

## THE HERD IS GROWING

It is almost a year now since Cleckheaton's Spoken Word Group, "Talking Zebras" started meeting on Saturday afternoons and in the past twelve months the group has become a vibrant presence on the West Riding Folk and Arts scene.

The group, which meets in the upstairs room at The Commercial on Bradford Road, has grown steadily from their occasional sessions to a well-attended session on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Saturday of every month (2:20pm onwards) with membership rarely dropping below a dozen and regularly pushing towards two dozen participants and listeners.

Members take it in turns to read or recite their favourite pieces of poetry, prose or monologue, with a varied mix of Shakespeare, Auden, Les Barker, Carol Ann Duffy and many more, being heard alongside the members own writings. Anything goes apart from politics and religion and the meetings have attracted visitors from as far afield as Rotherham and Rochdale to join the local 'herd'.

However, the group is not content with just the regular sessions and are keen to get involved at local festivals and charity fundraisers. In addition to some members taking part in "Lend Us Your Ears – an evening of verse" which raised £720 in June for Kirkwood Hospice, the organisers were proud to run an event at The Brighthouse Arts Festival on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> September to raise money for the Bradford Cinderella Club.

Now the club is organising a Poetry Competition for local school children, to encourage the enjoyment of poetry in the younger generation. Marni Quantrill Wales, aged 10, who is a Talking Zebra herself, came up with the idea, hoping to get other children involved. After writing poetry at school, she said "once you do it, it's quite interesting."

The competition is open to pupils aged 5 to 11 studying at participating local schools and they will be asked to write a new poem on the theme of "Animals". The competition, which runs until early November, will be judged by a panel of club members including Barbara Schiff, Judith Stones and Jim Saville who are all published poets in their own right. Prizes are offered to the best 2 poems in the 2 age divisions [KS1 & KS2] thanks to local sponsors, including Ponderosa in Heckmondwike. In addition the club will publish winning poems on their website and in event programmes.

Rebecca Martin, Head Teacher at Birkenshaw Primary School says "This is a fantastic idea as it gives local primary schools the opportunity to work with the community and our pupils to write for a purpose. This makes writing more engaging and meaningful for the children."

Winners will be notified in time to have their work read out at the Talking Zebras 1<sup>st</sup> Birthday Party which will be in the form of a concert taking place at the Moorlands on the evening of November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013. The poems may be read by the writers themselves or, if the writers prefer, by one of the clubs' regular performers. Tickets for this concert can be obtained from co-host David Lindsay on 07900 695873. New members and sponsors for events/competitions are always welcome and details about the group and their upcoming events can be found on their website - [www.talkingzebras.co.uk](http://www.talkingzebras.co.uk)