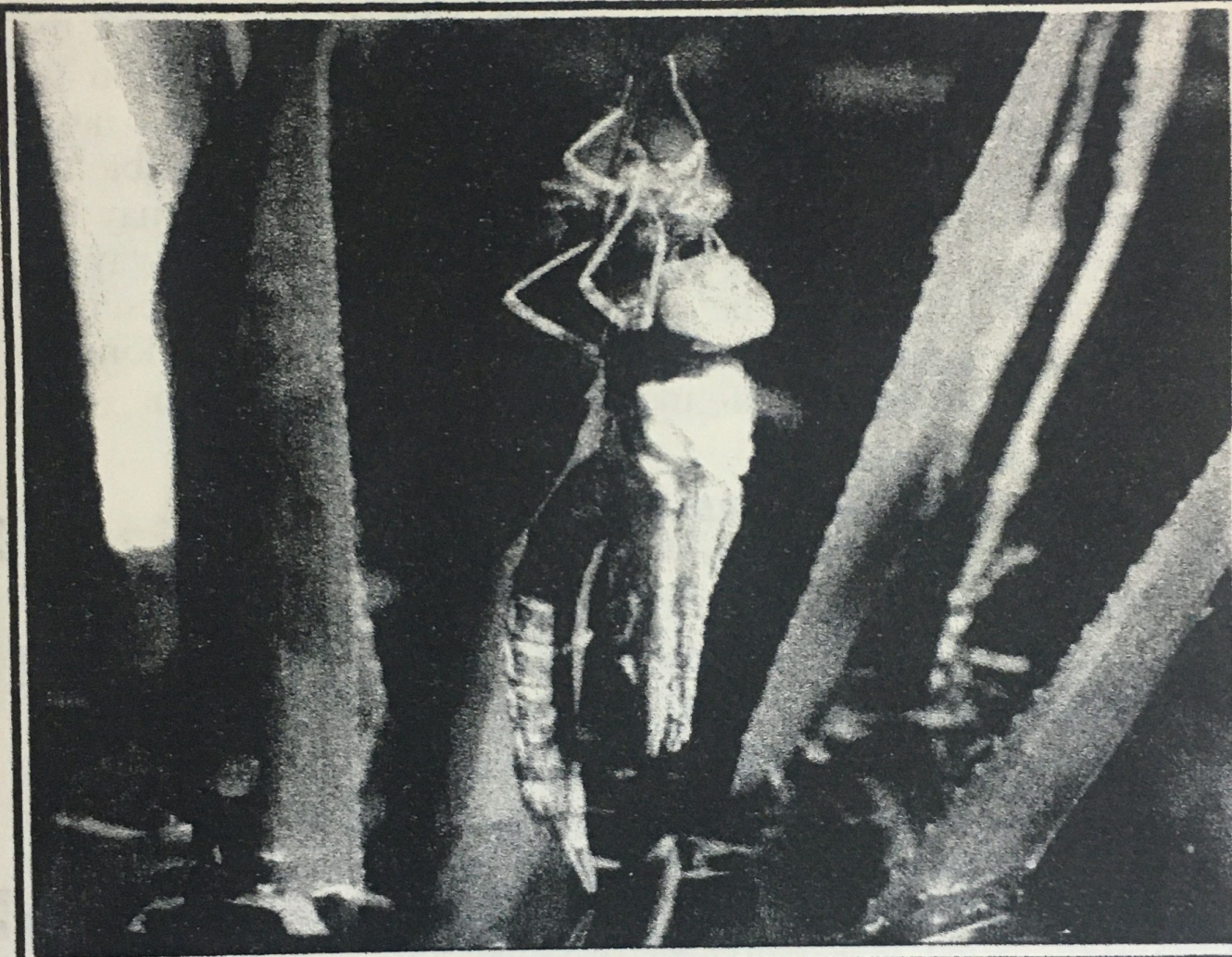




Magpie

Number 54

Summer 2005



Southern Hawker Dragonfly emerging from garden pond

Photo by - Ian Brown



**Standing up for Wildlife
in Greater Manchester**

50p

Editorial

Send in
YOUR Story

Editor's Office 0161-437 7040

You will remember that 2003 was a free year for Manchester Wildlife members, and as I did not send out reminders with the 2004 Magpie, then last year was also free. I feel it is about time we started collecting subscriptions again, so what I would like you to do is as follows.

On receiving this edition of Magpie, decide if you want to remain a member. If you do, please send me your subscription as detailed below. Those of you who have paid, by the time the next Magpie is issued, will continue to be members and will be able to benefit from all the excitement which that entails. There may be some who will not be reading this; they could have moved away or be otherwise unavailable. They, and anyone not paying a subscription will be removed from the membership list and will no longer be sent a copy of Magpie. Life members need take no action.

Subscription Rates:

- **Individual Member - £5**
- **Family, Group Members - £7.50**
- **Retired, Student, Unemployed Individual Member -£2.50**

So on with the newsletter. Most of the articles are by Anthony Phelps (what would we do without him). The Magpie is not as lengthy as usual but I hope you find it enjoyable.

In memory - With great regret we announce the death of MW member, Rob Allen. He will be sadly missed. I any of you knew Rob and would like to know the circumstances of his death, please phone me.



Manchester Wildlife Contacts

Anthony Phelps,
(Chair & 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

**PO Box 30, Bridge 5 Mill, 22a Beswick
Street, Ancoats. M4 7HR**

Artificial Kingfisher Nesting Banks

by Anthony Phelps

Back in 1991, I became aware of these, via an article about an artificial nest bank for Kingfishers at Fords at Dagenham. I wrote off to them, and came into contact with a gentleman called Don Trower, who worked in their Estates Management team, and had built the bank. He invited me to visit, which I did that summer, and was amazed to see the bank, and the photographs of the Kingfisher which had successfully nested within it.

The construction was very simple. A retaining wall of old railway sleepers was constructed near the edge of the lake. Behind this, it was in-filled, and at a suitable height, a sand-filled nest box was placed, with a pipe leading from a hole in the railway sleepers to join with the box. The bank was then in filled to the top, and topped with turf.



He did supply me with his plans for this, which I provided to the Mersey Valley Wardens when I heard that they were planning a similar bank on one of the islands at Chorlton Water Park, much later. However, they didn't use that plan, and, the Kingfishers have not used their bank.

At the recent Wildlife Working Group, we were talking about Sand Martins, and someone said that Kingfishers sometimes use and nest in Sand Martin nests - which I have, myself seen - at least a Kingfisher excavating an old Sand Martin hole - not sure whether it successfully nested in it afterwards.

However, I did mention the Fords nest bank, and Judith Smith, the County Bird Recorder was very interested, and asked me to draw a plan of the bank for her on the back of her agenda, which I did. It may be that she'll be able to locate the copy of the plans I gave to the Mersey Valley Wardens if she asks for them, although it was some time ago when I supplied them with it.

What I remembered at the time when I visited Dagenham, was that this successful nesting bank was created by people who just had a love of wildlife, and "just did it". They didn't have any specialist knowledge, or ecologists to advise them, and the plan is very simple, and could be recreated anywhere, and I hope it will be.

Book Review

by Anthony Phelps

This review was meant to be published in the last Magpie, in time for you to order for Xmas, but it didn't get in. However, it can be found on the Arkangel website:

<http://www.arkangelweb.org/index.php>

Then click on the "Review" prompt. Last time I visited it, it was number one, and each time you visit the review, it clocks up another hit.

The text of the review is:

Title: Big Bad World - Cartoon Molotovs in the Face of Corporate Rule - by Polyp

Polyp's first book is published

"Big Bad World - Cartoon Molotovs in the Face of Corporate Rule" - by Polyp

[New Internationalist Publications - ISBN 0-9540499-3-4 Published 2002]

Reviewed by Anthony Phelps, Manchester Wildlife

I've enjoyed Polyp's cartoons for ages - they seem to have cropped up throughout my years of campaigning in Manchester. I vividly remember his powerful image, which became a trademark of the Campaign Against Runway 2. This purported to be an aerial view (artists impression) of the (then) proposed new development, which looked just like a hand holding two fingers up at Manchester! Simple but inspired.

What I failed to realise was that he'd been published in the New Internationalist Magazine monthly for the past 10 years.

This book is a must for anyone who has ever fought against globalisation, stupidity by our so-called leaders, faceless bureaucracies and multinational companies. Polyp's message is simple, and was elegantly and powerfully expressed at the book launch in his flat on the 3rd August - "F*** the system!" (with repeats!). The best way that I know to do this is to laugh at it, and don't lose your sense of humour.

Peregrines in Manchester

by Anthony Phelps

People constantly seem amazed that I still do not possess a telephone. However, when I walk around, all I see is people having become slaves to the LCD display screen, constantly staring at this tiny glowing screen, and either warming or frying their brains with this new piece of technology - depending on which "informed opinion" is actually top of the pops of research at that particular moment.

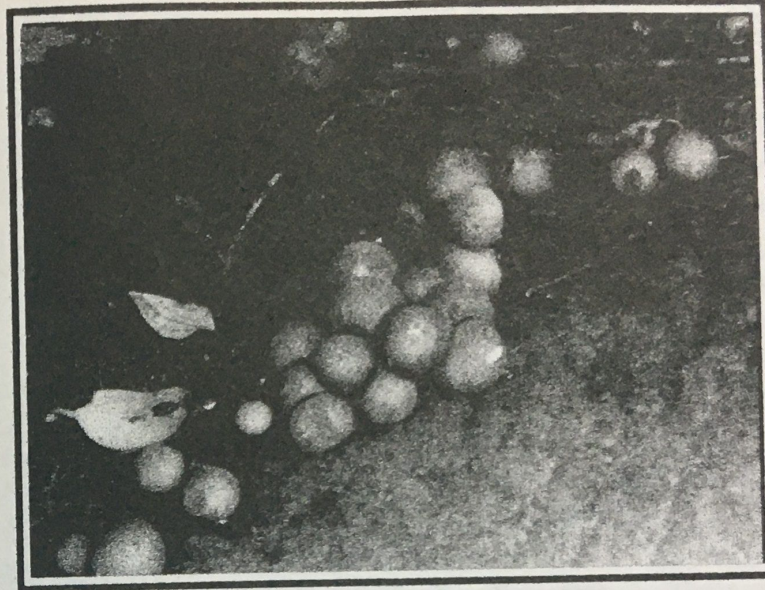
What this total concentration on this thumb exercising machine means is to miss everything else that's going on around them. My latest wildlife sighting was on Friday (17th December), when I was rushing from the CIS Tower (my latest place of work) to the Bank building on Balloon Street, when I looked up and saw what I'm 90% certain was a Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) and a Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) both drifting westwards over towards Victoria Station, but involved in "mutual mobbing" - both unhappy at sharing the same piece of air-space. I hadn't got my bins with me, as we were going out after work, and I'd deliberately not taken anything of value with me that day.

What I was expecting to see - and I know that we cannot guarantee anything in nature - was a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). There is a pair of them, and they used to breed on the old Agecroft power station site, prior to its demolition, since when they've been searching for a breeding site. Luckily for me, they have taken to some of Manchester's tallest buildings - notably the CIS Tower, where they are seen either perching, or flying around at about 21st floor level, which is fantastic, as I can look out from my desk onto Peregrines at eye level. Their other favourite perch and feeding place is Sunley Tower overlooking Piccadilly Gardens. Again, they can be seen perched, and there are good reports of them using the window ledges to pluck their, mostly, Feral Pigeon prey. I have myself stood watching one of them hunting pigeons over the Gardens, and even when I've been staring straight up with my binoculars, I've still not attracted a crowd, nor anybody asking what I'm looking at. Again, it's the old "people divorced from

wildlife" syndrome. People think, I believe, that there's nothing to watch in a City Centre – how wrong they are. I was talking to a birder at Martin Mere the other week, and we were discussing the old trick (should you be lonely anywhere) of simply standing and starrng through your binoculars, and before you realise it, you'll develop a crowd of other birders around you, afraid of missing a good sighting (this also can be used as a trick – simply gather your crowd, then slip away, leaving a crowd searching for nothing!). This doesn't work in Manchester, as I've tried it, it's almost as if I was invisible, or the passer-by thinks I'm simply awaiting the arrival of the men in white coats.

We are hoping to persuade a tall building owner in Manchester to put up a Peregrine nest box, and as I write, negotiations (involving Judith Smith, the BTO's County Bird Recorder) are still in progress. I'll update you on this – it'll be a news story when it happens, so also keep you eyes on the press. This isn't an example of a reintroduction of a species, but simply providing a little help for a species which has obviously found a place where it feels it can survive. In fact, Manchester is certainly behind London and Bristol (and possibly other cities), where breeding Peregrines are well known and documented. In America, there are wonderful stories of Peregrines nesting on hotel room window ledges in the middle of cities, and the rooms being booked out in the name "Mr & Mrs P Grine", so that the birds won't be disturbed by human guests during their time on the ledge. Bearing in mind the expense of some Biodiversity Action Plans (or BAPs); this one can be achieved with a little wood and someone willing to provide a site for it (and a little scaffolding, and a web camera, maybe?). Not bad, in my books.

Isn't it strange, but today, when I was telling my Dad the news about our Manchester Peregrines, he mentioned that, at the end of the war, whilst he was doing his National Service, he'd been stationed at HMS Peregrine. This was home to 778 Squadron, a testing squadron, all the pilots being test pilots. He said that it is now Ford Open Prison, home to at least one ex-Cabinet Minister. When he'd taken my mum, on their 30th wedding anniversary for a holiday in Wales, he'd driven past Ford, and was able to find the exact barracks where he'd lived and even the same window by his bed when he'd been stationed there.



I've a little bit a spare space here so I've included a photograph taken by Anthony Phelps of **Common Puffball** on Palatine Road.

Book Review

by Anthony Phelps

Title: The Mothercage - by Maire ni Bhraidaig

[Magpie House - ISBN 0-9544721-2-8 Published 2004]

Reviewed by Anthony Phelps, Manchester Wildlife

This is a book about a "fictious" Animal Liberation Front (ALF) raid (or "party"). However, don't think it's just about masked up 'terrorists', and if you're not into animal rights, then it's not for you. This is a book about people, and is cleverly written about the lives and feelings of each person who decides to take part in this particular raid to liberate animals. So, although you do get to understand the huge amount of planning and organisation that goes into such a raid, you also get inside the minds of each person involved.

The forward to the book is by Ronnie Lee, founder of ALF, who says "As someone who prefers to do rather than read, The Mothercage is the first book I have read from cover to cover in over 10 years ... No good book comes without a good ending, and the same can be said about this one. I'm not ashamed to say I was in tears".

I won't give away the ending, but have to admit that my eyes were watering when I got to the ending as well. I'd urge you to give this book a chance.

Urban Sand Martins

by Anthony Phelps

This summer has been good. It was at the end of our Medlock Valley Walk (Saturday 22nd May 2004), that Ian, Janet Cuff and myself decided to walk back to town via Helmet Street – the site of another of Manchester Wildlife's past campaigns, to save the Helmet Street recreation ground, as was reported in Magpies of old – sadly now built on with industrial units. Helmet Street is a short street, between Great Ancoats Street and Fairfield Street, just behind Piccadilly train station.

It was a very hot, sunny day, and I noticed a few Martins overhead, and, without actually checking, knowing the area, naturally assumed and said that they were House Martins.

On the other side of the street from the industrial units is a high retaining wall – originally designed to hold back the embankment on top of which used to be a railway line. It was into this wall that one of the Martins in question flew. What I'd failed to notice was the holes in the wall. They had, in fact, been Sand Martins.

That year the wall had been strengthened, with retaining bars and plates added. To ease the pressure on the wall from the embankment behind, about 13 holes had been drilled, from top to bottom, through the brickwork, about 2¼" (5½ cm) in diameter.

We sat and watched as several pairs of Sand Martins were seen to be flying into these holes – about 4 or 5 holes were observed being used.

We had found what must be the closest Sand Martin colony to the City Centre. I reported this site to Judith Smith, the County Bird Recorder, and wasn't surprised when I found out she didn't know about it previously.

What I find exciting about this colony, is that, had it not been for the hand (or drill) of man, they wouldn't have been there. Maybe we could persuade other wall owners, for safety reasons, of course, to drill similar holes in other walls, and increase their numbers. However, with this site, it is only a few yards across the road to the River Medlock, so the Sand Martins are not far from

their usual habitat. We'd need to find suitable walls near other rivers in order to identify other possible sites for drilling.

The other colony that I identified was suggested to me by Chris Walsh, who said he'd been cycling down the Ship Canal in Salford, and seen Martins flying out of the walls of the canal.

I visited the area (Sunday 13th June 2004), which is in fact the remainder of Pomona Docks, then an extensive area that we used to visit many years ago, but has now mostly been redeveloped for the new Metrolink. I was surprised at how much wildlife interest there still is there, both plant and birds, and will be planning a proper walk there next year (early June 2005). I quickly found the Sand Martins, and then, on the walls of the Ship Canal, found the huge colony nesting in the mortar course under the large top stones of the canal wall. I could have sat watching them for hours.

Once again, the Martins were using a man-made structure, and doing very well.



Guitars Wanted

by Dan Brown

As I mentioned in the previous Magpie, I am spending more time brushing up my musical skills (such as they are!). I have also taken to making, and repairing guitars. I have only made one but have repaired several.

If I can buy cheaply, or otherwise acquire, an instrument, I repair, as necessary, and give it away to a local school. In this way I hope to encourage more youngsters to take an interest in music; which can't be a bad thing. My main problem is finding guitars which are cheap enough (or free). If anyone has a guitar (in any condition), and has no further use for it, I would be delighted if they could pass it on to me. I should be able to make the necessary repairs and pass it on to the music teacher at my (or your) local school. Please contact me on 0161-437 7040.

Controlling Canada Geese Populations

by Anthony Phelps

I suppose my reason for writing this article is to justify becoming involved in this operation. Not that I feel a need to explain my actions, but as a long-time vegan – over 11 years now – and also becoming more and more involved in animal rights, it does seem, on the face of it, a strange thing for me to do, and I, along with the others taking part have all questioned their beliefs and actions, and are still doing so even having taken part.

It started with an email sent over the web from an AR contact asking for volunteers to help. I was down in Ramsgate at the time, and I sent an answer back from my friend's computer saying that I would make myself available.

The story was that Severn Trent Water, one of the privatised water companies, was concerned about the numbers of Canada Geese (*Branta Canadensis*) on their reservoirs in the Derwent Valley. They claimed that there were more than 600 geese on their reservoirs, and they were going to “cull them”, ie kill the adult birds.

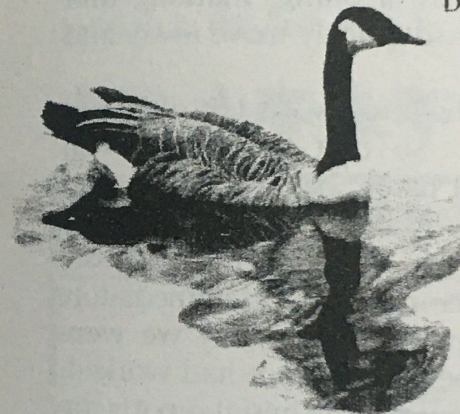
A group called PICAS negotiated with Severn Trent to discuss “non-lethal” ways to achieve the same aims, and “egg oiling” was agreed upon, to be done over a 3 year period, under licence.

The first visit to Howden Reservoir was on the 17th April 2004, when a group of people mainly from MAP Soc (Manchester Animal Protection Society) and I met early, when we were provided with our equipment, and the Paraffin oil with which to perform the task, and a map of the area to be worked. It wasn't really a good day for us, being a crew of four vegans, it didn't sit easily on our shoulders, and the only justification for imposing our collective will on the breeding cycle of these birds was that, if we didn't do it, the alternative was for Severn Trent to wait until the end of the season, when the birds moulted, catch them on the water whilst they were unable to fly, and lethally inject them.

So, although we'd all rather not have been doing it, we had the feeling that we had to do it to avoid a more horrible solution (“final solution”?) at the hands of Severn Trent.

The day was not a good one for us – I think a pundit would say that the birds won most of the matches. I have to say that my impression of Canada Geese as parents was non-existent when I started, but was full of admiration for them by the end of that day. I had had previous experience of geese – domestic geese (from Greylags) – when I was a child in short trousers, sent to collect their eggs at my Aunt's house out in the country. You can understand why some people favour geese as guard animals in preference to dogs!

We found 19 nests that day, with a total of 66 eggs found. Out of these, we managed to oil only 32 eggs. We had made a collective decision to leave one egg un-oiled in each nest, but still mark it with marker pen, so that anyone checking “our work” wouldn't find out. So there were really two “battles” that day; one



between Severn Trent Water and us vegans, and the other between the vegans and the Geese. The vegans came second, and the Geese came out on top!

What I didn't realise is that only the female Canada Goose incubates the eggs, with the male Goose mostly staying out on the water, except when the female is distressed, when he will fly in to protect her, although some of the very young males don't even bother with this. When the female needs a break, she'll cover her eggs with grass, reeds and feathers, until her return.

One reason why we weren't very successful was that we'd not done this before; the Geese didn't want us to do it, and, the more experienced birds were extremely aggressive. This is where my admiration for their parenting skills was formed.

Our technique was to try to persuade the female off her nest - try being the operative word. At our approach, she'd hiss, and hold out her wings, whilst refusing to even stand up from her nest. If you persisted, some birds would move off a little, allowing the other team members to move in and mark and oil the eggs. With the more experience pairs, even before this could happen, the male would fly in and attack us – I was literally flown into with the full

force of the male's chest hitting my body, with the wings hitting me repeatedly; terribly brave when you consider the size difference between a goose and a human. It's really amazing that they don't suffer any lasting injuries the way they throw themselves at you. One pair we found in a marshy area was so aggressive that they left all the team with bruises, and we hadn't even seen the nest! We never got near it, even on the next visit when we had worked out our strategy!

The next date was the 1st May 2004. This time, as mentioned, our strategy was developed, and we split the tasks. I was to move the female off, using my leg gently as a persuader. I had a walking stick to "widen" my body area, and act as a protective screen. Once the female was off the nest, one other on the team would help to keep both birds at bay, whilst the last two worked "safely" on the eggs. Following successful oiling, marking and logging of the nest and egg numbers, we'd quickly move away and allow the birds to continue.

The theory of egg oiling is that the birds won't lay any more eggs – which removal would cause. So that the female will continue sitting and the eggs just won't hatch, having been sealed by the oil. We did monitor several nests after treatment, from a distance, and were saddened that the birds were obviously distressed at our intrusion, and didn't seem to want to immediately move back onto their eggs. However, the second day we were there, we did see these birds still on their nests, so it had worked. Also, although we've not had detailed reports, the initial reports are that most groups on the lake after hatching seemed to have just one chick. Now, that's a surprise!

What really bothers me is that Severn Trent's initial estimate bore no relation to the numbers of birds that we saw and counted on the lake on the two occasions that we were there. It seemed to us that they were deliberately vastly over-estimating the numbers to "get their own way" and force some kind of control measures to take place.

Canada Geese are not a native species to this country, having been introduced into collections from North America. From these collections they subsequently escaped and have now formed successful feral populations. They should, therefore, in my opinion, be left alone; especially as they do not appear to be causing any damage to the lake, as far as we could see. When you talk to people

about it, they are disturbed that Severn Trent Water wants to kill them. Certainly nobody questioned us about what we were doing whilst we were there, which did not really surprise me – we did have a clip-board! Mind you, what did disturb me was the bus driver who stopped, and told us to be careful as "there were wardens in the area"!

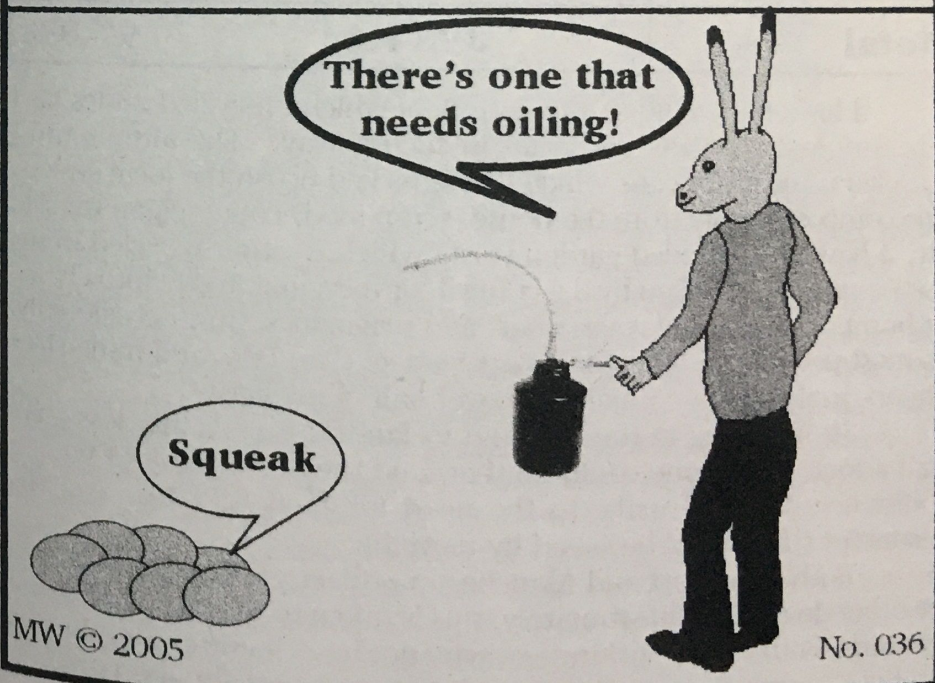
I know that some of the group are in two minds whether they want to do this again, and I don't blame them. However, I have decided to make my time available again in 2005, mainly because I don't want the alternative cull to take place. However, I believe that we won't be allowed to get away with leaving one egg un-oiled this time – they may have spotted our ruse!

So, on balance, I'd say that I would rather not have had to do this, but most of all, wish that we hadn't been forced into making the decision in the first place by Severn Trent Water's "need to kill".



March Hare

by Tim Lepidus



More Recycling

by Ian Brown

Some time ago I heard that everyone in this country throws away half a ton of domestic rubbish each year. I thought that this is an awful lot! Surely it can be improved upon by various means.

First of all we could buy less rubbish - reuse more - recycle more - etc. So I decided that I would weigh all the rubbish that went out of my house, in various ways, for a year. And here are the results:

Bin	39 lbs	9.8%
Glass	53 lbs	13.3%
Paper	210 lbs	52.8%
Steel	11 lbs	2.8%
Compost	63 lbs	15.8%
Plastic	2 lbs	0.5%
Clothes	11 lbs	2.8%
Total	398 lbs	97.8%

I have not included aluminium, of which I recycled 25 lbs, as I buy very few products packaged in such a way. The aluminium I recycled is mostly of cans which I have picked up on the local streets. The compost is only from the house; scrap food, paper, cigarette ash, etc. I have not included garden waste which is either recycled in my own compost bin, taken by the council for recycling, made into chairs, or burnt. I do not buy newspapers and magazines, only occasionally, so most people will have more paper waste than I do, and mine (free papers, junk mail, etc.) makes up over half of my waste.

39 lbs going in the bin, and to landfill is certainly less than half a ton. I everyone could do that, and they can, think of what a difference it would make to the need for land fill sites, and the resources that would be saved by recycling.

Both Stockport and Manchester collect garden waste (maybe other do also). Unfortunately, this is taken to Blackpool for composting. Better than nothing but why not have it composted locally and used locally? It would save a lot of transport (by road)!

Vanishing Wildflowers by Ian Brown

Alison Hunt has asked me to say something about the plight of some of our native wildflowers. Most of you will be aware of the situation as it has been well covered on the television and in the national newspapers. Many of our, once common, native wildflowers are threatened with extinction, particularly cornfield annuals and hay-meadow plants. The main reason is loss of habitat (isn't it always!).

This started with the ploughing of ancient hay meadows, in the Second World War, to produce more food. It continued with the change from hay to silage production, and the use of herbicides and artificial fertilizers. Now the sight of colourful flowers in our cornfields and meadows is a rare experience. Over 10 years ago, the Wildlife Trusts started a campaign called, *Vanishing Meadows*, to highlight the situation. We are not sure what affect this had but, at the time, it was stated that our wildflower rich meadows had declined by 97% since 1939. In the urban areas, the main reason for habitat loss is development. We have lost most of our meadows in south Wythenshawe to airport related development and this pattern has been repeated, in other areas, with the building of roads, superstores and offices.

We may seem powerless, as individuals, to do anything about this but, there are a few things we can do. You could support charities which are involved with wildflower conservation: Plantlife and your local wildlife trust, to name but two. You could plant wildflowers in your garden or yard. Seeds can be purchased from various seed merchants: try John Chambers (☎ 01933 652562) and ask for a catalogue. They should also be able to provide you with advice on planting. Don't try to grow anything too exotic; stick to plants which already grow in your general area but are maybe not too common. Primroses are a good start, and any cornfield flowers such as Common Poppy, Corn Marigold, Corncockle and Cornflower. Meadow plants, such as Ox-eye Daisy, or hedgerow flowers; Red Campion spring to mind. With a bit of luck your plants will spread around the area and, if the council don't spray them with weedkiller they might survive. If you need any general advice ☎ me on 0161-437 7040. My wildlife garden has been established for over 20 years; I like it and I think the wildlife does also. You don't need rich soil. I have a delightful stand of Hedgerow Cranesbill growing on my tarmac drive, with only moss for sustenance, to where they migrated after dying out in a bed of fairly rich soil, where I planted them.



Manchester Wildlife - Events and Meetings

2005 - Walks

Saturday 18th June - Pomona Docks - Meet 12 noon at the Castlefield Canal Basin (by the Y Hotel). Leader Anthony Phelps. The walk will be along the Bridgewater Canal. Contact Ian Brown ☎ 0161-437 7040.

Saturday 16th July - Urmston Ferry - Meet 12 noon at Urmston Station or at the car park on Daresbury Avenue at 1 p.m. Leader Ian Brown ☎ 0161-437 7040.

Saturday 13th August - Medlock Valley - meet at 12 noon at bridge 5 Mill, 23a Beswick Street, Ancoats. This is a short walk of about one hour. Leader Anthony Phelps. Contact - Ian Brown - 0161-437 7040.

Saturday 10th September - Fallowfield Loop Line - Meet 12 noon at the junction of Yew Tree Lane and Victoria Road, Withington. This event is in memory of Rob Allen, who died last year, for whom we planted trees on the embankment of this urban cycleway. Contact - Ian Brown - 0161-437 7040.



Indoor Meetings

Social Meetings - These will be at the Bulls Head, at the junction of London Road and Fairfield Street, south of Piccadilly Station. They will be on the third Tuesday of each month starting at 7.30 p.m. And finishing at about 10 p.m. Dates as follows: 19.07.05 - 16.08.05 - 20.09.05 - 18.10.05 - 15.11.05 - 20.12.05 - and similar Tuesdays throughout 2006.

General Meetings - These will be at the Jolly Angler, Ducie Street, near Piccadilly Station. They will be on the last Thursday of every other month, starting in January, at 7.30 p.m. Dates as follows: 28.07.05 - 29.09.05 - 24.11.05 - and similar Thursdays throughout 2006.



There is no useful contacts list in this Magpie - please refer to the previous copy of your newsletter. However, a new contact below.

Tree Helpline - 09065 161147

For any help you may need concerning trees - planning law - where to plant, what to plant in your garden.



Printed at MARC on recycled paper

MARC (Manchester Area Resource Centre) - the Place for community Printing and computer work. ☎ 0161-839 0839. 28-30 Edge Street, Manchester, M4 1HN

