

# Leisure

## Wildlife Watching

Local news and views of the natural world

### Attenborough – the last word?

ONCE again, in the issue before last, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust has chosen to fling more accusations at this column. This time it is a charge of ‘taking the easy option’ and ‘shouting from the sidelines’.

This arises from my failure to attend a day being held to explain the management of Attenborough Nature Reserve. This was not due to a wish to ‘take the easy option’ (or even fear of being worked over by posse of Wildlife Trust heavies!) but due to unavoidable work commitments. In any case, it would have been a futile exercise unless a conservation biologist with a reputation to uphold could have been on hand to stake it on endorsing both the substance and the certainty of some of the claims being made for management at the reserve – in particular that common snipe will breed on the Wheatear field development.

The current power and influence of the wildlife trust makes it easy to forget that as little as 25 years ago things were very different. It was then run on an almost entirely voluntary basis by dedicated local wildlife enthusiasts with its principal source of income being from membership subscriptions. Active members such as Norman Lewis – perhaps our most eminent local ornithologist and someone whose views on the chances of common snipe nesting on what was Wheatear Field would carry some weight – were backed up by academics such as Dr (now Professor) Jack Rieley

and Dr Peter Shepherd, under both of whom I was fortunate enough to study.

At this time, wildlife conservation, especially in urban areas, was not treated as seriously as it is today and the work of the those involved with the Trust at this time did a great deal to help establish it as a serious scientific discipline. This approach led to important achievements such as the translocation of endangered species becoming part of the planning process.

The Wildlife Trust is now a large organisation and is much less dependent on members’ subscriptions, much of its income coming from other sources including the lottery, sponsors, and partnerships. Entering into these can, however, compromise the Trust’s ability to take a position that would be of most benefit to wildlife – for example the issue of water quality at Attenborough. With the influence of members now reduced, the Trust is not really accountable to anyone.

This would not be a problem if it continued to be accountable to the high scientific standards set when achieving landmark legal decisions, such as the translocation of rare orchids at the former Wilford power station. Failure to do so risks squandering this legacy and discrediting both the reputation of the Trust and of wildlife conservation as a science.

This is what the whole debate over Attenborough has been about – not just a ‘difference of opinion’ but the substitution of credible science by what the Trust believes to be good PR.

While the reserve may be a pleasant place to visit and may offer a convenient opportunity to watch some wildlife, it represents a type of habitat – worked out gravel pits – that is not uncommon or threatened either locally or nationally. Its potential to play a significant role in the wider conservation of anything is limited by its water quality and the sheer number of visitors it now attracts.

Some of the habitat creation that has been funded to ‘mitigate’ the effects of the flood wall scheme, such as the reed beds in Coneries pit, may yield real benefits for wildlife but the gross changes caused by speculative schemes such as Wheatear field, with their highly optimistic claims for the wildlife that will be attracted, are hard to take who have watched Attenborough develop through nature taking over directly from industry.

Although education is important – the more people who are both knowledgeable and enthusiastic about wildlife the better – using Attenborough as an example runs the risk of spreading the notion that wildlife conservation is all about creating habitats in reserves rather than protecting the far larger areas of wildlife habitats outside them

Nature reserves are important for conserving our most precious wildlife places but few of them get the attention, or the amount of development, that Attenborough receives. The income it generates helps to fund the Trust’s other work around the county but this economic importance, and its association with a natural history icon, seems to have encouraged the Trust to put a ‘spin too far’ on its publicity.

Jack Smith  
Local ecologist

## Rugby

Play offs loom large for Green & Whites

THIS weekend sees the second instalment of Nottingham Rugby’s ‘double header’ against Worcester Warriors as they bid to reach the Championship play off semi finals.

The two sides met at Meadow Lane last Friday and a good finish saw the Green and Whites secure a losing bonus point courtesy of James Arlidge’s conversion of a Tim Streater try in injury time. Skipper Craig Hammond believes Nottingham can improve on that performance.

“We’ve got to be confident going into Saturday’s game,” he said. “We defended well last week, which we can be

proud of, but this week we need to play some quicker ball and play our own game.

“Our backs are the key to us getting a result and are the focal point of our team. I think Worcester knew that last week and made sure the ball was kicked off the field to stop us building up a high tempo.

“We’ve showed we can score against anyone when we get underway. On Saturday we’ve got a good chance to show that before travelling to Bristol and then returning to Meadow Lane.”

And Hammond feels Nottingham have a better chance of progressing to the knock out phase of the play offs than they had a year ago.

“The difference between this year and last year is greater depth to the squad,” he said. “We’ve got quality players who can come in and try and stake a claim for a first team place.

“There’s a competition for places we didn’t have last year and plenty of guys who want to give Glenn a selection headache. That’s a huge difference from last season’s campaign.”

Nottingham Rugby 2011-12 Season Tickets are now available on the club website. With the cost-per-game price frozen and even more action included in the deal, come and support Nottingham’s campaign for Premiership rugby!

## Win Tickets!

JUDGEMENT Day comes to Nottingham this April 16 when Nottingham Rugby take on London Welsh in crunch Premiership Play-off clash.

Glenn Delaney’s men will be looking to break through to the play off semi-finals as the Green and Whites vie for top tier rugby.

For your chance to win one of two pairs of tickets to the Saturday 16 kick-off at 3pm, just answer the following question:

Where do Nottingham Rugby play?

- A) Ireland Avenue
- B) Meadow Lane
- C) The City Ground

Send your answer on the back of a postcard to: Rugby Competition, c/o The Beeston Express, PO Box 7440, Beeston, Notts, NG9 1ZS to arrive no later than Monday, April 11.

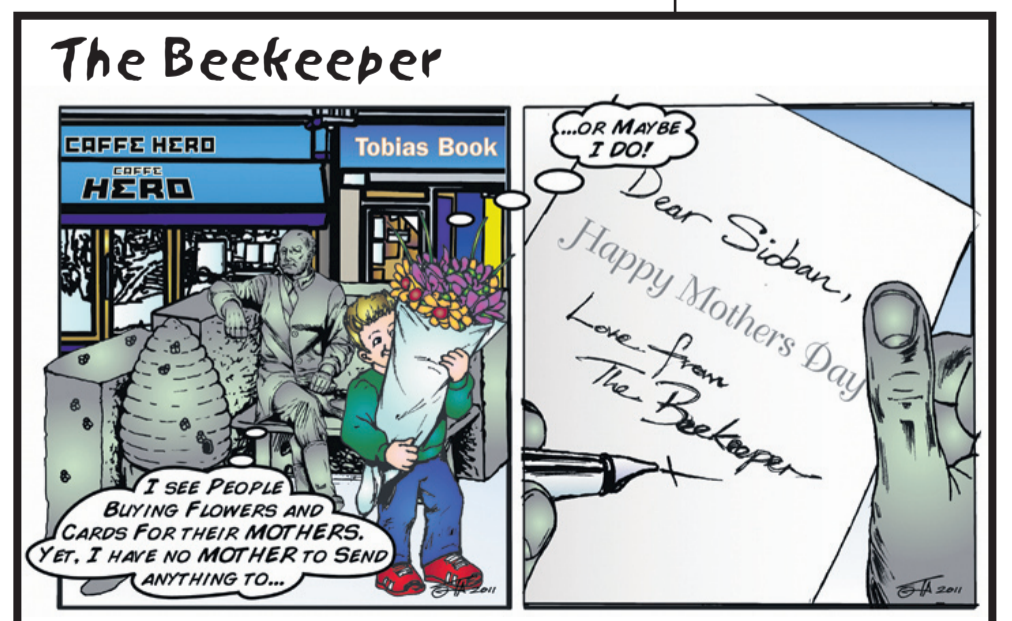
Mark your card/envelope ‘Beeston Express Ticket Competition’.

## Student athletes in town

HUNDREDS of students from Brunei will be gathering at the University of Nottingham on Saturday, April 2, for a day of sporting competition. The annual BruNotts Easter Games attracts Bruneian students based at universities all over the UK, to compete for glory in football, netball, badminton and squash.

Hundreds more are expected to attend as volunteers and supporters.

This is the eighth annual BruNotts games, which will be held in and around the University’s Sports Centre, on University Park, over the course of the whole day.



### Thought for the Fortnight

“The time of the singing of the birds is come.”  
*The Song of Solomon*

