

# PELICAN NOTES

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER for BIRDLAND PARK & GARDENS

[www.birdland.co.uk](http://www.birdland.co.uk)

Issue 4

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Recent wildlife sightings



Time flies at Birdland



New Arrival Koda...



Be a Keeper for a day



Arrivals and departures



'Meet the Keeper' - an interaction experience.

## Let's get physical

by Chris Abbey (Assistant Head Keeper)

### Bird Profile

Spike



Name: Spike  
Sex: Male  
D.O.B: 9 June 2007  
Species: King Penguin  
Favourite Food: Herring

Spike is the most popular penguin at Birdland, having his own facebook page with over 1000 friends.

He was hand reared by two keepers Holly and Alistair. His mum was left alone to incubate him in the egg, but she was tired of looking after the egg and deserted him.

His personal interests are eating lots of fish, swimming especially to lose some weight and make room to eat even more fish, playing football and from time to time he turns his flipper to modelling.

For some time now we have been giving 'Meet the Keeper' display at 12:30 each day during the summer months. We take Katyo the cockatoo along with eggs, feathers and the different components which make up the feeds for the many birds at the Park. The keepers give talks about working with the birds and the great care which is taken to look after them. Although they are all birds each breed has its own requirements which we need to follow in order to look after them properly.

The popularity of these talks has grown over the summer so we decided to hand raise a number of birds in order to make the encounter more enriching for the public. Our first choice was to hand raise a white faced scops owl. This is a very small owl and as a first attempt a good choice as the keepers knew we would be able to handle them effectively. The owls were left with the parents (who live in the boulevard aviaries) until they were roughly ten days old and about the size of a tennis ball. At this

point the baby owl is strong enough to handle its own food, regurgitate pellets and can also be kept at room temperature instead of having to be in a warm brooder. The keepers had to feed these young chicks every four hours and used this time to introduce the chick to the handling glove and the noisy environment of a busy bird park.

When these owls were old enough they were taken out for their first 'Meet the Keeper' and apart from Kayto having to share her limelight, the introduction was a great success. The scops owls were very popular and allowed the keepers to educate the public in just how different two breeds of birds can be from the colourful noisy tropical parrots to the patient quiet owl.

As the talks are given daily the keepers felt that it wasn't fair to use the same birds each day. Although the talk is only half an hour it can be difficult for the owls and Kayto to be on show. Just as you may not want to go to school or work

everyday the birds do not like to be handled every day and so the keepers decided they would need other character to display, and so the planning began. The keepers have been raising a young Great Grey Owl and a Snowy Owl who hatched in the Park earlier this year ( see back cover ).

We have recently built a small interactive centre, Encounter Zone, in the middle of the Park and have a few surprises in there! If you come along to one of our talks the keepers will be able to introduce you to Lily the Royal Python and Patches and Ginger the Guinea Pigs, George the Great Grey Owl, Koda the Snowy Owl, Cariad and Leia the Southern Scops Owls, our very own creepy Chilean Tarantula and possible a few other faces as well! The keepers can show you how to handle these amazing animals and tell you about looking after them. They are always happy to answer your questions and carefully allow you to handle the animals for photos and lovely memories!

# An Eggcellent Stork Story

by Alistair Keen (Head Keeper)



the birds incubating a stone that they picked up themselves in 2009 but no eggs had ever been produced.

That all changed this year when we received an excited call on the radio from our Director at 4pm on July the 13th reporting an egg in the twig nest they had been busy building. Sure enough, mum was turning an egg with dad in close attendance when we got there. What had caused them to lay after all these years? Back in January we had several trees removed from the front of the paddock, making the enclosure seem a lot more open and we believe that this was possibly the trigger to the laying of the first egg.

A 2nd egg followed 4 days later and the birds began incubating in earnest. We briefly considered removing and artificially incubating the eggs but given that they had incubated the stone very well plus the fact the males behaviour had become far more defensive/aggressive, the

decision was made to leave the eggs with the birds. Incubation lasts for roughly 30 days with both parents taking turns.

30 days came and went and after 40 days the overdue eggs were taken. Unfortunately both had been infertile but as this was a first attempt we are highly optimistic for the future. Keep your feathers crossed for a special stork delivery in 2012.



As you enter Birdland the first inhabitants you are greeted by are our pair of Marabou Storks, found through most of Africa south of the Sahara, they are one of Birdland's largest birds, standing at one and a half metres tall.

Many visitors remark how 'ugly' these birds are with their bald head, grey/black feathers and upright stance and indeed they also go by the name of the Undertaker Bird. This is further enhanced by the fact that they are often found in the wild hanging around the remains of Lion & Hyena kills. This is because Marabous are

predominantly scavenging birds, filling a crucial role of clearing carcasses. They can also catch their own food, from insects and frogs to fully grown flamingos and our male has been seen catching trout from the river regularly over the years.

Birdland have housed Marabou for a number of years now and although the species has been kept in a number of collections, they have only been bred twice in the UK. Our pair have always shown signs of wanting to breed, displaying and calling to each other and the female collecting twigs. We even had

## Recent wildlife sightings



The Marshmouth Nature reserve had its official opening on May the 14th when Countryfiles Adam Henson cut the ribbon.

Gloucestershire has had a very good 2011 for wildlife sightings with a number of very unusual sightings throughout the County. This has been true here at Birdland

where wildlife has been abundant all year.

Perhaps the most exciting sightings occurred in December when we had the worst of the weather. The extreme cold and snow brought many visitors to the Marshmouth bird feeders, from the common Blue & Great Tits, Chaffinches & Blackbirds to the unusual. Keen birdwatcher Tom Mabbett spent many a break-time in the reserve and was rewarded with some excellent rarities, the highlight being a stunning Hawfinch, the UK's largest finch. These birds are normally found in places such as the Forest of Dean, where they feed in deciduous woodland but this individual decided to

drop into our bird table!

Other sightings over the winter included a first Little Egret, Brambling, Lesser Redpoll, Siskin & Willow Tit.

Summer saw the migrants arriving in good numbers. Swift, Swallow & House Martin were all present feasting on the many insects that the river attracts, Pipestrelle Bats are also common at dusk. Many warbler species, including Blackcap, Chiffchaff & Willow Warbler were noted, singing to proclaim their territory. Much breeding has taken place in the reserve with family groups of Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Great Tit & Wren a regular sight. Red Kite has also been an increasingly common sight over the Park

as has Ravens and the local Sparrowhawks have been busy all year.

Butterflies were numerous with Small Tortoiseshell, Meadow Brown & Peacock the most common. Evidence of Water Voles continues to be found and more reeds are being planted to encourage them further. Otter has yet to be seen but are evident with several eaten trout found all along the river. An abundance of frogs and toads has led to regular Grass Snake sightings as well. We have also noted a number of Eel and Brook Lamprey in the river this year and will be working with the Wildlife Trust to survey for Crayfish and other species soon.

# Time Flies

by Mike Abbott (Head of Maintenance)

It's mid-October, on a warm, sunny Friday afternoon. The extended summer is nearly over, as I find myself strolling around Marshmouth, checking the bird-feeders and reflecting on what was an exciting year in our Reserve.

It started well with a number of interesting bird sightings, namely the male Hawfinch, which stayed a couple of days, then moved on. This was followed by a group of Redpole and Brambling, that stayed around for a few weeks, none of which had visited us the previous winter.

During February and March sixteen pairs of Rooks decided to start building nests in the trees around the Marshmouth Pond – this seemed to upset the balance for a while, as during the previous spring that area had seemed such a quiet, tranquil place, with only the odd cock pheasant being startled as you walked around before the Park opened. However, now the area had changed completely, with almost hysterical squawking at times and twigs constantly falling. After a few weeks everything appeared to settle down and nine of the bird-boxes had become occupied by blue tits and great tits, which were busily popping in and out of the holes, to collect and deposit their nesting material.

May saw the official opening of the Marshmouth Nature Reserve – we were very lucky to get Adam Henson, the B.B.C. Countryfile presenter, to come along and cut the ribbon. Adam was very impressed by the Reserve and we spent some time talking about the water voles, living in the area. Unfortunately, not many people have seen the cute mammals, as they are very secretive, but I am sure that as the family grows visitors will be able to share the experience. The water voles are now also living in the reed pond and are happily chewing their way through the reeds I planted.

In June Simon asked if I could put together a quiz that would be a permanent fixture. The quiz proved very popular with visitors – it was great to walk around and hear families laughing and joking, in competition with each other. It always amazes me to hear how much young children know nowadays and their enthusiasm during our pond-dipping sessions was wonderful – they all seemed eager to learn about what they had caught and then carefully return everything to the pond.

As I continue my stroll I notice a bumble-bee landing on a rogue Himalayan Balsam flower – this

reminds me of the Gloucester Wildlife Trust, who on several occasions brought a group of volunteers in, to pull up all the balsam, which is a very invasive plant that was starting to spread a little too quickly. Thanks to the quiz, we were able to collect a sum of money, for



the Trust.

I am somewhat astounded, as I look across the Reed Pond, to see a beautiful Painted Lady Butterfly landing on a nearby Cornus bush and an instant later two Red Admiral butterflies, apparently squabbling, pass me then rise up high into the sky and disappear.

My eyes are drawn to one of our bird-feeders – at first I think it's a Brambling, but fortunately I have my binoculars with me and yeas, you guessed it, the lone male Hawfinch is back. It seems quite content to just stand and fill up on sunflower seeds, totally oblivious to any other birds around.

As I finish my walk, I pass the Rowan trees that Simon and Holly planted in the early spring, now covered in berries. My thoughts drift to wonder which birds may visit to devour them – you will need to keep an eye on our website, where we will be keeping you posted about the birds that visit the Park this winter, you can also follow us on Facebook. However, I believe that nothing can beat seeing things for yourself, so come and visit us or get out into the countryside for a walk, where there is always so much to see. Even putting up a bird-feeder outside your home can give you hours of pleasure.

The birds in the Park are all eating a huge amount At the moment and putting on weight to help them survive the winter – do they know something that we don't? I fear that we could be in for a very cold winter.

Look out for my next article in the spring, when I will tell you what we have planned for the coming year.

# Eggs, Births & Arrivals...

## ARRIVALS:

- New Keeper Helen Barber started in March with Helen Perry joining us in August
- A pair of Black Necked Swan arrived in January from a private breeder
- A female Ruff arrived in January
- A female Golden Conure, 2 Male Avocets and 4 Diamond Doves arrived in February from Paradise Park
- A male Kookaburra arrived from Kirkleatham
- A male Hammerkop and Standing Day Geckos came from Flamingoland
- A female Bartlett's Dove arrived from Jersey
- February also saw the arrival of a male Green Imperial Pigeon from Blackpool
- In March we received a male Northern Ground Hornbill from Burgers Zoo (Holland)
- We also took delivery of a male White Bellied Go-Away Bird from Chester from whom we also received a female Hammerkop & female Tawny Frogmouth
- A male Lady Ross' Touraco came in from Edinburgh
- Male Blue Magpie & Luzon Bleeding Heart Pigeon came in from Flamingo Park, Isle of Wight
- A male Edwards Pheasant has arrived in May from Sparsholt College
- 3 Redshank arrived from Living Coasts
- A young pair of Striated Caracara have recently arrived
- Various 'creepy crawlies' have joined the collection including a Royal Python, Tarantula, Emperor Scorpions, Axolotl & Fruit Beetles

## BIRTHS:

- 2 Crowned Plovers hatched in January and another 3 in March
- The Turtle Doves hatched 2 chicks in April
- The Sacred Ibis hatched out 9 chicks this year
- 2 Temmincks Tragopan also hatched in May
- A Splendid Parakeet was a first at the end of May
- The Rhea produced 4 chicks in June
- August saw our first Red Crested Touraco chick hatch
- Snowy Owl Koda hatched in July and is being hand reared for future displays
- The ever reliable Azure Winged Magpies again produced chicks, 3 fledging this year
- A number of Desert, Zebra & Bengalese Finch chicks have hatched this year
- The House Mice had numerous young throughout the year



## EGGS:

- A number of species produced eggs for the first time this year, although these were clear eggs. This included:
  - Marabou Stork
  - Madagascan Teal
  - Vulturine Guineafowl
  - Bare-faced Curassow
  - Northern Helmeted Curassow
  - Lilac Breasted Roller
- We also had fertile eggs from the King Penguins but unfortunately neither egg successfully hatched.

# Koda *by Helen Barber (Keeper)*

Spring is a busy time of year for us keepers at Birdland and we have lots of work and preparation to make sure our birds have everything they need in order to breed.

This year was a very exciting year for me as the Parks resident Snowy Owls bred for the first time. Polo and Lucky have been at the Park for over six years but it hasn't all be plain sailing for the plucky pair.

Polo is our male Snowy Owl and arrived in the Park back in 2006, a year later he was joined by Lucky our female and it was hoped that they would quickly settle in and begin to breed. However Lucky had different ideas, although Polo was rather keen to mate and desperately tried to impress her she was having none of it. For the next two years both Polo and Lucky lived together quite happily but never showed any signs of wanting to breed and then winter arrived. It was 2009 and that was the year we had the big freeze, the Park was covered in snow and the netting on the snowy owl enclosure ripped under the pressure of the snow. Lucky took this as her big opportunity and escaped out into the wilderness but Polo wasn't so quick and remained behind in the enclosure. Lucky was caught up 2 weeks later in one of the nearby villages and returned to the enclosure with Polo and they quickly settled back in their normal routine. This year however Polo and Lucky started to display to one another, it was incredibly exciting for the all the keepers but especially for myself as I had only started at the Park in March and

was hoping that I would get the them to breed.

Polo and Lucky displayed to one another for the next 3 weeks and a successful mating took place. Snowy owls nest and raise their young on open ground in the wild and it was no different for Lucky, she spent the next week making several scrapes positioned around the enclosure. (A scrape is a dip in the ground that the female digs out as a nest). Lucky finally settled on a scrape that was positioned behind a large tree giving her some shelter from the viewing the public. Over the next couple of weeks five eggs were laid and Polo was totally involved, often collecting food to take over to Lucky so that she could happily feed herself and not leave the eggs. Lucky sat on her eggs for the next 36 days in all types of weather from extreme heat to torrential rain and not once did she leave her eggs. Lucky and Polo are first time parents and were displaying all the right behaviour in the incubation of their eggs and the rearing of their young.

Out of the five eggs laid three of them hatched. Lucky fed and protected her chicks extremely well and Polo made sure there was always enough food on hand to feed the growing chicks. After seven days Lucky began to look 'off colour' and she deserted her chicks, the keepers gave her a couple of hours but Lucky did not return, so the decision was made to hand rear them. The next day we found Lucky had passed away, it was a very upsetting time for the keepers and for poor Polo



but we were happy as we did still have 3 chicks that were depending on us. Unfortunately we lost the two smallest chicks, they were too young and did not take well to being fed by hand. The oldest chick however thrived, Koda as he has now been named, was fed four times a day continuously for the next 4 months. Every day he gained 4ozs and started to grow and develop a very soft downy feather and was an exceptionally cute little fluff ball. Koda grew very quickly by four months he had quadrupled in size and had started to develop his adult feathers, but every day you could see a difference in him. Koda also had his food reduced, not needing to be fed four times a day and went down to one feed a day, it was at this time that he also began his training.

Koda has been working very hard in the last month, we hope to be

able to use him in flying displays as well as allowing the public to hold him on a glove and be able to have their picture taken with him. However it is important to remember that Koda is only 6 months old now and although he works very hard we are taking baby steps in his training, he is now comfortable upon the glove so we have moved onto the next stage which is flying. Koda does have a tendency to fly away or lose concentration but with age he should calm down and focus on the job in hand.

Koda is a very happy young Snowy Owl and is quite a character too, he can often be seen out and about in the Park doing his training and will always be happy to have his picture taken and say hello to our visitors, keep a look out for him when you come to visit us.

## Keeper for a Day

A unique opportunity to work as a keeper for the day. Follow in the footsteps of the staff undertaking various tasks from cleaning an aviary to hand feeding a chick.

See website for more details.



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