

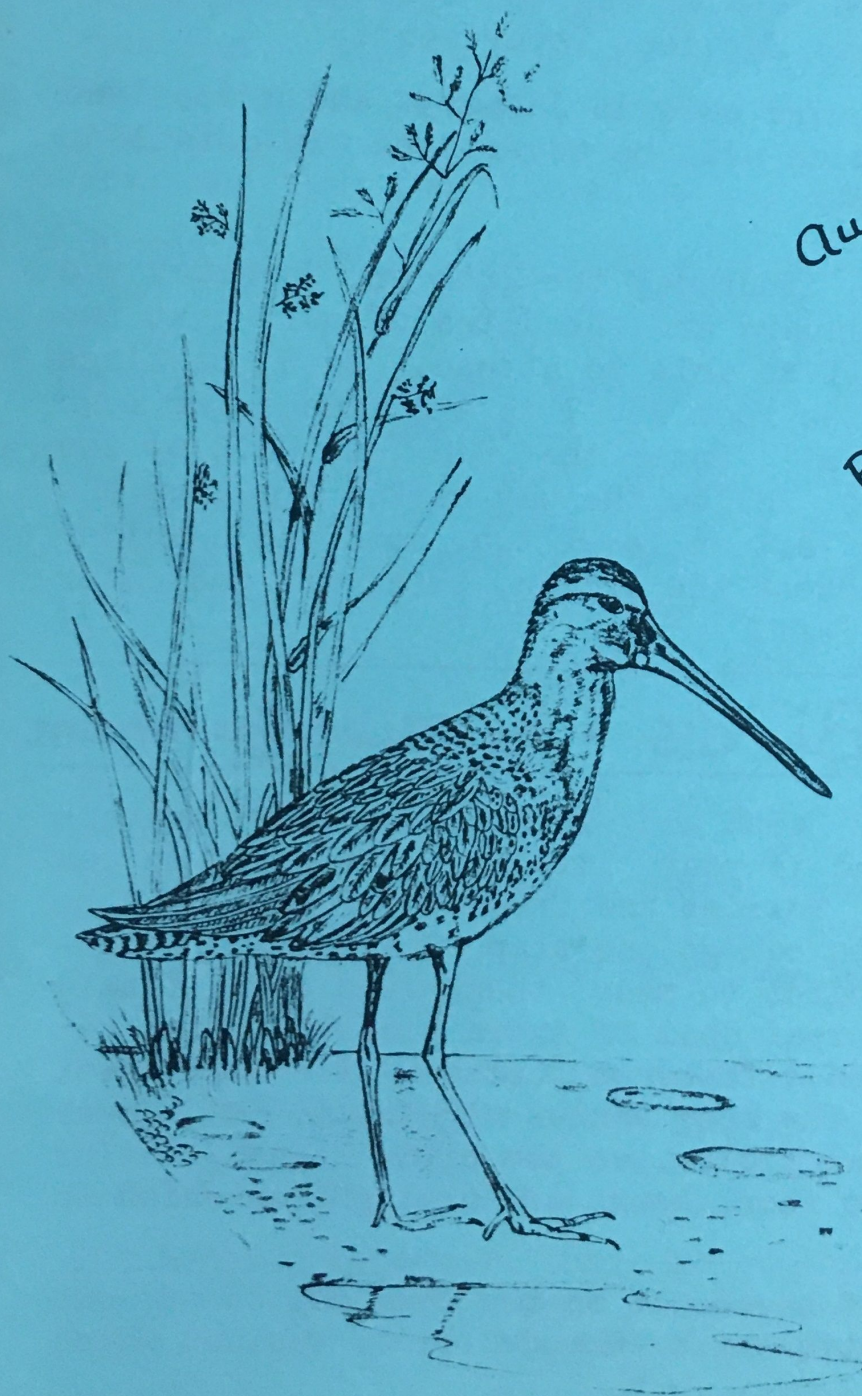


Newsletter of the Manchester Wildlife Group

# The Magpie

Number 11

Autumn 1988



Autumn Visitors

Slugs and Snails

Book Review

Feeding  
the Birds

Joke Competition

News



## Coming Events.

Tree Plant '88 - Our own tree planting will take place again, at Hough End and will be on the 19th/20th of November. Meet at Hough End Crescent, which is south of the junction of Alexandra Road South and Mauldeth Road West, from 10 a.m. onwards.

There will also be public plantings at Wythenshawe Park on the 6th of November and at Debdale on the 20th of November.

Trees will be available for public purchase between the 6th of November and the 4th of December at the following City parks:- Boggart Hole Clough, Heaton Park, Debdale, Platt Fields, Fog Lane and Wythenshawe. More details can be obtained from the Manchester City Recreational Services Department.

We hope to have a winter bird walk in January and a woodland walk in April, both of which will be advertised in detail in the next issue of "Magpie".

Wildlife Trust Meetings - Thursday the 24th of November and Thursday the 26th of January are the dates of our next two meetings. We hope you will be able to attend. Both meetings will take place in committee room No. 7 in the Manchester Town Hall Extension, at 7.30 p.m. Enter the Old Town Hall by the side door on Lloyd Street. Follow the way marked trail up the spiral stairway, turning left on level two, down the corridor to the second bridge. Accross the bridge, turn left and enter by the first door on the left. //

## Feeding the Birds - by Mike Garnham

Birds are the most easily seen and appreciated wild animals to visit your garden, and if your little patch of green can provide them with worms, berries and fresh water they will be quite happy. In winter you can go one step further by providing food, enticing the birds to show themselves more freely and giving yourself a great deal of extra pleasure. That bit of food can also mean the difference between life and death to a small bird. During the long winter nights, it is hunger not cold which is the real killer, as the birds loose a lot of weight and only have the short hours of daylight in which to make it up again.

Throwing a few scraps of bread out on the lawn may be of some help, but it hardly constitutes a balanced diet, besides which

some birds do not feed on the ground. The best food you could provide would be what the birds would choose for themselves, a mixture of berries, nuts, seeds etc., but for most of us it is a mix of kitchen scraps and specially bought food which are the main source.

Kitchen Scraps - Almost all your kitchen scraps can be used, except for highly seasoned and salty foods, (be careful to exclude salt because it can kill most small birds) and generally you need not worry about giving them food that will disagree with them as they will select what they want. Some of the best bird table foods are potato, (especially jacket baked), stale cake, uncooked pastry, raw minced meat, cooked chopped bacon rinds and cheese. You can use spare fat as binding to make bird puddings. Unedible or unsaleable fruit can also be put to good use. Apples, oranges, bananas and grapes are all excellent if you cut them up. I gathered a box full of windfall apples last year and they fed blackbirds and thrushes throughout the winter.

Specially Bought Food - There are several firms producing bird food mixes, which are an easy, if expensive way to solve the problem of what to put out. A supply of mixed seeds (especially sunflower seeds) and peanuts, and your birds will be well cared for. Peanuts are excellent food, being cheap, convenient and full of calories. They can be served, shelled from plastic or wire hoppers, or unshelled on a string for tits to play with. Coconut is also good but only in its shell, sawn in half and suspended upside down so the rain doesn't get in. You can also do a "Blue Peter" and use the shell as a Tit Bell. Desiccated or ground coconut must never be used as it will swell inside the birds' stomachs.

It's always best to avoid putting nuts out during the breeding season, because of difficulty some nestlings have digesting them. Under normal circumstances enough natural food should be available by then anyway. If you want to offer live insect food, meal worms or ants eggs can be bought from pet shops or bird seed suppliers.

The important time to offer food is between October and April when the birds' natural food is more hard to come by. Remember to throw out any seeds and nuts you may have left over in the spring, as they will not keep.

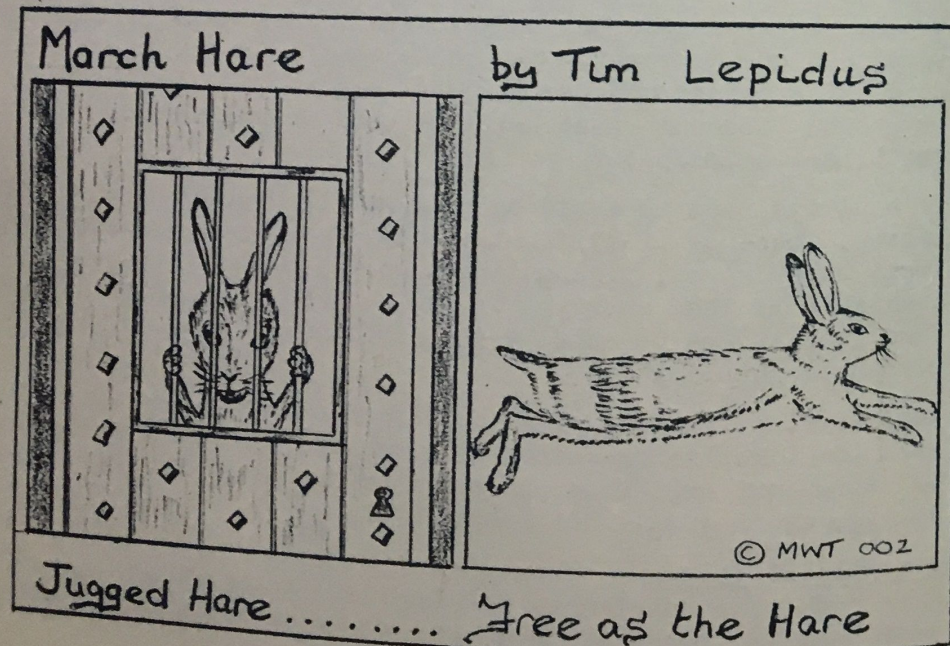
Pre-shelled Poison - There is at present no set limit on the level of toxic substances permissible in wild animal food, and last year 75 tonnes of peanuts contaminated with 250 parts per



billion (ppb) of a poison known as Aflatoxin (maximum limit in peanuts for human consumption 10 ppb) found their way into the shops. The poison, produced by a fungus, *Aspergillus Flavus*, causes cancer, liver damage and brittle bones in humans, and at 250ppb is enough to kill a horse never mind a Blue Tit. The contaminated nuts came from Brazil (where the offending fungus is endemic) and had been stored for a year longer than they should have been. From there they found their way on to the British bird food market after being certified unfit for humans, pigs, chickens and other domestic animals. These nuts probably headed for the sort of urban pet shop where they are dispensed unlabelled, loose and by the pound.

It is still safe to buy peanuts, by sticking to a company which markets the product in labelled packages, where the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food Certificate for its bird food won't permit any Aflatoxin above human consumption levels. Alternatively you can buy the loose brown (ie. not red) variety, coming from Africa or Asia, or unlabelled human fit peanuts to be found in greengrocers and health food stores.

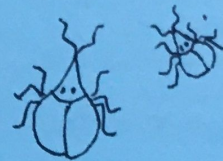
In the mean time something clearly needs to be done about a peculiar gap in the health regulations, not only for the birds but people could also eat these contaminated peanuts. //



## Joke Competition - Results.

This was a little disappointing as far as quantity of entries were concerned but we have three winners who will each receive a set of Longman Nature Guides and as promised here are the winning entries.

Claire Thomas.



Q. WHAT IS THIS?

A. THE LESSER OF TWO WEEVILS!

Philippa Lloyd (Aged 10).

Q. Why did the hedgehog cross the road?

A. To see his flat mate on the other side.

Mike Savage (Aged ?).

I saw a skylark in Newton Heath.  
I think it was lost!

(With apologies to residents of Newton Heath. Editor.)

These are not necessarily in order of merit except for the one from Mike Savage. Congratulations to the winners and prizes are on their way.

## Good News.

Reddish Vale.

We are pleased to report that the government have had a change of heart and has decided that this area of river valley should not now be sold for development. Instead, it has been decided to transfer Reddish Vale to the local authorities and now this pleasant area of our urban countryside will be saved for local people to enjoy. We would like to congratulate the "Save the Vale Campaign" on their efforts to bring about this result. We sent letters of objection to various people in authority and feel sure that these letters, together with many others which



must have been sent, will have played a part in persuading the government to change its mind. Add to this petition signatures and the mass rally at Reddish Vale in March and it proves that local people can play a part in protecting our open spaces.

#### Midland Railway Line.

Another bit of good news is that the Manchester City Council has passed a plan to create a cycleway/walkway on the Stockport to Didsbury section of this disused railway line. Work on this project should be completed by the end of March next year. It will then be possible to take a quiet route from Didsbury via Parrs Wood and the Mersey Valley almost into Stockport Centre. We hope that wildlife is given consideration when the route is constructed. //

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## Snail and Slug Survey - by Mandy North

The Department of Environmental Biology at Manchester University is organising a survey of snails and slugs, to determine patterns of distribution of the many species found in the North West of England. You may have seen the survey advertised in the last edition of "The Magpie".

The first and principal aim of the project is to list the common species found in a large number of sites. By comparing these lists, we hope to find evidence of competition between species which share a resource (e.g. eat the same plants), and a lack of competition between species which occupy different ecological niches. The survey should also provide clues to the conditions of the environment which allows one species to succeed over its rivals for a particular niche.

The survey will be complemented by laboratory studies of food preferences and aggression.

A second aim of the survey is to look at how widely different species are distributed, and how this compares with their relative abundance in individual sites.

The third aim of the survey is to record the spread of the worm-slug, Boettgerilla pallens, first recorded in Britain in 1972, but already known from a number of local sites.

Over 140 species of land snails and slugs occur in Great Britain; perhaps 60 in the North West of England. Some only live in specialised habitats, others occur widely. Six or more species

may be common in the same locality. The six are referred to as members of a "guild". Each guild member is sufficiently different from the others that it avoids a total overlap in its use of resources such as food. If two different sites are looked at, different species occur, and the position of one guild member is taken over by a new species. If one species replaces another over a large number of sites they probably occupy the same guild position. Sometimes, a single species may occupy the same guild position at all sites.

Gardens feature many foreign or improved native species of plants and present refuges for wildlife which are often warmer, more diverse, with more food and with lower levels of pesticide than many rural sites. Because of this richness, the membership of the molluscan guild may be more complete in gardens than in many other habitats.

Although the larger snails (Helix and Cepaea) hibernate, smaller snails and all slugs are active on frost-free days throughout the winter months. If you wish to take part in the survey please send for an information pack to Miss M. North, c/o Dr. S. Bailey Dept. of Environmental Biology, Williamson Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL. Any area can be chosen for the survey, e.g. your garden, local park, woodland, etc. It is anticipated that the survey will continue until May 1989. A copy of the survey results will be sent to all those participating. //

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## Autumn Visitors - by Donald and Jan McGeorge

As with each season, the autumn heralds a time of change, when the diverse plants and animals which inhabit our land, prepare themselves, in their different ways, for the winter to come.

Birds are no exception, and there are those largely resident species, be they thrushes or woodpeckers or members of the tit family, that may well stay within the confines of the British Isles but will nonetheless be on the move to some degree, as they establish feeding and roosting areas to keep them through the winter months.

Equally, there are those, such as yellow wagtails, house and sand martins, swallows and whitethroats, which are now heading for, if not having already arrived at, their African wintering quarters.



Then there are the birds which come to our warmer shores to escape the harsher climates of Northern Europe, Greenland and beyond. These will include thrushes, hawks, wading birds, members of the crow clan and many more.

The Mersey Valley has the good fortune to coincide with one of the migration flyways and thus gives us chance to sample this bird movement.

Previous autumns have thrown up some interesting rarities such as last year's bittern and the "trans-atlantic" long-billed dowitcher, both at Sale Water Park's Broad Ees Dole, albeit only briefly.

Numbers of snipe should be building up at the Dole, and duck species such as goldeneye, and particularly pochard and tufted duck, will be coming in to Chorlton Water Park.

The first redwing and fieldfare can be expected as temperatures on and around their summer breeding grounds in Northern Europe are falling.

Priory Gardens, which meet Dane Road in Sale, should see the build-up of the odd winter flock of small woodland species including possibly, long-tailed tit, treecreeper, and siskin, amongst the more common blue, great, and coal tits. The great-spotted woodpecker could also now be showing there.

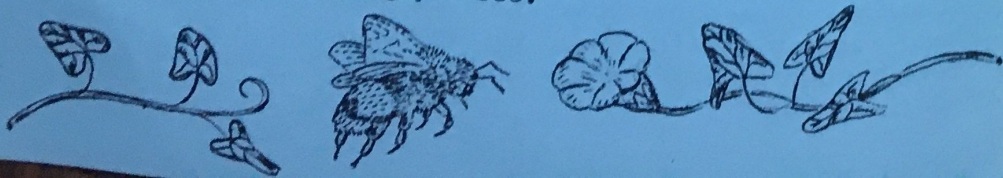
The autumn months can be a fascinating aspect of wildlife; be it familiar birds arriving from the continent, some feeding in your garden perhaps, or more unusual species on their way from coast - to - coast, all make the safeguarding of their and our wildlife habitats extremely worthwhile. //

## Poet's Corner.

### Gardens

by Philippa Lloyd (aged 10)

Bumble bee come and pollinate my garden,  
Coming and going, busy like a bee should be.  
Pollinate our trees; pollinate our flowers;  
Pollinate everything you see.



## Book Review - by Jan Boucher

THE BIRD TABLE BOOK - By Tony Soper.

Published by David and Charles at approx. £10. ppl92 Hard Back

The ideal of the Garden as a wildlife refuge may seem like a recent discovery. Not so, just consider the humble bird table with its long history stretching back to the provision of dove cotes in medieval times. For over twenty-one years one little gem of a book, THE BIRD TABLE BOOK, has been espousing the importance of the bird table as a necessary part of any garden. This book has recently been revised and re-printed for the new generation of ecologically aware gardeners.

The author, Tony Soper, is well known on television, the radio and in print for his expertise and love of the bird world and also for his ease and naturalness of presentation. So, if you are interested in attracting avian wildlife to your garden, providing them with the things they need, and understanding a bit more about their behaviour, then look no further because this book will tell you all you need to know, and more.

The text, though sometimes presented with what, to my mind are somewhat twee drawings, is an excellent example of good nature writing. Information is easily extracted but to read the book straight through is a pleasure and conveys the feelings of achievement that can be gained by following the step by step instructions contained therein. I am sure that most people can gain something from this book.

I have not read any earlier editions but it is easy to see the recent revisions made in the light of a new understanding of urban ecology and the effect of pesticides. The Bird Table is now seen as an integral part of any wild garden, providing an amenity to a wide variety of wildlife.

My only cavil is to a large chunk of the book being given over to the section on "Species Description" which seems to be a little useless without matching diagrams. //

Editor's Note - I think I should read this book as the birds don't seem to fancy the food I offer them. Maybe they are used to the banquet provided by Mike Garnham and have by now become a little fussy.



## More Good News.

North Reddish mini-wood - Earlier this year, we were asked, by June Greaves, to draw up a landscape plan for an area of open land in North Reddish. The site is surrounded by houses and is not likely to be developed. The plan has been accepted, with a few alterations to fulfil the wishes of local residents. After a lot of very hard work, by June, funds have been provided by Stockport Council and two commercial sponsors which will make it possible to plant trees this month. Two task days have been arranged with the Stockport Conservation Volunteers, for work to take place. The dates are the 16th and 30th of October, and if any member would like to join in, please ring Ian Brown, on 437 7040 for directions and further information. //

## Flower Power. - by Ian Brown

When wildlife is brought to our attention on the media or when conservation organisations are appealing for funds, usually it is animals which are the main subject of discussion. Plants do not always seem to have such a high profile. This is perhaps understandable because animals are generally more lovable than plants. Those who love wildflowers feel they should be given a little more consideration. Without plants animals could hardly survive. True, many plants need animals; insects to pollinate them, for example but some plants can survive without the help of animals. It is difficult to think of an animal which could survive without plants. They either feed on plants or on some animal which does so, or both.

Apart from trees, and some of our rarer wildflowers, plants do not seem to receive the care they deserve. In the countryside most of the crops are sprayed with herbicides and the flowers die. When was it that you last saw cornflowers growing amongst the wheat or barley. I worked for 25 years in connection with agriculture and don't remember seeing a cornflower in all that time. I did recently see many, growing in cornfields bordering the German Autobahns. Cornflowers are plentiful in Austria as the peasant farmers weed their crops by hand. So why not here?

Another threat to our wildflower meadows is development. Take the example of Blackwater Meadows in Bracknell District. This SSSI of national importance is to be lost to a huge M&S/Tesco superstore. The same fate could befall a fine hay meadow near Bruntwood Park in Cheadle. So the agricultural countryside is

not safe, not even SSSI's, but nature reserves should be. Many are owned by conservation organisations and hopefully are safe. Some nature reserves are the subject of management agreements between a landowner and the Nature Conservancy Council. These agreements are usually on short term leases and are not in all cases renewed so that management lapses and the reserve is, in effect, lost. This happened recently to an area, in Scotland, which is of national importance for Alpine flowers. Maybe this is a case for such places being in national ownership which we are told we cannot afford. Can we afford to lose such places?

What then is the solution? There is one, right here on our own doorstep. Our urban areas have many acres of land, which will not, for various reasons, be developed. Take City Parks as one example. In the past these have been managed too formally for them to be of much benefit to wildflowers but things appear to be changing. Some parks are being less formally managed and it will be interesting to see the results. Another area, where it might be possible to improve habitats for the benefit of wildflowers, are the river valleys. In these areas, much good work has been done to improve the environment but because of a lack of manpower the work inevitably tends to be concentrated where public activity is greatest. Thus, there are quite large areas which suffer from a lack of management and become dominated by coarse weeds and grasses which exclude the more delicate wildflowers. If some of the overgrown areas could be used for hay crops at various times between June and October then the plant diversity should increase. Of course, this would be of benefit to other wildlife and though we may not find ourselves swamped by rare plants, it must be remembered that it is generally the more common of the wildflowers, which are exploited by animals for their survival. //

## Thankyou B.T.C.V.

We would like to thank the B.T.C.V. for the use of their photocopier without which the economical production of the "Magpie" would not be possible. //

## Cover Competition.

Can you identify the bird on the front cover. There is a clue in this newsletter, so read it carefully. The first person to phone, 437 7040 with the right answer will receive a free pass to attend our tree planting at Hough End. //



# Membership Application Form.

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 and events.

I would like to join the Manchester Wildlife Group and enclose the following annual subscription:-

\* £6 - Family / Group.

\* £4 - Individual.

\* £2 - Unwaged, children under 16, Senior Citizens, etc.

(\* Please delete those that do not apply)

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

.....

.....

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

Address.....

.....

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

The Manchester Wildlife Group aims to protect places of interest and provide new wetland, woodland and meadowland habitats in our gardens and local neighbourhoods. At present we depend mostly on our members' subscriptions to cover our running costs. Members receive the Magpie quarterly and can get help and advice with their wildlife gardens. Members can participate in any events organised by the Group and even have the chance to become involved in the running of the Group, which can be very rewarding. If you would like to know more about the Group please contact the Chairman, Ian Brown on 437 7040 or the address below. Articles, letters etc. are always welcome.

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While every effort has been made to ensure that information given in the Magpie is correct, the Trust 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.