



Something in the night, the nocturnal world of Sussex

Presented by Michael Blencowe

Fri 9th February 2018

Michael's talk was just what everyone needed to cheer up a winter's evening. A near full capacity audience was treated to a mixture serious information, personal observations and anecdotes, delivered in an easy going style, with a touch of self-deprecation, that was a pleasure to listen to. Recordings and pictures of many of the creatures mentioned were played and shown.

Like so many personal interests, it all happened quite by accident. So in 2014 when Michael began to suffer from insomnia he decided to go out and drive around the countryside. Stopping off at various locations on the way he began to see and hear things that he had never really considered before. There were green sandpiper birds flying over with their high pitch chirps. Redwing thrushes were on their nocturnal migration, flying by night in the cooler air enables them to travel faster as well as avoiding predators. Light pollution from towns has proved detrimental as it now enables peregrine falcons to hunt them.

The next development was for Michael to install a trail camera in various locations and see what passed by. Initial tests in a domestic environment yielded many cats on the prowl! Setting it further away in the woodlands around Barcombe revealed Roe deer (only ones native to Sussex), Fallow deer (introduced by the Romans) and foxes.

Further out on the coast he was able to use other equipment to record the sounds of birds such as: the stone curlew, whose numbers had dropped drastically from about 60 pairs pre-war to 1 pair in the early 80s; the nightingale, whose numbers have declined 90% from 1967 to 2007; the bittern; the sedge warbler & the nightjar.

The nocturnal amblings weren't just limited to the UK. Holidays abroad featured the Arden dormouse, Cantabrian brown bear in Spain (whose droppings were easy to find but the animals themselves were very elusive) and the armadillo in the US. Michael was spotted picking up an armadillo by a policeman and immediately warned to put it down as they can transmit leprosy. It may not have been Sussex, but it was certainly fun to see!

Now we won't go outdoors at night without considering who else is out there with us.

Leycester Whewell, EHaDPS secretary, 12 Mar 2018