

# BORN TO BE WILD!

» Talking Point

Liz Nicholls talks to Reggie Heyworth, owner of Cotswold Wildlife Park, the UK's largest privately owned Wildlife Park, recently voted one of the top zoos in Europe.

**Q. Could you tell us about growing up with your father John who founded CWP?** "His first interest was always animals, whether it was cows or horses on the farm at home or ornamental ducks and exotic birds in a little aviary in the garden. I cannot think of him without always remembering his love of animals, especially his Labradors, which were always by his side."

**Q. How did you feel about the risk taken to establish Cotswold Wildlife Park at your family home?** "I think most of my father's friends thought he was mad, but he was determined and knew what he wanted to do. Others, such as Longleat and Woburn, were opening safari parks at the same time, but my father always wanted to get people out of the car to enjoy the countryside and appreciate the trees and gardens as well as the animals."

**Q. What experiences during your childhood fired your passion for wildlife?** "Having pets at home was always a big feature. I remember my father giving an African Grey Parrot to my older sister for her birthday once. All the books I read were about animals; I think Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals* was the first book I ever read on my own."

**Q. Do you have a favourite animal?** "I love the white rhinos more than any other animal here, especially as I spent five years in Tanzania working in rhino conservation."

**Q. How do you feel about conservation and the work the Park does?** "It's a big subject and difficult to encapsulate in a few words. Having worked in rhino conservation in Tanzania, I feel strongly about what organisations such as Cotswold Wildlife Park should be trying to do to help animals in the wild and to help the communities who have to look after them. It is a never-ending battle, but great work is being done and we should always keep optimistic about the future."

**Q. Is there a particular bit of feedback you have received from visitors or children that stands out?** "We get a lot of lovely postings on our feedback page and also through social media such as TripAdvisor. I think one of the things I most appreciate is that people feel the Park is so beautiful and relaxing, and is not too commercial. Of course, everybody loves the animals and the gardens but it is really nice to hear when they appreciate the beauty of nature all around them."

[www.roundandabout.co.uk](http://www.roundandabout.co.uk)

**Q. Please tell us about Tusk Trust!** "I'm very proud of my association with Tusk Trust, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year and supports 50 projects and communities in sub-Saharan Africa. Tusk is very fortunate to have HRH Prince William as Royal Patron, who is incredibly supportive and devotes time and energy to conservation in the third world, especially in Africa."

**Q. What are your greatest hopes for future generations of wildlife lovers?** "I hope future generations learn that nature is theirs to look after as well as to enjoy and I hope a visit to the Wildlife Park makes even the smallest child in some way aware of the beauty of nature and of their responsibilities to protect it."

**Q. What is your proudest moment so far?**

"The birth of Astrid, on 1st July 2013; our first ever baby white rhino. I wish my father – who founded the Wildlife Park in 1970 and who died in November 2012 at the ripe old age of 87 – had been alive to see the birth of Astrid."

**Q. What is the best life lesson you've learnt?**

"Always take the road less travelled!"

● Cotswold Wildlife Park, Bradwell Grove, Burford, OX18 4JP. Call **01993 823006**. Visit [www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk](http://www.cotswoldwildlifepark.co.uk) and [www.tusk.org](http://www.tusk.org) for more on Tusk Trust.

