

Leisure

Wildlife Watching

Local news and views of the natural world

ALTHOUGH it appears at its most obvious in matches between Nottingham Forest and Derby County, the rivalry between the two cities goes deeper than this, with Nottingham having seemingly won the competition to be the major city in the region.

Now Derby has gone one up on Nottingham with those stars of TV, newspapers and the internet – the peregrine falcons that have been nesting on Derby cathedral!

The progress of this nest has been constantly monitored and filmed, and has become quite an attraction for both tourists and local residents, giving them the opportunity to watch these spectacular birds going about the business of raising a brood.

Even after the chicks had fledged there were people on the newly built performance area near the cathedral (which doubles nicely as a peregrine watching spot) with binoculars trained on the now empty nest platform in the forlorn hope of catching a glimpse of them.

Derby is certainly not alone in having peregrines. The number of peregrines nesting in cities and urban areas around the country is rising steadily and, although churches are a favourite, other tall buildings are used.

So where are Nottingham's peregrines? Are we going to let Derby beat us in the star raptor stakes? Peregrine falcons have nested in Nottingham city centre in the past, on the Trent University's Newton Building, but current building work would certainly discourage them from nesting there at the moment. There are, however, other tall

buildings in the city centre and surrounding areas (maybe even in Beeston), which could provide suitable nesting sites – if peregrines could be attracted to them.

A study of successful peregrine nests in cities around the country would give some useful pointers to the sort of sites that they favour. Having identified a few suitable nest sites, the owners of the properties could be approached to allow a nest platform to be installed. These need to be little more than a solid base with a bit of shelter. The real problem is fitting them in the lofty locations that peregrines prefer – one solution could be to encourage property owners to install nest platforms, and perhaps nest boxes for other species, during the course of routine maintenance and repairs.

As well as suitable nest sites, peregrine falcons are attracted to cities by a plentiful supply of one their favourite prey species – pigeons! Despite their historical role as a source of fresh meat in winter, the feral pigeon has shown a disinclination to leave human company and, although many like to have pigeons in towns and cities, others regard them as vermin. Attempts to control them, including the ubiquitous wire spikes, which are always ugly and often as effective in injuring birds as keeping them out altogether, have met with little success.

If Derby's example is any indication, an active peregrine nest is a very good way to discourage pigeons – there are certainly fewer in Derby city centre than in Nottingham. Only a few of Derby's pigeons

will have been eaten by peregrines, most will have left just because of their presence in the area.

It would seem that, as well as providing a wonderful wildlife watching opportunity, there are practical and financial benefits to having peregrines nesting in your town and so everybody should be happy to see them.

Not quite. Racing pigeon fanciers are seldom peregrine fans as well, and this has been one of the sources of persecution of the birds. City nests such as the one in Derby often receive a level of monitoring and protection that increases the chances of chicks being successfully reared by virtually eliminating the risk of persecution – anyone interfering with the nest in Derby would probably be run out of town! This protection is a positive conservation benefit which is helping the recovery of these birds from their population crash in the 1950s and 60s.

Who should take the lead in attracting peregrines to Nottingham? Whilst wildlife organisations would no doubt be glad to help, the benefits to tourism and pigeon control means that it would be appropriate for local authorities to become closely involved. Millions of pounds of public money continue to be found to try and make Nottingham more attractive to visitors – surely a few quid could be found for this.

If peregrine chicks raised in Derby return next year, they could well find the territory already occupied. Let's try and tempt them to come along the Brian Clough Way – and set up a nest in Nottingham!

Jack Smith
Local Ecologist

Food in Season

OUR regular food column comes from James Crossman of Seasons Restaurant on High Road, Chilwell.

Hello again.

It's Wimbledon season, when our thoughts turn to hoping that Andy Murray does the business and how ridiculously expensive a tub of strawberries and cream is going to be in SW19 this year. They were £4.95 last year. There's no need to pay that much. Visit your greengrocer and get some locally grown punnets of strawberries and some Nottinghamshire double cream, and enjoy. It's worth keeping an eye out for 'pick your own' places as well. I know that a lot of them have closed over the years, but there are still a few about. The one on the A453 at Thrumpton is my favourite, and it's pretty near to Beeston too.

I'm really looking forward to the summer fruits coming into the restaurant. I've been working on some new ideas for summer recipes for Seasons. I've some fruity salads, some great new light main courses for the summer months, and some new desserts, using all the lovely new juicy fruits.

Whilst there's nothing wrong with a simple dish of strawberries and cream, I think there's a lot more you can do with them. They work well in a salad with rocket leaves and some nice strong Lincolnshire poacher cheese, or why not make a pie filled with strawberries and rhubarb (if you've got any left) or other red

berries like loganberries or raspberries when they come along. When the strawberries get really cheap in a few weeks time, think about making some jam too.

This recipe will quickly make a nice

Strawberry and Mascarpone Cheesecake

Put 250g/9oz of digestive biscuits (use orange or chocolate ones if you like) into a plastic bag and gently crush them with a rolling pin. Mix the crumbs with 75g/3oz of melted butter, and then spoon the mixture into a tin with a removable base. A 9"/250mm sandwich tin will do, or use a rectangular one if you like. Press them in firmly – but not too squashed – to make the base, and try and take it up the sides of the tin if you can. Put this in the fridge until it's hard and set.



To make the filling, separate an egg and put the yolk into a bowl with 1tbsp of caster sugar. Mix it with a fork for a few seconds until it's blended together. Add a 250g tub of mascarpone, and beat it together until it looks a light yellow, almost custardy colour. Add a couple of drops of vanilla essence if you've got it.

Now whisk the egg white until it's stand-up stiff. Fold the egg white into the mascarpone, keeping as much air in as you can. By this time, the biscuit crust should be hard. Spoon the mascarpone mixture onto the biscuit base and spread it right to the edge.

Take a 250g/9oz punnet of strawberries. Slice them thinly and arrange them over the mascarpone, then pop it back in the fridge.

Take the cheesecake out of the fridge 15 minutes or so before you want to serve it. If you must, you could grate a bit of chocolate over the top. It should only take about half an hour to make this summer dessert, and it's well worth it.

As well as the fruit, lots of nice vegetables are coming out of the garden at the moment. Look out for the first broad beans and the huge variety of salad leaves that are just coming in to the grocers. Try Mizuna - it's lovely. If, like me, you're fairly new to gardening, think about getting some of the winter stuff ready now too - cabbages, Brussels, and cauliflower all need some thought.

Happy eating, cooking and growing. If you'd like to book a table at Seasons restaurant, I'm at 69 High Road, Chilwell (just opposite the Hop Pole), then give me a call on 925 9994, or if you've any questions about cooking or ingredients.

All the details are on the website at www.seasons-restaurant.com.

All the best, James



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Seeking a new challenge?

THE Air Training Corps needs adult volunteers to help run its activities. Flying, shooting, sport and Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions are just a taste of the activities offered by the Air Cadets to youngsters aged 13 and above. But to deliver this exciting programme, and our respected academic syllabus, we need adult

volunteers from all walks of life. No previous experience is necessary, we just require enthusiastic adults who are willing to be part of the premier youth organisation in the UK.

1359 (Beeston) Squadron is holding an Adult Volunteer Recruitment Open Evening on Wednesday, July 1 between 7pm and 9pm at their HQ on Broadgate,

Beeston. Staff and cadets will be on hand to talk about the squadron and the activities offered as well as to answer any questions you may have.

For more information, ring 925 6774 between 7pm and 9pm, Tuesdays and Thursdays, or visit www.1359squadron.com or www.aircadets.org