



Newsletter of the Manchester Wildlife Group

The Magpie

ISSUE NUMBER 6

SUMMER 1987.

PLANT SALE * PLANT SALE * PLANT SALE * PLANT SALE * PLANT SALE

31 Stanley Road, Whalley Range on Sunday 28th June 1987 .11am - 5pm.

Open to members and the public, wild and garden plants, bulbs and water plants will be on sale to boost our funds. 'Phone 226 2029 and ask for Shaun or Rachel if you need directions or any further details.

The Wild Side of Town "Safaris"

The B.B.C. television programme, the Wild Side of Town will be broadcast in five weekly parts on B.B.C. 1 at 11 p.m. starting on Tuesday the 19th of May (which by now will have passed). It will also be repeated on B.B.C. 2, but we do not, as yet, know when.

As a follow up to the series we are organising four Wild Side of Town "Safaris", which will be walks in urban areas and the adjacent open spaces. These are as follows:-

1/ Hough End Clough. Sunday 21st June at 3 p.m. Leader Ian Brown. Meet at Hough End Crescent at the south end of Alexandra Road South. Car parking on Hough End Crescent and Mauldeth Road West, Chorlton. (OS Ref. SJ 834936)

2/ Hyde - Peak Forest Canal - Tame Valley. Wednesday 1st July at 7 p.m. Leader Alan Bamforth. Meet outside Hyde Town Hall, Market Place, Market Street, Hyde. Adequate car parking in the vicinity. (OS Ref. SJ 948949)

3/ Moston Brook. Tuesday 7th July at 7 p.m. Leader Steve Watson. Meet at the car park, east of Broadway (New Moston) and south of Moston Brook and $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile north of Oldham Road. (OS Ref. SJ 889018)

4/ Chorlton Ees. Sunday 12th July at 3 p.m. Leader David Bishop. Meet at Ivy Green car park, Brookburn Road, Chorlton (South of Chorlton Green). (OS Ref. SJ 813933)

We hope many members will take part in the walks and be prepared to help the leaders if they are well attended.

Future Meetings.

As choosing different days for our meetings from Thursdays has failed to attract those members who requested them from July onwards meetings are to be held where possible on the last Thursday of each month.

Wednesday 24th June 1987 at 13 Ruskin Avenue, Rusholme M14.

Thursday, 30th July 1987 at 31 Stanley Road, Whalley Range M16.

Thursday, 27th August 1987 at 1, Gaddum Road, Didsbury.

Thursday, 24th September 1987 at 82 Crantock Drive, Heald Green.

All meetings start at 7.30pm and are open to all members. Lifts to and from meetings can usually be arranged if you contact Shaun in advance (226 2029).

Join the Amateurs.

We have a number of EXTREMELY INTERESTING jobs that need doing on a regular basis and are VERY ENJOYABLE such as:

- typing and composing letters and articles;
- compiling and distributing newsletters;
- attending incredibly interesting meetings;
- applying for grants and sponsorship.

If you can spare one or two evenings a month please get in touch (Shaun 226 2029).

Fairbrother Conference.

The next Conference of urban wildlife groups is being organised by the Lancashire Trust for Nature Conservation and is to be held at Manchester Town Hall on Saturday July 25th to Sunday July 26th. If you wish to attend please let Shaun know (226 2029).

Wildlife Site Decimated

Jan Brown

A short time ago we objected to a planning application at Gurzon Green, Offerton. The plan was to build houses in a large garden which had become overgrown and a good wildlife habitat. Stockport Council refused planning permission on a unanimous vote. They then wrote to the Nature Conservancy Council about the possibility of designating the site as being of special scientific interest.

On the first working day of the following week, the developer, Roy Howarth Ltd., of Hale, cut down all the trees on the site except for a few, most of which were protected by a tree preservation order. We must point out that the developer acted entirely within the law, as far as we know, but it is, putting it mildly, a little insensitive to almost clear fell a wooded area at the start of the nesting season, particularly a planning permission had not been granted.

It would seem obvious that the law should offer more protection for such sites so that they cannot be destroyed before their wildlife value is established one way or the other.

Needless to say most of the local people were extremely upset and we will continue to support them in their efforts to fight the present application and also a new one which has recently been submitted.

The Wild Side of Town

CHRIS BAINES, April '87
Vice-Chairman of the Urban Wildlife Group
Vice-Chairman of the British Wildlife Appeal

There is plenty of exciting wildlife, living right in the heart of town. In fact, whilst the farming countryside has become more and more hostile, with poisonous chemicals, brutal mechanisation, and the dramatic destruction of hedgerows and other habitats, our towns have become cleaner, safer, and a good deal wilder, too.

The 'official' urban greenspace is pretty uninspiring of course - most parks and recreation grounds are still little more than green deserts, with their close-mown grass and lollipop trees, but in every town there is a great deal of unofficial wildspace too, and this is where the wildlife lives. If you just think back for a moment, to the secret, wild place where you used to play as a child - where you built dens, caught tadpoles and climbed trees, then you'll be remembering the kind of landscape that wildlife thrives in. We have thousands of acres of so-called 'derelict wasteland', overgrown with bramble, long grass and stinging nettles. Some of it is waterlogged, with ponds for frogs to breed in. Much of it has been undisturbed for so long that it has developed into pioneer woodland. Our churchyards and cemeteries are very important for wildlife in towns. They were very neat and tidy once, but now they are often overgrown. Many of them date back hundreds of years, to a countryside which was free from pesticides. They have survived as tiny relics of the past, and often contain uncommon wildflowers and butterflies.

One particularly important feature of the wildlife habitat in towns, is the continuous network of green corridors. The railway embankments, canals, streams and road-verges provide a wild, green communication system for wildlife. A city fox or hedgehog can commute around these green corridors in relative safety, calling in at the wildlife service stations along the way.

Perhaps the most important resource of all, for urban wildlife, is the wealth of private gardens. Together they cover over a million acres in Britain, and more and more of them are being actively managed for wildlife. By planting nectar flowers for butterflies, feeding the birds in winter, creating ponds and mini-meadows, banning the use of chemicals, and tolerating a little more untidiness, even the smallest of gardens can become a valuable wildlife sanctuary, bringing nature to the doorstep, and providing more pleasure for less effort.

Our world is in a mess. The tropical rain forest is being destroyed, the farming countryside has been sterilised, but at least in the heart of town, where most of us live, wildlife is thriving, and many people are going out of their way to improve their immediate environment.

This summer, following on from my BBC TV Series 'The Wild Side of Town', there will be Safaris in over 150 different Towns and Cities around Britain. Shell U K are sponsoring a major competition to encourage people to study their local neighbourhood habitats, and there will also be a major exhibition - called 'The Wild Side of Town', at the British Museum of Natural History, from 19th May onwards. If you're the kind of person who wants future generations to have wildflowers, birds and butterflies to enjoy, then you must get involved now, in helping the wildlife that lives on your doorstep. TOMORROW IS TOO LATE!

More Close up Photography - Ian Brown

The articles on photography in the Winter and Spring issues of the Newsletter may have left some of you with the impression that this is a complicated subject. It's all those calculations that do it and they make my head spin a little at times. But the calculations are the easy part. The tricky bit is the time and patience required to take a good photograph once you have worked out the aperture and flash distance etc.

Plants are not too bad as they do at least stay relatively still, but it seems that insects have minds of their own and can lead you a merry dance.

Of course it helps to know something about their habits. Let me tell you about my efforts to photograph a dragonfly undergoing metamorphosis.

On the 14th of July last year I took a quick look at my garden pond in the early morning, as is my wont. To my surprise I noticed some dragonfly larvae emerging. No film in the house (moral, be prepared). A quick trip to the local newsagents remedied this situation and shortly after I was all set up to take snaps of the happy event. After a while I realized I had been focusing on an ex-larva so I quickly found one which was still alive. This remained half in and half out of the water for some hours until at 5.30 the sun went in and the day became cooler. In my ignorance, at the time, I assumed dragonflies would prefer warm sunny conditions for their metamorphosis, so I packed up for the day and went to the laundrette to wash a few rags for my forthcoming holiday.

On return I found the thing had dissappeared. Later I saw another larva so I thought I would try again next day.

Starting at 6.30 the following morning I set up my equipment again and waited for something to happen. As the larva came up a bit and then went down a bit I got the feeling I had done all this before (the previous day in fact) and I realized it was watching me watching it and probably thinking "I'll wait until he goes away again". At 8.30 in the evening I gave up and went inside. A few minutes later I came out only to find the larva at the top of a water soldier leaf. As soon as it saw me it went back into the water. I thought "stealth is required" and I retreated to watch from a distance and sure enough it came up again and stayed where it was. Creeping back to the pond I set up my equipment again and at 10.30 things started to happen (including the flash gun falling in the pond) and I was able to take a sequence of photographs of the metamorphosis.

For those of you interested in such things here is the timing of events:-

- 9.00 p.m. Larva secured at the top of water soldier leaf.
- 10.30 p.m. Change starts with the dragonfly's head breaking through larva case.
- 10.35 p.m. Head and body come further out until at.....
- 10.40 p.m. Most of the body is out with the head hanging down almost to the water. Flash falls into pond when I cut an obscuring leaf.
- 11.19 p.m. Still in same position but legs must be dry because at.....
- 11.20 p.m. The dragonfly arches back to clasp the thorax of its larva with its feet and withdraw the remainder of its tail which then hung down to the water.
- 11.21 p.m. Blood is then pumped from the body into the wings which expand to their full length by.....
- 11.36 p.m. Wings start to dry out and body shrink, though I am not sure how long this takes as I went to bed at midnight.

Next morning the dragonfly was ready for off. In theory it should have been blind, as it had endured about 50 blasts from a high powered flash gun from a metre distant. However, it seemed to be able to navigate and was one of seven which reached maturity in my pond last summer. It would seem that night time is as suitable as day time for metamorphosis and indeed at night the dragonfly would be less vulnerable to predation at a phase in its life when it would be defenceless.

It is about time to get back to the technical side of photography and as I promised in the last Newsletter I will tell you how to photograph more mobile forms of wildlife.

Photographing moving subjects using flash.

It is all very well using flash remote from the camera when you are taking a photograph of a subject which is still, like a plant or a dragonfly undergoing metamorphosis. If your subject is moving, such as a live butterfly, you will have to use the camera hand held. To make the use of flash possible a side extension must be devised so that the flash can be mounted away from the camera and angled towards the subject at about 45°. To do this I have used an 18 inch length of dexion strip, one end of which is secured to the camera by the tripod mount and the other end supports the flash gun on a ball and socket joint. The advantage of using dexion is that it has holes at one inch intervals which enables you to move the flash in relation to the camera.

Before you can make any calculations you must decide on the lens to be used. In the case of insects it is best to use a longer focal length lens, for example 100 mm, as this enables you to be further away from the subject and therefore less likely to disturb it. Next, decide the magnification necessary for the insect to fill the frame. This would vary with the size of insect; for a bumblebee it would be 1x or life size; for a dragonfly it would be .25x or ¼ life size or for a butterfly about .5x or ½ life size.

Let us assume that we are taking a photograph of a large butterfly using a 100 mm lens with a 50 mm extension tube to give a .5x magnification.

Put the lens and extension on the camera and the camera on a level surface. Use a model as your subject (such as a small bottle with a label). Adjust the distance between the camera and the model (with the lens set at infinity) until the model is in sharp focus. Measure the distance from the model to the film plane then set the flash at the same distance, from the lens centre, along the side extension. Now angle the flash so that it points at the model. Next, accurately measure the distance from the flash to the model. This time we have a fixed flash distance (Fd) so we will need to calculate the effective aperture (Fe) to get the correct exposure. This is done as follows:-

$$\frac{Gn}{Fd \text{ in metres}} = Fe. \text{ The } Gn = 30 \text{ or } 7.5 \text{ out of doors.}$$

Assume the Fd just measured to be .45M then the Fe will be:-

$7.5 \div .45 = (Fe) 16.6$. To find the marked aperture we divide the Fe by the magnification + 1 which in this case is 1.5. $16.6 \div 1.5 = 11.1$. Set the aperture on the lens to f11 and you are ready to take a photograph.

If however the aperture is to wide to give the depth of field you require, use a lens with a shorter focal length and a shorter extension tube so that the magnification remains the same. This will enable you to get nearer the subject, thus decreasing the Fd and therefore increasing the Fe. For example:-
 $Gn (7.5) \div Fd (.32M) = Fe (23.44)$. In this case the marked aperture is f16.

Now to find your butterfly. It is best to let it settle on a flower as you are less likely to disturb it whilst it is sipping nectar. Approach the chosen subject until you have it correctly framed and in sharp focus and then press the shutter.

There is a lot more to learn about close-up photography and perhaps I will return to the subject at a later date and also answer any queries you have. In the meantime if you are interested in learning more, then I urge you to attend the extra-mural studies course on Plant Photography at Manchester University. For further details contact Dr. Sean Edwards on 273 3333 ext. 3319 during work hours. If there is anything in these articles which you don't understand then contact me at 82 Crantock Drive, Heald Green, Cheshire. SK8 3HA remembering to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope if you want a personal reply.

SOWING A MEADOW.

SHAUN WILSON.

Summer is the best time for preparing the ground for sowing a grassland area in the Autumn. I started a woodland meadow from seed in late 1985 and this year it flowered - a changing tapestry of white hedge - garlic, red campion and fine grasses, with the occasional ox-eye daisy, buttercup, dandelion, forget-me-not, stitchwort and bluebell. Once established this must be the easiest way to provide colour and variety to the garden - no weeding or messing about - just mow it twice a year.

Choosing the site is crucial to your success. Meadow flowers do best in very poor soil - so don't put it on an ex-vegetable patch! You may be able to move topsoil to another part of the garden - leaving the less fertile sub-soil. As with other habitats the larger your meadow area the greater chance you have of attracting wildlife, so try not to make it smaller than 10 square yards.

Now select your meadow seed mixture by estimating how much sunlight your area will get and finding out the type of soil you have - wet or dry, sandy or clay. (If you are lucky you may have part of your garden which for some reason has been used for dumping concrete, plaster or some other limestone/chalk product. Such an area might sustain a limestone mixture of flowers and grasses - probably the most attractive type of meadow).

To give your meadow a chance to get established you need to deal with any weeds on your chosen plot now (midsummer). By weeds I mean such plants as chickweed, lesser willowherb and horsetail - if you have large amounts of dock or thistles it is probably best to choose elsewhere as these are very difficult to eradicate. Just how you decide to get rid of your weeds is between yourself and your conscience. A non-persistent herbicide such as Round-up is the easiest way but any weedkiller will harm your garden wildlife in some way even if the ends justifies the means. You could try burning off the weeds instead but the resultant ashes will enrich your soil (not good for meadows) as indeed will sprayed weeds unless you clear the dead plants away afterwards. Hand weeding is probably the safest bet but you must keep on pulling them out until you sow your seeds in August or September.

Your seeds will arrive with the flower seeds separate from the grass ones - mix them together and sow very thinly and evenly at approximately 4 gms a square yard. Create a fine tilth with your soil before sowing and incorporate the seeds lightly with a rake afterwards. Firm down the soil and water. Some seeds will germinate before winter which will give the meadow a head start in the following spring. Others will benefit from being "stratified" by the cold temperatures before germinating in the new year.

There are many wildflower seed merchants nowadays but make sure you use one selling guaranteed native seeds. This is because many of our insects are adapted to native plants even though foreign varieties are very similar to look at. The merchant we usually use is: Emorsgate Seeds, Terrington Court, Terrington St. Clement, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE34 4NT. If you are sowing an area smaller than 25 square yards please get in touch as we may be able to share an order between a few members.

DAWN CHORUS DAY

UNITY KELLY.

4am on a cool and still overcast Sunday morning and its International Dawn Chorus Day, celebrated wherever there are enthusiasts sufficiently eccentric (or well-organised) to obey their alarm clocks, or in some cases, to prolong their Saturday night-life in the cause of wildlife awareness. The half-hearted only made Hough End Clough for five o'clock - by which time there was more sunshine and less birdsong. The local constabulary had by then reported suspicious movements at Hough End but no further action was taken (as far as we know). Fortified by refreshments from Rex & Marie's mobile catering unit, the serious bird listeners were eavesdropping on the local fauna, not without vocal protests from the resident wren population. Expert identifications were provided by two new members, and as the sun lit up the bluebells of Hough End a second guided tour of the Clough departed downstream. 13 people attended and 19 bird species and a bank vole were logged.

The highlights of the occasion were the pair of blackcap (not so common as the willow warbler) disputing possession of a thornbush with a pair of dunnocks, and the handsome grey wagtail spotted alongside the Brook with the bank vole. A sylvan idyll indeed by urban standards, and at least another dozen bird species could be expected anywhere between Hough End and Castlefield. The message of Dawn Chorus Day is that wildlife is alive and well wherever you live and with a bit of help and encouragement could be even more so.

An Evening Spider Hunt

6.15 Monday 6 July
+ 6.15 Wednesday 8 July

meet at lychgate St James Church
opposite Fletcher Moss Museum
Stenner Lane Didsbury (Nr Cock Inn)

leader Dr Paul Selden

cost £1.85, ends 8.45, if poss bring hand lens.

'Evening stroll round the environs of Fletcher Moss Park where we shall see some of the great variety of spiders which inhabit our parks and gardens.'

Manchester Wildlife Group aims to protect places of wildlife interest and provide new wetland, woodland and meadowland habitats in our gardens and local neighbourhoods. At present we depend almost totally on our members' subscriptions to cover our running costs. Members receive the Magpie quarterly and can get help and advice with their wildlife gardens. If you want to know more about the group please contact Shaun Wilson at the address below. Articles, letters etc. are also always welcome.

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While every effort has been made to make sure that information given in the Magpie is correct, the group cannot be held responsible for any mistake in the text. Likewise any person undertaking any project based on information from this newsletter does so at their own risk.

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If you care about our City's wildlife please join us by filling in the form below and returning it with a cheque/P.O. made out to Manchester Wildlife Trust Ltd. to 31, Stanley Road, Whalley Range, Manchester M16 8HS. Members receive "Magpie" quarterly and are welcome to all meetings.

I would like to join Manchester Wildlife Group for one year and enclose the following:-

- * £6 - Family / Group.
- * £4 - Individual.
- * £2 - Unwaged, children under 16, Senior Citizens.

(* Please delete those that do not apply)

Which of our activities interest you the most ?
.....
.....

Name..... Tel.No.....

Address.....
.....

Signed.....Date.....