

# Overton Biodiversity Society News

Autumn/Winter 2012

## Homes for Dormice

The OBS Committee has taken delivery of 20 nest boxes for Dormice. It is hoped that by positioning these in suitable locations around the village, Dormice will be encouraged to use them, which in turn will help expand the range of the population that we know already exists in parts of the local area. Two suitable sites have been identified and once in place, the nest boxes will be carefully monitored to see if any Dormice have taken up residence. This won't be an instant process though, as the nest boxes will need a summer to become established.

The nest boxes were purchased at a low cost from an organisation working to rehabilitate offenders and provide them with skills to start a new life and earn a living. The OBS Committee will make sure the people who made the boxes receive photos of them in situ and will keep them updated as to whether there is any evidence of Dormice using them.

## Kingfishers in Overton

During May, OBS members were able to attend a fascinating talk by Alan Willis, a keen Kingfisher photographer and author of the book *Queen of the River*. Alan followed a family of Kingfishers living locally on the river Test. On an almost daily basis, he photographed them and saw them through the breeding season, watched the parents nurturing their young, followed them through one of the harshest winters in years and witnessed the next generation of Kingfishers take over the territory and go on to have their own families.

Anyone wishing to photograph Kingfishers at their nest site must obtain a Schedule 1 Licence from Natural England, because the species is afforded special protection under UK wildlife law. The licence is also specific to one site. Armed with his licence and a selection of lenses, Alan spent his days observing and photographing the lives of these beautiful birds, which quite clearly hold a special place in his heart. Each Kingfisher has its' own personality, which came across in Alan's photographs and his anecdotes. Alan was able to observe some interesting behaviour during his time watching the birds, including courtship, territorial disputes and....erm....'waste disposal', which the children in the audience found especially amusing!

In the same way he has written his book, Alan spoke from the heart about the Kingfishers, making this an especially personal talk which had the audience enthralled. We are very lucky to have these beautiful and fascinating birds in the village and we got to know our resident

birds a lot better thanks to Alan's presentation. Alan has kindly provided one of his beautiful photographs and some sad news about the Queen of the River:



*A Tribute to Lady Guinevere. Yesterday (27<sup>th</sup> September) this beautiful young kingfisher passed away. We found her about half a mile from her nest site. She had choked on a fish which had stuck in her throat. She was the most beautiful kingfisher I have ever photographed. She was so friendly, and pictured on my hide. Alan Willis.*

We are sorry to hear of the passing of Lady Guinevere. Her legacy lives on though, with her offspring growing up and having families of their own along the river.

### **Hedges and when to cut them**

The OBS Committee has received a query or two about hedge cutting/trimming and when is the right time to do this, bearing in mind that for part of the year, birds will be nesting and bringing up their young.

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981, it is an offence to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built. Whilst many of us who

have hedges around our gardens and on our land like to keep them tidy and trimmed, cutting them during the nesting season does run the risk of being a criminal offence if there are nesting birds in the hedge.

This is a very tricky subject, as hedges are quite often the cause of disagreements between neighbours and can grow to hazardous proportions, such as to the point where they obscure road signs, which is clearly a dangerous situation in itself for both motorists and pedestrians. However, it is best to follow advice as issued by the RSPB, which recommends that cutting hedges and trees is avoided between March and August, as this is the main breeding season for nesting birds.

### **The Otters are coming!**

One species which is making a very welcome comeback along many rivers in the UK is the Otter. Sarah Lines from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIOWWT) came to Overton in September and gave a very interesting presentation on the encouraging spread of Otters throughout all counties in England. She brought along a stuffed Otter and a stuffed wild Mink, so the audience could see the difference between the two. Sarah talked about some of the hazards that Otters face, such as having to cross roads to avoid non-Otter friendly tunnels on rivers and canals and explained how the HIOWWT are helping to encourage Otters to set up home in the local area by providing artificial Otter Holts.

The River Anton in Andover is a good place to see Otters in daylight most days. Some readers may also have seen them, or at least the CCTV footage of them, at City Mill in Winchester. Who knows, perhaps an Otter family will choose to become permanent residents in Overton – keep an eye out and let the OBS know if you see any signs of them!

### **Local sightings**

- Tawny Owls active; Barn Owl seen on Kingsclere Road
- Canada Geese.
- Willow Warblers around Oak Close.
- Swifts left by end of July but House Martins and Swallows still around.
- Despite being a bad summer for Butterflies, we have received reports of Red Admirals, Commas, Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells. Painted Lady at Lordsfield.
- Worst year ever for moths but massive increase in early August.
- Bats active.

Don't forget to report your sightings to [fieldfare@jaybry.gotadsl.co.uk](mailto:fieldfare@jaybry.gotadsl.co.uk)

**Website:** <http://www.overton-biodiversity.org/>

## **Forthcoming Events**

**Saturday November 10<sup>th</sup> 2012 at 1:30pm:** Micheldever Spoil Heaps (“The Chalkies”) Work Party: Come and help clear invading shrubs from this Site of Special Scientific Interest

**Saturday December 1<sup>st</sup> 2012, 2:00pm at Overton Community Centre:** Christmas Hedgerow Crafts: Make your own Christmas wreaths and table decorations from locally sourced materials. £5.00 to cover materials. Numbers limited – please phone Jane 771121

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2013, 7:30pm at St. Mary’s Hall:** Wildlife Film Evening – more details TBC

**Saturday February 9<sup>th</sup> 2013 at 1:30pm:** Micheldever Spoil Heaps (“The Chalkies”) Work Party: Work off any remaining evidence of Christmas excess and help clear those invading shrubs!

**Thursday March 14<sup>th</sup> 2013, 7:30pm at Overton Community Centre:** AGM, followed by guest speaker Ashley Smith from the Hawk Conservancy Trust. Ashley presents a light-hearted look at the work of the Hawk Conservancy Trust. Includes home-made refreshments.

## **OBS Photo Competition 2012/2013**

***Get snapping!*** Take a good quality photo of any animal, bird, insect, reptile, plant or tree in its natural habitat (no hippos, elephants or family pets!) and you could be a winner! This year there is no entry fee and there are two classes – Adults and Juniors up to 18 years. Up to three photos can be submitted. Application forms, combined with a mounting sheet, are available from the Fireplace Shop: return mounted photos there for judging by 18 February 2013. You don’t have to be a member of OBS – but, as membership is only £1 per year, why not come to our next meeting and see what we are doing for local flora and fauna?

Any queries, contact Ken Towell on 770965.

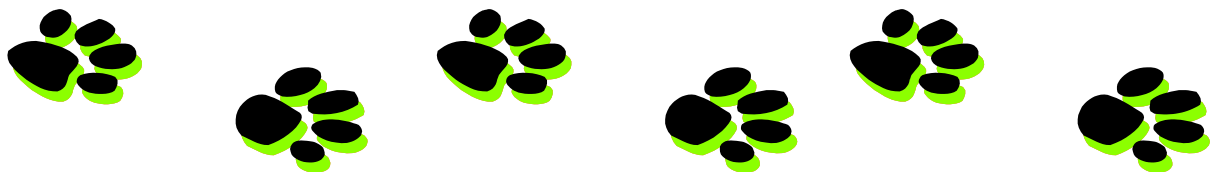
# OBS Juniors

## Smokey's sightings



Hi, I'm Smokey. I had a very bad start in life so I don't go outside, but I love to sit in my window and look out across the fields and see what's going on.

Hands up who thinks the summer was a bit of a wash-out! Mum says she feels cheated because most of the (few) nice days happened while she was stuck indoors at work. I must admit, my furry coat has been quite confused and one minute I've been shedding lots of hair, the next I've been growing it again! A lot of animals, insects, plants and birds have really struggled in the poor weather, with food and shelter being difficult to find. You might have noticed there didn't seem to be so many bees and butterflies around this summer - they have had a very difficult year. However, some species have really benefitted from it, such as slugs, snails and certain orchid species. We've had lots of spiders coming into the house, which Mum doesn't seem to like very much because she makes funny noises and leaps about telling me to "get it". I don't know what she expects *me* to do about it, but I wish she'd stop freaking out and just go and put some cat food in my dish instead.



## Things to look out for

Autumn is here and winter is just around the corner, but it doesn't mean there's no wildlife to look for! Trying spotting some of these:

- Birds gathering before they head off on their migration
- Squirrels busy collecting and hiding nuts - look out also for Jays, which also collect nuts for their winter stores
- Hazel nuts and acorns

- Fungi in woodlands and on grasslands (but don't touch!)
- Robins, which are one of the few birds to sing at this time of year
- Listen for the Tawny Owl hooting in the dark

And most importantly, don't forget...

- If you can, provide food for the birds - they need to eat a lot more in the cold weather, especially if it snows
- If your parents have a bonfire, *please* make sure they check it for sleeping hedgehogs before lighting it



Do you think it will snow this winter?

Send your sightings to: [fieldfare@jaybry.gotadsl.co.uk](mailto:fieldfare@jaybry.gotadsl.co.uk)