



Julia Bradbury

First lady

JULIA BRADBURY shares her recent experience of watching birds in East Anglia

IT'S quite fortunate this month's magazine takes a closer look at wildlife, because my filming commitments have brought me into contact with birds recently, a lot of birds. My travels took me to the Ouse Washes area in the Fens of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

Our great British coast and countryside is the winter holiday destination for thousands of birds as part of their migratory cycle. Icelanders, Russians, Scandinavians and Eastern Europeans all make a 'bird-line' for the UK. The Great Ouse Wash is the largest washland in the country and becomes a birdy paradise every winter when the floods bring in a raft of wildlife.

This season is prime-time for bird-watching as our feathered friends fight for survival. They are tough times indeed but the water levels are ideal and all sorts of wildfowl and waders, including pintails, mallards and gadwalls can all be seen feeding in the shallow waters.

You might see teals, tufted ducks and coots diving for food in the deeper areas, or lapwings and black-tailed godwits. There are also hen harriers, short-eared owls, and if you're lucky, peregrines and merlins.

But there are feathered friends to be spotted from the convenience of your garden or local park as well.

In Cambridgeshire I was near Ely with David Lindo who's a real expert when it comes to urban birding, which is all about the birds you can spot in towns and cities.

You'd be surprised how many species you can spot during winter. Feeding becomes harder so some

birds explore more built-up areas in the hope of extra titbits.

In fact I learned that robins are so inquisitive because they're used to following foraging animals such as pigs. They spot the pigs trotting along and churning up the ground, which throws up tasty little morsels such as worms for them to feed on. That's why it's not unusual to see a robin sitting on the fence watching you dig up the vegetable patch.

The Welney Wetland Centre is across the border in Norfolk and is one of nine reserves run by the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT). The Trust was set up in 1946 by Sir Peter Scott, grandson of Captain Robert Falcon Scott, one of my predecessors as Club President.

Described as one of the greatest conservationists of the 20th century, he wasn't just a champion of nature he was also an artist, an Olympic yachtsman, a popular television presenter, a gliding champion and a skipper in the Americas Cup. Sir David Attenborough has described him as a "patron saint" of conservation.

Sitting in a hide at Welney I interviewed Sir Peter's daughter, Dafila about her father and her love of swans. She has clearly inherited his skills as an artist and as we chatted she effortlessly sketched enviable swan shapes in her notebook while the Whoopers and the Bewick's swans fed in front of us. It's a magical sight because they all alight on the lakes and take advantage of the feeding that goes on. As dawn breaks the birds fly off in search of food for the day, but from about 3.30pm onwards you

can join in the organised feeding including a floodlit session at dusk. I did this accompanied by a warden and it was amazing to be in such close proximity to so

many birds as they jostled for the grain. Sir Peter Scott was one of the first to recognise that people had to care about the natural world in order to be motivated, take action and get involved – and that's why he set up the WWT, so people could get up close to nature, watch behaviour and learn to care.

Spending time with his daughter reminded me of the conservation greats that pepper our history and the wonderful wildlife that Britain must preserve.

Show starter

It was very exciting to be able to open the Caravan and Camping Show at Birmingham's NEC in February and to meet fellow members. It never ceases to amaze me how popular camping and caravanning is and the thousands of visitors to the show were testament to that. You can find out more about my appearance there on page 15.

Right: Julia pictured at the recent NEC show

