

# Leisure

## Wildlife Watching

### Local news and views of the natural world

#### An ill wind

THERE may be nothing the British like more than to have a good moan about the weather but the last few weeks have left very little for most to complain about. Day after day of sunshine, sometimes with unseasonably warm temperatures and often accompanied by a cooling breeze, has resulted in ideal conditions for getting 'out and about'.

This spring has been, initially at least, good for wildlife. Plant life has bloomed after the chill winter and many insects have also benefited from both this and the warm temperatures, including aphids – an important element of many food chains. Many butterflies have been on the wing and this has been a good spring for the orange tip. The male of the species, which bear the features that give this butterfly its name and which are easier to spot than the more secretive females, have been seen in good numbers.

One butterfly that has been showing reduced numbers so far this year has been the usually abundant speckled wood. This species prefers damp conditions and their relative absence is just one indication of the downside of the recent weather – as any farmer or gardener will tell you – the lack of rain.

April showers failed to make an appearance this year and, by the end of the month, many places were tinder dry. This is potentially the most hazardous time of year for fires as there is still a plentiful supply of dead plant matter from

the previous winter. This, together with persistent and often strong winds, resulted in ideal conditions for fires to take hold and there were numerous incidents around the country in wildlife-rich areas such as woodland and heathland – one of our scarcest and most valuable habitats.

Although a few of these fires may have been started accidentally, it seems clear that the majority were started deliberately. Whilst one could imagine the culprits might find setting fires less fun if they were surrounded and engulfed by the flames they create this was, in fact, the fate of most of their wildlife victims.

Whilst breeding birds may have escaped and could attempt to nest again, most of the wildlife using these habitats would have been wiped out and the habitat itself may take years to recover. This could affect the conservation of rare species such as the nightjar and the woodlark which breed in some of the areas that have been destroyed, and whose numbers had been recovering in recent years.

The recent rain should at least reduce the chance of more fires occurring and, if it continues to fall regularly, will soon compensate for the effects of the very dry spring. Even after the (relatively) little rain we have had there are already signs of increased activity from wildlife, particularly plants and insects, for which the recent weather had been a little too nice!

#### An ill wind?

As well as bathing humans in sunshine, the southerly airflows, which brought

us the warmest weather in recent weeks, also provided ideal conditions for some of the birds which migrate to this country to breed in summer.

For these birds, good migration conditions offer a number of advantages. Birds arrive earlier at their breeding grounds (as has happened this year), in better condition and with fewer casualties sustained on the way.

It was, therefore, a little strange to hear a spokesman for a local wildlife attraction on local radio bemoaning the fact that some birds which breed north of here, but which often call in to recuperate before proceeding, have this year taken advantage of the favourable winds and dry conditions and flown straight past us – disappointing the birdwatchers who had hoped to spot them.

This disappointment will be soon tempered in those who appreciate that, for migratory birds, a quick and easy migration provides the best possible start to a successful breeding season.

If the birds they had hoped to see do breed successfully there may be more of them to see in future years. Wildlife does not always appear 'on cue' and for birdwatchers, a bit of patience is not only a virtue – it's a necessity!

Jack Smith  
Local ecologist

## Boxing

# Mercians charity boxing night

SOLDIERS from the Mercian Regiment took on some of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire's top amateur boxers in a charity fund-raising fight last week.

The boxing night, held at Chetwynd Barracks, Chilwell, did not disappoint. The evening began with an exhibition fight by two young boxers: Tyler Daniels from Chaddesden-based Pegasus ABC and Giorgio Meah from the Derby Boxing Academy.

Then it was time for the Mercians to step into the

ring, with spectators treated to eight three-round bouts.

After 24 adrenaline-fuelled rounds, the civilians' technical skill proved triumphant over the Mercian's military might and the night ended seven bouts to one.

Proceeds from the evening will be split between the Mercian Regiment Benevolent Fund and two local cancer charities, Teenage Cancer and CLICK Sergeant.

Event organiser Major John Cotterill said: "The

quality of boxing was fantastic. Both teams can be proud of themselves. The fighters were all well matched. It certainly wasn't easy for the civilian boxers; each fight was closely fought.

"The turnout was great and we would like to thank everyone who came along to support the event. The event was organised to raise money for three charities, so you could say that the charities are the real winners."

## Fun, flexible and family-orientated fitness

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It will also improve your mental agility so would even suit those who prefer a good crossword to a cross-country run!"

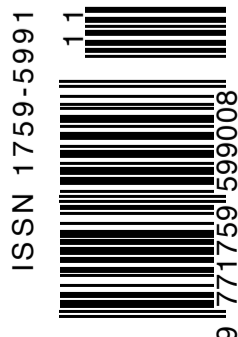
Praise from recent newcomers to orienteering includes: "The activities are exceptionally well-organised and enjoyable. You forget you are exercising." "It lets me spend time with my

parents doing something fun," and "With some very basic training from really friendly people, it was much easier than I expected. In fact, on the very first day, I actually did two courses because I had so much fun on the first one!"

The club meets in Bramcote Leisure Centre car park at around 6.30pm on Thursdays. £3 for adults and £1 for children.

Catherine added: "Orienteering is run as not-for-profit. We have a charge of £3/£1 adults/kids to cover printing of maps, insurance etc, but on May 19 and 26, we are running a special offer of £3 per family (two adults plus any number of kids).

For more information, see [www.noc-uk.org](http://www.noc-uk.org) or contact Catherine Hughes on tel: 07940 575 758.



### Thought for the Fortnight

"THE speed at which boiling milk rises from the bottom of the pan to any point beyond the top is greater than the speed at which the human brain and hand can combine to snatch the confounded thing off."

H F Ellis

## The Beekeeper

