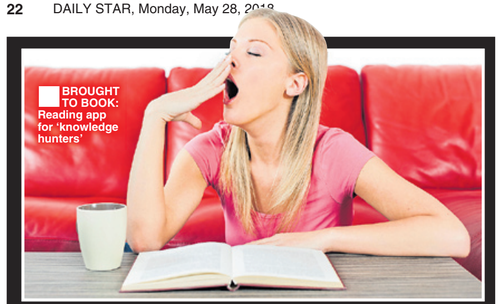

BROUGHT TO BOOK: Reading app for 'knowledge hunters'

SNOWFLAKES TOO BUSY FOR BOOKS

■ by PAUL DONNELLEY

MILLENNIALS who are too lazy or too busy to read a book now have a helping hand.

Phone app Blinkist has condensed 2,500 non-fiction books into 15-minute text or audio chunks so people can claim to be far more widely read than they actually are.

They include Charles Darwin's On The Origin Of Species and John Preston's A Very English Scandal, which has been adapted into BBC One's current Sunday evening three-part drama. Technology, self-help and business books are also popular.

Co-founder Holger Seim said men aged 25-40 are the main customers for the app, which costs £11.49 a month.

He said: "We call them knowledge hunters. People who want to advance in their career and improve their personal life."

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TV WILDLIFE STAR IS AS PASSIONATE AS EVER...AND A TAD WASPISH

'I don't like many human beings ...they are massively overrated'

NATURE NATURAL: Chris with furry friend. Left, relaxing. Right, with Springwatch co-hosts Martin Hughes-Games, Michaela Strachan and Gillian Burke

Pictures: TIM MERRY

CHRIS'S FAVOURITES

TV SHOW – Game Of Thrones
FILM – Blade Runner, the original
COMEDIAN – Stewart Lee
SPORTS STAR – Muhammad Ali
ACTOR – Audrey Hepburn
SONG – Shout Above The Noise by Penetration
APP – Twitter
FOOD – Cheese
DRINK – Coconut water
HOLIDAY DESTINATION – I never do holidays. I haven't got time.
NON-HOLIDAY DESTINATION – White Sands National Park, New Mexico. Nothing but white sand and blue sky. The ultimate karma.
ANIMAL – Scratchy. No doubt about that

Chris Packham Naturalist

THE MIKE WARD INTERVIEW

CHRIS Packham is annoyed with himself.

He's telling me about the queen wasp he found on his windowsill yesterday, which was desperately trying to escape.

"She was all but exhausted," he sighs. "I thought: 'Oh God, if I'd opened the window earlier she'd have been able to get out.

"I don't like it when I'm negligent. I gave her some sugar solution, then left her outside. I hope she made it."

Now at this point there will be people thinking: "A wasp? He cares that much about a wasp? What are wasps even for?"

But Chris gives a stock reply when people ask this. "My retort is simple," he says. "What are YOU for..?"

Yes, as he kicks off his 10th year as co-host of BBC Two wildlife series Springwatch, back tonight for a further three-week run, Packham is as passionate and outspoken as ever. We wouldn't want him any other way.

"I like wasps," he insists, defiantly. "I like foxes as well.

Helpless

"Everything's there to do a job in the ecosystem. Wasps are part of the cycle of life. They're important insect predators. And they don't sting you if you behave."

Yes, this whole cycle-of-life thing: Springwatch is big on that. But occasionally, as it monitors our wildlife going about its business – from barn owls, badgers to bats and beyond – it can make tough viewing.

I tell Chris I got genuinely upset last year by its close-up footage of tiny, helpless wagtail chicks being ruthlessly snatched from their nest by a jay. He must think I'm a right wuss.

"There's nothing wrong with you feeling that way," he assures me.

"That's how most of our viewers feel.

"But, ultimately, think of the jays. Somewhere a nest of young jays needed those wagtail chicks in order to survive.

"And their own nest would then be raided by buzzards. Again, it's that cycle."

In Chris's view, we're the species whose actions are the worst, taking way too much from nature, wrecking its balance. "In the end we'll break ourselves," he warns.

So can a show like Springwatch, with filmed reports, online extras, plus live footage of wildlife at its Cotswolds base, provide a wake-up call?

"We don't do campaigning," he says, "but we generate awareness and affinity.

"We celebrate British wildlife because it's brilliant, as exciting as anywhere in the world. We try to build a community who'll love it and care for it.

"We want people to understand that life for most of these animals is a real struggle."

"We", of course, is not just Chris. Alongside him on Springwatch again this year is Michaela Strachan. They go way back.

"We have a different outlook on many things," he admits. "But we have a great friendship and enormous professional respect. She's also a very strong woman. I don't like many human beings – they are massively overrated – but I like Michaela a lot."

Chris also famously loves Scratchy, his pet poodle. And for some people, he believes, caring for a dog can often be a significant step towards learning to care for nature.

"The dog is part of your family," he says, "and it teaches young people to respect life.

"As far as I'm concerned, it's as important as my stepdaughter. It's a child, in that sense, a dependent. But that's very different from what's happening in your garden and over the fence.

"There, our responsibility is to make sure nature's balance remains harmonious. If we get it wrong, it goes to hell in a handcart."

As for Springwatch's fanbase, Chris likes the idea of people discovering the show almost by accident.

"I want someone who's popped round to see a mate and found Springwatch is on because that mate is vaguely interested in it.

"They're expecting to chat about football, but then they see this thing on TV that's more interesting.

"Not that that's hard to achieve, mind you, given the state of the game. Bloody hell, Man City, 100 points, what's the point of bothering..?"

Even Chris's passion for music has become a Springwatch feature. Just to amuse himself, he used to sneak in hidden song title references from favourite old bands – The Smiths, say, or The Clash.

"One highlight for me," he reveals, "was seeing a blog entry from a 16-year-old girl. That's a hard target audience for natural history TV.

"It said: 'I'd never heard of the Jesus And Mary Chain until Chris Packham mentioned them on Springwatch.

"'Now I've got all their albums – and my dad's getting me binoculars for Christmas!'"

Chris has that quote pinned to his office wall.

"It's the double whammy," he chuckles. "I should've retired at that point. I was never going to beat that!"

● *Springwatch starts tonight on BBC Two at 8pm.*

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