



Fun in the snow in Cherry Tree Wood. Photo by John Dearing

Winter wonderland

Thanks to everyone who sent us photos of their neighbourhood in the snow. Here are a couple of the best.

Two days of heavy snow at the start of February kept children off school and some people away from work. The snowman count in Cherry Tree Wood was in double figures. Then we faced a week of icy pavements as freezing temperatures kept the thaw at bay. Thank goodness spring is on its way.



No one was going anywhere in Manor Park Road when at least six inches of snow fell overnight. Photo by Andrew Louth

Ricky Gervais: Work in Progress

By John Lawrence

Ricky Gervais came to artsdepot in North Finchley back in January to try out some new material. For three nights he tested out what got laughs and what didn't, ahead of a major tour later in the year.

Judging from the last night, when I was there, his material had plenty more hits than misses. Animals and their behaviour have always been one of his favourite topics. This time round was no exception when he skillfully debunked the Noah's ark

story and played a hilarious riff on spiders.

Knowing the audience

Comedy, said Gervais, should be offensive, or it's not funny, and comedians should not be cowed into being bland. He didn't mention the names of his good friend Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand, but he clearly had them in mind.

But, he added, you need to know your audience. For example, one gag that had his mates in stitches over a drink turned to extreme bad taste when he told

it to a group of elderly relatives over a meal. To tell the story, he had to tell the (extremely offensive) joke. The reaction it got from the artsdepot audience was 70% shock, 30% laughter. Job done.

Gervais says on his blog that he's enjoying doing stand-up comedy much more these days and doesn't fret about every person enjoying every line. At this warm-up gig, he certainly seemed to be very relaxed on stage: dressed down, not hamming every joke to death, and managing to appear effortlessly funny for just short of an hour. Bodes well for later in the year.

Aladdin's cave

By Sheila Armstrong

A valuable asset to the community around Church Lane is John Omar, who has had his shoe repair shop at the end of Manor Park Road for more than 20 years. You never know what you'll find in there until you visit him. He can mend and has mended most sorts of shoes in that time, including 40-year-old shoes that had fallen to pieces: major surgery was needed, he told *THE ARCHER*. And he can even mend trainers.

Other useful things he does are mending bags or luggage, making new handles, stretching shoes, cutting keys, replacing zips or buckles on bags or shoes, and patching things. Shoe repairers or cobblers have heavy weight sewing machines so if you have a repair problem go to him; he's a problem solver. He also stocks laces, belts, shoe polish.

His friendly helpful service is between 12pm to 7pm from Monday to Saturday. He can be contacted on 07956 329150. Not surprisingly, he often asks to be paid before he starts work. "It's amazing how many people intend to, but don't, collect their repairs," he said. "But if you are willing to pay I'm willing to work."

Bird-watching in the wood

From Sue Corson and the Friends of Cherry Tree Wood

At the time of writing it is National Nest Box Week. Eagle-eyed locals may already have spotted some in Cherry Tree Wood, which will be added to over the coming year when the Friends of Cherry Tree Wood hold sessions enabling people to join in the making and placing of nest boxes. These will provide safe breeding sites for the many native and migrant birds to be found there.

See them and hear them

Early spring before the trees come into full leaf is a good time to see native birds, when they will be in full song prior to the breeding season. The birds are usually in either the middle or upper canopy of the Wood, except for the wren, which will be close to the ground and has an unmistakably loud voice for such a tiny bird.

The greater spotted woodpecker has been heard in action

since mid-January. Other birds seen in the Wood in the past year have included blackbird, jay, crow, magpie, long tailed tit, blue tit, mistle thrush, song thrush, green woodpecker, starling, dunnock, robin, chaffinch, nuthatch, little owl, pied wagtail, wood pigeon (and feral pigeon), goldcrest, goldfinch and greenfinch. Many of these birds have successfully reared their young in the Wood.

Green parakeets feed there and migrant summer visitors include the chiffchaff (so named because of its song) and the black-cap (which has a very beautiful song). A frequent summer visitor is the redwing, which arrives in flocks of forty or more.

Keep your eyes open for announcements about nest box making and visit www.cherrytreewood.co.uk for other information.

Welcome to the wagtail

By Ann Bronkhorst

Have you almost tripped over a small bird with a long tail darting along the pavement in the High Road, behaving like that vanished Londoner, the sparrow? Our smart little visitor is a pied wagtail.

Helping it to thrive through the winter are several local shopkeepers and business folk who are charmed by this dapper little grey, black and white bird.

Carol, at Budgens, often sees it behind the store. Across the High Road, Mark (of fish shop Scott's) provides tiny scraps of fresh fish whenever it appears. And Paul at Poseidon's Fish Restaurant is cultivating a new customer: he feeds it at around 9am most mornings on the corner of Lincoln Road. The bird comes close to his hand and seems unafraid.

Down at the tube station the two stallholders regularly see

not one but two wagtails, one smaller than the other and with more white markings. Sid, who runs the coffee stall, slips the birds flakes of croissants.

So several sharp operators may be working the High Road, or just one with a mate or buddy. According to the Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds, pied wagtails are "adaptable opportunists" and are increasingly seen in city centres. Some even come over here from the continent for the winter. To find out more about these elegant little



Keeping watch on his patch of pavement.

Photo by Diana Cormack

birds, visit www.rspb.org or the British Trust for Ornithology at www.bto.org.

A charm of goldfinches

By Peter Murphy

I moved to East Finchley 25 years ago, a city boy from Liverpool with no country lore. Little did I imagine that one day I would witness a most unusual natural phenomenon: a flock of over 100 goldfinches feeding and roosting in my north-facing, East Finchley suburban garden.

This may not be an unusual sight in the countryside, but it is a phenomenon so unusual in the city that the RSPB and the British Trust for Ornithology were thrilled to the point of envy.

It all started last autumn when I put up a feeder containing Nyjer seeds; half an hour later I looked out of the window and saw a goldfinch stuffing his face. I quickly discovered that the bird books are wrong: goldfinches much prefer sunflower hearts. As soon as I gave them the choice of grub the numbers doubled. It was the most magical and

thrilling sight of my life.

Then one day, shortly before Christmas, I noticed an even more amazing phenomenon. At exactly 3.30pm, the lime trees at the bottom of my garden were stuffed full with the silhouettes of at least 100 goldfinches. Suddenly the collective noun 'charm' seemed far too coy; this was a 'stadium' of goldfinches.

I watched and listened with fascination until at about 4.30pm they took to the air, performed an aerial ballet and then dived into the laurel tree next door to roost for the night. I invested in a pair of cheap binoculars and now I'm a dedicated bird watcher for life.

Bird bounty

I have seen, and learned to recognise, more birds in my garden over the last six months than in my entire 53 years. I've seen chaffinches, gold crests, jays, magpies, starlings, dunnocks, rooks, siskins, blue tits, great tits, long tailed tits, all three native woodpeckers, wagtails, robins, blackbirds, and a flock of parakeets.

You may live in the suburbs, but if you put out a range of seeds and look out of your window, you will be amazed at what comes to your garden and your life will change immeasurably for the better. One other tip, don't keep cats as pets.

Tackling chlamydia

By Janet Maitland

Barnet PCT has sent letters to all 16-24 year olds encouraging them to take a chlamydia test if they are sexually active. Chlamydia is the most common sexually transmitted infection. Approximately one in 10 people under the age of 25 who have had a test are infected, but most do not know they have it.

If caught early, the disease is easily treated with antibiotics. If not treated, chlamydia can cause serious health problems such as infertility.

Getting a test done is straightforward. Self-testing kits, which you use in private at home, are available from many pharmacies and GPs. A testing pack can also be requested online and sent to you at home in discreet packaging.

To find out where to pick up a

pack or have one sent to you, go to www.bu21.org.uk or call 020 8447 3590 or 020 8447 3544. You can also call if you want to have a confidential chat with a health professional before taking a test.

It is recommended that a sexually active person should have a test every year, or each time they have a new sexual partner. If you have never had any sexual activity then you are not at risk and do not need to get tested.