

Leisure

Wildlife Watching

Local news and views of the natural world

Tree climb down

FOLLOWING the coverage that it received in this column in the last issue of *The Beeston Express* – though not, perhaps, as a direct result of it – the government has announced a ‘review’ of the Forestry Commission sell off because of concerns about access and biodiversity.

These are certainly areas of concern to many and this may appear to be a sensible reaction to widespread public disquiet. It could also be interpreted as a government hell bent on doing the wrong thing being dragged back from it by the sheer weight of public opinion. In any case, the battle is far from over. The legislation that will enable this sell off without further debate in parliament – the Public Bodies Bill – was already going through its chambers before the government’s consultation period on its plans for Forestry Commission privatisation even began!

For those opposing the government’s proposals, vigilance will be needed to ensure that they are not simply re-adopted in full once the enabling legislation becomes law and that the Commission does not die a death of a thousand, less well publicised, cuts. Now that the government has got it ‘in its sights’ there has to be doubt as to whether the Forestry Commission will be able to continue its work to safeguard woodlands that are not in its own property portfolio.

Toton – the Forestry Commission’s last stand?

The best local example of this is their intervention

after the destruction of woodland at Toton sidings a year ago. Although this elicited a fierce reaction from local residents, organisations such as the Friends of Toton Fields and the Toton Environmental Protection Society, local politicians and members of parliament, it was the Forestry Commission that made the most decisive move. Not only did they declare the felling illegal, they also issued a re-stocking notice. This notice is the subject of an appeal by the landowners, which is being determined as of now, with the result expected in the near future.

The action that the Forestry Commission undertook was probably as much as they could do. Many would support their ruling that the felling was illegal and hope that the appeal against the re-stocking notice fails – but carrying out its conditions to the letter may not produce the best result for wildlife on the site.

The notice states that, “a minimum of 2,200 silver birch trees should be planted but natural regeneration of any site native tree species will be considered an acceptable contribution to achieve a stocking density across the restocking areas of no less than 1,110 trees per hectare.”

A deadline for this to happen was set at June 30, 2011 but this will now pass because of the appeal process.

This may be no bad thing. Even in the first growing season after the clearance, there were signs that silver birch might re-colonise the site rapidly. A few mature trees survived and many

more were growing either as saplings or from stumps with viable root systems.

As well as this re-generation, there is already a more diverse ground flora than before and, whilst all of the dead wood on site may be an unpleasant reminder of what has happened, it also represents a potentially valuable wildlife habitat. The area offers a rare opportunity to observe just how quickly wildlife can take advantage of the conditions created by a traumatic event such as the clearance.

Whilst the action that the Forestry Commission took was a crucial first step in protecting this area and the proposed application for village green status would, if successful, offer further protection, the best long term aim would be for the area to be designated a Local Nature Reserve, possibly as an extension to the adjoining Toton fields LNR. A plan for its management could include some planting of a diverse range of suitable native shrubs and trees but might also identify the need to control, rather than plant, silver birch!

A management plan which maximises the site’s value to wildlife and preserves open access to it would attract widespread support and might be presented to the landowners as a (possibly much cheaper) alternative to restocking if their appeal fails.

Whilst the legal wrangle goes on, it will be left for nature to reclaim the site unaided. This is something that nature is very well able to do and it looks like Toton sidings will be a great place to watch it happening!

Jack Smith
Local ecologist

Softball

Recognition for local softball coach

AT the East Midlands Softball League AGM held last weekend, a new award, to be known as ‘The EMSL Commitment To Softball Award’ was presented.

The idea behind the award is to give recognition to those in the league who have helped to develop and grow the sport of softball in the East Midlands.

The inaugural recipient of the award was Paul Cooper of the Broxtowe Softball Club.

The league has now been in existence for 15 years and

Paul has been involved in it from the start.

As well as having a full time job with the fire service, Paul Cooper has been involved in setting up the league from the start and has provided coaching for all teams, not just the Broxtowe Softball Club, but at softball clubs, schools and colleges across the county. He also plays an active part in umpiring and player recruitment, and is team coach for the GB ‘Minimee’ squad.

Broxtowe Softball club secretary Matt Johnson said: “It is almost certain that the league and our club wouldn’t exist with Paul’s hard work and persistence.

“It’s great that the league committee recognised this, and decided Paul would be the first person to receive the award. We are very proud to have him on our team!”

Rugby

Green and Whites take on London Welsh

NOTTINGHAM Rugby will complete the ‘regular season’ section of their league campaign with a trip to London Welsh this weekend.

The Green and Whites will finish fifth in the Championship table, irrespective of the outcome of Saturday’s game.

That means they will be in the same play off group as league leaders Worcester Warriors, whilst there is also a chance that they will face London Welsh, as they did last season.

The final place will be decided by the game between

Rotherham Titans and Bristol, with the side finishing eighth completing what will be a tough group.

Nottingham skipper Craig Hammond knows his side must keep improving as the round of ties begin.

“We have everything to play for this season,” he said. “Last year Bristol finished top and were strong favourites, but it was Exeter who went up and they’ve looked impressive in the Premiership.

“We’ve been building up and improving all season. The play offs are an exciting time

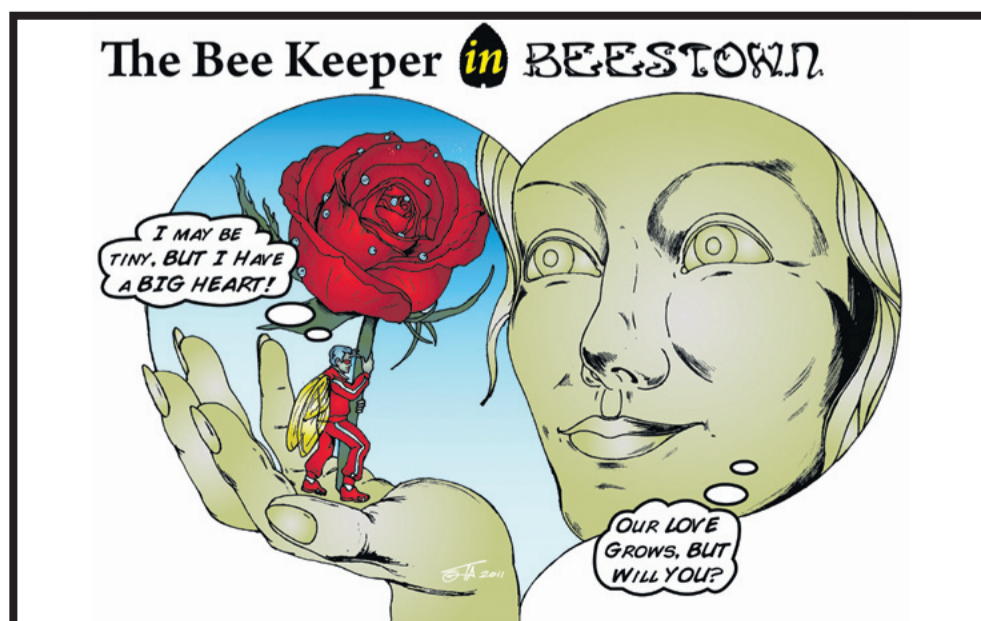
for players, coaches, staff and fans everywhere. We can expect some top class rugby, and we’re looking forward to bringing that action back to Meadow Lane.”

Director of Rugby Glenn Delaney is also looking forward to the play offs.

“On the field we’re taking it one game at a time,” he said.

“We are keeping our focus for what will be huge games requiring great concentration.

“There is no doubt that, for all rugby fans in Nottingham, these matches will provide great entertainment and a brilliant atmosphere.”



Thought for the Fortnight

A TRUE conservationist is one who knows that the world is not given to him by his father but borrowed from his children.

John James Audubon
(1785–1851)

