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The heron perches on the Fortis Green roof.



Chris's photo highlights the heron's elegant form.



On the wing: The heron flies off among the rooftop aerals.

Surprise rooftop rest stop for this bird of the wetlands

Although grey herons are resident in the UK, they are not a frequent sight round our way at any time of year. As a keen wildlife photographer, Chris Matthews, a resident of East Finchley for more than 25 years, has seen many grey herons on safaris in Sub-Saharan Africa but he never expected to see one on

his doorstep. So when Chris was at his desk upstairs in his Fortis Green house it was a great surprise when a huge grey heron landed, suddenly and gracefully, on the flat roof of the dormer opposite.

"Urban and suburban" are included by the RSPB among the natural habitats of grey herons, so it is not completely out of the ordinary. However, the other habitats they list -

woodland, farmland, grassland, marine, intertidal and wetland - are rather different from most of our East Finchley environment. And the grey heron is indeed primarily a bird of wetland areas.

Chris quickly grabbed his phone and took a photo, thinking the heron was going to disappear as quickly as it arrived. He admits the picture does not do justice to the bird's slender

beauty but at least it showed how one member of the species is happy to use the aerials and pipes of our rooftops as a vantage point, perhaps for a well-stocked garden pond.

Luckily, our friendly grey heron decided it was going to

survey the scene for a bit longer, giving Chris time to grab his camera and quickly attach the long lens he uses for his safari photography. Then he was able to get some striking close-up shots of this majestic bird as it took flight in search of its next meal.

A voyage of discovery away from a lost paradise

By Daphne Chamberlain

I've been reading a fascinating book. *Beatrice's Last Smile* is subtitled *A Journey Through Germany*, but it is also a journey through the mind and memories of its author Iqbal Ahmed, who lives in East Finchley.

Iqbal was born in Kashmir, in Srinagar, and was the first person in his family to have a passport. He was still a teenager when he applied for it, with nothing definite in mind but what he describes as "the age-old desire for men and women to cross waters and meet people from other cultures, who speak different languages".

In the course of the book, he introduces us to many friends and acquaintances who have crossed those waters: Iranian, Afghan, German, Kashmiri, Turkish, Nigerian and Polish among them. They are some of the thousands of migrants and refugees living in Germany,

and Iqbal's latest journey there tells us about their struggles and varying successes.

As he finds out more about these people, he also discovers more about the history and traditions of the country. This is a glimpse into what lies behind the well-known tourist spots. Quoting Proust, he realises that "the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."

Read this book with a nimble mind! It's not a one-straight-line progression. As a remark, an encounter, a sudden thought reminds him of something or someone else, we follow his



Iqbal Ahmed

memory. Very often, we go back to Srinagar, the paradise of his childhood, lost to political turmoil. Proust again had the words for it: "True paradises are the ones that we have lost."

Germany was the first place Iqbal's passport took him to but he has lived in London since 1994 and in East Finchley since 2007. Though very easy to read, his own words are that history is a warning of where resurgent nationalism can lead us. *Beatrice's Last Smile*, ISBN 978 1 5272 1130 8, is published by Coldstream Publishers.

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