

## Leisure

# Rare bat roost found at Attenborough

IN more news from Attenborough, we learn that a rare migratory bat, the Nathusius' pipistrelle, has been discovered roosting for the first time in Nottinghamshire.

A male and female of this small bat species have been found settled in a bat box at Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's Attenborough Nature Reserve.

The Nathusius' pipistrelle is a rarely recorded migrant bat, which is increasingly being recorded at wetland sites throughout England; however very few mating roosts have ever been located. Males will occupy roost sites at this time of

year and sing to attract female bats.

Speaking about the news, Attenborough Nature Reserve's Tim Sexton said: "This is a very exciting find. We had suspected that this species was breeding somewhere on or near the reserve, but no-one could find any evidence. We erected several bat boxes, and I recently noticed several droppings on the ground below one of them – a good sign! So we invited a bat expert from the Nottinghamshire Bat Group to inspect, who confirmed that not only was it definitely a bat roost, it was the Nathusius' pipistrelle – a first for Attenborough!"

Despite weighing under 10g (about the same as a 50p piece) the Nathusius' pipistrelle bat is capable of flying incredible distances, with some individuals migrating to the UK for the winter from as far away as Scandinavia. The bats are often found near water and use river corridors as a feature to migrate and feed along. Their voracious appetite means that they can consume around 3000 insects in a single night.

This discovery makes Attenborough only the second site in Nottinghamshire where Nathusius' pipistrelles have been seen during the summer – the other being

the Wildlife Trust's Skylarks Reserve near Holme Pierrepont, Nottingham.

Mr Sexton continued: "With seven of the UK's 17 breeding bat species regularly recorded at Attenborough Nature Reserve, the reserve is a perfect starting point to spark an interest in these rarely seen nocturnal mammals. Throughout the autumn, bats will begin to concentrate on building up their fat reserves to see them through the winter and so will be more visible as they'll be feeding more regularly."

## Cycling

### Computer glytch applies temporary brakes to cycling club expansion

A LOCAL cycling club believes a computer glitch may have prevented information going out to potential new members.

Following a recent publicity drive in *The Beeston Express*, the Erewash Valley CC received numerous inquiries from people interested in joining up.

"But," says organising secretary Malcolm Griffin, "I now believe some of the emails sent out giving details of club activities may not have reached their intended destinations. Many of my regular members have complained of not receiving their monthly newsletter by email, and I fear this problem may also apply to new enquirers, judging by the poor take-up."

Malcolm is asking anyone not in receipt of the information requested to contact him on (0115) 939 7060 or by writing to: 6 Westerlands, Stapleford, Notts, NG9 7JG.

## Wildlife Watching

### Local news and views of the natural world

AS cold northerly winds blow away what has been a very pleasant 'Indian summer' we can reflect on what has been, overall, despite a chilly and inhospitable spring, a good year for wildlife.

Plants that were able to delay flowering until after the cold temperatures passed have taken advantage of what have been good growing conditions over the rest of the summer to produce a bumper crop of fruit, berries, seeds and nuts. Blackberries, holly, sycamore and hawthorn are amongst those which have shown exceptional yields this year, whilst some rowans look as if they in danger of their boughs breaking under the weight of berries that they are carrying!

This has led to 2013 being declared a 'mast year'. The term 'mast' –

meaning fruit of the forest trees, such as acorns – is principally used to denote abundant harvests for oak, beech and sweet chestnuts, but the concept is often extended to include especially heavy yields of fruit for other trees and shrubs. The frequency of mast years varies from species to species with no set timetable. For beech, a mast year typically occurs every five to ten years, compared to six or seven for an oak and four or five for a sweet chestnut. This year, there seems to be an especially high level of mast years, with species such as beech, oak and sweet chestnut synchronising despite their differing cycles.

Although weather conditions are a major factor in the occurrence of 'mast years' in multiple species these alone cannot predict them and scientists

have long suspected that something else, such as genetic factors, must be involved. There is little or no evidence to support these theories and the answer to the question 'what really causes mast years' is – nobody knows!

This is not a question that will concern the wildlife that can take advantage of this bounty and it will be a well-fed autumn for nut, berry and seed eaters – increasing their chances of surviving the winter to breed next year. For winter visitors, such as the redwing, fieldfare and waxwing, there will be a bumper crop of berries waiting for them when or if – in the case of the waxwing – they arrive.

Plants do not, of course, produce their fruit to provide others with food. Although some plants do have seeds that need to be eaten to be viable, for most

this destroys them. Heavy yields in 'mast years' overwhelm the ability of the species which eat them to consume any more than a small proportion of what is produced, thereby increasing the chance of a large number germinating.

For wildlife 2013, despite its unpromising start, has been a welcome relief after a succession of bad years and it being a 'mast year' bodes well for 2014.

#### All a bit fishy

The correspondent to our Letters page (September 6) who was advocating shooting cormorants to protect wildlife at Attenborough could, by the subsequent response, have been left in no doubt that this was not necessary.

Some points in his letter did, however, slip by without comment.

One of these was that there were no inland cormorants before 1980. This is a myth that has built up in some quarters but one that is completely untrue. There is even a recognised sub-species of cormorant which predominantly uses freshwater habitats and

prefers nesting in trees to doing so on cliffs!

Cormorants were persecuted in medieval times as they were seen as competition for a food resource used by humans. After the industrial revolution – and on into living memory – many of our watercourses became polluted to the extent that they were virtually open sewers, containing no fish of interest to either man or bird and often no life at all.

Anglers, through bodies such as the Anglers Co-operative Association, were one of the few groups to bring attention to the polluted state of Britain's freshwaters and their efforts were in no small part responsible for the huge improvement in water quality that we see today.

This improvement is certainly one reason for the increase in inland cormorant numbers in recent years, but you would struggle to find anyone with a knowledge of wildlife conservation who would advocate that they need to be shot to protect other species.

There would be no such problem amongst those

who run and use heavily stocked specialist angling venues. These have become widespread in recent years initially for trout fishing but increasingly for coarse fishing as well. They are commercial ventures and it is perhaps not surprising that owners, who have paid good money to buy the fish, and anglers, who have paid good money to catch them, are not too keen to see this valuable stock being eaten by cormorants who find these places, with their easy pickings, particularly attractive.

It is possible to obtain a licence to shoot cormorants but a move last year to allow general shooting was unsuccessful – to the displeasure of the fishing lobby. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that our correspondent may have been part of this group.

If so, he should now realise that he will need a better excuse to shoot this bird than to paint a picture of the evil cormorant plucking fish from the beak of a cute grebe chick!

Jack Smith  
Local ecologist

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#### Thought for the Fortnight

"AN ounce of loyalty is worth  
a pound of cleverness."

Elbert Hubbard (1856 – 1915)