Sussex applications soar

Figures released by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) this week show that applications for undergraduate places at Sussex have gone up by a massive 22.7 per cent since the same time last year.

A total of 15,338 prospective students had applied to Sussex by 15 January, an increase of 2,833 on the 12,505 who did so by the same stage in 2004. The University has now enjoyed significant growth in applications for three successive years – and this growth is set against the backdrop of a continued rise in offer levels to study at Sussex.

Sussex has the greatest percentage rise of any of the 1994 Group of universities (five of which have actually seen a downturn) and the 22.7% leap in applications compares to a national rise of only 8.9%.

This increase does not include applications to the Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS), which has itself seen a 17.5% increase in applications to read medicine.

Although UCAS released the figures on 16 February, they refer to applications received by 15 January, when around 80-85% of applications would have come in. Since then, with final applications coming through from UCAS and from overseas students, the most up-to-date figures show the final position could be up as much as 25% at Sussex.

All subjects at Sussex – in the sciences and in the arts – have seen significant increases in applications. Subject areas with an increase of 30% or more are Social Work (+96%), Environmental Science (+81%), Anthropology (+44%), History (+43%), Music (+40%), Physics (+35%) and Engineering (+31%).

Two very successful new undergraduate programmes have also attracted hundreds of applications: the BSc in Business and Management Studies (451 applications) and the single honours BA in Media Studies (348 applications).

Welcoming the UCAS figures, Academic Registrar Owen Richards highlighted a number of initiatives that may have contributed to the increase in applications.

For example, the Schools and Colleges Liaison team and academic departments have been targeting increasing numbers of prospective students in London and the south-east. This outreach has been combined with a wider range of services for visitors: weekly campus tours, subject conferences, mature-student drop-ins, widening participation tasters, etc. “These have all encouraged prospective students and their families to visit Sussex,” said Owen.

He also picked out the re-designed student-recruitment publications as a possible success factor; the prospectus in use by 2005 applicants is the first to carry the University’s new visual identity. The new arts curriculum, introduced in 2003, has also continued to prove popular. Prospective students will get their first look at the newly revamped science curriculum when the 2006 prospectus comes out in early March, just a few weeks from now.

And Owen had some more good news to deliver: “We are turning around offers considerably faster than ever before, due largely to the success of new pilot arrangements that simplify the job of selectors.”

Sussex is one of the leading institutions in the world for arts and social science research and teaching, according to major new rankings.

In the Top 50 Arts and Humanities Universities table, compiled by the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES), Sussex is ranked sixth in the UK and 22nd internationally. Among the Top 100 Social Sciences Universities, Sussex is placed eighth in the UK and 48th in the world.

The tables are a further developments of the THES World University Rankings, which were published in November 2004. Measurements used included staff-to-student ratios, overseas recruitment and the intellectual clout yielded by research publications.

Sussex’s overall position in the world rankings, assessed by a special college of 1,300 academics, was ninth in the UK, 17th in Europe and 58th internationally.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alasdair Smith, said: “It is gratifying that in the social sciences and the humanities our performance is even stronger than our performance in the overall table.”

Findings were provided for 200 universities spread across 27 countries. The United States and the UK dominate the rankings for both subject areas.

Harvard tops both discipline-specific tables, as it did the world rankings, followed closely by Oxford, Cambridge and other leading American institutions. Other top ten UK universities include SOAS, Edinburgh and the LSE, Manchester and UCL.

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What we really thought about our “greatest ever Briton”

He was recently voted the “greatest ever Briton” in a BBC poll, but what did the British people really think of Winston Churchill as he led them through their “darkest hour” in World War II?

A unique archive at Sussex, which has contributed material to the newly opened Churchill Museum at the Cabinet War Rooms in London, shows that the public had very mixed feelings about “Winnie”.

The Mass-Observation Archive, housed in the Library, offers a wealth of personal views of Churchill, written by ordinary men and women during the 1940s for a wartime studies project. These views, volunteered as part of a process to monitor public attitudes to political leaders, including Churchill, helped to form a ‘morale barometer’ of the times.

As a result of this continuous monitoring, anthropologist and founder of Mass-Observation, Tom Harrisson, predicted in 1944 that Churchill would not win in a post-war election.

Dorothy Sheridan, head of Special Collections, says: “Angus Calder (the historian, Sussex alumnus and author of The People’s War: Britain 1939-1945) has commented that this prediction, made in 1944 when Churchill’s popularity as a war leader was at its height, was Mass-Observation’s ‘finest hour’. This is because it vindicated the use of ‘soft’ subjective data, such as diaries, to provide evidence for shifts in popular thinking.”

Typical comments from 1942-44, in the years after the “phony” war, Dunkirk, the Blitz and the Battle of Britain, refer to Churchill as “the best man for the war, but not for the peace”. People had respect for his leadership and admired his “bulldog” spirit, but did not think he was the moderniser needed to build the new Britain people were already looking forward to.

He was also seen as too authoritarian, with little understanding of the needs of ordinary people (“he has contempt for new ideas”; “doesn’t listen to criticism”; “rather too much of the public school about him”; “he cannot cease bolstering up the class to which he belongs”).

Some writers express distaste of Churchill’s public persona. One likens him to a “bandleader”, while another describes him as an entertainer who “plays rather too much to the gallery”. Even his legendary oratory is called into question, when one respondent comments: “He goes to the microphone as if he thought his oratorics would act as an anaesthetic.”

Churchill’s idiosyncratic habit of taking a daily siesta is also called into question, when one respondent writes: “Maybe it’s a bit childish to go to bed as soon as he arrives in Downing Street, but I suppose a Prime Minister must have some relaxation.”

The thoughts of one Land Army girl in 1942, however, probably best express the feeling that brought about Churchill’s electoral downfall: “The traditional England he champions is not the one I want to see preserved,” she wrote.

USSU president re-elected despite no-vote campaign

Roger Hylton has been re-elected president of the Students’ Union – despite a concerted campaign encouraging students not to vote at all.

The Autonomous Students’ group generally attempted to compete with 18 sabbatical candidates vying for attention in Library Square last week. The anti-vote campaign hoped to promote the “democratisation of the Union” and decisions being made at a grass roots, rather than elected representative, level.

One of the students behind the campaign said: “Sabbs [sic] think they are so amazing. But they are not, they are weak. Whenever anyone gets elected they get caught up in a tide of bureaucracy.”

The student admitted she had voted, but said she had spoiled her ballot paper so no one could accuse her of being apathetic: “When it’s a choice of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, do you vote for?” she said.

Despite this, the sabbatical elections went ahead smoothly. Only Roger stays from the current team; the other sabbaticals were either at the end of their two possible years in the role decided not to run again.

Current USSU Entertainments Officer and Music student Tom Harle takes on the badger and elections in his role as Communications Officer. Anthropology student Rosa Wilson Garwood takes over Joe William’s Finance portfolio, with Abi Webb (English) taking on Welfare and Sophie McGlenn (Sociology) Education. Media and Film student Jo Walters provided a shock in taking the Activities post; currently RAG chair, she is the first non-sports person to fulfil that role.

Something less shocking is the complete lack of science students in the final six. Historically sabbatical positions are dominated by arts students (perhaps because scientists are too busy in labs to campaign?) and this year is no exception; three winners are from the School of Humanities, two from Social Sciences and Cultural Studies and one, incumbent Roger, from the Sussex Institute.

The new team take over in the summer. Whether they live up to their mantle of Tweedledum and Tweedledee remains to be seen.
How diverse actually is Sussex?

Diversity Week – the annual celebration of the people and cultures that make up Sussex – comes to campus from 7 March. Expect a mix of events including presentations, flag-making sessions and a social for gay and lesbian staff. But what does ‘diversity’ mean? And is Sussex actually that diverse?

Tom Harle, newly elected to the post of Communications Officer in the Students’ Union, says the term diversity means “a lot of people from different backgrounds coming together and sharing experiences”. According to the Equality and Diversity Officer, it means “creating a place of work and study that respects and includes differences and creating an environment that maximises the potential of all people”.

Rosa Wilson-Garwood, the Union’s next Finance Officer, isn’t convinced this ideal exists at Sussex: “On the whole it feels like most people here are from London middle-class backgrounds.”

The statistics tell a mixed story.
- Seven per cent of teaching staff come from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. This compares well with the 5.7% of BME people in Brighton and Hove, but is below the 8% national average.
- The number of female academic staff has risen to 32%, but this is still less than the 51% city average.
- It’s disabled staff who have had the biggest rise, from 0.5% to almost 4% in just two years.

Equality and Diversity Officer Liz Burchett says getting Sussex up to speed will take time, but all projects are in place: “The Equality and Diversity Forum is raising lots of good ideas. We are working towards staff networks for BME and disabled staff, ensuring we advertise jobs in the minority press, and looking to attain the ‘Positive About Disability’ recruitment symbol. But initiatives have to come from the appropriate members of staff.”

The University’s student BME population at 20% is lower than the national average but way above that of the local area. Women far outnumber men at Sussex and there are more disabled students than the average. However, when it comes to recruiting students from more deprived backgrounds, Rosa’s observation might hold some water.

Head of Schools and College Liaison Tanya Shadrick says things are changing, but it takes time for results to be seen: “We attract over 4,000 inner London school children to campus annually, and have over 700 registered with us who would be eligible for guaranteed standard offers.”

One of the least noticeable minority groups might be one of the biggest on campus: gay and lesbian staff and students. As staff and students are rarely asked to answer questions on their sexuality (and many might be unwilling to do so), it’s likely the numbers present on campus and in Brighton are underestimated.

Events such as Diversity Week and a heavier focus on equality issues means Sussex is becoming less of a white, middle-class university. But the ethnic make-up of the region, and the fact that Sussex is starting from such a small base, suggests it will be some time before Sussex can truly call itself diverse.

The full Diversity Week timetable can be found at www.sussex.ac.uk/qualities/diversityweek.

Diversity Week highlights

- All week
  Black history exhibition, Arts C.
  Unison exhibition, Sharram House.

- Mon 7 Mar
  All day: An opening day of fun and colour, including hand-made kites, banners and flags from around the world. (Come and paint your flag on Mon 1 Mar and Wed 3 Mar. Contact arts@sussex.sussex.ac.uk for details.)
  2pm: Understanding diversity. A presentation by new unit Continuing Education Research and Development Unit (CERADU) on lifelong learning and widening participation. ED8 336.

- Tue 8 Mar
  5.30pm: LGBT staff social. An informal event for staff to meet one another, have a few free drinks, and discuss if more could be done to meet LGBT staff needs. Falmer Bar, back room.

- Thu 10 Mar
  2pm: Translating diversity policy into practice. Educational researchers look at the challenges of turning good ideas into everyday reality. BSMS lecture theatre.

News in brief

ID cards

The ‘drop-in’ times for new and replacement ID cards has changed. They will now be available between 9.30am and 12.30pm, Monday to Friday. ID cards will not be issued outside these hours, except by prior arrangement. Group bookings can be made as usual by telephoning Keith Hunt on ext. 3278.

Crèche charity sale

On Tuesday (22 February) and Wednesday (23 February) the Crèche will be holding a sale of nearly new toys, children’s clothing and cakes in Norwich House to support the Children of Sumatra appeal. Contributions are welcome.

Colombia talk

Sussex AUT (Association of University Teachers) and Justice for Colombia are organising a meeting on 2 March at which Colombian congressman Wilson Borja will speak about “Britain’s secret war”. Branch president Jim Guild says: “The Colombian government, which has been fighting left-wing guerrillas for 40 years, murders anyone it judges might support the guerrillas or oppose government policies. Trade unionists, student leaders, journalists, teachers, human rights activists – in their thousands – have been murdered by government forces and right-wing paramilitaries. Britain supplies secret military aid to Colombia despite it having the worst human rights record in the western world.” The meeting is at 6.30pm in the BSMS lecture theatre.

Rise-and-shine yoga

Sussexsport are now offering an early-morning drop-in yoga session at the Sportcentre every Wednesday, from 7.15am–8.30am. All welcome. Staff pay £3 per class, students £2.50.

STEP

Here’s how students can earn £180 per week (with no tax or National Insurance) in the Sussex area on a structured eight-week project: by ring Pat Tse Sutcliffe on 7044404 or emailing patris@innc.co.uk to join the Sholl Technology Enterprise Programme (STEP). See www.step.org.uk.

"Susssex is diverse in that people embrace different cultural looks but they don't understand where that look comes from." - Raj Anand Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence postgraduate

"On the whole at Sussex it feels like most people are from London, a middle-class background and private schools." - Rosa Wilson-Garwood Anthropology undergraduate

"Everyone is respected and no one is excluded. Everyone has a place they can do something." - Adam Mitchell Geography and Environmental Science undergraduate
Gold star for excellent teaching

According to the Guardian, this was a ground-breaking report, because it drew attention to the link between flexible labour-market policies, sub-contracting and forced-labour practices. The report advocates that action to protect workers' rights should be separated from the issue of immigration control. The full report is at www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-9317-en.cfm.

Also in the news this month was Dr Adam Eyre-Walker, whose finding (with researchers at Bath and Edinburgh) that the how lack of mates among human ancestors six million years may have left modern humans more vulnerable to genetic disease appeared in the New Scientist (25 January), the Guardian and the Scotsman.

Holocaust Memorial Day, organised by the Centre for German-Jewish Studies at Sussex, received plenty of local coverage (Meridian TV, BBC Southern Counties Radio and the Argus), with its organiser Chana Moshefska also being interviewed by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (26 January).

Elsewhere in the world, South Africa's Radio Cape Talk interviewed economist Dr Peter Holmes (25 January) about the usefulness of international meetings such as the World Economic Forum and G8.

Other radio guests included Dr Michael Bull, who was on BBC Radio 3 (30 January) in conversation with American composer Steve Reich about technology in music. Dr Michael Collyer, meanwhile, commented on Tory leader Michael Howard's announcement of his party's immigration policy on BBC Southern Counties Radio (24 January).

Sussex postgraduate Nathaniel Copey told the Argus (31 January) about his experience as an election observer in Eastern Europe and the "blatant rigging" in evidence for the result of the Ukraine election last year.

And, last but not least, Sussex was placed high up in the THEs world rankings for arts and social sciences (3 February). There's clearly a lot of good research going on in these subject areas, and we in the Press and Communications Office would love to tell other people about the findings. Call me on ext. 7437 or email J.a.bealing@sussex.ac.uk.

Fifty academics will receive awards at the graduation ceremonies on 25 February in recognition of their excellent teaching.

The annual Teaching Awards scheme is open to all academics at Sussex who teach courses or supervise higher degrees. Shortlisted nominees prepare a portfolio of evidence for consideration by a judging panel, which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alasdair Smith.

Dr Natalia Beloff has done outstanding work in restructuring Java programming courses in the School of Engineering and Information Technology. "This is a subject that can present great difficulties to some students and a challenge to the majority," explains Professor Dick Grimsdale, her colleague.

Natalia made changes to the delivery, support structure and mode of assessment, which led to a significant improvement in students' performance. In lab sessions she gave the students dedicated and patient support, encouraging them to solve problems themselves rather than just supplying answers.

She has also developed an introductory course in the foundation year in Information Technology, and that has proved to be an outstanding success with many innovative features. More recently Natalia has been developing a new MSc course, which is also proving to be very successful.

It could be said that new members of staff should receive training in teaching. "The converse is the case," says Professor Grimsdale. "Longer serving members of staff would learn a great deal from her skills and dedication."

Dr Mairead Dunne's teaching award relates to her contribution to teaching and learning at the doctoral level.

Mairead has been the convenor of DPhil research students in the Education department for the last three years and brings her own position as a thinker and as a researcher explicitly to teaching and learning with postgraduate students.

In particular, says head of department Pat Drake, Mairead's strength as a teacher "lies in the extent to which she has recognised that building a research culture depends on research students being brought into that culture".

As a result of this thinking, Mairead has established seminar programmes in the department to bring research students together with each other, with faculty and with visitors. Pat explains that, "This is a significant achievement when working with people from different countries, at different stages in their research and with different fields of enquiry."

Other initiatives include a new international professional doctorate (EJD) programme and the development of e-learning at postgraduate level as well as more research resources and communication online.

Dr Donna Jessop joined Sussex in 2001, principally to teach on the MSc in Health Psychology. She is now the programme director, although in the last couple of years she has also taught a popular final-year undergraduate option on health psychology.

Most of Donna's teaching has been seminar based. "Her strengths as a teacher lie in her ability to draw students into seminar discussion, to inspire and enthuse them, and get the best out of them," says Dr Rod Bond, head of the psychology department.

He adds: "Students rave about her in course evaluations and she almost invariably receives the top rating." As Donna points out, though, this information is gathered at the end of a course and therefore does not directly benefit those particular students. So she solicits feedback throughout a course and makes it apparent to students that they can (and should) have a say in how the sessions are structured and run.

Continued on next page...
Recognise exceptional work with a Chancellor’s Award

Chana Moshenska, Director of Educational Programmes in the Centre for German-Jewish Studies, was unable to receive her Chancellor’s Award at the summer graduation ceremonies in July 2004 and instead will be at the Dome on 25 February.

It’s not too soon to think about who you might like to nominate for one of the 2005 Chancellor’s Awards. The scheme recognises exceptional contributions to the work and life of the University by members of staff. It provides the opportunity, alongside the Teaching Awards, to acknowledge the wide range of work that goes into making Sussex the place it is.

Nominations can be made for any activity, aside from direct teaching and research. Examples of successful activities might include attracting more and better students or staff to the University; providing improved support to staff and students; enhancing students’ experience while at University; helping students prepare for success in their future careers; or improving the standing of the University in the local community.

The awards are open to all staff, whether full- or part-time, permanent or fixed term. There is no minimum or maximum age or length-of-service requirement.

People may be nominated by any member of staff, student or former student, or can be self-nominated, but will need a supporting statement from the nominee’s manager.

The panel considering nominations is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and includes a number of senior staff and members of Council. Further information and nomination forms are available online at www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/registrar/chancellorsawards.shtml, or in hard copy from the Registrar’s Office.

...Continued from previous page

Donna herself makes notes after every session, detailing its strengths and weaknesses together with ideas about what could be included or modified in the future.

Since spring 2003 Dr Pat Le Riche has led the development and delivery of a new BA in Social Work. A joint degree with the University of Brighton, it is a complex undertaking that involves working with representatives from local agencies and service users.

The students are also a very diverse group, with an age range of 18 to 52 and from very different educational backgrounds. The challenge for Pat as an educator has been to adapt to the needs of this diverse student body and to apply her existing knowledge and skills in teaching to new situations.

At the end of the first year of the degree, it is clear that it is very successful. “Student feedback is very good, remarkably so for a new programme,” says Professor Imogen Taylor, head of Social Work and Social Care. Applications are up by some 25% this year.

Pat transfers her teaching expertise to other programmes, including the BA in Social Policy and the Masters in Social Work. She demonstrates a passionate interest in students and a fascination with the process of their learning.

An experienced teacher who rose to head of department, Duncan MacKril is now the music tutor on the secondary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme.

Now in his sixth year at Sussex, Duncan has completely revised the music course to meet new government requirements; updated and extended the curriculum content; and expanded his teaching strategies and methods of delivery.

As a result of this continuous review and improvement, Duncan has been highly praised in two recent inspections by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education). He has also brought about some ground-breaking, nationally respected innovations, including a revolutionary new assessment system for pupils’ work that is now commercially available.

Duncan has considerably developed the range and use of music technology equipment for use by trainee teachers at Sussex, which Ofsted and external examiners have noted as a strength of the course.

Pat Drake, head of the Education department, concludes that, “He really is that combination of inspirational, extremely well organised and pragmatic that makes everyone – students and colleagues alike – trust him absolutely to teach them.”

Who would you nominate?

The Teaching and Learning Development Unit (TLDU) is now inviting nominations for the 2005 Teaching Awards.

The purpose of the awards is to encourage excellent teaching; provide recognition for excellent teaching (in addition to promotion, not as a substitute); and raise the profile and status of curriculum planning, teaching, learning, assessment and academic support.

The awards are open to all those teaching or providing academic support for courses approved or validated by the University at any level (foundation, undergraduate or taught postgraduate) and for MPhil and DPhil supervision.

Applicants for the award may be nominated by a member of staff, student or alumnus/a of the University, or be self-nominated.

Awards will be made in three categories: experienced teachers, ‘rising stars’ and academic support.

A nomination form and further information are available from tdu@sussex.ac.uk or at www.sussex.ac.uk/TDU. If you have any queries, contact Sue Claydon on ext. 8714 or email s.b.claydon@sussex.ac.uk.

The deadline for nominations is 21 March.
OBITUARY

Rev Dr Sergei Hackel (1931–2005)

The Rev Dr Sergei Hackel died suddenly on 9 February after a heart attack. He taught at Sussex from 1964 to 1988, retiring as Reader in Russian in the School of European Studies.

He had an unusual and distinguished career: during his time at Sussex he was ordained a priest of the Orthodox Church, served as Orthodox Chaplain, grew his ‘trademark’ massive black beard, and became a leading figure in London and Moscow church affairs.

He came into university teaching in his mid 30s after working as a school master and librarian in Cambridge; his parents, from a family of German origin but Russianized for generations, passed on to him a deep knowledge of Russian and European culture. He was expert in classic Russian literature, a genial teacher, and genuinely bilingual. While at Sussex he did a doctorate (resulting in an important book) on the poet Alexander Blok and his attitude to the Revolution. He edited the journal Sobornost (Eastern Churches Quarterly), and did a great deal of work for the BBC; many Radio 3 listeners will have heard his beautifully delivered commentaries to Orthodox Christmas and Easter Services.

He and his Russo-Irish family lived in Barcombe Mills in a fine house aptly called River Lawn; he often had to begin his journey to Fulmer wading in gumboots through the flooded Ouse (one flood sadly brought havoc to his fine collection of books).

He was to the end a frequent visitor to the campus, and his soft-spoken but incisive comments will be much missed at seminars on religious or Russian topics.

Robin Miller-Gulland
Research Professor in Russian Studies

BONUSES ON BACK BURNER

The Savings Review Group has decided that the annual process to review staff reward will this year consider proposals for re-grading and promotions only. The process will not consider any discretionary payments – i.e. recommendations for bonuses or discretionary increments. Staff will of course continue to receive cost-of-living increases and any normal increment due to them.

“This has not been an easy decision to reach, nor has it been taken lightly,” said Barbara Bush, Director of Human Resources. “The main reason for suspending discretionary payments for one year is the overall cost to the University. The alternative to making savings on discretionary payments is to ask heads of units to find such savings elsewhere at a time when all units already have tough savings targets to achieve.”

The decision not to award any discretionary payments does not represent a formal change to staff terms and conditions. The campus trades unions have however been informed of the decision.

Human Resources will be negotiating with the trades unions which evaluation mechanism should be used for considering re-grading and promotion proposals. The University is proposing to use where possible a system called Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA), which will also be used to move staff on to a new grading structure under the framework agreement.

The vast majority of salaries will rise later this year when the framework agreement is implemented and all staff (except professors and senior administrators) move on to a single pay spine and the new grading structure.
Smoking outside buildings

As part of the University's commitment to providing a healthy and safe workplace, smoking in campus buildings (with the exception of some bars and student facilities) has been banned for some time now.

In recent months the Health, Safety and Environment Office has received a number of enquiries from people concerned about smoke drifting into their offices from people smoking outside building entrances. This issue was also raised at the last meeting of the University’s Health, Safety and Environment Committee (HSEC).

Currently, no policy exists governing where people can and cannot smoke outside buildings. Clive Parkinson, Director of Health, Safety and the Environment, describes the approach that has been taken so far: “Where complaints have been raised we have tried relocating bins to encourage smokers to congregate away from doorways and have also posted ‘polite’ notices to highlight the problem of smoke drifting in through office windows.”

However, this has been of limited effect, and one of the other solutions discussed at the HSEC was the imposition of a two-metre smoking exclusion zone around all University buildings; such a system is already in force at the University of Brighton.

The Health, Safety and Environment Office are seeking your views on this proposal so that it can be further debated at the next HSEC on 3 March. Email safety@sussex.ac.uk.

A walk on the wild side

Spring has arrived early this year and the grass areas on campus are beginning to brighten to their annual display of spring flowers.

David Harper
Life Sciences

David Streeter
Life Sciences

In past years we have written about snowdrops, celandines and violets but we have said nothing of crocuses. Although we have no native crocuses in Britain they have been cultivated for centuries and frequently naturalise. Most come originally from southern Europe and Asia Minor.

Those naturalised on campus are what in horticultural circles are usually referred to as Dutch crocuses and comprise several species and their hybrids.

Those with flowers ranging from deep purple to white, often with strong purple streaks, are mostly varieties of Crocus vernus which is widespread in the mountains of southern Europe where it grows in grassland and open woodland.

The antecedents of the large yellow ones are a bit more complicated. They are apparently hybrids of C. angustifolius from the Crimean and the more widespread C. flavus from eastern and central parts of the Balkan Peninsula and are probably referred to as C. x stellaris.

Also coming into flower now are the plums and cherries. The earliest are the various forms of the Cherry Plum, Prunus cerasifera, from the Balkan Peninsula, Iran and Russia. The white-flowered wild form is often planted in hedgerows in the southern part of the country and there is a nice specimen in the shrubbery on the south side of the Mantell Building.

The ‘sweet-singing little plum’, or Prunella modularis, is one of the dullest-looking birds in the world. Better known as the Dunnock (“little brown one”), it is about the size of a Robin or Ruddock (“little red one”). The streaky brown plumage is relieved only by blue-grey markings on the head, neck and breast; these tend to be more extensive on males.

The Dunnock is common on campus wherever there are bushes next to open ground, and the alternative name of ‘Hedge Sparrow’ describes its habitat well. Naturalists have long deplored the idea of Dunnocks with their fine, pointed bills sharing the name ‘sparrow’ with the more familiar heavy-billed birds. Biochemical evidence suggests, however, that our ancestors were right: Dunnocks and House Sparrows are more closely related to each other than either to finches, for example, Robins.

For most of the year Dunnocks shuffle along the ground, flicking their wings and tail nervously as they search for tiny insects and seeds. But in the early spring their behaviour changes from shy and retiring to bold and brash. They charge around, repeatedly giving loud ‘seep’ calls, singing (especially if they are males) and chasing each other.

We shall return in future to this bedlam, which is just starting and can be watched easily in the bushes around Bramble House. It turns out that the Dunnock’s dull plumage hides a lifestyle that makes most television soaps seem tame.

‘University Challenge’

The Science Society and Students’ Union are holding auditions for BBC TV’s ‘University Challenge’, which will be screened in autumn 2005.

To stand a chance of being picked, come along to the auditions to be held on Wednesday (23 February) at 2pm, 3pm and 4pm. Forty questions will be set and the highest scorers go through to the next round. Just turn up to a session that suits at Pevensey I AO7.

For more information, email Keith Smith on kds87@sussex.ac.uk.

LETTERS

Heard the one about the new book?

Alison Field, Bulletin editor, replies:

We do apologise for our comedy of errors in publicising Andy’s book before it was actually completed.

We were fooled somewhat by both Routledge and Amazon.co.uk advertising the said book for sale. When both the publisher and a major bookseller offer books for sale we usually deem this to mean you can go out and buy them. In this case we were misled.

However, we do hate to see academics hiding their light under a bushel and hope we can do even more for Andy’s book once it’s actually finished. As someone humorous may once have said, “Carry on Writing”.
Academic events

MON 21 FEB
3pm International Relations and Politics seminar: Ulrich Brand (Kassel), Emerging forms of post-Fordist protest and the impossibility of global Keynesianism. Arts C233.

4pm Neuroscience Languages and Linguistics seminar: Horace Barlow, Old and new ideas about what the cortex computes and how it does it. Genome Centre seminar room.

4pm ROLLS Languages and Linguistics seminar: Roberta Piazza (Sussex), Some categories for analysing the verbal-visual interrelation in cinema. Arts D310.

4.30pm Sussex and IDS special seminar: Fesutu Mogae (President of Botswana), Botswana's development experience. LSMS Lecture Theatre.

5pm Geography seminar: Stephanie Barnettos (IDS) and Ben Rogaly (Sussex), Employment practices in British agriculture. Arts C175.

5pm Education seminar: Trevor Chevet (Sussex), Engaging rural communities in public policies and programmes: Some conclusions from European and UK research. Arts D610.

TUE 22 FEB
12 noon Biochemistry seminar: Steve Jackson (Cambridge), Early events in the mammalian DNA damage response. JMS Lecture Theatre.

THU 24 FEB
2pm Sociology symposium: Norman Stockman (Aberdeen) and Jeyu Liu (Sussex), Gender, class and ethnic professions in contemporary China. Russell Building 24.