

Leisure



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Wildlife Watching

Local news and views of the natural world

AS we freeze in the Arctic temperatures of the coldest November and early December for many years, there seems every chance that we are in for an even harder winter than the last.

Whilst for most people this does not mean much more than discomfort, inconvenience and high heating bills, for wildlife that is active during the winter, prolonged periods of sub-zero temperatures with lying snow can mean a real struggle for survival.

Wildlife in towns and cities areas has a number of factors in its favour. They are usually a few degrees warmer than the surrounding countryside, something known as the 'urban heat island' effect. As well as this, they can provide feeding opportunities not least, in the case of birds, from garden feeders. For anyone who feeds birds in their garden now is the time to maximise the amount (and quality) of food offered – it can make a real difference to the survival of their garden birds. Trying to keep a supply of unfrozen

water is also worthwhile but difficult to achieve when the temperature is consistently below zero.

The recent temperatures have been so severe that some water birds have seen much of their feeding areas disappear under a sheet of ice for long periods. They could also benefit from a helping hand full of something more nutritious than stale bread. It is worthwhile, if out for a walk, keeping some nuts and seeds with you – you may just find a bird, a robin perhaps, bold and hungry enough to eat from your hand.

Although some wildlife species benefit from deliberate human feeding, others have found ways to live amongst us with no direct assistance. An example, which is an increasingly common sight alongside rock doves (feral pigeons) in our towns and cities, is the pied wagtail. As well as finding food in town centres, pied wagtails have also found that trees in these areas can make very good winter roosts. Only certain trees are selected

The recent freezing weather conditions have forced Nottingham Rugby to sit out the last couple of weeks, with their home game against Rotherham and last week's trip to Esher both being postponed.

The Esher game now re-arranged for Tuesday, December 21, with a 7.45pm kick off.

Rugby

The Green and Whites will hope for a return to action this Friday (December 10), when they are scheduled to take on Bristol in the British and Irish Cup.

They will certainly want to avoid the sort of fixture pile up that put such a serious dent in their promotion aspirations last season. After a couple of spells in which they had to play three games a week in order to catch up, they were quite simply exhausted by the time the play offs came round.

Staying focused Director of Rugby Glenn Delaney has been pleased with the hard work his players have put in during the cold spell and their determination to remain focused on their goals.

"We have all been disappointed not to have

been playing," he said.

"But no-one has let that disappointment impact on their efforts in training.

"It has been frustrating for everyone here that we have not been able to get out and play, but we all remain completely ready and energised to get back out onto the pitch."

At least the break has given a few injured players the chance to recuperate, and Delaney could have almost a full strength squad to choose from.

Tim Usasz and Sione Kalamafoni are available again following their international commitments, while full back Cesar Sempere is back in full training having broken a bone in his hand back in October.

branches to improve the lighting at ground level but this could have been achieved without such a reduction in the value of the roost to the birds. A further possibility is that an objective of the work was to discourage pied wagtails from roosting here, perhaps because of the 'mess' they may create under their roosting trees. If this is the case, then it is an overreaction. This roost and similar ones are normally used only on the coldest winter nights making any perceived 'problems' that they cause strictly temporary.

This seems to be another example of tree maintenance work resulting in the casual destruction of wildlife habitat. It would be interesting to learn the exact purpose of the branch cutting and if the status of the trees as a winter roost for wagtails was known and taken in account when planning it.

If the motivation was, in fact, to get rid of the wagtails then the work has been largely successful.

Jack Smith
Local ecologist

– those that are will have good shelter from prevailing winds and often a proximity to some sort of heat source, usually a street light. Once established, a good roosting tree can attract hundreds of pied wagtails and be used for many years.

Wildlife watchers may well be aware of the location of some of these roosts. One long established roost in Nottingham city centre can be found at the junction of Cranbrook Street and Lower Parliament Street near to the Palais. This otherwise unremarkable tree can have many pied wagtails roosting on the coldest nights as traffic roars by on either side of it. A visit to this roost, or looking out for others, could be an antidote to a stressful day's Christmas shopping in town.

Beeston also has, or should we say had, a well-used pied wagtail roost site in the trees at the bus station – readers may recall coverage of it in this column. Sadly, after recent branch cutting, far fewer birds are using it than in previous years. The reason for this is the removal of branches close to the streetlights, which provided the best roosting spots.

Whatever the justification for the removal of these branches it was certainly not to improve the appearance of the trees, which now have a lopsided look. There may have been a case for clearing some

Travel

Take care on the roads this winter!

AS the cold wind blows and temperatures drop, check your cars before setting out on any long journeys this Christmas season. Some things can easily be checked.

Tyres – tread depth should be checked, as should the tyre pressure (look in the handbook).

Lights – check all of the lights on your car, and remember that lights are there to ensure you can be seen, rather than to see by. Give them a clean!

Oil and water – should be checked weekly.

Screen wash – The more concentrated the screenwash is, the less likely it is to freeze in the storage bottle.

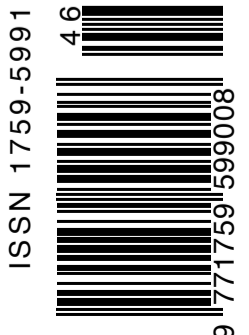
Wipers – the wipers should clear the car's windscreen. If they don't, you are putting yourself and other road users in danger.

Next Issue

Will be published on
January 7, 2011

Please note that there will be **NO** Beeston Express on December 24 (Christmas Eve)

Have a Happy Christmas!



Thought for the Fortnight

Always use tasteful words – you never know when you'll have to eat them.