

# Leisure

## Wildlife Watching

### Local news and views of the natural world

#### Radio Interference

FOR some, one of the things that is still great about Britain is the BBC. Although it does at times attract criticism, it still sets the standard to which other broadcasters have to aspire and represents a buffer against the 'dumbing down' that would inevitably occur if it did not exist. It also produces much programming that commercial operators do not even attempt to emulate and still makes a good job of fulfilling its original remit to "entertain, inform and educate". Nowhere is the last of these objectives more evident than in the output of Radio 4. Although some of its content may seem a little 'highbrow' for those interested in getting to the heart of many topics it is an invaluable source of what is, in effect, continuing education.

Science has been well represented in both television and radio programming in the last couple of years but, good as some of the television programmes presented by celebrity scientists are, the science often has to be toned down a little for consumption by a wider audience. It is radio, relieved of the need to project attractive images, that provides the best opportunity to impart in-depth knowledge of this subject. These are a number of Radio 4 programmes that include wildlife and environmental coverage in their content, but the most science-led have been Home Planet and Saving Species.

Home Planet has been running for twelve years and consists of a panel of experts answering listener's questions on both wildlife and wider environmental

issues. This can yield fascinating results, with the members of the panel pitching their knowledge and reputations against each other to provide detailed and enlightening responses. It was, therefore, with dismay that devotees of the programme learned that Home Planet had, unceremoniously and without explanation, been axed from the schedule.

Saving Species has been the one radio programme to concentrate exclusively on wildlife. Broadcast live weekly, it is a source of up-to-the-minute news and information and this format has allowed it to engage with projects such as the satellite tracking of cuckoos from Britain to their wintering grounds in Africa. It has been able to provide week-by-week updates on their progress and, in the process, reveal to listeners behaviour that has been, up to now, poorly understood.

Although no announcement has been made that Saving Species is to join Home Planet on the list of extinct programmes, its current long run is now over and there appear to be no plans for its return. The suggestion by presenters in the final editions that the tracked cuckoos were likely to return before the programme does not bode well and highlights something that will be lost by its absence. Listeners who have been following the progress of the cuckoo's migration will just have to guess how they are doing on the return journey next spring.

Of all the services that the BBC provide, Radio 4 has possibly the most enthusiastic, passionate and loyal users and they might rightly ask how

programmes such as Home Planet and Saving Species can simply disappear from the airwaves. The answer appears to be in the power vested in the controller of the station. We have been here before. The programme for which Saving Species was a welcome, if overdue, replacement – the Natural History programme – was given the chop by another controller seeming intent on making their name by annoying and alienating listeners – James Boyle.

The current controller is someone called Gwyneth Williams and these changes are part of her first re-organisation of the station schedule. It bears a depressing resemblance to that conducted by her notorious predecessor; in particular the replacement of weekly live programmes such as Home Planet and Saving Species with (potentially much cheaper) 'nature' content that can be cobbled together from archive material.

Irate listeners just have to lump it. Despite the licence fee, which funds the BBC by being a form of taxation, it comes with very little representation. Although most would agree that politicians trying to influence its coverage of news and current affairs is wrong, any who are prepared to champion the interests of listeners in the face of wholesale changes to a valued service might find they are on to a vote winner.

Then again a view might be taken that programmes such as the above – which provide information that could lead to be the basis of some of their policies being questioned – are best left off the air!

*Jack Smith*  
Local ecologist

## Rugby

### Green & Whites need to regain form

AN impressive run of six straight wins for Nottingham Rugby came to a sorry end at Rotherham, and was followed by defeat at home to Bristol last weekend.

Their performance at Rotherham was poor and although they defended reasonably well, they showed little of the attacking spark that brought those six consecutive victories.

It was a different story against Bristol though, and a simple case of being beaten by not only the better side on the night, but probably the best team in the Championship on current form.

There is no disgrace in that, and the Green and Whites should feel some satisfaction at having run one of the title favourites as close as they did, losing 35-24.

With six league games remaining they are on course to achieve their minimum objective – a place in the promotion playoffs – but need another couple of wins to guarantee it.

They start their run in with a tough trip to Penzance this Sunday to take on Cornish Pirates, followed by the visit of Doncaster Knights to

Meadow Lane the following Sunday.

The return from injury of a number of key players should aid their cause, as both Tim Streater and Jack Cobden started against Bristol following long lay-offs.

Both have been among the Green and Whites' leading try scorers in recent years and have been missed. Neither was able to get into the Bristol game as much as they would have liked, but will feel better equipped for the challenges ahead having taken that important first step.

## Attenborough Weather Notes

#### December 2011

Weather data (from weather recording station situated in Attenborough Nature Reserve)

**Highest temperature:**  
13.1°C, 26th  
(average extreme max. temperature 12.9°C)

**Lowest temperature:**  
-2.1°C, 18<sup>th</sup>  
(average extreme min. temperature -4.5°C)

**Average temperature:**  
5.2°C  
(daily min. + max. / 2)  
normally 4.1°C

**Monthly rainfall:**  
60.4 mm  
(slightly above average rainfall for December)

A fairly average December saw a complete contrast to December 2010 although the slightly above average rainfall was good news after an incredibly dry year! The unsettled weather saw windy spells, a few nights of frost and a little sleet, the nearest reports of snow being to the north of Nottingham.

A comparison between December 2010 and December 2011 shows the variable nature of the weather in our region, as shown in the table opposite.

**Average min. temperature**  
2010 -2.7°C 2011 3.6°C

**Average max. temperature**  
2010 1.9°C  
2011 8.1°C

**Lowest max. temperature**  
2010 -4.2°C (20th)  
2011 3.4°C (17th)

**Days below freezing**  
2010 10 2011 0

**Nights below freezing**  
2010 21 2011 4



### Thought for the Fortnight

#### Proverb for the New Year

FEAR less, hope more; eat less, chew more;  
whine less, breathe more; talk less, say more;  
hate less, love more  
and all good things are yours.