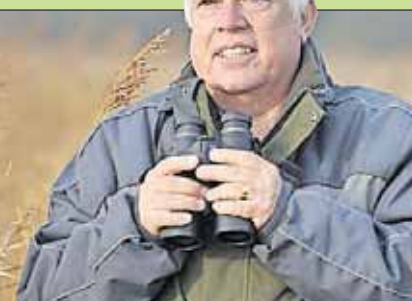


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ENCOUNTERS



*Sketches from
East Anglian wildlife
by John Grant*

Pictures in the mind, a connection with a hero

BIRDS are endlessly fascinating things. They sing, they migrate and they lift our spirits. But for me they are so, so special for another reason as well.

They can trigger in some dark recess of the mind connections with the past - places visited, situations enjoyed or endured, and people you have met.

Sometimes when a species is encountered it can transport you back with such an intensity it is

overwhelming. The memory floods back and the present and the past blur and entwine. The intoxication is heady indeed. And recently I was intoxicated in precisely this way in the Bittern Hide at RSPB Minsmere.

On September 27, 1973, the late, great Eric Hosking, in many ways the father of modern wildlife photography, famously saw a little crane on the self-same nature reserve, although he appears not to have photographed it.

One of the true pioneers of his craft, Eric is still rightly lauded, long after his death, for his stunning work, the quality of which was years ahead of its time. His pictures, clearly, wonderfully, made his name - but his name is also linked with that crane. It was, after all, the first of its kind to be seen in Suffolk since 1830.

Now a little crane was creeping about at the reed edge, enthralling its hide-full of admirers - the first to be seen in the

county since Eric's. A drop-everything-and-go, must-see-and-simply-must-not-be-missed sort of bird.

I confess. I dropped everything and went. A frantic twitch before the evening light faded. A sprint along the woodland trail from the car park to the hide. Huff and puff and almost keel over.

But all the panic was worth it. Not just for the bird. It re-connected me in some way with Eric. I had the infinite

pleasure of meeting him on one of his many photographic forays into Suffolk a full 30 years ago. Courteous, humble and entertaining as I interviewed him in a little cottage near Butley, Eric seemed honoured to be the subject of an East Anglian Daily Times feature. A great photographer, I thought, but also a delightful human being.

As the crane crept, Eric spoke to me again. Across the years. Affable as ever.

'B' for brewery, brewery for bees

Adnams' distribution site at Reydon, near Southwold, is a hive of industry in more ways than one. Here the widely acclaimed brewer and distiller explains one of its environmental and sustainable projects that looks like being a sweet and tasty success

Local honey is a great delicacy for a lot of us, but do we fully appreciate the bees that make it for us?

Honey bees are among the thousands of different species of bee that are under threat around the world and to put it simply "no bees = no food", so we need to help them thrive. This is exactly what Adnams, the Suffolk-based brewer and distiller, did earlier this year when they introduced two hives of honey bees to their distribution centre in Reydon, near Southwold.

In a partnership with local beekeeper Steve Barrett, 60,000 honey bees were re-homed on the site in hand-crafted hives, after being rescued from a roof back in May.

Adnams' approach to the environment and sustainability has always stood out, so when the coastal brewery approached Mr Barrett he was thrilled to come on board.

Commenting on the new arrivals, he said: "I have long been a fan of Adnams and the company's environmental and sustainable practices so I was really keen to work with them on this latest project."

Mr Barrett is proud of his hand-made hives and approach to beekeeping, which is really just about looking after the bees. He makes weekly inspections of the hives to ensure the colony is fit and healthy and free of signs of disease.

It is decades of indiscriminate pesticide use, farming and land-use practices that have destroyed bees' habitat and food sources, and today's virulent diseases and pests are wiping out colonies of honey bees, as well as many other species of bee globally.



GETTING A BUZZ FROM THE BEES: Left and above, Steve Barrett tends to the bees at Adnams' distribution centre at Reydon, near Southwold. Inset left, a close-up of two of the hives' inhabitants.

Photos: CONTRIBUTED



"By looking after the bees I can make sure they stay healthy, treat them for disease and give them supplementary food

if they are struggling too" said Mr Barrett.

The Reydon site, home to Adnams'

environmentally-friendly distribution centre as well as the Adnams bio-energy anaerobic digestion plant, provides a fantastic habitat for the bees. The surrounding area is low in fertility due to its thin sandy soil, meaning it's the perfect habitat for plants adapted to sandy heaths - vipers bugloss, bee orchids, birds-foot trefoil and ox-eye daisies already grow well here. The bees, however,

can travel up to 3km from the hives in search of food which puts them in reach of the gardens and hedgerows of Reydon, Southwold and Wangford.

Mr Barrett added: "While it can be quite difficult to find safe homes for honey bees, Reydon is situated in the site of a former gravel pit which means it's well positioned in a sheltered, south-facing area. The bees also have access to a great mix of pollen from the wild flowers that

grow, particularly on the distribution centre's sedum roof and from the more urban flora found in nearby Southwold."

The company recently carried out an ecological audit on the 41.5 hectares of land on site with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust to understand how the bees fitted in to a vast array of flora and fauna on site.

The trust's conclusion was that it considers the site to be "an excellent mosaic for mammals, reptiles, invertebrates and birds".

Adnams will be working with the trust's recommendations to ensure that the site remains a haven for local wildlife.

In line with Adnams' own ethos for efficiency, the bees are being encouraged to create their very own jars of honey. Set with a tray of 16 jars in each hive, Mr Barrett is encouraging the bees to build their combs and honey directly into the jars, as well as via the normal frame collection method.

The question on everyone's mind then is this - are we going to see Adnams' honey in the shops any time soon?

Ben Orchard, Adnams' environmental manager, said: "We are thrilled with how the bees have settled into their new home and are looking very healthy."

"Steve has introduced some fascinating innovative beekeeping techniques to the hives and we do expect to see some honey this year. We want to ensure the bees are not robbed of their food supply for the winter so we will be leaving enough honey behind for them to feed on, but the rest will be given to our chefs at our Swan and Crown hotels to come up with some inspiring menu options."

Adnams is looking to continue growing its apiary at Reydon with Mr Barrett over the coming years, and perhaps then the honey will become available for customers to buy in the Adnams stores.