



RAISING THE FLOORBOARDS

It was a strange cub season. Infant cubs normally arrive over a fairly tight, eight week period between late February and late April. That's when most cubs are born. But this year we were receiving newborn cubs from as early as January and as late as mid May.

Rescue centres across the UK were reporting similar weirdness, with barely any fledglings arriving at the usual time and a famine of small mammals when there should have been a feast!

We're inclined to put some of it down to weather conditions, for

we certainly experienced an inordinately wet spring! It would certainly have affected the insect population, with a knock-on effect for birds dependent on a good insect crop. But the same can't be said for foxes. In fact, with worms closer to the surface due to the wet weather, badgers and foxes should have cleaned up on the proceeds. But where we suspected they were affected was with fox earths becoming flooded – and we saw all too many of those filled to ground level with rainwater that had nowhere to drain.

This may have been a factor in a drop in the

number of cubs received this year – 15% fewer than usual - with high mortality caused by drowning and exposure. It's tough out there!

As for those cubs we *did* receive, let's start with **The Floorboards**. This was a litter of four cubs born beneath the floor of a family's living room. The noise, plus the smell of decaying food brought back by the adults, was proving too much for the householder and although they didn't want to take lethal action, relations were becoming a little strained.

The Fox Project works with three associated

fox deterrence consultancies. Offering such a service is a vital part of our work and it saves the lives of many thousands of foxes each year when bewildered and beleaguered householders reach the end of their tether trying to find a solution to fox 'problems'.

Prior to the service being established – several years before The Fox Project even had a name – the only recourse people had was to turn to lethal 'pest controllers', even when it was the last thing they wanted to do. Today, things are different, and most UK local authorities refer folk to our Fox

continued from front page...



Deterrence Helpline for a non-lethal solution.

Usually, a programme of deterrence goes to plan and where cubs are involved, the outcome is seldom other than predictable; the vixen smells the repellents, believes another animal is sniffing around her cubs and nervously moves them to one of her other earths – foxes are seldom without a back-up plan! It's textbook stuff. Never fails.

But this time it *did*. Whether she was an inexperienced mother or if something else spooked her, we'll never know. But the vixen returned several times and behaved as if the cubs were strangers. In the end, she left without them and was not seen again.

This left the deterrence team with a dilemma.

The cubs were too young to support feed and, in any event, that would hardly have solved the problem about rotting food beneath the floor. So we reluctantly accepted they should come in. It was frustrating and we hated it. But misadventure sometimes creates the need and, it has to be said, theirs was a less traumatic form of misadventure than brings some cubs to us.

A second family was found on a rubbish tip. Normally that wouldn't be a bad place to start your life as a fox, as food resources in the form of discarded food, and the rodents that follow, provide a larder from Day One. The downside is bulldozers, dumper-trucks and JCBs rumbling back and forth above your head. Sooner

or later you're going to be crushed, blocked in or dug up.

And that's just what happened. The driver was mortified to think he'd almost killed the cubs but had no option but to remove them. It left a vixen out there without her infants, but maybe that was for the best. **The Stigs** – named after the kids' TV favourite - were a very undernourished litter. With only three recovered, we suspected their siblings had starved – another inexperienced mother? – and we lost another during the course of treatment.

Nathan was the happiest cub in the world. Inexhaustible, joyous, hyperactive – and that sort of behaviour always sounds alarm bells. We all need to sleep sometime. But Nathan kept right on going!

We've so often seen cubs like him suddenly keel over. It's almost as if they know they won't last long and they're going to make the most of it.

Sure enough...no warning... no suffering. Nathan just went. A short but happy life.

We've long ceased being surprised when seemingly healthy cubs die. Every cub that arrives without

obvious explanation as to why it was found wandering alone is subject to the same suspicion. Did the vixen know Nathan was not a viable cub? Very probably she did. Animals understand and sense these things more than we do. From her point of view there's no use wasting time supporting an animal that will never amount to anything – particularly when you've other mouths to feed. As I said before, it's tough out there!

Mrs Pugwash was brought in by a lady who had hauled her cat off the cub, sadly, too late to save one of the cub's eyes. But this was another cheerful little cub you never heard complain. She just got on with it, slightly cross-eyed but never obviously disabled. Why Mrs Pugwash? Well, we've named a lot of one-eyed foxes Nelson or Long John Silver. But they've been boys and if you can't give a girl the name of a pirate captain, you can at least give her the name of a pirate captain's wife!

Jamie and Packet were also visually impaired but in their case it was congenital. Both seemed happy around people and so we did what we never do with cubs. We befriended them to try to halt reversion to wild.



That's not an easy business as all their instincts are to go wild regardless of any friendship you offer. But it worked, and we've been pleased to 'home' them for life with a wildlife park. A good result, even though failing to get an animal back to the wild always feels like failure.

Little Gnasher was a ball of spitting fury from the off and he never liked us at all, whereas **Joanie** loved everybody and is still coming back to her rehabber's home on a

daily basis for food and conversation. But she's very selective. Show up with someone she doesn't know and she melts away into the woods and comes back later. That's good enough for us.

Unfortunately, there are always others displaying the wrong attitude and refusing to go wild. We have to take those to the wire, constantly trying to wrong-foot them by moving them from fosterer to fosterer and from familiar holding pen to

unfamiliar holding pen in an attempt to undermine any trust they have in humans. Thankfully, we won on all counts this year.

So who else did we have? Well, amongst our most memorable cubs were the exceedingly handsome **Brinsley**, plus **Clover** and **Hermione**, two very beautiful ladies. **Aye-Aye's** bug eyes put us in mind of the strange mini-lemur from Madagascar, and **Snout** came in smelling strongly of the cigarettes smoked by the lady who

found him, earning him a name based on the prison slang term for contraband tobacco.

So that's another cub season over. Are we sorry to see them go? Not likely! Our reward for raising cubs is being able to buy them another chance after life had given up on them. What they make of that chance depends on the individual - on character, luck and circumstance. For us, it's enough to know they're back in business.

BOG STANDARD



Gents

You have to give them credit. The unholy pro-hunt partnership of Daily Mail and Telegraph have been very successful in frightening the more gullible elements in our

society about foxes.

The facts don't come into it. Some folk believe if it's in the paper it must be true or the press would be told off for telling fibs! If only...

The latest Telegraph story involved South Londoner Anthony Schofield, supposedly attacked by a fox whilst sitting on the toilet. As if a story about a man who doesn't bother to close the toilet door wasn't unsavoury enough, the image he conveyed as he described chasing the fox around the house with his trousers round his ankles was even more unsettling.

Mr Schofield told how the fox had both him and his cat in its mouth at the same time – not an easy trick to pull off for an animal with a jaw size comparable to a Corgi.

After a prolonged and hoppity chase the fox finally left – no doubt holding a lower opinion of human sanitary arrangements than previous. The relieved – possibly even flushed – householder described the incident as being "Like a struggle for my life!" The Evening Standard reported the fox as having fractured the man's wrist. The Daily

Mail said the fox had fractured both wrists. Total fiction. Nothing was broken.

Mr Schofield - a man seemingly unencumbered by the burden of self-respect - was persuaded to pose for our esteemed media, grinning widely whilst sitting on the toilet with his trousers down. Suffice to say, we have higher standards than those publications and won't be reproducing such a photo here.

When all's said and done, it appears nothing much happened. But we'll give Mr Schofield the last word. He said, "The fox was like a wild animal!"

FOXROX

The 5th Rock With The Foxes was, as always, bigger and better than the last! And this time it was '50s/'60s rock 'n' roll all the way, with the retro Firetones, River

Boys and Dave B.

We jived until jaded, got through a great vegan barbecue, soaked up beer and punch to fend off dehydration in the July heatwave, and consumed our own bodyweights in home-made cake. In the

process, hosts Frankie and Bill Fisher and a host of volunteers notched up several thousand welcome 🐾🐾🐾🐾 for which we're very grateful.

Be there next year. It's not to be missed!



FOX GOT BASS

FARMERS BOOKED

A class of Kidderminster Kids from Wyre Forest School wrote to us in March asking for information on foxes, which we were happy to provide. Unfortunately, we were unable to help

Vladimir Brown with his particular request to stop Farmer Boggis and his pals from trying to kill their local fox. We needn't have worried. Acting on information provided by Vladimir, our special

investigations team found Messrs Boggis, Bunce and Bean had already been dealt with by a man named Roald Dahl, and Fantastic Mr Fox was alive and well.



CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS

Oh, I know! Not Christmas already! Well, not quite yet but we need time to process orders so there's no point waiting until the end of November to tell you what we have for sale. You need to buy early to avoid disappointment.

So what have we this year? Artist Thea Olrog has come up trumps again, with a great new Christmas card depicting Santa in trouble with the law, and Lynn Cordell's 2013 tote bag design is up for grabs.

Dani Clarke has designed our 2014 calendar, with some lovely shots of this year's cubs. It's a real bargain. When you've done with the calendar you can tear off each photo and it becomes a ready-to-mail postcard!

Dani's also designed a new set of three fridge magnets and a writing pack you'll receive with

letterheads customised with your own name and address or, if you want to give it is as a gift, with a friend's details.

For kids, we've got a six inch ruler smothered in cute cubby faces and, for the fashionistas, there's a diamanté iron-on patch of The Fox Project logo to brighten up a t-shirt, jacket or jeans.

We're also booking early for our 2014 Adoption scheme because so many folk like to give this to family or friends as a Christmas gift. Of course, you can do it as a gift to yourself – hundreds of people do – but for those unfamiliar with how it works, here goes...

It's not a good idea to expose our rescued cubs to too much human activity. After all, they have to go back to the wild and the best chance they have is to do so

without thinking of people as friends. If they decide to make friends later, that's their decision but, for their own safety, they must leave us with an attitude of suspicion towards people.

So we came up with an Adoption scheme that allows you to follow the progress of three rescued cubs, from infancy to release and from spring until autumn, through a series of personalised certificates. These show photos and biographies of your developing cubs. And you also get to adopt an adult casualty for so long as it's in our care. And all

this for a straight £20!

We've previously mailed adoption certificates in laminated form, but it's not really an eco-friendly option. Like most plastics, these take years to decompose and the world becomes a more polluted place with each discarded laminate. So we're dispensing with laminates as of now. The planet comes first.

Still on that subject – we're now making it possible for you to receive your newsletter by email if you prefer. Both options will remain available, but printing, postage and paper don't get any



CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS CONTD.

cheaper. Maybe you would prefer to receive your newsletter digitally? If so, please tick the box on the order/donation form – and you'll get all future communications by that means.

Even if you're not purchasing from us, you can still swell our coffers this Christmas without it costing you a penny. If

you're thinking of buying online from Amazon, Toys R Us, Argos, B & Q, PC World, Debenhams, iTunes, Waitrose, John Lewis, Sainsburys, Millets, Mothercare or hundreds of other retailers and service companies, we can get a percentage cashback on your purchase.

The scheme earns

hundreds of pounds for The Fox Project every year. All you have to do is log into Easyfundraising and follow the link to your preferred provider from there. It's an absolute doddle. Here's where to look if you've not previously joined up **www.easyfundraising.org.uk/how-it-works**.

And for those who've done it before, don't

forget to do it again this Christmas.

Finally, we've an extended range of sales goods items above and beyond those we can illustrate in our newsletter. It's not quite ready as we go to print, but keep an eye on our website **www.foxproject.org.uk** for the opening of our online shop.



Natural Cotton Tote Bag



Diamanté Iron-on patch



Set of 3 Fridge magnets



6" school ruler



"Carry on Clamping" pack of five Xmas cards



Personalised Stationery pack



2014 Calendar

Order form overleaf

