

SUSSEX BOOKENDS

A WEEKLY CELEBRATION OF THE SUSSEX CHARACTER

Over the coming weeks the correspondence pages of some of our newspapers will be full of contenders for the annual race to hear the first cuckoo. As befits such a traditionally rural county, Sussex is rich in local superstitions that relate to this most recognisable of birds. For instance, any baby fortunate enough to be born on the day the first cuckoo calls will be lucky all its life. In contrast, if you hear the cuckoo calling while in bed you will have bad luck unless, of course, you remove the sock from your right foot while reciting the rhyme, 'may this to me, lucky be'. I'm not sure what you should do if you aren't wearing socks at the time! Young girls waiting for a proposal of marriage must carefully count the number of times they hear the cuckoo call; the total being equivalent to the number of years before they will marry. Probably the most popular custom was Cuckoo Ale; on hearing the first cuckoo the listener must go to drink its health *immediately* at the nearest inn!

The Brilliant Booth

All Brighton bird lovers will be familiar with the Booth Museum of Natural History in Hove and it's a long-time favourite of Susan and Gina Jamieson, who feature it in their book *Old-Fashioned Family Days Out in Sussex*. Here's what they say, 'Mr Edward Booth, a Victorian ornithologist, created his collection of stuffed birds in 1874. Here, numerous cases

of birds display the taxidermist's art, showing their beautiful plumage in their natural habitats. There are fossils, rocks and minerals, insects in amber and beautiful butterflies, so lovely and so sad, pinned into their display cases. And best of all for many young naturalists is the large collection of skeletons, from a tiny pygmy shrew to a whale.'

Out & About in Sussex

I know fearless *Argus* readers are always on the lookout for something new and exciting to do, so what about a spot of ghost busting? Regular guided ghost walks will be running throughout the coming months in various places all over the county. In Brighton the popular Ghost Walk of the Lanes led by actor and storyteller Rob Marks (resplendent in full Victorian costume) leaves from the Druid's Head

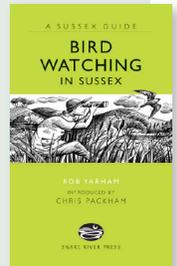
pub, Brighton Place, at 7.30 pm every Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening (see www.ghostwalkbrighton.co.uk for details). And the wonderful Pevensey Castle, is the backdrop for the Pevensey Ghost Walks, hosted by Robert Stevens Bassatt, beginning at 7.30 pm every Saturday night (see www.sussexguidedwalks.co.uk for details).

Attend if you dare!

Birdbrain Quiz

1. Which farm building is commonly home to the owl?
2. Night-hawk and fern-owl are common names for which bird?
3. What colour birds did Dame Vera Lynn sing about?
4. Which silver-tongued bird did the poet John Keats write an ode to?
5. The feathers of which species of duck make the most luxurious quilts?

Email your answers, along with your name and address to: editorial@snakeriverpress.co.uk. The sender of the first set of correct answers received wins a copy of *Bird Watching in Sussex* by Rob Yarham, worth £8.99. The correct answers will be posted on our website (www.snakeriverpress.co.uk) next Saturday.



Lost words

Word of the Week
Batfowler: A mean-spirited soul who takes birds at night using something called a batfowling net (a folding net on long poles).

The term is used by Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, Act ii, scene 1.

Gon: 'You are gentlemen of brave metal; you would lift the moon out of her sphere, if she would continue in it five weeks without changing.'

Seb: 'We would so, and then go a batfowling.'

In Sussex dialect the word 'bat' means something other than a flying mammal.

Email your suggestions to: editorial@snakeriverpress.co.uk
The answer will be posted on: www.snakeriverpress.co.uk next Saturday.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Even if you can't tell a hobby from a handsaw, the sight of a soaring bird over the Sussex Downs always lifts the heart. That's what seasoned bird-watcher Rob Yarham believes, and to help the rest of us to get more out of these life-affirming moments, he has chosen his top 20 Sussex birds and written



an affectionate personal tribute to each of them. His descriptions of the birds and his encounters with them will inspire you to go out looking with new eyes. But where to look? Fear not, as the second half of *Bird Watching in Sussex* is devoted to a review of

the best sites and places to find Rob's top 20, and many other fascinating birds: Sussex natives, incomers and birds of passage. Each of the top 20 birds is handsomely illustrated by Brighton artist Curtis Tappenden.

Bird Watching in Sussex is available from all good bookshops or direct from Snake River Press priced £8.99 (visit www.snakeriverpress.co.uk). Or why not try to win a copy by entering our birdbrain quiz above?

Live & learn

What's in a name? Well often quite a lot, as many Sussex place names retain their Anglo-Saxon prefixes and affixes. Here are a few examples.

Burh . . . a hill or citadel (such as *Burghersh* and *Pulborough*)

Feld . . . a plain or flat place (for example *Heathfield*)

Ham . . . a village or enclosure (such as *Beddingham*)

Hurst . . . a wood (for example *Nuthurst*)

Stede . . . a station or a place (such as *East Grinstead*)

Tun . . . a dwelling or a close (such as *Alfriston* and *Alciston*)

Wic . . . a dwelling or village (for example *Berwick*)

We would love to hear from readers of similar interesting, quirky or strange facts relating to the county. Email us at: editorial@snakeriverpress.co.uk