our homes and buildings to prevent heat loss, and depriving the swift of its nesting sites in the process. See our article on swifts on page 9 of this issue and what we can do to provide homes for them.



In addition, we are in a fight to the death over the highly damaging consequences of modern agriculture. The power of Monsanto/Bayer, other chemical spray companies and the few global companies that produce our food is another matter, but the recent EU bans on use of certain pesticides and the rest of the cocktail of chemicals we spray on our "food" is beginning to help us turn a corner.

We have much to thank the Soil Association for in their promotion of healthy soil and organic food.

But we have to act quickly if we are to safeguard our food, much of which we import, and in this country to save our countryside and that means everything from the smallest invertebrate and the insects to the many mammals, birds and amphibians, etc that feed on them.

GEF's 25th Anniversary Event on 11th October, 2018

All readers of this newsletter are invited to a free "ticket-only" keynote talk by James Smith, Chair of the Carbon Trust and former Chair of Shell UK on the subject


"Can we and will we avoid dangerous climate change?"

James has summarised his talk as follows:

"In the first half of this century, energy production must double to lift people in the developing world out of poverty. But carbon emissions must be halved and eventually eliminated if we are to avoid dangerous climate change. A wide range of technologies exists to get this done and, broadly speaking, it's affordable. But the changes needed to the existing energy system are massive. Far too little has been done so far. And it's risky to believe that renewables alone can make enough difference. The talk will cover what needs to be done and will emphasise the kind of leadership needed to get us on the right path. The climate doesn't have a reset button and we're close to being out of time. We have one shot to get this right."

The talk will be given in the Council Chamber of the Guildford Borough Council Offices at Millmead, GU2 4BE and will start at 18.30 and finish at 21.00.

To reserve your free place, please rsvp to adrian@lampcottage.net or call on 01483 222687.



Guildford Environmental Forum aims to improve the environment in and around Guildford for wildlife and for people and to build a sustainable future.

Join us in our work for the town and have this newsletter posted to your door four times a year. Forum membership costs only £10 per year or £15 for a couple, and new members are warmly welcomed.

Please contact Adrian Thompson on 01483 222687 or email adrian@lampcottage.net



CALENDAR



All the Forum's Group meetings are open to the public

Sunday 19 August

Apple pressing at Mane Chance in Compton.

Mane Chance is a horse and pony rescue charity, and there will be a diverse range of stalls raising money for the charity. All stall holders, including GEF, will donate a proportion of their takings to Mane Chance. We'll be in the orchard, so bring your apples and plastic bottles to take home the juice. 1200 to 1700.

Thursday 30 August

Scything at Rosamund Garden.

Mark Allery is back to run our ninth year of scything courses for beginners and improvers. Please come and help us manage our grass and top up your scything skills. Sell your strimmer – you'll never need it again. Everything will be provided, including refreshments, but please bring a packed lunch and suitable clothing. You'll learn how to set up the scythe for your body shape, the right technique for best results, how to sharpen the blade, peening (what's that?), the story of hay and scything, etc. 1000 to 1600.

Meet at Rosamund Garden at the top of Longdown Road, GU4 8PP. Park along the grass verge. Cost £35 per head, discounts available. Please register with John Bannister to discuss arrangements – 01483 570468 or 07443 914347.

Sunday 2 September

Apple pressing at NT Winkworth Arboretum.

We'll be apple pressing once again in this lovely setting just south of Godalming. Please bring your apples and plastic bottles to take the juice home. And bring the children because they love what we do and like to help us wash, cut, grind, pound and press. Details from John Bannister (see above).

Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 October

Apple pressing at Surrey Hills Wood Fair.

This year the Fair will be at a different venue – details in the next newsletter, so please stay in touch.

Thursday 11 October

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with keynote talk by James Smith, Chair of the Carbon Trust (details on page 11 overleaf).

GUILDFORD ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

Chair – Adrian Thompson

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Treasurer – Adrian Thompson

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Membership – Position vacant

(Adrian Thompson pro tem: details above)

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Guildford Environmental Forum's newsletter is published in March, June, September and December. Please send contributions for the next issue to Clare Windsor by Monday 13 August. The views expressed in this newsletter are strictly those of its contributors and Guildford Environmental Forum.