



MANCHESTER WILDLIFE'S OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

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Editorial

Editor's Office 437 7040

Well, that's it then, the Abbey Pond is no more! I would like to propose a vote of thanks to those hardy souls who braved the harsh, freezing conditions trying to save the pond and bringing its plight to public attention; at least the people of Manchester know about it now and I hope the Council, the Science Park and Hulme Regeneration have been suitably embarrassed. I heard that Dr. Allen (Director of the Science Park) commented on the protest saying he thought it was a lot of fuss over a little thing. Well, it's all right for him, living in lovely rural Wales, but the Abbey Pond was the last wild space in Hulme: no little thing to those living in that bleak inner city area.

On the 27th of July 1993, at the UDP inquiry, we were told by the Council that there was no planning application in for the site, but they have known about the development for years and the first application was filed on the 16th of July. Also, I believe that there was a plan which would have saved the pond but Hulme Regen (or Hulme Degen, as they are affectionately known, locally) quashed it. They don't seem to like wild open space; it doesn't fit in with their Urban Design Code, which appears to favour wall to wall concrete. It's a pity because it looks as though Hulme will become a void which Manchester Wildlife will just have to work around. //

"If it wasn't for the 'ouses in between"

by Roger Moore

Open Space v. Housing

Yes we are losing open space. The city planning department is "being economical with the truth" over this but I believe Government policy is the main problem. Over the last few years I can identify at least 7 sites near me in Longsight that have been built on. So, O.K., they weren't nature reserves but they were wildspaces, some with mature trees and well established habitats. They were good short-cuts too!

Most have been developed by Housing Associations to provide rented housing. Yes, well people need somewhere to live, but there are plenty of houses falling to bits around me. So why

don't they modernise them and leave the wildspace? Well it goes something like this.....

The Government squeezes Manchester harder every year to reduce its spending, the result being poorer services but also a desperate need for the City Council to balance the books by raising capital. It can do this by selling "surplus" council land.

The Government doesn't like council housing. They prefer private landlords and Housing Associations in particular to provide social housing. The Housing Corporation is the Government body that oversees and puts up cash for development.

The H.C. was originally set up by a Labour government to provide cash to H.As. to re-modernise old run down housing. This "re-hab" grant provided decent affordable housing and helped to rejuvenate inner city areas. This cost a lot of public money.

The current Government changed the rules to cut public spending on housing. They've made it almost financially impossible for re-habs to be done but have made building from scratch - "new build" very attractive. So H.As. need land.

The Council has land. They sell it to H.As. to raise a few bob to clear the debts. The H.As. build new houses and the open space - the mature trees, ponds, flowers, the badly needed playspace for inner city children - disappears.

Meanwhile, older houses crumble and homeless people beg on the streets. Vandalism and youth crime grow.

This is a sort of madness and what's more, we're paying for it in both money and environmental terms. My housing co-op has complained about the situation to the HC as we believe rehabs are the best way to solve housing problems and keep wildspace. Maybe Manchester Wildlife could also complain - it might make a difference - maybe...(We're complaining - Ed)

"A government which robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul"

George Bernard Shaw

Please note that all cheques, for membership subscriptions etc., should be made payable to - Manchester Wildlife and sent to the Treasurer, Ian Brown. //

Manchester Wildlife Contacts

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A Blackcap's Tale

by Tony Browne

On December the 4th, two blackcaps, a male and a female, appeared in my garden, moving through the bushes searching out food. Never having seen this species in the garden before, and not expecting it in winter, I rang John, the expert who lives nearby and asked if this sighting were possible or was last night's home brew good stuff. Apparently a single bird had visited his garden for three days: so having established my wife's, and my own sanity, even if on a temporary basis, I learned that fruit cake was acceptable to the bird which was probably an over-wintering visitor from Scandinavia. As I talk to my local birds when I feed them this was all right as we have Danish friends and I can copy the sing song phrasing, even if I only know "pass the butter" and "skol".

However, they disappeared rapidly and the story restarts when a single male appeared on the bird table on December 21st. He stayed for Christmas and the New Year leaving us on January 10th. Particularly interesting was the bird's behaviour during his stay. At first, feeding on bread and fruit cake, he was attacked by the resident robin and took evasive action.

After a couple of days of this he turned on his attackers and stood his ground.

He then turned his attention to the peanuts in the hanging feeder. He soon decided this was his private property and stationed himself above it attacking all comers with success, except for the squirrel. The tits and sparrows could only use the plastic thingummy on the window, being unable to match the blackcap's aggression. He left in a huff on the 10th as I had run out of peanuts, which were not replaced for a couple of days. //

(So blackcaps breed in Britain and migrate to this country for the winter but do any of our breeding blackcaps over-winter here? - If you know, let us know - Ed.)

Manchester Wildlife Sweatshirts for Sale

Be smart; look cool. Why not buy one of our quality long or short sleeved T-shirts, or Sweatshirts. All styles in medium, large or extra-large, in black and L and XL short sleeved T-shirts and Sweatshirts in Royal blue. And they're not bad value. s/s T-shirts - £5.50; 1/s T-shirts £6.50; Sweatshirts £7.50. Order early to avoid disappointment by phoning Ian Brown on 437 7040. Your garment can be collected at any of our events or meetings, or on our Members' Day. //

A SOUVENIR OF BRUNTWOOD

The Bodger has made a signed Post-and-Rail Stool of Willow from Bruntwood Hay Meadows. The stool is to be about 18" high with fancy turned posts and rails, and a sea grass seat. If you would like a souvenir, to remember Bruntwood Hay Meadows, as they were, send your bid by post to: The Bodger, 82 Crantock Drive, Heald Green, Cheadle, Ches. SK8 3HA, by the 22nd April 1994 or by hand on our Members' Day. The winning bid (highest) will be announced on our Members' Day. In the event of a tie there will be a draw. As a guide, such hand-crafted stools would sell for about £50. All proceeds to Manchester Wildlife funds

Come on, someone must want a souvenir of Bruntwood Meadows

Eye Witness

by Pondlifer

The Last Hours of Abbey Pond *****

Abbey Pond, and all its wildlife, was obliterated on the 24th of February in a deliberate act of destruction directed by a Director and shareholder of Manchester Science Park. This was in flagrant violation of Councillor Spencer's much vaunted Planning Condition No.8, which states that: "Prior to the commencement of any development on the site, the pond and its contents shall (mandatory) be transferred to an alternative site. Reason: To safeguard the pond's ecological value." On the 16th of February, our green Councillor was at pains to tell a top level meeting about the pond, that this remarkable act of ecological generosity was made in the teeth of entrenched resistance from his colleagues whose stance he summed up as "Sod the pond, just fill it in with concrete." That is exactly what happened but without bothering to comply with the troublesome planning condition. This astonishing act took place before many witnesses; the media, the campaigners, the Under Sheriff of Greater Manchester and many police. Maybe it was an act of spite by the Science Park's Project Manager, Mr.W.J. Townson of Bowdon, member of the Board and owner of 62,000 preference shares in MSP Ltd., for the two weeks of inconvenience caused by the pond occupation.

The eviction of the Pond campers or "residents", as Earth First would have it (the Post Office delivered mail to a hand crafted box on the fence) began at first light on the 24th in accordance with due process of law. The two week old Republic of Newtonia had a short but intensely busy and harmonious life, forging links with the community, keeping children off the streets, entertaining visitors and staying warm and well fed. We were supported by many gifts of food and equipment, and complimented by the local police for our responsible behaviour. (If only the powers that be were as well behaved as the protesters - Ed.) Dr. Allen, MSP Director, described us as "marauder and invaders". The shock waves from the protest caused a level of embarrassment, to the bureaucrats, not previously experienced by Manchester. Did our mascot, Issac the giant newt, also have a claw in the collapse of Global Forum?

By 3 pm that day, the protest was over and observers were waiting for the tanker to return from St. George's Park where the "alternative pond" had been given refuge at the eleventh hour. Two loads of 5000 gallons had been pumped out (did anything survive this experience?), but this had made little impression on the Abbey Pond. The object of the exercise, in terms of the stated procedure for discharge of the planning condition, was to expose the vital sludge layer containing virtually all the aquatic life, insulated from the sub-zero temperatures by the volume of water above. Abbey pond contained an estimated 30,000 + gallons. We were told the half size "replica" would need 15 to 20 thousand gallons, allowing for seepage. Clearly another day (Friday) would be needed to dispose of the remaining water and retrieve and transfer the sludge. Manchester Wildlife had written to Hulme Regeneration suggesting that at least half of the material should be taken to a safe and more suitable destination in the Mersey Valley. This letter, like others, remained unanswered.

We had also commissioned an independent appraisal of the entire mitigation process from a respected ecologist who sent a damning report to the City Planning Officer and also discovered that the "retained" ecologist (hapless fellow, evidently impaled on the horns of a professional dilemma), had not been fully informed of the planning condition about translocating the pond and "was quite taken aback by it". No wonder; it was by then the 9th of February and, as we know, the pond was to be drained on the 11th! Even more to the point, the new pond hadn't been started and wasn't ready to receive so much as a bucketful until the 23rd! Where do you keep a pond for a fortnight?

It was with shocked disbelief and some quite unprintable comments (to the chap from the Guardian) from parents escorting children home from the nearby schools, that we saw a huge JCB appear, as if from nowhere, charge onto the site and proceed to shovel mounds of soil, rubble and trees into the pond, so dealing with the contents of the pond and the hibernating newts at one blow. Mr. Townson, clad in his "elegant black overcoat and matching trilby", conducted the operation like a man possessed but he was overheard to say, it had been the "most embarrassing day of his life". It may not be his last!

The breach of the planning condition was total and the professional credibility of the Planning Department, the Science Park and ecological consultants is in shreds and tatters. Manchester Wildlife is buckling down to the piles of paperwork involved in bringing those accountable to book.

Vice Chancellor, Martin Harris (University of Manchester) has expressed sincere but futile regrets, realising that he had been at the wrong end of a certain amount of misinformation and convenient silences; the University representatives on the MSP Board appear to have told him nothing at all. You'd think the V.C. would find out for himself from his university colleagues, most closely involved with the pond in happier times! He does have a souvenir - a personal fax from David Bellamy pleading the case for the pond "as a real living centre to a science park of which the University and the community of Manchester could be proud."

This had been the vision of Dan Aris and many others from the outset; what have we got now? In the words of Nitin Thakrar, Ethnic Participation Advisor to the Community Forest, "an injury to nature and the local people. A wound that cannot be healed." No prizes for guessing who will be the recipient of our prestigious "Des Poiler" Award for 1994. //

Members' Day

The details of this event are contained in the Member' Day Supplement. We have an interesting programme with Basket and Tent peg making and an excellent speaker. This will be a must for all who have an interest in urban wildlife and the event is open to all.

DON'T MISS IT - MAKE IT A DAY TO REMEMBER

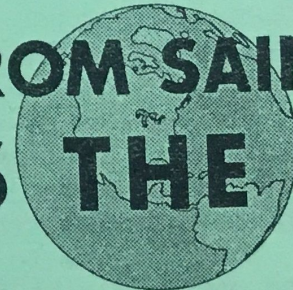
With all the activities taking place our greatest need now is for members to help; catering, before and on the day, setting up and running the event. If you can spare a little of your valuable time contact Unity Kelly (226 4583) or Ian Brown (437 7040) who will be pleased to hear from you. Only with your help can we hope to make the day a complete success. //

We would refer you to page eight of our summer 93 *Magpie* when doubts were cast on the future of this event. Well, it's not quite gone but, as well as having considerable troubles, it has been watered down somewhat. The festivities at Castlefield have gone and all we are left with is the conference, which is being attended by delegates of 50 cities from around the world, the theme of which will be "Cities and Sustainable Development". However, many voluntary groups want to put on events to celebrate the occasion and these will be community activities and gatherings with exhibitions, entertainment and visits and will be co-ordinated by North West Focus who are compiling a friendly and accessible programme of events. This will be available in libraries, information centres etc. The celebrations will run from 18th June to 3rd July. We will be taking part in this **Cousin of Global Forum** with a Sustainable Industries event, time and place to be decided, and a walk to highlight the environmental destruction at Bruntwood Meadows and Abbey Pond. If you would like to take part in/help with these event, phone Ian Brown (437 7040). Our walk will meet up with Walk for the Earth's London to Manchester walk which is to highlight the Government's lack of commitment to the principles of Rio '92 (Details: Penny Eastwood 0422 844710)

Look out for details. Take part. Get involved. Let's show those Politicians what Sustainable Development really means

*Which Supermarket Group
is destroying the
Bruntwood Hay Meadows?*

**FOOD FROM SAINSBURY'S
COSTS THE EARTH**



Butterfly Survey 94 - Starting now! Why don't you take part in this survey by looking for butterflies on your local open space. There is a survey form on the back of your events list (to save paper); if you need more take photo-copies; if you need advice on how to proceed, phone Ian Brown 437 7040. //

Amphibian Conservation Training Day - This event takes place on Saturday 21st May in Bolton (10am-4pm). Should be an interesting day. For more info or to book ring Anton or Heather at Bolton Wildlife Project (LWT) 0204 361847. Modest charge includes site visits, handling, identification, surveying etc

Manchester Craft Centre - We have had discussions with City Council officers about the possibility of a Craft Workshop in the Stable Block at Wythenhawe Park. There is a room which we think will be ideal for the purpose. The slight disadvantage of it being upstairs and having a hard floor are offset by it being a secure premises, important in an urban area. We have a few matters to sort out, like insurance and Health & Safety at Work but the omens are good and the Council seem to be as keen as we are. This is another project on which we will need help so if you are interested in traditional crafts, of any kind, contact Ian (437 7040) or Unity (226 4583). We will be starting with bodging and chairmaking, closely followed by rake and tent peg making. This is part of our Sustainable Development plan; with the coming of the Red Rose Forest, we hope that woodland crafts will create employment of a kind which will not be damaging to wildlife or our open spaces. //

Mersey Valley Countryside Quiz - This takes place at 7.30 pm on the 19th of April at Jacksons Boat Pub, Rifle Road, Sale Moor. We have won the quiz for the last three years so we have volunteered to set the questions (which is proving to be harder than answering them) this means that **MW** cannot enter a team. However **MW** members may join other teams, providing they have had no part in setting the questions. Of course you can come along and join in the fun! //

Turn Your Back for a Second - The danger of doing this was revealed on our survey of Pomona Docks. Someone seems to be constructing a road, which won't help the wildlife; Lapwings don't appear to object. What else is to happen here, we are not sure but when we find out we'll let you know. //

Book Review

by Ian Brown

Traditional Woodland Crafts/Raymond Tabor. ISBN 0-7134-7500-5

"It was as a naturalist that I came to the woodlands of eastern England; when I leave it will be more as a woodman." So writes the author in the preface to this superb book. After 20 years he has learned many woodland crafts at the hands of older traditional woodland craftsmen and believes that the revival of these ancient crafts will do much to put right the 70 years of neglect which our woodlands have suffered.

The several chapters begin with Woodmanship which tells us coppicing started with Neolithic man and explains the whys & wherefores of this historic method of woodland management. The chapter on Raw Materials lists some common tree species used in woodland crafts going into their history, properties, uses and ideal spacing to produce the best growth. Under Care of the Wood is Silviculture (growing good wood), pest control and how to maintain a wood in good order. There are chapters on; Tools and how to use and maintain them; Devices employed by woodland craftsmen; Riving Wood, which is the skilled art of splitting coppice stems to produce wood of the right size for the job. We are even told how to Buy, Cut and Measure wood which is important both for the woodland owner and the craftsman and advises beginners to contact local conservation bodies, who own or manage woodland, for supplies.

The largest section of the book is on the crafts themselves. Some like tent peg making and barrel hoops are only mentioned briefly but others, such as fencing, thatching wood, hurdles and besoms are dealt with in great detail. With a closing chapter on Modern Markets and Their Economics (20 million hazel thatching broches are sold annually) and appendices giving dimensions of specialist tools and woodman's devices; there's even a page on charcoal making; this is an excellent book on the production and use of small dimension wood and invaluable to anyone considering taking up traditional woodland crafts. Also it is a must for those who own woodland which is in need of management. Or just for a good read! //

Flake - Wiltshire name for a cleft hurdle. (Raymond Tabor)

Useful Contacts

Insects Peter Hardy - 969 4771 (evenings & weekends)
Manchester Foxwatch - Hotline No. (061) 247 1599

Birds RSPB Stockport - Tony O'Neill - 962 2449
RSPB Manchester - Simeon Rydz - 434 2720
Bird of Prey Rescue - Brian Wilcocks - 945 3831

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
Sale & Altrincham - Shelagh Aston - 275 3146 (day) 928 2223
Salford & Trafford - Brian Taylor - 872 7640 (day)
Stockport - Kim Porter - 0625 874729 (weekends & evenings)

Cheshire Wildlife Trust
North Group (Trafford) - Liz Blackman (Chair) - 962 6748
Stockport & Tameside - Rhian Law (Secretary) - 0663 743070
Wilmslow Group - Tony Browne - 436 1761

Lancashire Wildlife Trust
Bolton Wildlife Project - Annie Surtees - 0204 361847

Manchester Friends of the Earth - 13 Paton Street - 236 4155
Friends of the Mersey Valley - Ann Buckingham - 881 1814

Mersey Valley Wardens - Sale 905 1100 - Chorlton 881 5639

Manchester City Conservation Officers - 273 5843
Elaine Norsworthy - Countryside Officer
Graeme McVitie - Woodland Officer

Manchester Wildlife is a networking organisation - You are included on our contact list; are we included on yours? Other groups might like to come to a similar arrangement!

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