

Colin's Blog

Friday 16th February 2018

Nature's Ways and Nature's Days

Are you feeling the cold and fed up suffering from Winter blues?

It's time to look upon the joys of nature that are breaking the surface and are ready to break out into carpets of colour. Daffodils, Crocuses, Snowdrops and



even some early Bluebells and Wild Primroses, can already be seen in some areas. If you haven't found them, they will soon be seen, announcing that Spring is just around the corner.

As an only child, I turned my attention to exploring the wonders of nature, and immersed myself in discovering and appreciating the wildlife, trees, flora and fauna that could be found just a short bus ride away in both Waltham Forest and Epping Forest. I often think about the children of today, many of whom, have not experienced, or indeed been introduced to the wonders of nature on their doorstep, and, I do everything that I can, to encourage children and young people, to put away the technology, and to be at one with the natural world that surrounds them.



I have always admired the splendour of trees, and the important role that they play in the environment and the air that we breathe, so it was disturbing to hear about the spread of a disease called 'Xylella Fastidiosa' which could threaten to devastate our wonderful broad leaf trees. In December the RHS warned about the need to try to prevent the bacterial disease from reaching the UK and said that to help to prevent the spread of the disease, gardeners and nurseries should

not buy plants from abroad. If the disease hits our shores, then Oak, Elm, Plane and Sycamore trees as well as Lavender, Rosemary and Oleander could be affected. Apparently, the bug restricts their ability to draw water from the soil.

We have enough problems from the barriers and obstacles that the EU are trying to put in the way of a successful Brexit, without having to cope with other problems from Europe and elsewhere, so we all need to be on our guard and report any sightings of the disease to the appropriate authorities. That said, apparently the EU have responded by agreeing to impose more checks on high-risk plants as they are transported between countries. Let's hope that the border checks are more effective than those relating to immigrants trying to get to the UK illegally. Perhaps I am getting too old and cynical!

Prince Charles has often been outspoken about the need to protect nature and the environment, and recently held a private summit for horticulture and forestry experts at Highgrove, where it was said that the bug covers the leaves with scorch marks and could kill around 350 species. Michael Gove spoke at the summit and said: "Failure to act would be like 'sawing off,' the branch on which we sit!" It was good to hear some positive words of warning from a politician, rather than more rhetoric about Brexit!

<https://forestry.gov.uk/pestsanddiseases>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sponsored/earth/tree-diseases/11931506/tree-disease-guide.html>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disposal-of-trees-and-plants-infected-with-specified-plant-diseases/disposing-of-trees-and-plants-infected-with-disease-rps-71>

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/support-us/support-an-appeal/tree-disease/>



Cold calls from fraudsters claiming to be from the Home Office

Fraudsters are purporting to be from the Home Office and cold-calling victims to claim that there is a problem with their immigration status.

Fraudsters are calling victims from what appears to a genuine Home Office telephone number **0207 354 848** - which has in fact been 'spoofed'. To spoof numbers, fraudsters use software that allows them to display any number they wish on a victim's phone.

Fraudsters tell victims there is a problem with their immigration status and in order to rectify this issue, they must pay an up-front fee. They are asked to confirm personal details, such as their passport number and date of arrival in the United Kingdom. If a victim starts to question the call, the fraudsters point out the 'spoofed' number to make the request seem legitimate.

In 2017 305 Action Fraud reports included the Home Office number 0207 035 4848. **Victims mainly Indian:** Many victims who have been targeted by this fraud have had an association to India. The fraudsters often state that the victim has outstanding criminal charges against them in India, or that their official documentation was not completed satisfactorily upon their arrival into the United Kingdom.

Victims are left with three options - either face deportation; face arrest and imprisonment; or pay the up-front fee.

Victims are asked to pay the fees through a variety of methods, including; Bitcoin,

money transfers via a Money Service Bureau or by purchasing iTunes vouchers before relaying the voucher code to the suspect.

Fraudsters usually attempt to keep the victim on the phone until the payment is received, which can be hours at a time.

How to protect yourself

- The Home Office, Police or any UK Law Enforcement Agency will never ask for money over the telephone.
- Government agencies do not use non-secure payment methods such as a transfer via a Money service Bureau, iTunes voucher(s) or cryptocurrency e.g. Bitcoin.
- When receiving unsolicited calls, be wary of providing personal information, or confirming that personal information the caller already claims to hold is correct. Always ensure you know who you talking to. Ask for the details of the organisation the caller represents and call them back yourself on the officially published numbers rather than the numbers the caller may try to provide you with.
- If you have any concerns regarding your immigration status, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/> to speak with someone regarding your specific immigration issue.

Victims lost £41 million to romance fraud in 2017

New statistics released ahead of Valentine's Day prove that the UK is continuing to lose huge amounts of money to romance fraud – with victims conned out of £41 million in 2017 alone. This is according to figures from The City of London Police, whose remit covers online fraud nationwide, working with Get Safe Online and its partners.

Romance fraud is described as when someone creates a fake identity to enter a relationship with a victim with the intent to steal either funds or personal information. In 2017, **3557** romance frauds were reported to Action Fraud, averaging 10 reports a day.

This amount equates to **£11,500 per victim**. Those who fall victim to these frauds are almost twice as likely to be women (63% compared with 37% of men).

However, evidence suggests these numbers do not accurately represent the true scale of the problem due to the embarrassment felt by some victims of fraud, which can discourage people from coming forward to report their experience. But reporting is crucial in stopping these fraudsters whose impact extends beyond just taking the money.

Almost half (43%) of victims said that the crime had a 'significant' impact on their health or financial wellbeing.

A further 18% had to receive medical treatment as a result of being a victim of a romance scam – or had been left at risk of bankruptcy.

The report comes from a new **#DateSafe** working group, tasked with raising awareness of the risks of romance fraud in the UK. The group includes Get Safe Online, City of London Police, London Metropolitan Police (FALCON), Age UK, Victim Support and the Online Dating Association (ODA).

The group will also share its five #DateSafe tips across websites and social media platforms to help inform and protect users of dating sites and apps ahead of Valentine's Day.

#DateSafe tips

- **Don't** rush into an online relationship – get to know the person, not the profile and ask plenty of questions.
- **Analyse** their profile and check the person is genuine by putting their name, profile pictures or any repeatedly used phrases and the term 'dating scam' into your search engine.
- **Talk** to your friends and family about your dating choices. Be wary of anyone who tells you not to tell others about them.
- **Evade** scammers by never sending money to, or sharing your bank details with, someone you've met online, no matter what reason they give or how long you've been speaking to them.
- **Stay** on the dating site messenger service until you're confident the person is who they say they are. If you do decide to meet in person, make sure the first meeting is in a public place and let someone else know where you're going to be.

Tony Neate, CEO of Get Safe Online commented: "Lots of happy relationships are built as a result of meeting someone online. However, as in any form of dating, there are some nasty characters out there who will try and take advantage of someone looking for love. If you're using online dating tools in your search for 'the one', it is important you have your wits about you, so you can spot when something isn't quite right, before you get in too deep and can no longer see the warning signs. Our five tips will hopefully help you do just that – so you can enjoy online dating without worrying about who's behind the profile."

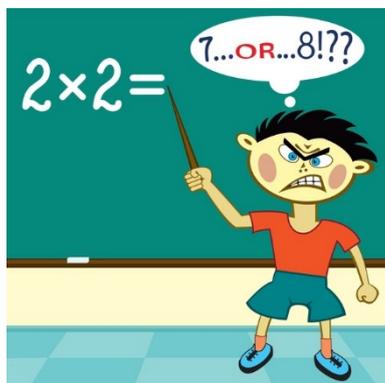
The City of London Police's Commander Dave Clark, the National Co-ordinator for Economic Crime said: "We see many cases of dating fraud each year, in which the cost is high, both emotionally and financially. Heartless fraudsters cruelly use dating websites, social media and direct emails to exploit those looking for love. Fraud can manifest itself in many different forms and is constantly evolving; it can have a major impact on victims, both financially and psychologically. In the case of dating fraud, the emotional damage is often far more difficult to come to terms with. These callous criminals will target vulnerable victims for their own monetary gain and our latest intelligence tells us that women in their forties are the most likely to be tricked in this way. We are therefore urging people to spot the signs of dating fraud

in order to protect themselves and to follow the 'Date Safe' advice this Valentine's Day and in the future.

"If you think you have been a victim of dating fraud, it is very important that you **report this to Action Fraud**. Sharing this information will help us to track down and identify these cruel criminals who manipulate and take advantage of people who are searching for love."

If you think you have been a victim of fraud you should report it to Action Fraud by https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/report_fraud

ActionFraud
Report Fraud & Internet Crime
0300 123 2040



SUMMING UP

Much of which I was taught at school has proved to be irrelevant in my career and indeed, everyday life!

Two important exceptions, were learning my 'Times Tables,' and Spelling, both of which have stood the test of time and been extremely useful.

Both I, and indeed, many of my peers, have expressed concern over the lack of emphasis given to both of these topics in many primary schools, since the passing of my schooldays. Starting in the 1960's and festering throughout the decades since, there has been elements in the teaching fraternity, who didn't consider such teaching as 'Trendy,' and not in line with so-called, progressive education.

In 1988, Kenneth Baker, the Education Secretary, publicly declared his support for times tables, but he faced considerable opposition, but, since then there have been moves to get rid of 'Trendy theories,' and replace them with proven teaching methods. Government sources are now saying that: All children must learn their times tables by the age of nine. This is good news albeit long overdue, however, they go further by saying that they will be imposing online tests by 2020. With many schools, teachers, parents and children, struggling to cope with the on-going pressures of 'SATS,' are reckon that they are going '**A BRIDGE TOO FAR!**' Reverse the silly trend that has been prevalent for years, but do so without creating even more pressures in a world already bogged down with academic pressures, otherwise, our children and grandchildren, will lose even more of their childhood, to satisfy statistics!



BLUE BADGE HOLDERS BEWARE

New statistics show from the Transport Department show that the thefts of parking permits for disabled motorists have quadrupled in

the past four years. Apparently, 2,921 blue badges were reported stolen in England last year, compared with 656 in 2013.

Thefts, forgeries and abuse, is shown at record levels, and last year, English Councils took legal action against 1,131 motorists for blue badge abuse.

Your responsibilities as a Blue Badge holder

It is down to you to use the Blue Badge properly. The badge and its concessions are for your use only. It is a criminal offence for you or anyone else to misuse the badge, and doing so could lead to a £1,000 fine and confiscation of the badge. Making sure that the scheme is not abused will benefit genuine badge holders, such as yourself.

If you are using the parking concessions as a passenger, it is your responsibility to make sure that the driver is aware of all the rules set out in this guidance.

You must never give the badge to friends or family to allow them to have the benefit of the parking concessions. You must never use a copied badge to park or attempt to alter the details on a badge.

The badge remains the property of the issuing local authority. They can ask for the badge to be returned if it is being misused.



A TRIP TO LONDON.....

On Thursday, my family and I travelled to London to watch the 'Annie Musical,' at the Piccadilly Theatre. It was a really nice 'feel good experience,' which is more than I can say for the inward and outward journey, which reminded me of the days that I used to travel to

London regularly as a Consultant and Trainer. Although there were many commuters who behaved responsibly, there were a considerable number of travellers who pushed past, or jumped in front, which is unhelpful when you are travelling with two young children. The other annoyance, is when you are trying to disembark from a train, and impatient commuters try to board the train before you alight, therefore blocking your exit. Not only is it impolite, in fact, pig ignorant, it is also very dangerous.

I sympathise with commuters who still have, and use, basic manners, and I am glad that I no longer have to tolerate travelling to London on a regular basis!

That's it for this week, so Keep Alert, Keep Secure, Keep Safe, and have a great weekend.

Don't forget that you can also read my blog at: <http://www.eppingforestnhw.org.uk/>

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