

Buchanan wows theatre crowds

Television naturalist Gordon Buchanan wowed crowds with his tales about coming face-to-face with polar bears and wolves when he brought his one-man show to Shropshire.

Gordon, best known for his documentaries The Snow Wolf Family and Me and The Polar Bears and Me, regaled the audience at Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn with stories about the thrills and drama of coming face-to-face with such magnificent beasts.

His used film footage of his work in far-flung corners of the world to give the audience an remarkable insight into his expeditions.

His two-part documentary about snow wolves aired in December last year, and revealed extraordinary footage of him bonding with a wild wolf family in the Arctic and gave viewers a remarkable insight into their relationships and behaviour.

Originally from the Isle of Mull in western Scotland, Gordon has worked in wildlife documentaries for the past 20 years and is passionate about raising awareness about the world's endangered species and habitats.

But he said while his work has taken him as diverse places as South America, Asia, Africa, Papua New Guinea, Russia and Alaska, he found it really enjoyable sharing his experiences with people in the UK.

Club lines up tennis festival

A festival of tennis is being served up this month to coincide with a top tournament, featuring world ranked players on the brink of stardom heading to Shrewsbury.

The Shrewsbury Club, in Sundorne Road, is staging a major tournament featuring rising professional tennis aces from across Europe.

The Aegon GB Pro-Series men's 15,000 dollar, about £9,850, event between March 21 and 28 offers free admission to watch top class tennis action.

"The Festival of Tennis will run from March 14 to March 28 and it will be built around the Aegon Pro-Series event," said Dave Courteen, managing director of the club, who has helped organise the event.

"As well as the tournament, there will be a tennis exhibition and the whole family will have the chance to pick up a racket using fun Tennis Factory equipment in The Square."

There will also be a tennis-themed wine tasting at Tanners Wines, Wyle Cop, on March 25. Tickets at £30 are available from the club on (01743) 467755.

Daffodil appeal to aid Marie Curie

Marie Curie's Great Daffodil Appeal is launching in Telford this month.

And the charity is asking people to make a donation and wear a daffodil pin to support people living with terminal illnesses.

The Great Daffodil Appeal runs throughout March and is Marie Curie's biggest fundraiser.

All the funds raised from the appeal will help Marie Curie nurses provide care to someone living with a terminal illness, so they can spend more time with the people they love.

Events in Telford are being held at Poundworld today and tomorrow, Superdrug tomorrow, Matalan on March 21 and 22 and Asda Donnington Wood on March 12 and 22.

People can also pledge £5 by texting DAFF to 70111.

Steam and beer at railway's weekend

A steam and beer gala is being held at Llangollen Railway this weekend.

At least 1,000 people are expected to visit the town each day of the festival which runs from today to Sunday and March 13 to 15.

There will be six visiting mainline locomotives travelling from as far as Devon, Leicestershire, Yorkshire and Lancashire and the event will utilise the newly-extended railway into Corwen. A trade fair will be open at Corwen Station to support the event.

The festival has been organised by the 6880 Betton Grange Society Ltd, a charitable organisation that is building a Great Western Railway "Grange Class" locomotive.

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Retiring M6 Toll chief is proud of road's place in transport history



Tom Fanning is stepping down in May

The retiring boss of the M6 Toll says he is proud of his role in creating "a bit of history" after running the company behind the UK's first pay-as-you-go motorway for 14 years.

Tom Fanning prepares to step down in May but he remains fiercely committed to the often-criticised Midlands toll road, saying it has been a success and offers good service and good value for money.

The road links the M6, close to its junction with the M54, to the M42 and helps motorists avoid the notorious congestion of the Midlands motorway network.

Mr Fanning said: "I'm proud to have worked on a little bit of history, the first and maybe, probably, the only toll road in the UK. We haven't raised the prices since

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2012 and we are getting up to 50,000 or 52,000 vehicles a day during the week. That is traffic that isn't clogging up the M6 between junctions 11 and 4.

"Without the toll road that would be traffic clogging up the A38, the A5, as well as the M6."

He has stressed that the decision to go has been his own. "I could have stayed on until 2016, but I felt this was the right time. We've been through a major financial restructuring in which we took £1 billion of debt out of the business, leaving it in very good shape."

Mr Fanning spoke to the toll road's own-

ers, the Australian global finance group Macquarie, about his decision during a business trip in January. They were supportive, he said, adding: "I decided now was the time to enjoy myself, do some travelling. I have a beautiful home in Portugal and another one in Ireland I've just refurbished where I want to spend some time."

There have been problems and Midland Expressway has been constantly criticised for not achieving the originally envisaged traffic figures of up to 75,000 vehicles a day.

But Mr Fanning believes that is unfair. "Those figures were given at the inquiry back in 1992. They projected we could take 72,000 vehicles a day, which was half what the M6 traffic was back then. Those were highly optimistic," he said.

Raider with 'fearsome record' will not serve extra time in jail

Man burgled homes while out on licence

Report by David Banner
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A SERVING prisoner who admitted burgling two homes in Shropshire and taking thousands of pounds worth of jewellery and electrical items will not serve any extra time in jail, a judge has ruled.

Connor Davies committed the two burglaries while on licence after being released early from a seven-year stint for robbery, Shrewsbury Crown Court heard.

Davies, from Wrexham, admitted breaking into the homes in School Lane, St Martins, Oswestry, and Weston Avenue, Oswestry, on the same day.

The offences took place on September 18 last year.

Mr Robert Edwards, prosecuting, said in the first raid Davies escaped with a crate of lager from the kitchen and more than £5,000 worth of jewellery.

In the second, the 23-year-old took electrical items.

These included an Xbox, iPad and laptop as well as more jewellery, the court heard.

Stopped

The owners of both homes were out at the time of the burglaries which took place in broad daylight, Mr Edwards said.

The prosecutor told the court Davies was stopped by police later that day in Wrexham as a passenger in an Audi car.

Officers found the crate of lager, some of the jewellery and a hammer in the footwell by Davies' seat, the court heard.

Mr Edwards said Davies was interviewed by police the following day and made full admissions to carrying out both burglaries.

He was recalled to prison to serve the rest of his robbery term and will not be released until January 2018, the court was told.

Mr Paul Smith, for Davies, admitted his client had a "fearsome record" for someone so young.

"It can only be hoped he will make the most of his time in custody," Mr Smith said.

Recorder Mr Denis Desmond sentenced Davies to three years and four months in jail for the two burglaries.

"Clearly the only question is how long you should go to prison for," the judge said.

"You have a bad record and represent a high risk of serious harm from re-offending."

But legal rules state the sentences must run concurrently to his existing term - meaning he will spend no extra time in jail for them, the court was told.

TV show favourite pays a visit



Funella Furchester with Wayne Jenson, Macey Lee Connaughton, Seth Weston, Dylan Shenton, Ellie Laming and Tony Reed

Star of Furchester Hotel Funella drops in to see her young fans

Youngsters got to meet one of their favourite TV stars when she visited their school.

But because Funella Furchester is a puppet, she had to be accompanied by a BBC producer when she arrived at Lawley Primary School in Telford.

Tony Reed is the man behind the CBeebies show The Furchester Hotel, which is popular among youngsters at the school. He decided to get in touch after reading about the children's visit to Telford's Buckatree Hall Hotel, an outing which was inspired by the programme.

Report by Rachel Jenkins
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Mr Reed spoke to Year 5 pupils about his job and where his career path had taken him, while the key stage 1 pupils watched an unaired episode of the show and met Funella Furchester.

Headteacher Carol McQuiggin said: "The children were ecstatic when we told them the producer of The Furchester was coming to school. They couldn't believe they would meet the man who makes the

shows and that they would also watch an episode before anyone else.

"It has been a very exciting few weeks for them, from the brilliant visit to the Buckatree Hall Hotel and then to meeting Mr Reed and his puppet for the show.

"I know there's a few pupils who were very interested in the hospitality industry and others in the television industry. Perhaps Lawley has some of the BBC producers and hotel owners of the future.

"We'd like to thank Mr Jenson from the Buckatree for organising the initial trip and Mr Reed for visiting."

Improved train timetable is on right track

More than 50 representatives of businesses, councils, tourism and community groups between Shrewsbury and Swansea have welcomed an improved timetable for the Heart of Wales railway line.

Professor Paul Salveson, a lecturer and consultant on railway policy, was a speaker at the meeting held this week.

He said: "The railway improvements could be the cata-

lyst for wider and sustainable development of Mid Wales which brings social, economic and environmental benefits but which respects and celebrates the distinctiveness of the area."

The Heart of Wales Line Forum is hoping the new timetable - which will see an extra train brought into service in May - will be the first step towards improved operational service, and is focusing on the

rail franchise in 2018. Alongside this will be a new social enterprise developing local ideas for community rail and inviting participation across the area and sharing resources.

Forum chairman and Shropshire councillor Mansel Williams said: "I would like to thank the Welsh Minister, Edwina Hart, who has supported and guided work towards an improved train service on the Swansea to

Shrewsbury line. The Forum's paper Unlocking Mid Wales outlines plans to work in the community and with local businesses to make better use of railway assets, while helping to regenerate the Mid Wales region in a sustainable way."

The line was recently featured on the BBC's Great British Railway Journeys series with Michael Portillo and in the French TV travel show Belles Echapees.

Coffee cash to boost charities

A group of ladies have donated £800 to charity raised through their weekly coffee morning at the United Reformed Church in Newtown.

The coffee mornings are held at 10am every Saturday, and ladies have donated £200 each to Hope House, Motor Neurone Disease, Leukaemia/Cancer research and the Hafan Day Hospice in Newtown.

John Cooper from Newtown URC said he was impressed and proud of the ladies.