

3rd July 2020

THE ORC WEEKLY

Nature to Nurture

We are now into the fourth week of our second half of the Summer term, and so pleased to have seen so many students joining us for our online courses since April. A big thank you to everyone that has filled out our Survey regarding plans for September onwards. We will bring you the latest updates in due course, but we very much hope to be welcoming Students back to in-person courses (providing this is still possible under the latest guidelines), as well as continuing courses online, from September.

This week's newsletter is focused on Nature. In this edition, we will look at nature from both an inside and outside perspective. Over the past few months, some of us might have been able to go on walks or spend time in green spaces, whereas others may have needed or preferred to stay indoors. But inside or outside, there are so many different ways that we can access and appreciate nature – whether this is looking out of the window or stepping outside to notice what is going on in nature around you.



We hope this Newsletter will give you just a small flavour of some of the different ways that nature can help us to look after our own wellbeing, and in-turn remembering the important part we have to play in looking after nature ourselves.

Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Mental Health Phonenumber

The 24/7 mental health helpline provides people with mental health advice during the coronavirus pandemic. This round-the-clock helpline will make it quicker and easier for people in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire to get the right advice they need for their mental health and emotional wellbeing. This line operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for people who need mental health care when their situation is not life threatening.

Phone number for adults: 0800 783 0119

Phone number for Children and Young people: 0800 783 0121

Wild animals enjoy freedom of a quieter world

Coronavirus lockdowns globally have given parts of the natural world a rare opportunity to experience life with hardly any humans and traffic around. We have seen our wildlife exploring emptied streets, parks and waterways, and while many of these are not unique sightings, the last few months seem to have given our wildlife the confidence to explore deeper into areas of human habitation and stay for longer. The benefit of the pandemic doesn't stop at our wildlife; our natural world has seen a surge in growth, with trees, flowers and other species of vegetation being able to recover and grow, no doubt helped by the reduction in air pollution levels. Scientists have noted a significant improvement in air quality over the past few months, due to a dramatic fall in air traffic and industrial emissions.



I think it's important to give a balanced view and acknowledge that it has not all been positive. Our wildlife sanctuaries and zoos have been impacted by the loss of income from visitors, and this has affected the day to day running of these institutions. However, with the most recent news from the government that animal sanctuaries and zoos can re-open with appropriate measures in place, it means that we have chance the chance to visit some of our world's most endangered species and learn how we can do more to protect the natural world around us. Do take a look at the following page for examples of local places in Oxfordshire that you can now choose to visit safely should you wish to do so.

It is easy to forget that our natural world and the wildlife were here before us, and over the past few

months we have seen how quickly our wildlife, trees, flowers and vegetation can reclaim the land that they once dominated. Let us not go back to our old ways of life but embrace what we have rediscovered since the lockdown and work together with our natural world. **Tony**



Oxfordshire based wildlife parks

Venturing out?

Below is a list of Oxfordshire based wildlife parks and gardens that have re-opened, or are re-opening soon – all of the below organisations are taking great care in implementing measures to enable the general public to visit them safely:

Cotswold Wildlife Park and Gardens - Burford:

Cotswold Wildlife Park is now open again every day of the year (other than Christmas). You can read more about how to visit on their website:

<https://www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk/>



Oxford Botanic Gardens and Harcourt Arboretum:

The Arboretum and Oxford Botanic Gardens (two separate locations) are now open for those who are able to visit safely. If you would like to visit, you need to book a time slot in advance; you can do so on their website here: <https://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/visit-arboretum>

Blenheim Palace Gardens - Woodstock:

This is classed as a UNESCO world heritage site, situated in the beautiful grounds of Blenheim Palace. Like the other venues, you need book a date and time slot prior to visit. There are plenty of walks to discover within the beautiful grounds. For more information, you can visit their website here: <https://www.blenheimpalace.com/visitus/what-to-do/formal-gardens.html>



Staying in?

If you don't feel like going out to visit any of these places and would prefer to stay indoors, there is still plenty on offer! Both Edinburgh Zoo and ZSL London Zoo have set up webcams for people to watch the animals and their behaviour at any time of the day. These webcams are live and will give you an interesting insight into the daily life of some of the animals that live in these zoos.

Both ZSL and Edinburgh Zoo do a huge amount of conservation work with endangered animals. This includes locating the remaining populations of threatened species, promoting sustainable wildlife-human relations in local communities, as well as field work and research to help ensure the survival of many threatened animal species. For more information about their conservation work, please have a look on their websites.



By clicking on this link you can watch, via live cams, pandas, penguins, tigers, koalas, and lions going about their daily lives: <https://www.edinburghzoo.org.uk/webcams/panda-cam/>



By clicking on this link you can watch, via live cams, lemurs, squirrel monkeys, sloths, penguins and giraffes go about their daily lives:

<https://www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo/virtual-london-zoo>

Hope is the thing with feathers

At the centre of my kitchen table I have a small collection of old-fashioned china models of birds - a cheerful Robin Redbreast protecting his nest, and two chaffinches, both perched on branches of gaudy blossom, both with the tips of their tails missing. None of them are elegant or sophisticated or valuable, but they are always there, and there's always a vase of flowers beside them. Flowers and birds have seen me through a lot of dark times. There have been times when there wasn't much else keeping me cheerful - times when I would keep going by trying to find a moment's joy each day to lift my spirits. More often than not that moment of joy would be a bird or a flower - catching sight from the car window of poppies shining scarlet along the edge of a

*"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all.*

EMILY DICKINSON (1830 TO 1886)



field, or standing still at twilight in the garden to listen for a minute to the blackbird's last song of the day, or noticing a robin land close by and look at me with his head to one side, seeming to show such curiosity about the world.

The poet Emily Dickinson wrote about birds as a metaphor for Hope, describing Hope as something that is always inside us, however dark the days. During this strange lockdown Spring of 2020 I think it's no surprise that many, like me, have turned to birds and flowers for comfort. Spending more time in our homes, we have had more opportunity to notice the small birds living their lives

outside our windows, more time to notice the turn of the seasons as nests are built, eggs are laid, broods nurtured, and fledglings fly away - as life goes on. In an uncertain world, asked to change our familiar habits and live life differently, birds seem to show that Hope is always there, all around us. However our lives change, the birds are still going to welcome another new morning and sing with joy at the end of another day. I've heard people say they think birdsong was louder in this lockdown Spring, and yet scientists say it was quieter than other Springs - we just stopped to listen a little more.

Keeping going by looking for tiny moments of joy is exhausting. There were dark days in the past when I thought that was all there was to lighten life - but I now know things can feel much brighter much more often. At the Recovery College I hope we can signpost students towards finding Hope to sustain them much of the time. I don't need my china birds as often as I once did, but I keep them on my kitchen table just in case I need a reminder - as long as the birds keep singing (and they always will keep singing) there's always Hope. **Stephanie**



Behind the Binoculars

This week we've spoken to Zoë, a tutor at the Recovery College who works as a Ward Manager in the Forensic setting at Littlemore

Why do you birdwatch?

I have always loved walking and birdwatching adds another element to a good walk. It also offers an opportunity to stop and really see what's happening around you. Bird behaviour is very interesting, some can be quite comical, you see everything played out amongst the birds; mating, fighting, eating, family groups. I really enjoy sitting in a hide on a walk, you have to be really quiet and it's so peaceful. There is almost something spiritual about sitting quietly in a hide with your own thoughts and just observing what is happening around you.

What is a good place to birdwatch?

Anywhere! That's the beauty of birdwatching, you can do in anywhere at all, from a bus stop, from your office window, in a city centre, in the countryside. There is always something going on. Locally there is Otmoor RSPB reserve which is really peaceful and there are lots of species and different types of habitat. I have seen Hobbys there, an extremely aerobatic falcon with distinctive orange thighs which catches and eats dragonflies whilst on the wing. It's amazing to see them snatch the dragonflies out of the air and then bring them up to their beaks all whilst flying still. Later in the year they catch and eat Swallows and Swifts on the wing and eat those too. They have sickle shaped wings like the Swallows and Swifts which makes them fast and agile flyers.

What is the most interesting bird scene etc you have witnessed?

It's a bit gruesome but I was on Skomer Island in Pembrokeshire, Wales and it is famous for having Puffins breed there. The young Puffins are called Pufflings and they are so cute, little balls of fluff. Puffins nest in burrows underground a bit like rabbits. There is a sea bird, a gull, called the great black backed gull, who predated on small birds as well as fish. They have a wingspan of around 1.5 metres so really large! I was watching a black backed gull through my binoculars, he was hopping around the Puffin burrows which were unattended as the adults



were out to sea fishing. I could see he was checking the burrows, sticking his beak in. He then pulled a Puffling out of the nest and proceeded to kill and eat it. It was sad to see but also a bit like watching a David Attenborough documentary and quite fascinating to see in real life.

Do you use any apps or technology when you birdwatch?

Yes, I think the best birdwatching guide is the Collins Bird Guide and there is now an app by the same people which is amazing. The app is great to have because the guide is quite a heavy book and if you are taking binoculars, a scope, waterproof, lunch, flask and cake (of course!) it's good to lighten the load; but also because it shows you videos of the birds behaviour and recordings of the birdsong.



Tell us a phrase from birdwatcher's jargon:

Twitcheer versus Birder. I am very much a Birder not a Twitcheer. I enjoy watching any birds, they don't have to be rare or ones I haven't seen before. I am not interested in 'ticking them off'. It is nice to see something new as part of the challenge is to identify the bird, but if I only see a Blackbird splashing in my pond or a group of Sparrows chattering in a tree I am still more than happy. Twitcheers want to see all the birds, especially the rare ones, and there are Twitcheers who will text each-other and drive the length of the country just to see a rare bird. Some people will even fly to other countries to 'tick them off'! Zoë

A Note on Blackberries:

It's not the time of the year for blackberries just yet, but I've started to notice little green jewels forming and beginning to burst through the brambles, as spring has leapt into summer.

If you are able to go out on a walk, do have a look out for the blackberry plants and notice their different stages over the coming weeks. They can be found in woods, heaths, roadside verges, canal paths and sometimes even in your garden – they won't be ripe just yet as this tends to happen from July-mid September.

I like to use this time of year to work out where the best wild blackberries are growing locally. I have found observing their different stages of growth quite grounding and reassuring in many ways. Other than the idea that soon on the horizon



might be a delicious blackberry crumble or compote, seeing the different stages of their growth and development over the weeks and months also serves as a reminder that things are constantly changing.

In a period, particularly over these last few months, where things have felt up in the air, we could be

feeling anxious or we're not always sure what's around the corner, it can be helpful to remind oneself that things change, things will always change, we can't control everything and that's ok.



RSPB - How to get your Wildlife Guide



The RSPB have produced a free guide called Welcoming Wildlife to your Garden. This guide is full of information about how to best support and welcome nature into your space, and the different species that you might see or have become more aware of.

- This guide can be used by anyone whether you have access to a garden, outdoor space, or a small balcony.
- It will help you to spot different types of nature including different species of garden birds; introduction to garden minibeasts; how to

help hedgehogs and butterflies, and monthly gardening tips and the best plants to attract bees

- You can request for them to post you a guide (it normally takes a week or so), or, you can download load it straight away onto your computer/tablet
- To request the RSPB Welcoming wildlife to your garden guide, please click on the link and follow the 'Request your guide' instructions:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/welcome-wildlife-to-your-garden/>

Art corner

For this week's Art Corner we are featuring two wonderful pieces by Tan and Karen, showcasing a range of artwork and photography

Karen:

A selection of photos from a health walk with mind, and from a day out at Warwick Castle. It boosted my mental health recovery and gave me new memories. Flowers are a beautiful in reminding us that they are a great tonic on depressed days



Tan:

I'm very much a beginner but I enjoy creating and was inspired by the art course at the Recovery College and how we were taught to create intuitively. Here is some artwork I've been doing inspired by the art course at the college. It's DVD art and acrylic painting on pebbles and bark



If you'd like to be a part of Art Corner in future editions, please email us at: contactORC@restore.org.uk - and we'd be delighted to share your work

WWF and Mental Health Foundation

For further information on mental health and nature, the interactions between the two and more ideas as to how we can support our own wellbeing, please have a look at the Thriving with Nature Guide produced by the WWF and Mental Health Foundation

More information on their can be found by clicking on this link: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/thriving-with-nature/guide>

To download the PDF guide, you can click here: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/Thriving-With-Nature-Guidebook-Digital-Copy.pdf>

The guide is available and open to anyone, but WWF and MH Foundation suggest it may be most helpful for those of us living in urban areas who may be experiencing stress or other strains on their wellbeing.

Together we can strive for a world where everyone thrives in nature! Get involved on social media:

Use the hashtag #ThrivingWithNature
Tag @MentalHealthFoundation and @WWF_UK



"Nature helps me to understand we are part of something bigger."

Supporter on Twitter



Please do remember that if you are in Crisis, you can contact:

**Mental Health Helpline (24/7)-
Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire**

0800 783 0119 (support for adults)

**0800 783 0121 (support for children
and young people)**

**Samaritans - 116 123
(free-phone, 24/7 support)**

Dial 999

if you feel you are at immediate risk

Dial 111

**if you need medical help quickly, but
are not at immediate risk**

For a full list of organisations that you can contact, please click on the link below to head to the Signposting document on our website

<https://oxfordshirerecoverycollege.org.uk/signposting/>

If you need to get in touch, please do so:
by emailing contactORC@restore.org.uk, or
calling us on 01865 779613