

PIKE'S Bird Guide to Britain



ALL BIRDS IN COLOUR

by Chris Pike
Fourth Edition

PIKE'S BIRD GUIDE TO BRITAIN – Special Edition



his fourth edition of *Pike's Bird Guide to Britain* is dedicated to the memory of the **Honorable Christopher John Pike**, affectionately known to family and friends (and we are all friends here!) as *Chris*.

Pike's Guide as it came to be known, has long been an invaluable companion for birdwatcher, ecology student and back-garden naturalist alike. But what of the man behind the publication?

Fortunately, late in 2017, Chris shared some memories of his life growing up in North Devon. Like a chance encounter with his favourite of birds, the *robin*, we are rewarded for our patience and attention with a glimpse of one of life's treasures and some insights into embracing the simple pleasures of life.

Robin... that most understated of birds, and yet one, perhaps because of his boldness and familiarity, is held with such deep affection by all whose path he crosses.

Born into a farming family in 1965, Chris was raised in the countryside at *Yeoford*, before later moving to the *Old Torrington Road in Barnstaple* at the end of 1999. Although not one to dwell on the past, he could incredibly, tell you the DAY of your birth in seconds (if you first gave him the month, date and year). And then he'd recite both the day and full date of your birthday when you next met! Despite living very much in the present day, when asked, he recalled going to school in *Yeoford* with some affection. *"It was good. We did writing. Looked at books. I played football with the other children outside..."* But it was on the farm where Chris' love of birds and the *robin* in particular, began. *"There were cows. On the farm. Some sheep. Lots of them. The farmer-man looked after the cows and sheep. Went to market. I didn't go. Looked at the birds. Robin. And Blackbird... My favourite's the robin."* Chris had no brothers or sisters and so, when his father later died, it was, *"Just me*

and Mum.” “Nice living there. Right on top of a hill. Brinsmead. Lots of birds...”

Why is it that we are drawn to some birds more than others? Could it be that the shaman of old are right? That the creatures we are drawn to, which we notice when they cross our path (or are curious about when they don't) in some way reflect qualities we have within ourselves - have come to teach us more about ourselves?

Perhaps that is something to ponder for another time. But listening to Chris's life story and knowing what we do of the *robin*, we can certainly appreciate how the two had a kinship and maybe (if we should choose to tarry a while) bring us *Lessons for a Life Well-Lived*.

LESSON ONE: Share your song and celebrate life...

Despite being a larger-than-life character in all sorts of ways, Chris was very much the *humble celebrity* in his adult life. It was through his contact with the *Silver Lodge Day Centre* that he became active in the local community. He enjoyed the company of friends and was not averse to hard work. So, it was no surprise when he volunteered for a council project, *Green Force*, clearing footpaths and tidying estates, picking up litter and clearing brambles. Thinking back on that time, he recalled how with his friends, “*Craig, Arthur and quite a few others... we wore gloves. It was prickly. I cut back the grass growing over the paths, with a spade.*”

They were paid by the council, but for Chris it was more about “*Keeping everywhere beautiful... Put the litter in the bags. Collected it all. Then the bags were left by the bins for the council to pick up.*”

The social side of it appealed to Chris too. After all the hard work, “*We'd go for lunch at Fremington Quay.*” Picnic lunch consisted of, “*...Whatever Mum packed. Pork baps. A drink of coffee in a flask - a blue Thermos. With sugar. Yogurt. A creamy one. Blackcurrant. No cakes!*” And this tradition continued even after the work for *Green Force* came to an end.

LESSON TWO: Enjoy the moment...

But it was not all work and no play... A man of simple tastes, Chris's pipe and *St. Bruno* tobacco was never far away. A visit to the pub with friends to

play skittles on Mondays, would inevitably see him take a break outside for “...a smoke”, always the gentleman – taking his leave with a smile. And then Tuesdays and Drama group, where he would embrace his 'inner-performer' with acting and improvisation, singing and dancing. Sunday afternoon would be a time for walks in the countryside, “...with Auntie Jean” and undoubtedly a bit of birdwatching. “*You have to be quiet. Sometimes I take photographs. Look at books about birds. Draw them...*”

As the poet, William Henry Davies wrote,

“*What is this life if, full of care/ We have no time to stand and stare...?*”
LESSON THREE: *Be joyful!*

“*A smile was never far from his lips...*” recalled another Chris – an instructor and friend from his *Green Force* days. “*He often saw the funny side of things. And when he did, it was difficult to stop him laughing.*” Undoubtedly, those twinkling eyes with their long dark lashes, would flash and “*Inevitably others would join in...*”

No birdwatching that day, I imagine!

*And finally, for now... LESSON FOUR: **When speaking (or singing!) be heard...***

A man of few words, when Chris did have something to say, there was a quiet power in his expressions, often accompanied by that aforementioned twinkle in his eye...

A gentle-giant of a man, *Christopher John Pike*, like his beloved robin, had a voice which claimed your attention. Memorable because of that unique quality of tone which stayed with you, long after his 'song' had been sung.

'Hope' is the thing with feathers - Which perches in the soul - And sings the tune without the words - And never stops at all...

Emily Dickinson

The Honourable Christopher John Pike (28th February 1965 - 28th February 2018)

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