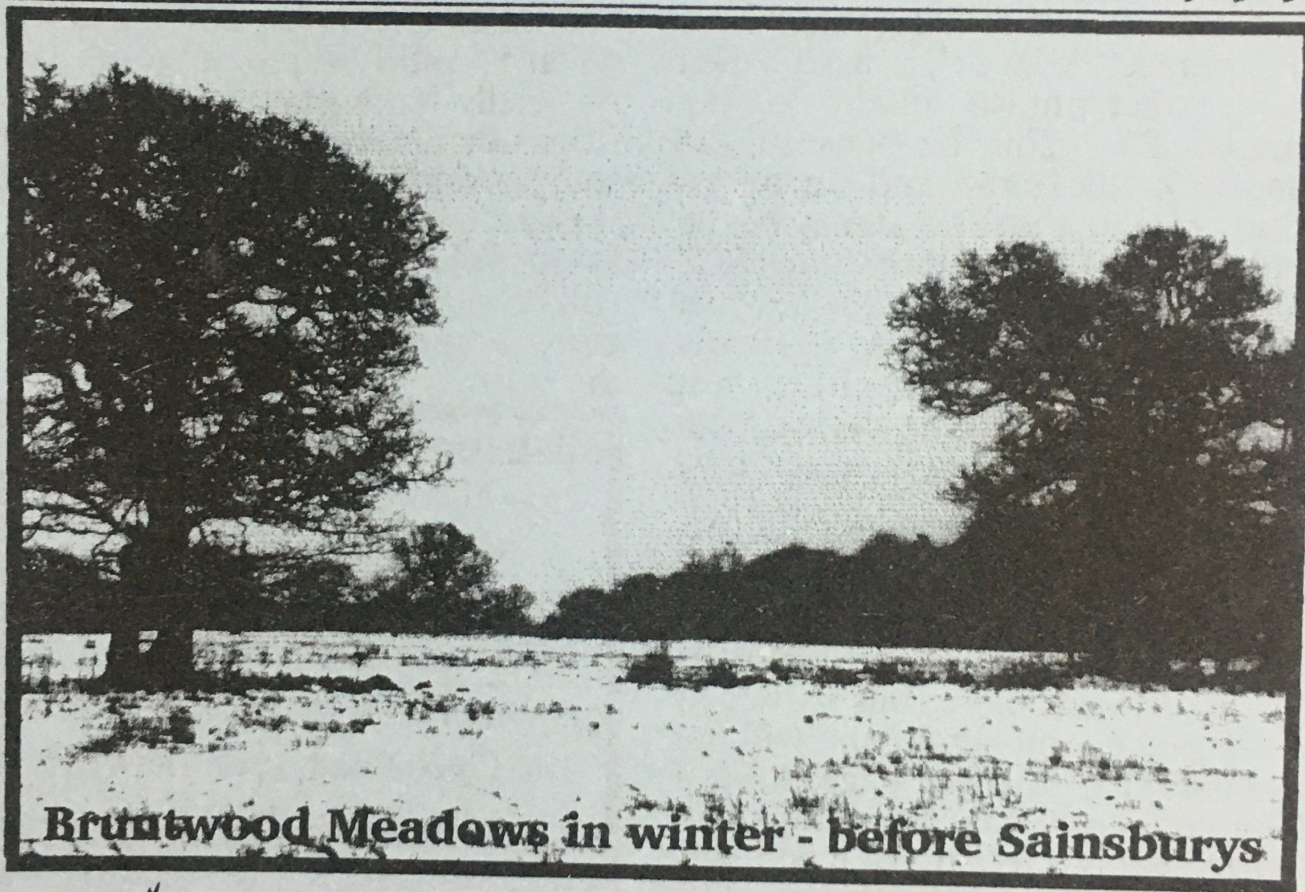


**"The Excellent Newsletter
of Manchester Wildlife"**

*John Vidal, Environment
Correspondent, The Guardian*

Magpie

Number 44 - - - - - Winter 1999



Bruntwood Meadows in winter - before Sainsburys



**A Happy New Year
To all our Readers**



**Standing up for Wildlife
in Greater Manchester**

50p

Editorial

Send in
YOUR Story
Editor's Office 0161-437 7040

An editor's job is a piece of cake! Well, it is if you take a fairly relaxed attitude to the task. Most of the articles go into "Magpie" with very little editing. In these days of computer technology, typed articles can be scanned in and some contributors provide their copy on floppy disk. A spell check and a quick read through, to be sure they make sense, is all that is generally required. Easy stuff. However, there is one thing that will not get past this editor. Have you noticed how the phrase, "due to" is used when the correct phrase should be "because of"? This happens in the press, on the radio and on television, even on the BBC! It may be the only thing I remember from GCE English Language but the correct use of these two phrases is clearly etched on my mind. It is best summed up in the sentence, "Because of a points failure at Slade Lane Junction the train for Barrow is delayed. It is now due to arrive at 11.54. We apologise for the delay." There may have been changes to our weird and wonderful language since I left school but this particular folly gets on my nerves and will not be tolerated in these pages. So if you could get this one thing right, when submitting articles, it will save me a little time. Any other mistake in English grammar will probably go right over my head.

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

What, you may ask, has "Magpie" in store for you this time? Well, recycling seems to be taking up a fair proportion of the space in this issue. We have touched on this subject before but I hope that some new ground is being covered. I probably don't need to remind you that re-cycling, and reuse of materials, is of great importance to nature conservation, especially in respect of habitat loss caused by landfill sites. It seems a bit daft to throw our waste into holes in the ground when it could be put to good use, especially if we have to further destroy our natural habitats to make stuff to replace the waste we have wasted! I hope you know what I mean; I'm not sure that I do! There will be more stuff as well (I hope) so enjoy your read and we'll be back in the spring.

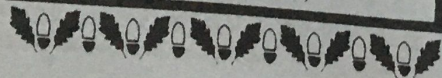
Manchester Wildlife Contacts

Rob Allen (Chair), 10 Brooklyn Court, Wilmslow Road, Withington, Manchester. M20 9NA
Tel: 0161-448 8631

Anthony Phelps, (Secretary) Flat 7, 104 Clyde Road, West Didsbury Manchester. M20 2JN

Ian Brown (Editor & Treasurer)
82 Crantock Drive, Heald Green Cheadle, Cheshire. SK8 3HA
Tel: 0161-437 7040

Fax (One World Centre):
0161-834 8187



Oil be Seeing You

by Gray Slick 3

Whilst trawling through the Sunday papers my attention was arrested by an intriguing article about the eventual evacuation of St Kildan islanders when their traditional way of life could no longer be supported by the decimated population that was left. Tourists and the military were apparently the only presence left and the latter were thinking of pulling out completely allowing the island and the surrounding seas to revert back to nature.

That of course would have been the case had not the insatiable oil companies, courtesy of course of HM Government exploration licences, spear-headed an invasion of this priceless World Heritage Site. When Greenpeace and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society released the results of their cetacean survey in the Atlantic Frontier they found the area swarming with sperm whales, minke, pilot, fin, sei, and even the almost extinct blue whale and several species of dolphin and porpoise. The precarious grip on survival of the planet's largest ever mammal should in itself ensure that this otherwise wild and unspoilt area be respected for its intrinsic value and left undisturbed.

As I angrily cast around for the usual suspects to vent my spleen on it started to dawn on me that, as in so many other instances, isn't it a case of, "well hang on how does this process actually get going in the first place?" The fact is that everybody who expects instant access to oil products is driving forward the world-wide despoilation wherever it occurs, from the invasion of tribal lands in Nigeria or Equador to the drilling and mining of the deep ocean bed. We all have it within our power to reduce our drain on the dwindling natural resources that can only continue to be exploited due to our level of consumption of the final product. Our present almost insatiable appetite for consumer goods and transport fuel is probably the single biggest factor underpinning this process. Those who claim to have the environment at the top of their agenda are now to be counted in their millions. Imagine if that body of people eschewed at least one car journey per week, shared or borrowed, rather than bought, at least a proportion of the implements they currently use! If on the other hand we continue to demand to travel as far and as often as we wish and buy what we desire whenever we feel like it, then we have only ourselves to blame. The large and ever growing numbers of people involved could make this achievable. The devastating effect achieved by the anti-fur campaign on that despicable industry, which has now shrunk to a shadow of its former self, demonstrates what can be achieved when a deep cut in the supply line by a large enough body is made.

As admirable and worth doing though they are, storming a corporate citadel is unlikely in the long run to persuade, say for example Shell, to abandon their present commercial strategy and take up basket weaving. The money men who run these companies will always react to the dictates of the balance sheet. If the enormous costs of extracting transporting and processing the stuff couldn't be met by the end use sales, it just might make them turn to something else - it's certainly worth a try.

4 For Peat's Sake

by Janet Cuff

Further to my article in Magpie 41, concerning the use of peat by Stockport Council, in hanging baskets and other horticultural activities, readers may like to know that I've been hanging on in there pursuing various leads.

I had to give up my enquiries to Chester City Council as a bad job as, after passing my letter from one department to another, over a period of about 9 months, they eventually returned my original letter with no comment whatsoever! (Over to you - Cheshire Wildlife Trust - Ed.) However, my enquiries to the Henry Doubleday Research Association (following Roger Moore's suggestions in Magpie 42) were well worth the effort: they sent me a lot of information on composting, including composting of organic municipal wastes. As the editor had pointed out, in a footnote to my article, that Stockport is now composting garden waste at its Adswood eco-centre, it seemed a good idea to go back to Mr. Brayshay, head of Stockport's Woodbank nursery and ask him about the possibility of using this composted material as a peat alternative, as well as asking for an update on the progress of Stockport's research into other materials.

He phoned me, in response to my letter, and took much time updating me on various developments. The barley straw experiments have, unfortunately, had only limited success in that the acidity content caused some plants to keel over, so obviously this material will have to be used selectively. Regarding HDRA, Mr. Brayshay was aware of this organisation, in fact they had been helping Stockport Council set up its trials with composted waste garden material from the Council's own "cruncher" at Vernon Park. Results so far indicate that compost is not a particularly successful growing medium for bedding plants, but that shrubs are much more tolerant of it. A problem he identified is that, whereas peat is consistent in quality, compost varies considerably. However, it is very likely that compost will soon be used on a fairly regular basis for shrubs.

Regarding bedding plants and hanging baskets, Stockport are continuing, for the most part, to use a peat-based compost, the peat used deriving mainly from engineering extraction, eg. motorway construction sites. Hardly sufficient justification for building new roads, a point Mr. Brayshay readily admitted, although feeling that as long as huge amounts are available from this source, Stockport might as well make use of them, whilst at the same time pursuing the quest for alternatives.

In conclusion, I have to say that I was very satisfied with Stockport's attitude to this question, and felt they were making serious efforts to come up with solutions. Corroboration of this view came in an article in the "Stockport Times", on the 11th of September - Bruntwood Park, in Cheadle, is one of 16 parks in England, and the only park in Greater Manchester, to be awarded a Green Flag by the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management, which has Government backing. Visiting judges praised the park, not only for its high standard of equipment and its exemplary toilets, but also for its reduction in reliance on pesticides and lack of use of peat. (I wonder what the judges would have thought of the park if Sainsburys had not built on Bruntwood Meadows - Ed.)

There is an alternative by Rob Allen 5

The peat to be avoided by environmentalists is sedge peat which is derived from English heaths and moors, more than 75% of which have been damaged or destroyed. At least preferable if simply nothing else will do is sphagnum (or moss) peat which is still to be found in large quantities in Iceland, Canada, Norway, Finland, Ireland and Russia. It has most of the same qualities as sedge peat and is usually lighter and more absorbent.

It should be emphasised that all peat is used most commonly as a mulch to suppress weeds and conserve moisture and as a soil conditioner. In every case compost is by far superior and, in the case of the latter, peat adds little in the way of humus, that is, the vital thin layer of organic living matter rich in plant foods and micro-biological activity.

Despite widespread and determined information campaigns it comes as a nasty surprise that sales of peat are actually increasing. It has been confirmed that peat sales have risen by possibly as much as a half over the last five years.

A major step forward could be made if blanket licences to mine peat similar to those granted decades ago for aggregate and mineral extraction were called in by the government and reviewed, given the fact that many sites are now designated as SSSI'S.

Even in garden centres there are now quite an array of alternatives ranging from the self explanatory and exotic 'zoo poo' to fibrous mediums made from coconut husks (which would otherwise be waste products). And it appears that, in the long term, shredded tree bark has got the best long term future as complete replacement, especially as it can now be obtained in a less coarse mixture that has already been composted for some time.

Compost is Best

by Ian Brown

And nothing will persuade me otherwise. I have been making compost for many years now and the results have been most satisfactory. Used undiluted, as a potting compost, it really makes the plants grow. Unfortunately, my compost bin is not large enough to create sufficient heat to kill all the seeds which are introduced, so it is not ideal as a seed compost as plants, other than those intended, will also sprout up. The main culprits seem to be nettles and comfrey. This problem used to be overcome, in larger gardens, by cooking the compost in special ovens which would kill all unwanted seeds.

They say that you only get out what you put in. This certainly applies to compost and the secret is variety. All organic household and garden waste should be added to the heap. Some say that meat should be avoided, as it could attract rats, but if you have a closed compost bin this should not be a problem. I'm not talking about great sides of beef here but small scraps of fat and gristle should do no harm. The nitrogen content of green vegetation should be balanced with a source of carbon; too high a concentration of grass clippings tend to go mushy. The best thing is to add plenty of shredded paper and cardboard. This will also dilute the strength

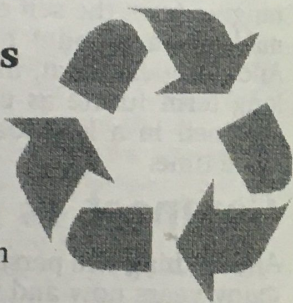
6 of the nutrients in the green waste so the compost can be used for potting or bedding plants without any further additions.

This variety thing got me thinking about the barley straw compost mentioned by Janet Cuff. Some plants did not appear to like it, so I phoned Mr. Brayshay to find out more. It is an Irish product and the waste barley grain from the Guinness brewery is mixed with the barley straw. Maybe not enough variety there! Mr. Brashay also mentioned a product called Richmore, composted bark and wood fibre, which Stockport Council was trying out. We will try to find out more on that for the next "Magpie". During discussions at our November social meeting, the topic of community (local authority) vs. domestic composting came up. We thought there might not be enough control on the variety of ingredients in community composting. At some times of year there could be a surfeit of, for example, lelandii cuttings. Mr. Brayshay said that, in effect, the whole year's input of organic waste, from the Adswood Eco-centre and Stockport's parks and gardens, was mixed up and composted so the balance of ingredients should be adequate. A new method of composting was being tried out. This is called "pod" composting. Organic matter is put in polythene tubes and air is circulated through. Sounds interesting!

Stockport seem to be trying very hard to find a substitute for peat. What are other local authorities doing, in Greater Manchester? If you know, please let **US** know.

Recycling by Anthony Phelps

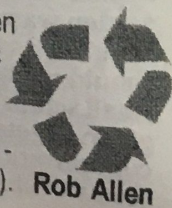
On Tuesday 22nd September 1998, as a representative of Manchester Wildlife, I took up one of the 16 positions as Director of EMERGE, the Hulme-based community recycling company. Also, during the same week, I became a representative of a newly appointed Waste Minimisation Group at my place of work.



Hopefully, I can help do my little bit to encourage, and educate people to want to reduce the amount of the earth's resources they use, and to ensure that they recycle anything that they cannot use. Only by following the "three Rs" (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) can we turn around the crazy situation that exists at the moment where we bury our rubbish in the ground, thus helping to pollute our water supplies, and produce methane which can damage our health and our properties, as well as destroying wildlife-rich "holes".

**Eco
Tip**

Recently spotted on a visit to Brookside garden centre in Poynton were numerous bins, water butts and compost containers made from recycled plastic. These are not only environmentally sound but a very good buy as they should last a lifetime - highly recommended (and no I'm not on a retainer).



Rob Allen

Another One Gone - by Margaret Brown

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It was quite by chance, during a lunch time walk down Barton Dock Road, that we discovered our Shangri La. Opposite Barton Power Station was a patch of scrubland and when we slithered down a bank it was an amazing sight: blackberries, huge ones hanging in bunches like grapes; and that was not an exaggeration. When we came back the following day, with containers, we picked several pounds in a few minutes. My boss never believed me when I showed him my haul and was convinced I had bought them from a shop, but there were no shops in that area then.

There is now the Trafford Centre and an extended shopping area nearby and the greenness has vanished. It was not just the blackberries that were the attraction: quite a few plants and grasses were scattered around and in the warmth of the autumn sunshine, insects and butterflies hovered about and the willowherb seeds floated in the air. Half close your eyes and you could imagine you were really in the countryside.

I pondered many times as to why the blackberries were so luscious and came to the conclusion that they were well fertilised by rabbit droppings, benefitted from the heat of the power station, and were kept free of pests by the sulphurous atmosphere from Trafford Park and also that the original seeds had been brought in by birds from the kitchen gardens of Trafford Park Hall. This wildlife haven continued for many years and the yield of blackberries was always good, so much so that we saw people collecting the fruit in buckets on occasions!

Part of the land was taken over by a factory, so fearing the worst, my son dug up a few of the bushes and they were planted in my garden. They were staked, manured and pruned but the result was an odd dish or two of blackberries and the quality was very inferior. So that delicious fruit is now just a memory because tarmac spread from the factory to make a car park and unless you had once been in that area beforehand you would never understand what a treasure it had all been. I only hope the rabbits and other creatures managed to escape in time and find another home; and what about the blackberries? Well, there are a few inferior bushes along the nearby Bridge-water Canal and one of my bushes is still surviving. How much more of our wildlife can we continue to lose?



8 Compost Toilets

This is going to be a difficult article to write without saying a certain word. I know I won't get it past Ian, so instead, I'll be using the phrase "waste products", which I will use as

by
Sue
Age

both noun and verb.

I recently found a book called "The Humanure Handbook"* in Frontline Bookshop in Manchester. It intrigued me, so I bought it, and it's completely fascinating, and I'd recommend that you read it. It's about a man in America who has been "disconnected from the sewage system", where he lives, for the last 15 years. He recycles all his family's "waste products" by composting them, along with all his garden and kitchen waste, producing fine compost and growing all his food in it.

What gripped me about this guy is that he's an "evangelist" (the book is also very funny, with some highly amusing cartoons as well), and every line is full of enthusiasm, encouraging others to follow his example. A lot of people, he says, are "fecophobic" (including his own mother, who he seemed to take great delight in shocking one day) - that is, afraid of human "waste products" because they are constantly told, by people in authority, that these "waste products" are dangerous, and contain horrid diseases and other things, which are just waiting to jump out and harm you, and the best thing is to flush them away, and "let us deal with them for you". The truth is contrary to this, provided you treat them with care, and follow simple hygiene that we have all been taught at one time. They only become "sewage" when they are mixed with all the other products we allow to inhabit our sewers, where they get mixed with oils, heavy metals and other "stuff".

Did you know that we are one of the only species on this planet who put "waste products" into our own drinking water (I don't include all the species of fish and marine mammals who don't really have much option), then spend billions of pounds/dollars/etc, cleaning it out again, so we can use the water for drinking again. When put like this, it does seem extraordinarily stupid, very wasteful, and dangerous. We allow farmers to put animal "waste products" onto fields, and are quite happy, and indeed spend more money buying organic products from them, as we perceive this to be a better, more sustainable way of growing food than using industrially produced fertilisers. I was pleased to hear on the news that there is a new housing development which incorporates a "new" system of "grey-water" retrieval (from sinks, washing machines, etc) with cleaning processes, so that this can be reused in the toilets, saving both money and water. However, I was disturbed that they felt it necessary to invest so much in carefully cleaning this water. After all, they were only going to flush it down the toilet again! Never mind, it is a start, I suppose.

What's so different about our "waste products" to that of animals? Actually, nothing. They are both a resource which came from the land - you must have heard of, and probably even used the phrase "you are what you eat" - and should, ideally, be put back onto the land to complete the cycle. So much of our education process is about "cycles of nature", and we are encouraged to "close the circles" in lots of things we do. We

are urged not only to recycle our resources, but also to purchase recycled products to keep the circle rolling. Why not with our "waste products"?

Basically, the process starts very early on in our education. I bet your mum told you to "wash your hands after you'd been to the toilet". That makes you think that it must be dangerous. (Am I saying that education is a bad thing?).

This man who wrote the book spends ages repeating the fact that, yes, human "waste products" can and do contain pathogens, which can be passed onto other humans, not only by touch, but also if we grow food in them, and then eat the food, and handle the soil in which these pathogens can survive (some of these pathogens can be dangerous, although nearly all are treatable). However, by following a simple composting process, which gardeners have been using for hundreds, if not thousands of years, all these pathogens can be killed, and the resultant compost is entirely safe. So concerned was this man about this safety aspect, that he took it upon himself to test his own "waste products", and his resultant compost at the local University, and all the results came back negative. He periodically repeats these tests, especially when he's had lots of visitors for courses, etc., and so far, there have been no problems, and he doesn't expect any.

One of the most persistent pathogens, and the one he uses as a test for whether a particular composting toilet system is effective and safe is the Roundworm egg (*Ascaris Lumbricoides*). In the book are tables showing the temperature and the length of time this should be maintained in order to kill all the various pathogens. Even in a normal garden compost heap, the temperature is sufficient to render all "nasties" dead (Roundworm eggs are killed at 55°C for 2 hours, 50°C for 20 hours, and 45°C for 200 hours). Even Domestos only kills 99% of household germs - I've always wondered about the 1% that was left over!

What is important, before you all go and disconnect yourselves from North West Water, and start to compost your own "waste products", is that you must have a mixture of materials for a compost heap to work properly. You need a supply of carbon-rich materials - like the covering material for your compost toilet (partially rotted sawdust is ideal, which kills all smells, and stops infestations by fly maggots), and for covering the top of your compost heap (straw is ideal) - as well as the nitrogen-rich "waste products". Also, you need layers of material to trap Oxygen in the heap, like the straw, and most of the garden clippings, as the "thermo-philic" bacteria (the workers that provide all this free labour for you) require not only food, but Oxygen - a little like us really, and they will keep going, except in the coldest Winters, when the heap will freeze, but as soon as Spring comes, they thaw, and carry on from where they left off. He's very keen to point out that most books on composting tell you to add lime, turn the heaps, etc - he basically says another word I cannot get published in the Magpie, and that this is all unnecessary. He adds to his heap each day, and the bacteria are mostly working just under the top of the heap - they move up to compost each layer as it is added, so turning

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and mixing the heap does not help, and can actually cool the heap, and it must be remembered that it is the heat that kills all the "nasties" and makes your compost safe. Maybe that's another reason why I feel this man and I are on the same wavelength - he doesn't even believe in wasting his own energy!

* Subtitled: "A Guide to Composting Human Manure (Emphasising Minimum Technology and Maximum Hygienic Safety). Author: Joseph C Jenkins. Published in 1994 by Jenkins Publishing, PO Box 607, Grove City, PA 16127 USA.

To Tusk or not to Tusk by Anthony Phelps

This morning, whilst listening to the BBC World Service, I heard an interesting discussion on how modern day species are evolving, or adapting, not to the natural changes in climate, or a changing environment, but as a direct result of the actions of man.

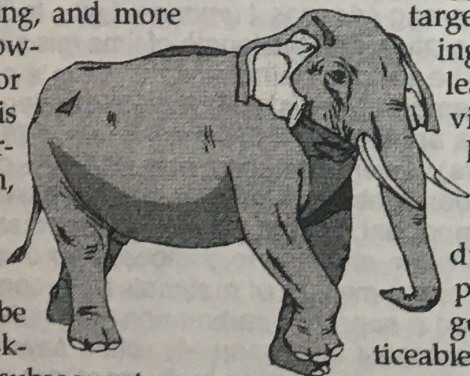
Apparently, African Elephants are changing, and more and more are growing with smaller, or no tusks. This is because of the persecution of man, and the fact that elephants without tusks are more likely to be passing their "tuskless" genes on to subsequent generations. The Indian Elephant has suffered from the hands of man for far longer, and is a less tusked species than the African Elephant.

In the marine environment, which is suffering from increasing persecution at the hands of huge trawlers and factory ships, changes are happening. At one time, Cod spent several years growing before reaching sexual

maturity. However, with greater, and more persistent catches, they've started to become sexually mature at an earlier age, and, of course, a smaller size.

Even plant species are being affected. Mahogany is one of the most prized of tropical timbers, with loggers preferring to target straight growing specimens. This leaves the individuals which are less straight, and have more side branches to produce pollen, and pass on their genes, and it is noticeable that there are less straight Mahogany trees available to the loggers.

I, personally, feel quite hopeful about this news. It means that nature is able, at least in selected species, to fight back against our relentless exploitation, and become something which is less "palatable" to us - ie. smaller fish, curved and branched trees and ivory-less elephants. All this within a few generations.



Tree Planting on Kenworthy Fields 11

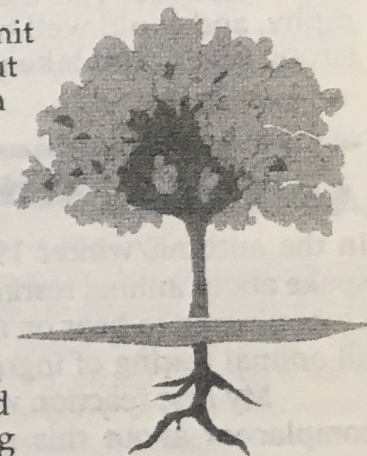
When I think of tree planting, something which I've been involved with in Manchester Wildlife ever since my first ever event, many moons ago, on Hough End Clough - all we used were people, spades and trees. Yet, despite this, the trees are doing fine, I can tell you - these being the ones which managed to survive the ravages of the council's mowing regime!

Since then, someone seems to have come up with a new technique (don't know if this was learnt on a college course, or what), which involves ploughing the land prior to planting. Various reasons have been brought to my attention when I've asked "Why?", but the most common one is that the ploughing severs the roots of the competing grasses, to give the young trees a better chance.

On Kenworthy Fields, I have to admit that the grass is quite rank and coarse, but the trees which were planted were about a foot and a half tall, enough of a height advantage to ensure that they weren't shaded out by the existing vegetation.

My personal technique when planting is to cut a turf square, dig my hole, plant my tree in a corner, and then place the turf square upside-down to cover the hole. I find that this, either on its own, or in association with a lino/old carpet cover, keeps the grass from getting too great a hold before the tree establishes itself. In any case, surely you're not going to simply plant a tree, and forget about it? Are you? Manchester Wildlife periodically revisits its planting sites to check the trees, and pull up any grass from around them, which, in my opinion, is all that is necessary. I know that the Council seem to like spraying around their trees (pavements/graves/anything else that stands still long enough!) with weed killer, but they seem to have this power thing - needing to control every living thing - usually by killing it! I know that when they used this technique on Platt Fields several years ago, a few of the trees were killed too.

On Sunday 27th September 1998, when I visited the Working Woodlands Festival at Moses Gate Country Park, Bolton, I collared Jem Brown, from the Red Rose Forest, and asked him to explain and defend this new technique for tree planting, leaving him in no doubt that I felt it was a waste of time, and didn't do the



job it was meant to do, ie keep the grass from growing back around the tree.

He told me a few things of interest. Firstly, much of the land on which this new planting is taking place around Manchester is on former tip sites, like Matthews Lane, Kenworthy Fields, Nutsford Vale Park and others. He said that because of the poor and thin soil structure, that ploughing the land was being tested and monitored on these sites, in association with one of the Universities to evaluate its effectiveness. This is why the plantings on Matthews Lane are in square blocks, heavily fenced in.

So, it looks like we're going to have to suffer this technique for several seasons to come, until, as I hope, they will work out that the old techniques are perfectly acceptable. I have to warn you to be careful, though, as with the grass seeming to love this new technique, you may not notice the ridge and furrow topography, and could well turn your ankle over. My advice is to wear strong boots, and take it slowly.

by Anthony Phelps

Animal Testing

by Des Poiler

In the autumn/winter 1997 edition of the Magpie (number 41), I spoke about animal testing in relationship to Sainsburys. Yesterday, I was pleased to hear on the news that the Government were to stop all animal testing of ingredients for cosmetic products.

My first reaction was "Great", but I feel that we should not be complacent about this ruling. What it does mean is that, until agreement can be reached on a European or world level, that the companies who have been stopped from testing their products in this country, can simply (and may well do) move their testing operations to another country.

I personally, have been using products which are truly "animal friendly" for years now, the products neither contain animal ingredients, nor are they tested on animals either as ingredients, nor as a finished product. Many are available "over the counter", although I purchase mine from a "safe" company via mail-order (at no extra cost, dependent on the size of my order).

So, please keep up the pressure on your MP to push for at least a European ban, and target any companies who may be found to switch testing to other countries, to force them to stop. It isn't necessary, and causes untold suffering to the animals which are tortured in the name of vanity.

"Don't let them muck about with your genes"

by Jean Bender

I was pleasantly surprised at the last pub meeting when Ian showed me the latest edition of Deeside Wildlife Trust's newsletter, and found my article republished therein.

My thanks to Pip Perry for her kind words about the article, and hope all those Deeside people get involved in stopping this insidious move by unrepresentative multi-national corporations to control the world's food supplies, and threaten the existence of many wild species of flora and fauna.

Just a brief update on the genetix snowballers. Monsanto have issued "SLAPP" orders against the five. A "SLAPP", or "Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation", is designed to force protestors into silence, by suing them for defamation, injury or conspiracy, not necessarily to win the case, but to bring victims to the point where financially, or emotionally, they cannot continue their defence. The most famous SLAPP of all, and the first in this country, was against the McLibel Two.

However, people don't like the thought of small groups of people being bullied by giant corporations, and I hope it will backfire on Monsanto as spectacularly as it did in the McLibel Case, with the snowballers being the David (and the Helen?), and Monsanto being the Goliath.

The information in this update came from the September/October 1998 edition of "The Ecologist" magazine, which I'm pleased to say is back on the bookshelves (I got mine from Unicorn Grocery in Cholton). This edition has previously been pulped by the printers, afraid of being sued by Monsanto. Luckily, the publishers have found another printer who wasn't bothered, so we can all read their "Monsanto Special Edition".

Walk on by Kenworthy Anthony Fields Phelps

Rob and I were asked, by Lance Crooks, to lead a walk for Northenden Civic Society. We decided on a date, Sunday 13th September 1998, and I decided on the location - Kenworthy Fields, as it is somewhere that I know very well. After I'd returned from a holiday at Unity's, I managed to find one weekend to work out the route, and see what was about.

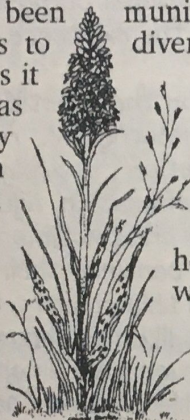
Rob and I met up at Lance's home, and when Barbara and her mother arrived, we set off to go to the meeting point "outside" Tesco's. I was pleasantly surprised, as there were 9 of us in the party, which was a good number. The walk around the fields was excellent, although the ground underfoot felt more like porridge in places. There wasn't much in the way of "wildlife" to observe that day, but I managed to show them patches of Kenworthy Fields that, despite them knowing the area, they'd never ventured on before. We have been asked if we'd repeat the walk in the Spring, which we will. After the walk, we decamped back at Lance's (thanks for the Scheeze on toast!).



There is a great debate raging over house building on brownfield sites. These are sites which have previously been developed. Some might think that this is preferable to building in the Green Belt. The main problem with the Green Belt is that its boundaries have been drawn with little thought as to what is there. In many places it can be almost sterile, as far as wildlife is concerned. Surely there could be little objection to building a few houses in such places.

On the other hand, some brownfield sites have very high bio-diversity and many have SSSI and SBI status. Though in theory these officially designated sites should have protection from development, I wouldn't bet on it. What about the brownfield sites with high bio-diversity but without protection. Building on such sites would certainly not be in the interests of our native fauna and flora.

The time has come when each, and every, development proposal should be subject to a de-



tailed environmental study to make sure that important wildlife sites are not lost. Also, as brownfield sites can sometimes be the only locally available open space, sites should be assessed for their importance to the surrounding community, regardless of their biodiversity.

It is said that, at any one time, there are about 1 million vacant residential properties. These should be repaired and renovated before building more houses on open spaces. This would not suit the big house building companies, as there is more profit in new build, but we cannot afford to lose any more of our wildlife rich countryside. It is about time we had a planning system which took into account all the above factors. When this happens, wildlife organisations, such as ourselves, will be able to concentrate on improving conditions for wildlife rather than spending most of our time trying to stop things getting worse.

badly served by public transport and there would be a heavy dependency on the private car.

Though the site in question may not be in Greater Manchester, the decision means that a nearby part of our countryside has been saved from being covered in concrete. I mean, how many leisure developments do we need. There are two indoor tennis facilities nearby, one in Cheadle Hulme and one in Heald Green. Not to mention those in the pipeline at Dumpington and Botany Bay Woods.

Victory

Good news, for a change. A leisure complex, at Handforth Dean has been thrown out by Environment Secretary, John Prescott. Local Councillor, Patsy Calton, who has been campaigning against the development for over 12 months, said, "It's great news because the inspector has realised that local shopping centres have been damaged by out-of-town shopping centres." Another overriding reason for refusal was that the site was

Badger Cull



Yes, it is true, the Government plan to slaughter 20,000 badgers to establish whether culling is an effective way to prevent the transmission of bovine tuberculosis (TB). Badgers have been implicated as a source of infection for cattle for almost 30 years. Nationally less than 0.5% of cattle herds are infected with TB but this is rising rapidly - there were 515 new cases in 1997, and the figures for the first few months of 1998 were around 45% higher. The rapid rise in the number of infected herds is thought to be largely because of the series of cool moist springs. If the weather pattern changes, the number of infected herds is likely to decline just as fast.

Though there is a clear link between TB in badgers and cattle, most available evidence is at best inconclusive. While TB in both badgers and cattle is widespread in Britain, most cases in both badgers and cattle are in the South-west. Because of this the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and food (MAFF) intend to start with a culling trial in selected sites in that part of the country with the first areas selected being the North Devon/Cornish border, and in the North-west Gloucester/Hereford and Worcester border. The aim is to complete the first trial area by the end of January 1999. The total cost of the trial will be more than £7 million a year. The aim of the trial is to provide a basis for selecting a TB control strategy while waiting for a cattle vaccine to be developed. The trial may last six to seven years.

Naturally this proposal has met with huge opposition. The National Trust and the Wildlife Trusts are both large landowners in the South-west, and will not be allowing MAFF to kill badgers on any of their land. In detailed submissions to the standing committee of the Bern Convention, the National Federation of Badger Groups (NFBG) report that the British Government has already killed more than 20,000 badgers over the past twenty-three years without proving a link between badgers and TB. The standing committee of the Bern Convention will be holding its annual meeting on the 30th of November (1998) and it is expected to confirm that, if Britain goes ahead with the cull, it will be in breach of a number of the convention's articles. Ratified in 1979, the Convention is Europe's longest-standing wildlife treaty and commits contracting governments to protecting species listed in its third Appendix. Badgers are included in this list because they are declining in Europe; the UK is a stronghold for the animal.

Dr Elaine King, conservation officer of the NFBG, says that MAFF is obsessed with killing badgers because it is politically expedient, not because it is the most satisfactory solution. The Mammal Society and the NFBG believe that MAFF should divert resources into an integrated approach to the problem. While pressing on with the development of an

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effective vaccine and an improved diagnostic test for cattle, studies on the route of disease transmission would identify improved farming practices that could lead to a rapid reduction in cases of TB in cattle. MAFF is currently spending only £1 million a year on developing a vaccine for cattle compared with the £7 million they are proposing to spend per year on the trial cull.

The badger is one of Britain's best-loved wild animals, and it is inevitable that members of the public will demonstrate against the Government's proposal, and take direct action against the killing. When so much time and money is spent to protect badgers from badger diggers; from the effects of development and dangerous roads, it seems ludicrous to think of putting into practice a scheme in which badgers will be trapped and shot, to provide undeniable evidence that badgers do infect cattle.

(This article was reprinted from "Wildlife Matters" the newsletter of the Deeside Urban Wildlife Group)

Leaves - a Blow by Blow Account

by Anthony Phelps

It's started already - don't know if you've noticed it. Silly, resource wasting gardeners spending countless hours blowing leaves around their gardens.

Their rubbish bins are quickly filled with them, and these all end up in landfill. These same people can also be found in garden centres buying expensive bags of mulches, composts or, heaven forbid, peat, to put on their gardens. If only they could follow the example of a lady I spoke to near the ToCH Playing Fields in East Didsbury, who was actually collecting leaves from outside of her garden, to pile up under her bushes. They make a perfect soil conditioner, as the worms love them, and carry them underground for you. They provide homes for hibernating hedgehogs, and larders for birds such as Blue Tits and Blackbirds - and happy times can be spent watching them digging through the leaves finding all the creatures that live in the leaf litter, helping it decompose.

So, a few of them may blow about a bit in the wind - that's what leaves do. At the end of autumn, when the trees are bare is the time to sweep them up, and move them around. If you start too soon, you're wasting time and precious power, as a fresh cover will quickly settle behind you.

If you're bothered about what your neighbours will think, seeing leaves heaped up under your bushes, why not put them into your compost heap, or even into unsealed bin bags, and make your own leaf mould. You can use that next spring/summer to plant up your pots, and it'll all be free.

"PLEASE DON'T WASTE THE EARTH'S RESOURCES"

We Are Already Recycling! by Lesley Bernadis

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Despite what we read in the (environmentally-friendly) press, in fact we are all involved in recycling; interestingly, we have had contact with recycling for so long, we don't recognise it as such, nor notice it happening world-wide, so it might be worthwhile exploring some ongoing activities from the Recycling perspective.

From prehistoric times, don't forget, land has been recycled by nature: for example, in the Tertiary geological period, many mountain chains were formed by volcanic activity, notably the Alps and the Rockies/Andes American chain. Subsequently natural erosion has started to wear down these mountains (by wind, rain, snow and frost action) so that today surrounding areas are blessed with recycled rock particles (soil, though its recycling process has been lengthy and complex), and agriculture is now widespread in these lowland areas. The time required for these processes is so lengthy that we don't see it happening in our lifetime, except in rare cases such as Surtsey (a new volcanic island off Iceland) which has now been colonised by plant life.

Then there is water. Have you ever wondered where our regular supply of rainwater comes from? Well, it consists of wind-borne moisture evaporation off the oceans, in Britain's case, usually from the Atlantic. Then it is deposited (over both land and sea) as the temperature drops/air pressure rises and the moisture condenses as rain. When it falls over land, it drains as rivers - back into the sea. Even when man collects it in reservoirs then uses it domestically and industrially, it returns to rivers as sewage and thus re-enters the recycling process. Despite what North West Water charge us, Mother Nature is recycling rain for free!

Now, let's consider what we do with water. First of all, we drink it - and then return it to the environment as sewage. Recycling takes place. Secondly, having drunk (and eaten, and cooked) using pots and pans, we do the washing-up. Has it ever crossed your thoughts that almost everything in your kitchen is re-used? In jungles, some indigenous peoples use a large fresh leaf as a plate for each meal, and thus literally recycle plant life when they discard used leaves on the jungle floor. This is an impossibility in Britain, where large leaves cannot survive our winter. Our coniferous trees bear "needles" all year, and deciduous trees drop their leaves for winter. Most flowers die back in the winter, to grow from bulbs or seeds in the spring. So instead, we must re-use our cleaned implements - even our storage containers such as lunch-boxes and tea-caddies. Thirdly, to keep ourselves warm (or modest!) we wear clothes, but we have to keep them clean. So we wash them too, and thus re-use more items. It may not be recycling in the narrow sense of the word, but it is closely affiliated and relates to the further eco-friendly concepts of reducing production, waste and packaging.

Pursuing the idea of clothes, think of charity shops selling second-hand clothes cheaply. Where do these clothes come from? From people like us, who donate the clothes we no longer wish to wear, rather than bin them. Re-use again.

Libraries also operate on the principle of re-use. Public or private, members are allowed to take books home to read, provided the books are returned for other members to re-use. There is also a very small re-use element when libraries offer unpopular books for sale, rather than bin them. Following this train of thought, anyone with children will have come across toy libraries. These substitute toys for books. In both cases, consumption (and production) are reduced because many members can re-use the same item.

On a completely different tack, doorstep delivery of milk involves re-use of glass milk bottles, and many families still use this service. A further eco-friendly benefit of this system is that delivery is made by electrical-battery-powered vehicles. And cat litter is now available pelleted from recycled wood shavings.

This has not been an exhaustive review of how our daily lives already incorporate recycling and related concepts. I have merely tried to illustrate how much existing recycling goes unnoticed. These personal jottings are just a Devil's Advocate viewpoint to tap the shoulder of the recycling lobby, offsetting the mountain of recycling anxiety with a few grains of reassurance. We all know where Great Oaks come from!

North West Bird Fair

This was held on the weekend of the 21st & 22nd of November 1998 at Martin Mere, a Wildlife and Wetlands Trust reserve to which I had only been once before, on a birding group visit. However, on the 15th of November, I went on the train, and it's easy - £4.95 return and only about half an hour's walk from Burscough Bridge station (last stop before Southport).

I decided to visit the Bird Fair on the Saturday, starting with a bit of luck when I was offered a lift as I'd just started my walk from the station.

Having been to the national Bird Watching Fair at Rutland Water on a couple of occasions, this event was small, in comparison, but packed with visitors. There were plenty of things to occupy people, and their purses - with stalls offering birding equipment, books, paintings and outdoor gear. There were lectures on a wide variety of topics and of course the birds themselves, outdoors, where I spent a considerable amount of my time. I even managed to find several species I'd failed to locate during the previous weekend, including a huge female Peregrine and the elusive Smew. All in all, there's something for everyone, and it's not a great expense, so why not go there next year.



Anthony Phelps

Book Review

BIRDS IN GREATER MANCHESTER 1997 - 22nd Greater Manchester Bird Report

Edited by Judith Smith - Greater Manchester Bird Club, September 1998, paperback
140pp, £5.00 (+ 50p postage)

from: Mrs. A. J. Smith, 12 Edge Green Street,
Ashton-in-Makerfield, Wigan WN4 8SL

Every year the magazine "British Birds" presents awards for the Best Annual Bird Reports. I suppose anyone could submit a report of birds in their garden or local park but these would be limited in their interest and value as reference material, so most submissions are from county-wide groups. The 1995 Greater Manchester Report was placed 11th in this national "competition" and the 1996 Report was adjudged 7th best and winner of the "small membership" category. So how does the latest edition compare?

First impressions count, and a generous grant from the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities has made possible a full-colour cover with excellent photographs (by Gordon Yates) of Kingfishers front and back. There are four more colour photographs inside and the use of coated paper for the printing has made the report a little less bulky than usual. The 140 pages of text are visually enhanced by the occasional map and a dozen line drawings which vary in quality though the fine pen work of Paul Greenall is of a high standard.

The proof of any bird (or botanical or butterfly) report is its systematic list - the inventory of species seen during the year with notes on where and when they occurred, their numbers and an analysis of whether they are thriving or in decline. The task of producing this list must have become less onerous in recent years thanks to the computer database. Records submitted by observers (over 200 contributed in 1997) are entered and, when the time comes to compile the report, can be extracted as necessary. In theory this is much easier than when everything had to be hand-written or retyped, but consider this - in excess of 17,500 records were entered onto the Greater Manchester bird database in 1997, and that's the easy bit!

Some county bird reports are little more than lists of data (e.g. Mallard: 95 on Newton Park Lake - 5th Jan.; 87 on Smalltown Pond - 10th Feb.; etc.) the hard work is making dry statistics (however important they may be) into something readable. This is where Judith Smith and her assistants (John Butterworth and Paul Brewster) are to be congratulated. The facts and figures are still there but the inclusion of observers' comments and the occasional tongue-in-cheek remark provide some light relief. I particularly liked the description of the Magpie as an "opportunistic dandy" (do they mean the bird or this magazine?).

Where the Greater Manchester report scores over its "rivals" is in its coverage of our more common birds. Most editors will allocate as much space to a single sighting of a Red-cheeked Lesser Whistle Warbler (which

had just escaped from a local pet shop) as they will to their numerous, but declining, population of House Sparrows. Our county reports, quite rightly, give more space to the Mallard than to the Red-breasted Merganser.

The Systematic List, of 202 species, takes up over half of the report and makes full use of data gathered from well-organised scientific surveys so accurate comparisons can be made with previous years. The remainder of the report includes several short articles, a list of useful names and addresses and news of various "developments" which may well threaten local bird populations. To be critical, this report probably contains more typographical errors than usual but these do little to detract from a publication which in content is as good as its predecessors and in appearance surpasses them. No serious student of ornithology should be without a copy.



Stephen Suttill

Maybe the Law isn't an Ass after all? by Witha Smallpea

I've just received my copy of "SchNEWS" (a weekly "real" news update, that you simply must read to find out what's going on in the world).

In my previous articles in the spring 1997 (number 39) and the summer 1998 (number 43) editions of the Magpie, you will have read all about the "Gandalf" trial. Well, "it's over!", and the last two defendants, Robin Webb (editor of the Animal Liberation Front magazine), and Paul Rogers (editor of Green Anarchist), have both had their "conspiracy" charges dropped. This leaves Hampshire constabulary with serious egg on their faces (maybe they'd have preferred a tofu creme pie? If you're a regular SchNEWS reader, you'll understand this reference!), but more importantly, an estimated bill fast approaching £10 million, all of which has been spent in the four and a half years they've been hounding Robin Webb (surely a dangerous criminal?) during "Operation Washington".

Originally six people had been charged with "conspiring to incite persons unknown on unspecified dates over a five year period to commit unspecified criminal damage". During the first trial, three editors of Green Anarchist were found guilty, and each given a three year sentence. However, after only serving three months, their convictions were quashed, and they were released from jail. All these people were actually guilty of doing was reporting the facts about direct actions.

Robin Webb's comment to SchNEWS was: "I'm delighted that, what the National Union of Journalists referred to as 'an extreme vendetta against me by Hampshire Police', has finally come to an end".

To get your copy of SchNEWS regularly, send a first-class stamp per edition required, or donations (payable to "Justice?") to: SchNEWS, c/o on-the-fiddle, PO Box 2600, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 2DX. It's also available from the One World Centre, and on the Internet: address: schnews@brighton.co.uk

Have They Gone Completely Mad or What?

Roll up, roll up, come and see the freak show - yet another unsustainable development for Manchester! Well, if we're going to go potty, we may as well go completely potty. What am I raving on about, you may ask? There have been reports in the press about a brilliant (?) idea for a horse racing course, near Worsley, on 2,000 acres of land in the area of Botany Bay Woods. Race horse owners and jockeys are delighted saying it's a crying shame that Manchester hasn't got a first class race course. They may not be old enough to remember that there was such a facility, on the banks of the Irwell in Salford, but it closed down about 30 years ago and was turned into a housing estate. If I remember rightly, the reason it closed was because it was not economically viable. This factor is unlikely to have changed, particularly as there are many more leisure facilities placing demands on our already strained purses.

Other leisure facilities are promised for the development, such as: shooting, boating (with a marina), wind surfing, fishing, archery, orienteering, pony trekking and a golf course. I would have thought that most of these facilities were readily available in our many country parks and river valleys. Housing will also be a part of the development. To placate the environmentally concerned, a Country & Leisure Park is proposed which will include a visitor centre & themed trail, a play & picnic area, wildflower meadows, tree top trails and play sculpture (?).

We are not yet sure what the environmental implications will be but there are sites of nature conservation interest in the area. As there is no planning application, at present, we cannot make a reasoned objection but it looks as though the main reason against the proposed development will be on wildlife grounds.

You may be interested to know who is behind this idiotic scheme. To those of us in the know there can be only one candidate. It's Peel Holdings, of course, the developers of the shopping city at Dumplington. One gets the impression they will not be happy until they own all the land in Greater Manchester and have built something completely useless on it.

Keep your eyes open on this one. The more people who object the better and if you hear anything, let us know. _ _ _ _

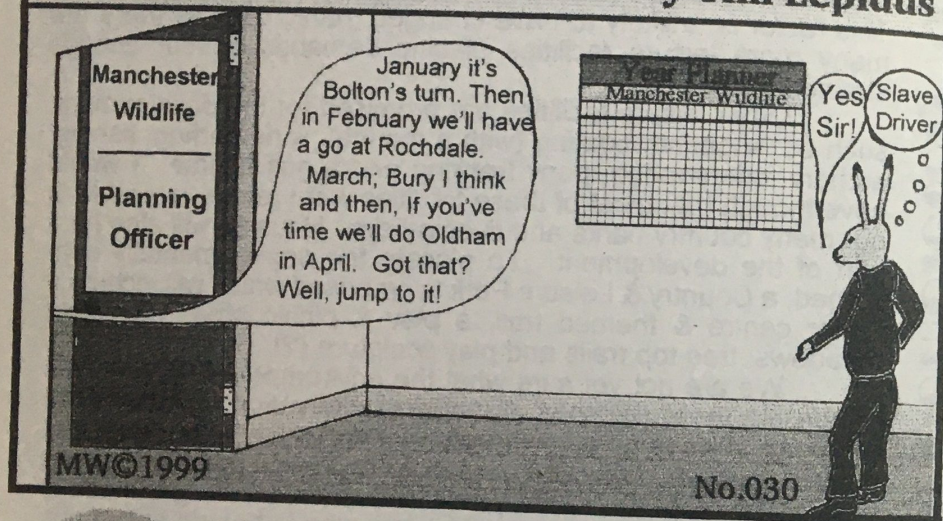
Fortunately, it's not all madness. In Magpie 41 we reported on a proposed indoor ski slope in Wigan. The wonderful name for this development is Xanadu! The good news is that the application has been called in for public inquiry so maybe common sense will prevail after all. Did you see the ski slope in Albert Square? I had a quick look when I was in the City centre, just before Christmas. It didn't look very popular and I have never seen anything quite so tatty. Mind you, when we have to put up with a giant Father Christmas on the roof of the Town Hall, what can you expect!

Bury Wildlife Network

Manchester Wildlife is now a member of the Bury Wildlife Network. This group, in effect, replaces the Bury Wildlife Advisory Group which was disbanded some time ago. The Network's membership is made up of wildlife and conservation organisations covering the Bury area. MW member Dave Bentley is our representative on the Network and he will also be monitoring planning applications on the north side of Greater Manchester. When the Bury Wildlife Network does something of note it will be reported in this newsletter.

March Hare

by Tim Lepidus



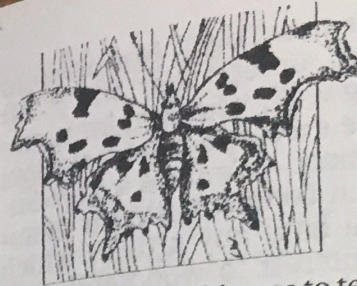
Moss

There have been reports of moss being stolen from the wild countryside. In fact, a florist was prosecuted, and fined, for just such a misdemeanour. Moss is a wild plant and it is an offence to uproot any wild plant without the landowner's permission. Much of the moss stolen is taken from woodland nature reserves and is used in the making of wreaths.

It is possible to buy environmentally friendly wreaths but how does one tell? To be sure it is best to avoid buying them.

In a similar vein, a florist was prosecuted for stealing old wreaths from a cemetery skip. This was reported as a heinous crime but I say, "good for them". Surely it is better that waste floral tributes should be reused in the florist trade rather than being landfilled, or at best composted.

Ian Brown



Butterflies in 23 Reddish Vale

by Piers White

You may have seen an article in the Metro News about the "Three-acre safe haven for insects" under the headline **Butterflies flutter free**. This was to tell us of the good news that a derelict industrial estate in Reddish Vale had been transformed into a haven for butterflies. Wild flower (and grass) seeds have been sown and shrubs & trees will soon be planted to attract as many species as possible. Paths will enable visitors to see the colourful insects at close range.

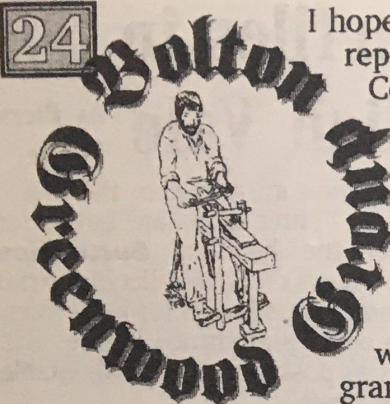
Roy Hymas, project ranger for Stockport Council's urban and countryside service, said: "There are around 20 species of butterfly which have been sighted in Stockport and we want to encourage them to stick around and others to come into town. There will be as many natural habitats as possible, within the park, including wet, dry and shady areas. We are introducing a wide variety of plants into the park aimed at bringing in specific types of butterfly. For example, the Brimstone needs Alder Buckthorn and the Green-veined White needs Cuckoo Flower. There's nothing like this in Manchester (though fortunately there are still some wild areas left - **Ed.**), although there used to be one in Alexander Park, Whalley Range. Apparently, people said it looked too messy because of all the natural grasses and wild flowers and it's now been lawned over."

The park will be open in spring, this year, to coincide with Butterflies in Your Garden Year, and Stockport Council is producing a leaflet to enable them to survey the butterflies in the borough. This will include colour pictures of the 12 most common species to help with identification.

We were a little worried about the statement, in the Metro article, that the area of the park had been landscaped with "tonnes of topsoil", as most wildflowers prefer a poor soil if they are to survive competition from ranker vegetation. On inquiry, we were assured that the topsoil was not of the usual rich variety but more in the way of adding different types of "soil" such as sand and gravel. If you want to see the park it is near the Reddish Vale visitor centre. We will try to arrange a trip during this summer. Hopefully we will see you there.

(Much of this article was taken from the Manchester Metro News 29.5.98)

While we are on the subject of butterflies, a quick mention of our Butterfly Survey. As I said in the previous Magpie, 1998 was not a good year. We have had only one survey report, so far, and it was not from me. On the few occasions I went out looking for butterflies, I was mostly unlucky. Let's hope that 1999 will be a better year. More in the spring Magpie when we will be sending out survey forms so you can take part. Meanwhile, as soon as this newsletter is done and dusted, I will be getting back to work on the survey report which should be ready, sometime next century!



I hope you like our new Logo. Not much to report this time, except that the Craft Centre is going well, with regular work-days; we are even open on weekdays, by appointment. We have a newsletter to keep in contact with our members. If you have any articles which will be of interest to woodland craft workers, they would be most welcome. Issue One is already out; others will follow when we have a new programme of events. There will be an open day on Saturday the 8th of May. The main

thing to note is that membership of the Bolton Greenwood Group is **free**. If you would like to join please contact: **Ian Brown, 82 Crantock Drive, Heald Green, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 3HA** - Tel. 0161-437 7040, with your name, address and telephone number.

School Nature Areas by Merton Niven

While we have been consulted on the planning of school nature areas, on a number of occasions, there is only one in which we have had 100% involvement. That is at English Martyr's RC Primary School.

The nature area was planned to be as simple as possible. A hedge was planted round the perimeter, there were small areas of tree planting, wild meadows and a grassed path winding through the site. Of course there was the obligatory pond which was kept topped up by tapping the drainage from a nearby roof. The first setback was when the building (an outside classroom) was demolished. Fortunately the head teacher, Paddy Heheghan, ensured the pond was watered during the drier spells. The nature area has been a success; it was easy to manage and appreciated by the staff and children at the school.

However, a new setback had occurred. The school is to close. What will happen to the site we do not yet know and it is possible that the wild garden will be lost. When we find out more we will be in a better position to know if anything can be done to save the situation.

We would like to do more work on establishing nature areas in schools but it takes quite a lot of work and we would require the support of our members if we are to take on any more of this type of project.

Meanwhile, if you want to see the nature area, at English Martyr's, why not join us on our annual work day at the school. Details in the events list on page 27.

by Basil Faucet

Floods!

During 1998 there were two periods of horrendous flooding; the first at Easter and the second during October. I had personal experience of the first as I had to ford a considerable flood, outside Hereford and to see the Lugg meadows completely covered by water was quite an experience. It is probable that the October floods were the worse as the River Severn, at Bewdley reached 21 feet above its normal level. All in all, 1998 was a pretty wet year.

What I found most interesting was the number of "experts" who were paraded before the television cameras to give their opinions. It wasn't just their appearance which was interesting, but what they said. In October, a spokesman from the Environment Agency (formerly the National Rivers Authority) said that building had taken place in water catchment areas which would have been better left undeveloped. Some development has even taken place on flood plains. This meant that, instead of rainwater soaking into the ground and being gradually released into the streams and rivers, water drained of the hard ground instantly, giving rise to the possibility of flooding, downstream.

It's common sense really but we have used this reasoning, on a number of occasions, in our objections to planning applications on open spaces, only to be told that the NRA had no objections on these grounds. Two cases which spring to mind are the Sainsbury/John Lewis Superstores at Bruntwood (nearly 50 acres of open meadowland) and office development at Sharston Playing Fields. So when the River Mersey floods, don't blame us!

Now, when there is a national, or international, disaster, be it flooding, hurricane, avalanche or mud slide, an "expert" will pop up and blame it on a factor caused by, or exacerbated by, human folly. The most common candidates are El Niño and Global Warming. Environmental organisations such as Friends of the Earth, WWF, RSPB and possibly Manchester Wildlife have been saying such things for years and it is gratifying to know that scientists, politicians and bureaucrats have now come round to this way of thinking. It should have happened sooner. Whether or not those in positions of power will do anything to correct the situation, we will have to wait and see. More pressure from environmentalists will help and we can act as individuals. If we embrace the principles of Agenda 21, particularly sustainable development, we can all play a part.

Competition Result

The competition in the summer 1998 Magpie did not prove as popular as we might have hoped. There is, of course, a winner and that honour goes to Charlotte Abbas. The promised prize of a needle case and a paper knife will be on its way, as soon as the Bodger has a chance to get to work on the former.



Millaa Millaa Bat Hospital by Angela Graham

In October I went to help at "Millaa Millaa Bat Hospital" in the Atherton Tablelands region of Northern Queensland. It's an area where the tropical rainforest has been cleared for dairy farming. A large shrub called the tobacco weed has invaded the cleared land and the bats (spectacled flying foxes - *Pteropus conspicillatus*) feed on its flowers. As a result they come into contact with paralysis ticks which they wouldn't normally encounter and have no defence against. These ticks inject a toxin, which paralyses the host animal. The bats return to their camps in the jungle, become paralysed, fall from the trees and quickly become infested with fly maggots if not rescued. The peak tick season coincides with the time when adult female bats are carrying dependent babies.

One tick is sufficient to kill an adult spectacled flying fox. These bats have a head and body length of about 240mm, forearm length about 170mm and weigh about 700g. They have a wingspan somewhere in the region of a metre.

We volunteers walked through the jungle beneath the bat camps twice a day rescuing stranded bats. (The Australians kept questioning my use of the word "bat". People kept saying "do you mean bat or do you mean flying fox?" They have a point, because now I've met fruit bats I'm surprised anyone ever considered they might be descended from the same lineage as insectivorous bats.)

We took the paralysed bats back to the corrugated metal hut that was the bat hospital, injected them with antitoxin and killed and removed the ticks. After that the bats received subcutaneous fluids twice a day because they were unable to swallow, antibiotics (to prevent pneumonia - a complication of partially paralysed lungs) and valium for the more anxiety prone individuals. Often they needed eye drops too because their facial muscles were paralysed and they couldn't blink. Fly eggs and maggots were sprayed with permethrin-based insecticide and cleaned-off as well as possible and the bats were kept cold (if you can call 18 degrees centigrade cold!) to minimise the effect of the toxin. The hospital was air-conditioned but very sick bats were wrapped in a towel and laid on an ice-block! Any orphaned babies were hand reared for release into the wild in February.

The babies are just like human babies. They were fed four hourly (very old-fashioned - have the Australian's never heard of demand feeding?), cried if they weren't given a dummy in-between feeds, wore nappies and cried if they were lonely to the point that people took them to bed with them just to shut them up. They were kept warm in an ancient incubator designed for human babies.

I had a wonderful time and entered into the true spirit of the occasion by playing host to one of the paralysis ticks (and it hurt!) and accidentally injecting myself with a needle I'd just used on a bat. You may have seen in the press that there have been human fatalities in Australia when people have succumbed to equine morbillivirus, which originates in fruit bats. So if I fall ill in the next few weeks... (I've been immunised against rabies, so that shouldn't be a problem).

This year there's been an extra problem for the bats because the tobacco weed has been sprayed with herbicide and lots of babies have been born with cleft palates and other deformities. As it's a dairy farming area I can't help but wonder it there might be a knock-on effect for humans. (The authorities were trying to blame the deformities on equine morbillivirus while I was there, but I believe they've accepted the herbicide argument now.) And the moral of the story is - **leave nature alone.**

Finally, the BBC had just finished filming when I got there. The hospital is supposed to be having a 3 minute slot (which took 2 days to film) in "Too Close for Comfort" (I can't imagine what they mean... ticks I hope, except I suspect equine morbillivirus will sneak its way in there somehow) in June 1999. Anyone wishing to make a donation to the hospital, which is run entirely on voluntary contributions, should contact me on 0161 797 4745.

Manchester Wildlife - Events and Meetings

January 1999

Saturday 23rd - EMERGE/CND Benefit (Big Bazaar, Jumble Sale and Auction) - Time 2pm at Chorlton Central Church, Barlow Moor Road. Contacts: EMERGE 0161-232 8014; CND 0161-834 8301.

Thursday 28th - General Meeting - Time 7.30pm at the One World Centre (Friends Meeting House basement), Central Street, Mount Street, Manchester. Contact Ian Brown 0161-437 7040.

Sunday 31st - Walk around Chorlton Water Park with the Mersey Valley Wardens - Times 10am & 2pm at Chorlton Water Park Visitor Centre car park, Maitland Avenue, Chorlton-Cum-Hardy. Leader - Adam Davidson. Contact Mersey Valley Wardens - Tel. 0161-905 1100.

February 1999

Tuesday 9th - Social Meeting - Time 7.30pm at the Old Monkey Public House, junction of Portland Street/Princess Street, Manchester. Convenient for Piccadilly Gardens Bus & Metro Station. Contact Ian Brown 0161-437 7040.

Sunday 28th - Walk around Chorlton Water Park/Kenworthy Fields - Time 10am at Chorlton Water Park Visitor Centre car park, at the end of Maitland Avenue, Chorlton-Cum-Hardy. Leader - Anthony Phelps. Wear strong boots and be prepared for anything or nothing. Contact Ian Brown 0161-437 7040.

March 1999

Sunday 7th - English Martyrs School - Nature Area Management - Time 12 noon at the school, Manley Road (off Alexandra Road South) Whalley Range. Contact Ian Brown 0161-437 7040.

Tuesday 9th - Social Meeting - Details as for 9th February.

April 1999

Tuesday 13th - Social Meeting - Details as for 9th February.

Future Event (further details in next Magpie)
Sunday 16th May - Spring Walk on Kenworthy Fields - with Northenden Civic Society. Leaders Anthony Phelps and Rob Allen.

Useful Contacts

RSNC, Urban Wildlife Partnership.	Chris Gordon, 01522 544400
English Nature.....	NW Regional Office, Bernard Fleming, 01942 820342
Cheshire Wildlife Trust.....	North Group, Trafford, Liz Blackman, 0161-962 6748
	Wilmslow Group, Tony Browne, 0161-436 1761
	Stockport and Tameside, Eric Stead, 0161-494 9130
	Bolton Wildlife Project, Mick Weston, 01204 361847
Lancashire Wildlife Trust.....	
Medlock & Tame Valley	Mildred Burlinson, 0161-330 2721
Conservation Association.....	Salford & Trafford, Val Sutton, 0161-872 7640 (day)
BTCV.....	Sale & Altrincham, Shelagh Aston, 0161-860 6910
	Bolton, Rick Parker, 01942 817302
	Bury, Lawrence Kitchenon, 0161-796 6404
British Trust for Ornithology.....	Greater Manchester Recorder, Judith Smith, 01942 712615
Red Rose Forest Team.....	Jane Whitaker, 0161-872 1660
RSPB.....	
	Bolton Group, Tony Johnson, 01204 468850
	Manchester Group, Simeon Rydz, 0161-434 2720
	Stockport Group, Tony O'Neil, 0161-223 8987
Bat Groups.....	South Lancashire, Angela Graham, 0161-797 4745
	Cheshire, Mike Freeman, 01606 41581
Butterflies/Moths.....	Barry Shaw, 0161-491 0753
Mammals/Insects.....	Bolton Museum, Steve Garland, 01204 522311
Amphibians/Ponds.....	Dave Bentley, 0161-724 8602
Mersey Valley Wardens.....	Sale, 0161-905 1100. Chorlton, 0161-881 5639
Croal/Irwell Valley Wardens.....	Nicky Greek, 01204 571561
Stockport Countryside	
Ranger Service.....	0161-477 5637
Trafford Council.....	Roz Park, 0161-912 4174
Manchester Sustainability Group...	Adrian Pearce, 0161-234 4594
Manchester Recycling Officer.....	Pete Stevens, 0161-234 4629
Stockport Recycling Hotline.....	0161-474 4747
Manchester FoE.....	0161-834 8221
Networking Newsletter.....	Michael Bane, 01457 871609
Visions Community Design.....	Judith Mottram, 0161-834 6309
Bolton Greenwood Group.....	Ian Brown, 0161-437 7040 - Mike Fisher 01204 574457

Manchester Wildlife is a networking organisation. You are included on our Contacts List, are we included on yours? Please in form us if any details are incorrect.

You are welcome to reproduce anything contained within "The Magpie", with an acknowledgement.

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