

Leisure

Wildlife

Beeston Wildlife Group

Botswana

IT was a full house for the first talk of the new season for Beeston Wildlife Group, the local branch of the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, held at Beeston Rylands Infants School on Monday, September 17.

Nigel Slater introduced the evening's speaker, amateur naturalist and photographer Malcolm Walpole. Using a stunning audio-visual presentation, Malcolm described his recent visit to Botswana and its world famous game reserves. Located in the middle of the southern portion of Africa, Botswana, with its

deserts, savannah grasslands and inland river deltas, is establishing itself as the country to visit for wildlife.

Malcolm travelled the country in a 4x4 vehicle using local guides to lead him through the game hotspots of the Okavango Delta and the Kalahari Desert. On his travels, he encountered herds of elephant, lone rhinos, giraffe, gazelles and migrating wildebeest – all species familiar to his audience. Not so familiar were the extraordinarily colourful birds such as the bee-eaters and rollers photographed in their natural habitat chasing after bees

and other flying insects. Sleeping 'in-country' under canvas allowed Malcolm to get close up to his targets – sometimes a little too close up, like the night a pride of lions wandered through his campsite; just millimetres of canvas separating him from the King of the Jungle!

At the end of his presentation Malcolm answered questions from his audience, none more searching than those from committee members Martin and Sarah Butler who were leaving the very next morning for their own African wildlife adventure in... Botswana!

Next meeting

The next monthly meeting of the Beeston Wildlife Group on October 17 will feature a talk by one of the region's foremost naturalists, Dr Tim Melling. Tim's presentation will cover all the natural and wildlife gems of the unique English county of Northumberland.

This season's full programme of talks and nature walks, open to Nottingham Wildlife Trust members and non-members alike, can be found at www.att.enboroughnaturecentre.co.uk/activities

Mike Spencer
Beeston Wildlife Group

Football

Chilwell United gains sponsorship

LOCAL under-10s youth football team Chilwell United are on the hunt for new players after winning sponsorship from a national PR firm and supermarket giants Tesco.

The team, whose home ground is at John Clifford School and whose logo is a wolf, practice on Monday evenings and play on Sunday mornings.

Coach Bren Davis said: "We're building a nice little squad of girls and boys who are getting better each season. They have a good time – this year they've come up with the idea of forming a huddle before kick off and howling! They're a fun bunch but they're also serious about climbing the league."

The team, which plays in the FA's Nottingham Young Elizabethan League, has just won shirt sponsorship from Bulletin Academic, a Beeston-based communications agency that supports universities across the country in creating impact with academic research. They've also won support from the Tesco community fund to pay for equipment.

Bulletin Academic MD Martin Stott said: "As a firm we have a national focus but we employ locally and support our local community. Hopefully we'll help unearth a new Rooney and make a real impact."

The team is open to Year 4 and 5 boys and girls. For more information call Bren Davis on tel: 07534 146 995.

Wildlife Watching

Local news and views of the natural world

Toton Trees

THE issue of the trees at Toton sidings continues to cause controversy. In the wake of the Forestry Commission's decision to amend their restocking notice, there have been recent contributions to the letters page of the Express raising concerns that postponing any re-planting until a review in 2015 is letting those who cleared the site 'off the hook'.

This is an understandable reaction which illustrates the strong feelings of those who valued these woodlands before they were destroyed – but how justified are claims that natural re-generation of silver birch will be insufficient to restore the site?

Looking back at its history might help to answer this. It was for many years a working part of Toton Sidings but over years of disuse was naturally

colonised by silver birch, which developed into dense, single species stands – the woodland that was cleared in January 2010. Less than two years after this and even after the driest spring and summer for many years, the re-generation of the silver birch is well under way. This has been assisted by trees growing from surviving stumps and the seed bank in the soil provided by the trees which used to stand in it. In the absence of further disturbance it is highly likely that, by 2015, nature will have done a better job of replacing the lost trees than replanting might have and also that, in time, the area would revert to the dense birch woodland that stood there beforehand.

Plant diversity

Shocking as the clearance of these woodlands was, the opening up of the site and

the removal of shade cover has allowed a wide diversity of plant life to become established including many wild flowers as well as a few 'garden escapees'. One of the highlights of this year was when almost the whole area was carpeted with ox-eye daisies. Less than two years after it was torn apart the area is already more valuable to wildlife than when it was dominated by silver birch woodland.

The crucial question for Toton Sidings is whether it is restored, through planting silver birch as per the original order, to its state just before the clearance, or whether it should now be managed to retain the wildlife interest that has subsequently developed. Whilst some may favour the former, wildlife enthusiasts would plump for the latter.

The recent devastation has itself created some features that have and will be of benefit to wildlife. One of these is a result of the way that the clearance was carried out, leaving all of the felled wood on site. Creation of 'dead wood habitats' is often an important objective of woodland management and Toton now has a potential abundance of these. After the trauma of their creation

they should now be left undisturbed just where they are.

In time, it may be necessary to control the silver birch in order to preserve some of the rich ground flora that has already developed with the objective being fewer, larger, trees but one thing lacking is any diversity of tree species. Apart from silver birch, only hawthorn is really becoming established. There are just a few oak saplings and the odd rowan, all of which have struggled in the dry conditions this year. These do, however, provide an indication of the species that could thrive on the site.

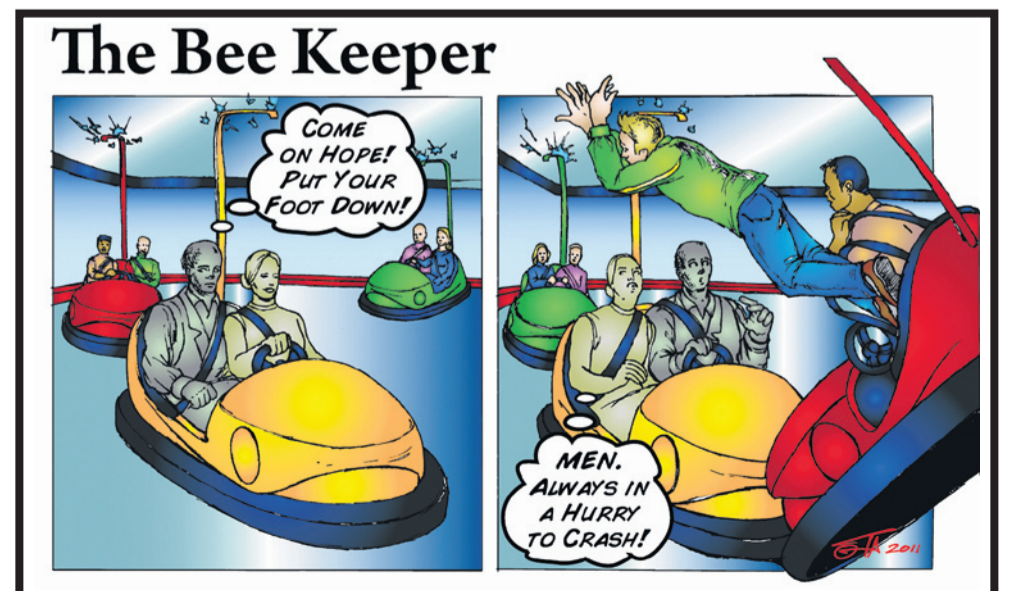
Oak saplings

Although the random planting of unsuitable or non-native species should be discouraged, the idea of one of our readers to contribute saplings for planting does have merit, particularly if they are native oaks. These are often naturally associated with birch in woodlands and if a supply of oak saplings, sourced from local trees, could be available when the 're-generation period' ends, planting them could provide an alternative to introducing even more silver birch. Growing oak saplings does take time, though, and anyone wishing to participate

would need to start now to have a chance of producing a sapling that is fit to plant out in 2015.

Despite the opposition to it in some quarters, the decision to amend the re-stocking order was, on balance, the correct one and one which puts the long term future of the site, and the value for wildlife which is part of its amenity, ahead of the desire to impose a financial penalty – in the form of an order for extensive re-planting – on those responsible for clearing it.

Jack Smith
Local ecologist



Thought for the Fortnight

Education is the inculcation of the incomprehensible into the ignorant by the incompetent.

Josiah Stamp