

# Community

ADVERTISING FEATURE

## An A – Z of Fitness: V is for VO<sub>2</sub>max

SOME people will want to know where they stand in the great scheme of things! Just how fit are they? Not just in terms of how they feel, but objectively and perhaps in a universally accepted way.

As far as cardio vascular fitness is concerned, there is a test which measures how well the body takes up and uses amounts (volumes) of oxygen. It can involve maximum effort (to exhaustion) to establish the result, usually using a treadmill or an exercise bike whilst hooked up to a mouthpiece, which measures the gases used.

The equipment and its technicalities don't lend themselves to use outside the sports science lab. Pedalling or running to exhaustion is not for everyone either, so other well regarded tests have been devised. However,

to obtain a good score, one needs to be rested, fit and well and injury free. The tests also need to be approached with a determination to do ones best.

There are a couple of varieties of the Cooper Run, which is acknowledged a good estimate of VO<sub>2</sub>max or oxygen uptake. The first is to run as far as possible in 12 minutes. The second variation to run 1.5 miles in the best time that you can. For both methods you will need a method of accurately knowing the distances involved and a stopwatch. Tables on the internet can interpret your results.

Now, as for the rest of us mere mortals, how can we measure the improvement in our stamina? Firstly we need to know our resting pulse rate just prior to the normal fitness activity that we do. Then we

need to measure our pulse rate at intervals when the exercise has finished. Keep simple records and note the improvement in the time taken for the pulse to return to normal. There are also variations on the Canadian step test suitable for home use, where 3 minutes of stepping on and off a 12 inch step, bench or sturdy box is combined with pulse-taking before and after. For more about the method and results, visit [www.topendsports.com/testing/tests/home-step.htm](http://www.topendsports.com/testing/tests/home-step.htm)

Many fitness studios have cardio vascular equipment that can be used for this type of testing. A good instructor can advise as to suitability and can often offer a wider variety of tests for strength, flexibility, lung capacity and body composition.

*Joint Effort Fitness*

## Cold snap brings high number of rare birds to nature reserve

VISITORS to Attenborough Nature Reserve have enjoyed a treat in recent days following the sighting of an unusually high number of rare bitterns. Whilst staff and volunteers would normally hope to see two or three birds each winter, the arrival of five birds has caused a real stir.

It is believed that the birds have been forced to seek new feeding grounds as a result of the prolonged cold spell and that they may have arrived from the continent.

The growth of the bittern population over the last decade is regarded as one of the UK's biggest conservation success stories with the population growing by around 250 percent following efforts to create new areas of reedbed habitat for the birds. Whilst the reedbeds at Attenborough Nature Reserve are not large enough to support breeding bitterns, they have regularly attracted overwintering birds – but never as many as this

year.

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (NWT) Conservation Officer Mark Speck said: "Each year we hope to welcome one or two bitterns at Attenborough, but when we realized we had at least five individual birds on site, we were amazed. This must be one of the largest overwintering populations in the UK. We hope that one day the Trent Valley will resound with the evocative booming mating call of the bittern."

Mr Speck continued: "We believe that the increased number of visiting bitterns is partly due to the severity of the weather. The fact that some areas are frozen has also forced the birds into different parts of the reserve, making them easier to spot than normal. However, whilst this presents a great opportunity for people to see a bird that they may never have seen before, we would ask people to take extra care not to cause disturbance.

In winter, bitterns often reside in areas of reedbed or other tall vegetation close to water where they can find a good supply of fish to eat. However, much of the open water at Attenborough Reserve is frozen, making feeding difficult for these shy birds.

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust has decided to begin a temporary supplementary feeding programme to help the birds cope with the freezing conditions. The birds will be fed with sprats donated by a local fishmonger.

NWT Communications Manager Erin McDaid said: "We wanted to give the bitterns the best chance of surviving the cold and have decided to provide some extra food. The sprats make an ideal substitute for the fish the birds would catch naturally here at Attenborough."

## Wildlife Watching

### Local news and views of the natural world

HOWEVER tough the recent spell of arctic weather has been for humans, it has been tougher for wildlife. Although our native wildlife is adapted to cope with spells of cold weather and snow, prolonged periods of sub-zero temperatures can result in a struggle for survival that some will lose.

Wildlife which relies on humans for some of their diet, for example garden birds, is in better position than most to survive. This can be aided by garden bird feeders maximising feeding levels and providing unfrozen water – no easy task with the recent temperature levels.

Birds of still water habitats have suffered as well, but this has also had the effect of making them easier to spot. At Attenborough, for example, as more of the water in the reserve froze over, much of the bird life was confined to

and concentrated in the decreasing patches of open water. Some birds chose to move to the River Trent, giving good views of species such as widgeon, goosander and shoveler that are usually to be found in the reserve itself.

The star bird at Attenborough in recent weeks has been the bittern. Following reports in the media that five bitterns had been spotted at the reserve and that, so the story goes, they were moving to Clifton Pond because the ice had made their usual roosting area in the Delta area accessible to foxes, many visitors, ranging from curious locals to what appeared to be die-hard 'twitchers', braved the freezing conditions in the hope of seeing one. With a little field craft and a lot of luck, your correspondent was able to catch a good view of a bittern walking on the ice before disappearing into a

reed bed – but this was away from Clifton Pond and the Delta, which were the main areas of human activity.

It is not unusual for bitterns to over-winter at Attenborough as well as at other sites along the Trent valley, but the numbers seen this year are exceptional.

One of the management objectives at Attenborough is to have bitterns breeding on the site but there must be doubt that any of these winter visitors will return to do so. An increase in the area of reed beds, as is being undertaken at the reserve, will help to make it more attractive but the conflict between the fact that the bittern is a shy and elusive bird that would rather not be seen at all and, on recent evidence, the large numbers of people that might come to Attenborough to see it could make the reserve much less attractive as a breeding territory. Whilst all

wildlife lovers would like to hear bitterns booming over Attenborough, we may have to wait a while yet before it happens.

Another wildlife story in the news recently was the destruction of birch woodland near Toton sidings, which had developed into an area valuable to wildlife and could have been particularly important in the recent cold weather. This gives the timing of the clearance, during a particularly cold period, a cruel twist – any wildlife taking refuge in the woodland which was not exterminated in the clearance process would be

at grave risk of perishing in the sub-zero temperatures.

The loss of this woodland has angered local residents and caused them and local politicians to question how this could have happened so suddenly and without warning. They should not be surprised that no notice was given – it is likely that that was part of the plan to destroy the woodland before anyone had the chance to object.

So how did this happen? It seems that Network Rail sold the land containing the woodland to the highest bidder at auction last December and there was no

legal impediment to the new owners clearing the site, as they have done.

The crucial question that should be asked of Network Rail and its sole shareholder (HM Government) is; should land like this be sold to any Tom, Dick or Harry with no questions asked about what they intend to do with it. If there is a policy of selling off land regardless of the consequences for the wildlife interest that may have developed on it, losses like Toton are likely to be repeated elsewhere.

*Jack Smith  
Local Ecologist*