

NatureNotes



Born and bred in St Albans, Rupert has enjoyed observing and recording local wildlife for over 30 years. Drawing inspiration and insight from the sights and sounds that accompany the seasons throughout the year, he invites you to tune in to the often overlooked natural world all around us.

Rupert Evershed's monthly diary of the natural world

Twitter @rupertvershed Blog: www.notingnature.wordpress.com

Kingfisher moments...

It might seem strange (or obvious) to say, but nature is wonderfully natural! It is blissfully free from self-consciousness and freely expresses itself in no other way than itself. I think this may be one of the reasons why we, as humans, enjoy being in nature so much and perhaps why so often it proves to be not just healthy for our bodies but also for our minds too.

Nature invites us back to a time when we were less self-conscious, when we responded to whatever was in front of us with honest, gut-felt emotion and sentiment. Nature draws us back to childhood when awe and wonder still existed, along with mysteries allowing our imaginations to run wild.

A breath-taking sunset, a delicate butterfly or majestic mountains all still have the power to transfix us in awe and wonder. Ever-changing cloud formations, a hollow tree or the bend in a path or river can all spark the imagination. For a moment we lose ourselves and forget what we should be doing or

need to be doing and treat ourselves to just being.

I walked into just such a moment the other day whilst walking along the River Ver off Cottonmill Lane. A group of three generations – kids, parents, grandparents – stood spellbound, staring at a bush just the other side of the river. Only metres away a bright little blue and orange bird sat perfectly still on a twig: a kingfisher!

Extraordinarily confiding, this little male kingfisher is fast becoming a local celebrity as it extends its fishing rights all the way to Verulamium Park. Here, no less perturbed, he attracts a much larger crowd armed with cameras and telephoto lenses. Today he had a smaller audience armed only with the latest smartphones.

In whispered voices his every move was discussed and then, in a blink, he dived to catch a fish and a ripple of hushed excitement ran through the group. The sudden headfirst plunge was thrilling, not just for its suddenness, but also for the lightning bolt of electric blue

that flashed from his previously hidden back feathers. Up until that point he had been simply a beautiful blue bird, recognizable from so many photos and illustrations. Now he became a startling shock of emanating blue light, something totally different that no camera or illustration could hope to capture.

Even the usually matter-of-fact Collins Bird Guide allows itself an exclamation mark when trying to describe the blue of the kingfisher's back: "bright blue (shifting from azure to cobalt)" In other words, you'll know when you see it for it is a colour to be experienced, not read about.

This is nature's gift to us when we pause and take a moment to watch and wait. The sitting kingfisher is enough to grab our attention but then we are rewarded with an unforgettable moment – a streak of colour we perhaps didn't even know existed or hadn't previously experienced.

The group waited together to see if he would dive again and as we waited a very yellow wagtail flew in



■ The River Ver kingfisher.

Picture: STEVE HOLLAND

to feed just below the kingfisher's perch. As yellow as the kingfisher is blue this most inappropriately named little bird – the grey wagtail – more often than not goes unnoticed, as it feeds along the river. Today, however, it complemented perfectly the blue gem sitting just above it.

Suddenly we were all children again, sharing excitedly what little knowledge we had of the birds and marveling together at the colourful scene before us.

Perhaps without the real children in the group we might not have given ourselves permission to stand and watch for so long but somehow

they made it okay to just stay and be excited.

Eventually the kingfisher flew on down the river and we went our separate ways but carried with us a treasured moment: a moment away from ourselves, a moment when we found ourselves lost in nature. Such moments do us the world of good and could well be the antidote for the winter blues.

Nature is never short of surprises but you have to be willing to get out in it and perhaps tarry a while. And, if you have them, take the kids, or the grandkids, for they will fast track you back to the best place to appreciate nature: childhood!