



Newsletter of the Manchester Wildlife Group

The Magpie

Number 1 Spring 1986

Public Inquiry ~ Woodhouse Park

Wildlife Park

Roots of the Group

Wildlife Gardening Tips

Adverts & What's On

First in a series of Wild Walks



Spring is sprung!

The grass is ris!

I wonder where dem boidies is!

Not to mention frogs, newts, bats, foxes, butterflies and all the other wildlife that, against all the odds, are endeavouring to live in our city and urban areas.

The answer is, of course, on our disused railway lines and canals, in our overgrown churchyards and wastelands, wildlife gardens and river valleys. Not so much, unfortunately, in our manicured parks and sterile roadside verges and many "amenity" areas that often consist of a wind-swept football pitch and a few token stunted trees.

As a group we have begun to make contact with various departments in the Town Hall that administrate our open spaces, and we believe that with enough public support we can persuade the council to improve one or two local areas for wildlife. There are grants available for such work, and many council employees and councilors are sympathetic to our aims. We need to choose a site central to our membership and drum up local support for a wildlife park or "corridor" in the area. Hopefully we may be able to employ one or two people to manage the scheme under the Manpower Services Commission (M.S.C.) and we are applying for grants accordingly.

Our current membership is spread mostly in a band stretching from Trafford through Fallowfield and Didsbury to Heald Green and Heaton Moor, with the majority around Whalley Range and Chorlton.

So send in your suggestions please; at the moment we are considering the following areas:-

1. Hough End woods and the part of Chorlton Brook that runs through it.
2. A "linear" park around the edge of Hough End playing fields.
3. Parts of the abandoned Midland railway line between Chorlton and Didsbury.
4. Alexandra Park in Whalley Range.

If you want to suggest an area, other than the ones mentioned above, please let me know.

FROM LITTLE ACORNS.....

In July 1985 the last meeting of the South Manchester Wildlife Gardeners decided to re-launch itself as the Manchester Wildlife Group. The following is a brief history of our activities in the preceding year.

A mention in the Manchester Evening News encouraged several people to phone me towards the end of the Summer of 1984. Having dug a pond in my garden and stocked it with plants I'd found it to be a fairly expensive business. If there was a group of people interested in wildlife gardening in Manchester, perhaps we could swap plants between ourselves and arrange discounts on pond liners etc.

The first meeting was a bit chaotic but we eventually sorted out our priorities and decided to meet regularly. That year we dug 3 garden ponds, exchanged dozens of plants and shrubs, and built about 30 bat and bird boxes. 50 posters and 100 leaflets were printed and distributed, a mini-meadow sown and several workdays undertaken at a small native tree nursery run by the Cheshire Conservation Trust. Our garden birds got through over 2 hundredweight of peanuts and seed and we established a discount on pond liners with a manufacturer.

However, some of us felt we could no longer ignore the wildlife beyond our backyards and we began to make our views known concerning planning proposals affecting wildlife in the city. 3 of our members attended a national conference of urban wildlife groups in Birmingham last June which encouraged us to change our name in order to reflect our new interests.

Some projects were not so successful! A scheme to lend wildlife and gardening books between members failed dismally and we never managed to arrange specialists to give lectures as we had planned. Still, everyone felt our achievements far outweighed these minor setbacks especially considering our membership was less than 2 dozen.

We will always retain wildlife gardening as one of our main objectives and hope that, under our new guise, we can encourage and protect wildlife in our city as well as in our gardens.

SHAUN WILSON.

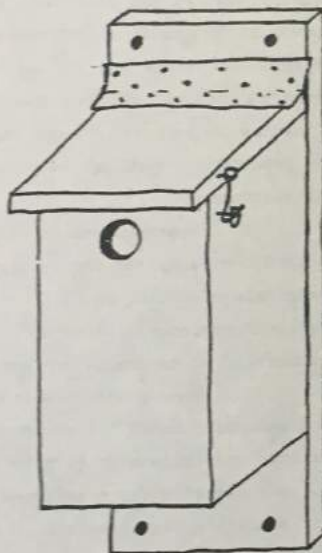
STOP PRESS !! March 17th - 22nd is Manchester Council's very own community tree planting week sponsored by its planning department. They have selected 10 areas in Manchester each to be planted with 1000 whips (young saplings). Chosen areas near our members include Brookburn Road, Chorlton and Ladybarn Road tip. If you want to help check that the scheme won't be destroying any existing habitats and/or if you want to take part in the tree planting please let us know (Shaun 226 2029 or Ian (437 7040)).

WILDLIFE GARDENING TIPS FOR SPRING.

If you haven't done so already, now is the time to check on your bird boxes. They may need old nests taking out (ideally this should be done in autumn) or even mice nests removing! This is done to reduce the risk of infection. Also repairs to the box may need to be carried out. If the wood has weathered and split, a patch up job can be done with the box "in situ" Lino, leather or furniture rubber webbing can be used either stuck on with hard wearing adhesive and/or tacked on. Also check the box is still firmly attached to the tree!

Things to look for when buying a bird box.

- * The wood is stout, not treated and preferably 2.5 cm. thick.
- * The lid is hinged so old nests can be cleaned out.
- * Ideally there should be some draining holes in the base.
- * It should be as draught-proof as possible, that is, no gaps except the entrance hole.
- * There should be enough room to drill holes in it, to put the box on a wall or tree. Better still, it should already have them drilled in it.
- * If the box is for tits and the like, the hole should be no more than 1 1/4 inches in diameter and it doesn't need a "perch". This just attracts other, predatory birds, to pay a visit.



There is one more thing that can be done for the birds, or more precisely, the swallows. If you have a garage or shed put a 6 inch square shallow wooden tray on the rafters in early April, leave an access hole high up for the swallows to get in and out. With a bit of luck you may have them as summer visitors. Make sure it is inaccessible to cats.

Another important thing to remember is to carry on feeding the birds well into May, this is especially necessary for the finches. Their natural food supply of seeds etc. has probably finished and there is a gap at this time of year until the first Spring plants set seed to provide the finches with food again.

The Pond:- if your pond is over-hung by trees, you may have put netting over it in Autumn to stop the leaves falling in. If so, now is the time to remove the netting or take some of the leaves out to stop the pond becoming too smelly in Summer. The edges of the pond may need tidying up, any exposed liner covering etc. This is the best time of year to plant wetland flowers, (in May) when you can see what's coming up. Try not to disturb the frogs though! They should be spawning now and it's a good idea to provide a route for the froglets to get out in the Summer. Hedgehogs also need an escape route from a pond.

Pruning:- here's a quick guide what to prune and when:-

- Feb - March: Trees and shrubs, except ones that are liable to bleed from the wound. Hedges obviously come into this category. Wisteria.
- March - April: Roses. Jasminum nudiflorum. Hypericum. Hammamelis. Hydrangea. Cob-nut trees. Gooseberries. Evergreens. Winter flowering heaths. Summer to Autumn flowering Ceonanthus. Buddleia.

N.B. Hawthorn is best not pruned every year because insects and birds will eat the lot. This may apply to other shrubs etc. so, in terms of wildlife, its probably best to prune lightly or only when the plant becomes very leggy.

Herbaceous borders:- tidying up in the garden is best left as late as possible in the Spring. Birds will feed on old seed-heads and house insects in the leaf litter- the blackbirds love to rummage in this for slugs, which all helps the gardener in the long run. Plants can be moved at this time of year and seedlings put in so its a good time to re-arrange things in the flower beds.

Here's a list of herbaceous plants that are good for birds, bees, moths, butterflies and caterpillars:-

Teasels. Bi.	Honesty. La./Bu./Be.
Thistles. Bi./La.	Sweet rocket. La./Bu./Be.
Sunflowers. Bi.	Nettles. Bu./La.
Docks. Bi./La.	Allysum. Bu./Be.
Grasses. Bi.	Ageratum. Bu./Be.
Evening Primrose. Bi./Mo.	Phlox. Bu./Be.
Polyanthus. Be./Bu.	Lavender. Bu./Be.
Aubretia. Be./Bu.	Thyme. Bu./Be.
Iceplant. Bu./Mo.	Michealmas Daisy. Bi./Be./Mo./Bu.
Single Dailias. Bu.	Brambles. Bu.
Dandelions. La.	

Abbreviations:-

Bi.....Birds.	La.....Larval (moths and butterflies)
Bu.....Butterflies.	food source.
Be.....Bees.	
Mo.....Moths.	

Annual wild flower patch:- a blaze of colour with the minimum of effort can be created by throwing some annual flower seeds down on a raked patch of earth in full sun.
 Poppies, Flax, Corncockle and Corn Marigold can all be used and will provide colour all through the summer as well as food for bees and butterflies.
 Next spring, simply pull up the old stems, shake the heads over the same patch of ground and rake over - they'll all come up as beautiful again in the next summer.

MEADOWS:-

If you have sown a meadow mixture last Autumn or this Spring you will need to cut it down to 2 inches (no less than this) every time it reaches 6 inches or more - that's about every two months on average. Remember, you mustn't let your meadow flower and set seed in the first year or you won't have much variety next year.

Established meadows or grasslands in their second year should be cut down to 3 inches, no less, in March if necessary. All you have to do now is watch the flowers bloom and set seed throughout the Spring. Depending on how fertile your soil is you shouldn't need to cut it again until late July or early August. However, if the grasses get too out of hand or if you are swamped with unwanted annual weeds, don't hesitate to make an earlier cut - this might seem brutal but otherwise you'd end up with a weedy mess!

If you plan to let your lawn grow this year the same advice applies as it does to the established meadows, especially if you dig out a few patches and fill them with wild flower plants and grasses. If you sow seeds in such patches you're probably better off treating the whole meadow as if it were in its first year.

Whichever stage your meadow is at, always remove the clippings otherwise the nutrients in your soil will build up again and threaten your perennial flowers by increasing the occurrence of the lush grasses and weeds.

Rachel Harvi.

What's on & Adverts

All dates - please 'phone in advance in order to check dates, times, and if you need directions or a lift. (Tel. 226 2029 and ask for Shaun Wilson).

Workdays Sunday 23rd February 1986. 10am at the Cheshire Trust tree nursery at Fairy Lane.

Sunday 9th March 1986. 10 am at Trafford Ecology Park - tree planting with the BTOV.

Sunday 23rd March 1986. 10 am at Fairy Lane tree nursery again.

For sale/Wanted

Ian needs a filing cabinet to help along his planning work for the group. If anyone can donate one or knows of a cheap cabinet please get in touch.

~~Seed mixtures of annuals, perennials, meadow mixture wetland flowers, native Nottingham butterfly etc. all for sale at BARGAIN prices.~~

HELP! This newsletter needs help (as you've probably guessed) so if any of you feel inspired to draw a front cover or write a piece about urban wildlife etc. DO NOT HESITATE. If you don't have time to put it into writing please let us know any way and we can write an article in the newsletter for you.

WOODHOUSE PARK INQUIRY.

Just before Christmas I attended the Public Inquiry into the Ringway Local Plan on behalf of the Manchester Wildlife Group.

We were objecting to some of the Manchester Council's proposals for development in this area. In particular, there is a strip of open countryside between Woodhouse Park and the airport which the local authority wish to destroy with light industrial development. It is a fine example of species rich grassland, with ponds, marshy areas and mature hedgerows. Whilst it is not spectacular in the manner of the Yorkshire Dales or the Lake District, it is a very pleasant area which acts as an open break for the Wythenshawe people from the buildings of the airport - which is to be considerably expanded.

A local residents organisation and some individuals also objected to the proposed development, as the area is much valued by them as a little piece of countryside on their doorstep.

A major problem is that the main owners of the land - a land speculator and the local authority - would probably see a 30-fold increase in the value of their land if development goes ahead. With such vast amounts of money at stake they will obviously be determined to capitalise on their investment.

Our main case for objection rested on the fact that there are many acres of derelict industrial land in the Manchester area which should be developed before open countryside sites are used for such purposes.

The City Council had an advantage over most objectors in that they could afford the services of a skilled barrister to present their case - courtesy of the ratepayers of course!

Most objectors could not afford such luxuries as they had to pay their own expenses; but this was taken into account by the inquiry chairman, a very fair and astute man who did not appear to miss a trick. We were also very lucky to gain support, which we did not expect, from two objectors, namely The Ministry of Agriculture and the Macclesfield Borough Council.

The inquiry itself was a most absorbing affair but it was necessary to attend every day to make sense of what was going on.

We must now be patient and await the result, but we do hope it will be in favour of saving what little is left of open countryside in Manchester.

Ian Brown.

Wildlife Walk

Hough End and the Chorlton to Didsbury disused railway line.

This walk looks at a variety of habitats and is probably best tackled in late Spring or Summer. The easiest access point is down the steps from Mauldeth Road bridge [1]. There are two pleasant detours here before we begin the main walk. The path along Chorlton Brook (which leads to Chorlton Park) has a fine large hawthorn hedge running beside it. Flowers here include yarrow, mugwort and sweet cicely. The second detour follows the abandoned railway track to where it joins the used goods line, which is probably a good area to see foxes in.

Returning along the track and under Mauldeth Road bridge we unfortunately reach one of Manchester's unofficial rubbish tips [2]. However, the electricity substation has dozens of small trees planted around it and a diversion from here leads to Hough End Clough. This is a nice patch of mature woodland with Chorlton Brook meandering sharply through it. It's often alive with all the usual garden birds plus pied wagtails and the occasional mallard. This is a good spot to finish if you haven't got time for the rest of the walk since Mauldeth Road bridge is quite close.

For those made of sterner stuff we return to the railway track where we quickly reach the corner of some allotments [3]. Between here and Princess Road Bridge you should find some interesting plants including St. John's Wort, tufted vetch and wood sage. Alternatively, you could walk through the allotments - many of which are overgrown and provide a rich habitat for moths and butterflies in the warmer months. If you spend some time here you may be rewarded by the sight of a kestrel or meadow-pipit and you'll be sure to hear skylarks in Spring.

The track between Princess Road and Burton Road is quite well wooded [4], if a bit litter strewn, and if you carry on under Burton Road bridge you'll soon come to the best part of the walk. The trees and undergrowth are so dense here the abandoned station is difficult to make out. Beyond this the track is flooded right up to, and under Palatine Road bridge [5]. The pond is very shallow but wide enough to force us up onto the cutting to get round it. From May onwards it is teeming with frogs, newts, sticklebacks and dragonflies and its birdlife includes the grey wagtail.

