

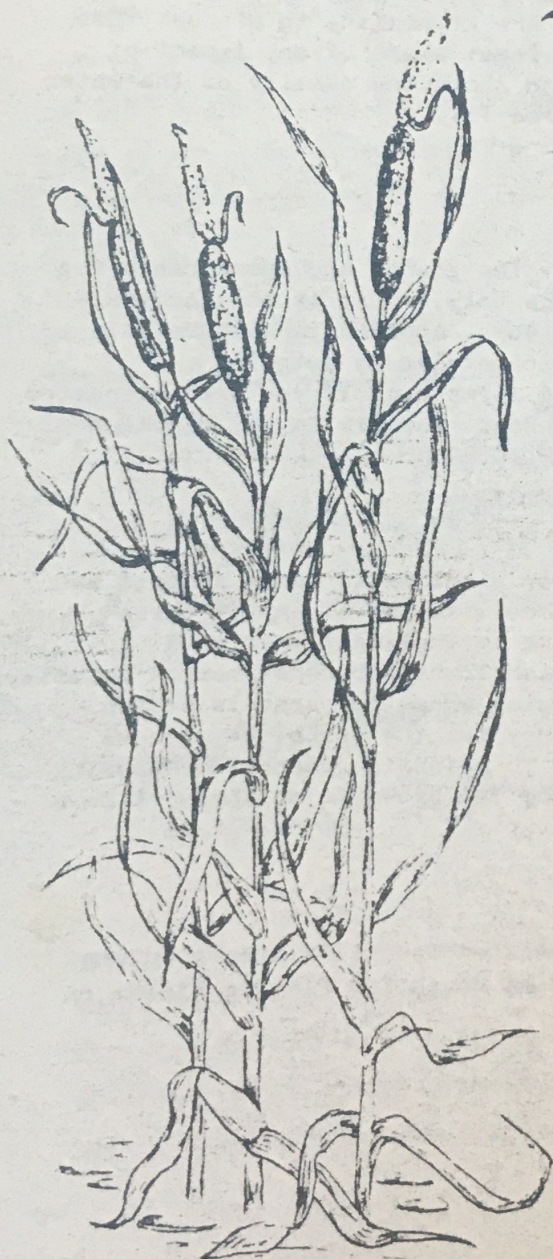


Newsletter of the Manchester Wildlife Group

# The Magpie

Number 7

Autumn 1987



Blackley Woods

Safaris

Fairbrother Conference



RB



# News

## HOUGH END CLOUGH NATURE RESERVE

On 22nd July 1987 the Leisure Provision Sub-Committee of Manchester City Recreational Services agreed to accept Hough End Clough as a Nature Reserve, to give our Group permission to draw up a detailed management plan for the site, and also for us to remove invasive species from the Clough. The most important thing here is that the Clough is now recognised as a valuable habitat for wildlife and people to enjoy. Hopefully, in consultation with Recreation, we can improve the site by increasing the diversity of species there. However, this does not effect the "permissive rights" which the Water Board have on the Brook running through the site, and at this moment the Board are drilling a bore hole in the area presumably to help them decide what works need to be done here. We are attempting to discuss this further with the Board so that they are at least aware of any impact of their works on the ecology of the site - who knows, the quality of the water may be improved (it certainly can't get worse !!).

## FUNDRAISING JOB

We need an enthusiastic fundraiser to apply for grants and sponsorship for our group. Pay will be on a commission basis only, so it is only suitable for someone looking for occasional, casual work. Applicants must be able to work on their own initiative and to type accurately. An outgoing personality will be useful when approaching firms etc. If you are interested please apply in writing to MWG, 31 Stanley Road, Whalley Range, Manchester M16 8HS. Closing date for applications : 19.10.87.

## NATURE AREAS FOR SCHOOLS

We have been involved in designing areas for wildlife in local schools and also one hostel for disabled young people. Realisation of any of these schemes is a long way off, but we are hoping to implement them on a regular basis in conjunction with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and Manchester Education Department. Designing areas for schools is fun, good for wildlife and kids, and also raises money for the group. We hope to extend this service to provide cheap, easy to maintain grounds for housing and factory sites etc. and will be employing Ian Brown to do the work on a commission basis. Anyone for a Tupperware party?

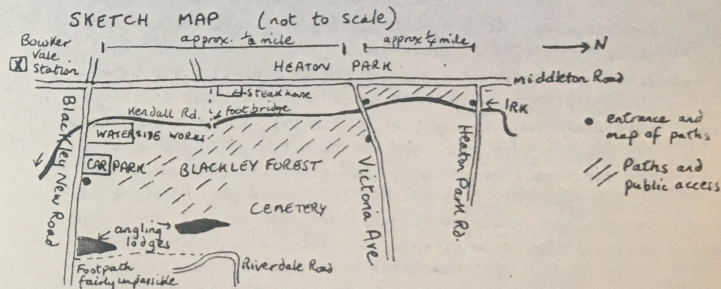
## TREE PLANT 87

Yes! Once again we are taking part in Manchester Council's tree planting epic. The site selected this year is again on Hough End Playing Fields on the Southern side of Hough End Clough.

# Walking in Blackley Woods

Diana Downing

This site on a low hill above the Irk valley offers a pleasant hour or two's stroll. For those not fortunate enough to live in north Manchester it is easily accessible by train, bus or car. A hunting forest for the Manor of Manchester, then farmland, later flanked by a bleachworks and a dyeworks with their accompanying lodges (reservoirs), it hosted more recently housing and a golf course. The new Blackley cemetery took over the golf course, the dyeworks disappeared and the William IV Angling Club took over its two main lodges. In 1953 local residents helped establish some woodland again by planting beech and other trees. Acorns were imported from south Manchester for school-children to sow. In the last few years further planting of trees has taken place and older paths have been linked with new ones to encourage walking (linear and circular).



Spring and summer produce a surprising variety of flowers in the grassland, woods and marshy areas three miles from the centre of town. Autumn offers assorted shades: silver birches, colourful oaks, rowan berries and brambles, bracken, cotton grass, even a little heather on the hillside. Look out for jays, some water birds, perhaps a kestrel.

continued...



There are clear maps of the paths on boards at each of the four main entrances. The carpark is recommended not least because we found over forty plant species there in August in addition to the official vegetation. The new paths are certainly welcome but they do include some rather steep steps even in the mainly level section north of Victoria Avenue. A few muddy patches also require sensible shoes. There are no seats provided, but the fine views of Heaton Park's trees and glimpses of the distant Pennines are free. Natural history notes of interest and other comments can be sent to Manchester's Recreational Services Department. Together with the Planning Department they are collaborating with Rochdale Corporation to improve and open up further stretches of the Irk valley.

## Blackleach

Blackleach Reservoir is a large 'lodge' hidden behind the houses on Bolton Road in Walkden. The owners, British Coal, (formerly the National Coal Board) hope to develop a neighbouring area for residential building, but this involves removing over 300,000 cubic metres of mining waste - and using it to fill in Blackleach.

The reservoir is a popular one with anglers, who have stocked it over many years, but it is as a haven for birds that Blackleach is most surprising. Over the past 10 years, 116 species have been seen on and around the water, including rarities like phalarope and divers. The attractiveness of the reservoir lies both in its size - over 15 acres of water - and in its relatively low level of disturbance; the nearest large body of water, Clifton Marina, suffers from heavy recreational use. Blackleach also harbours many wildflowers, including orchids, and was recently designated as a Grade B site of biological importance by the Greater Manchester Countryside Unit.

Local people showed their opposition to the scheme when members of Salford City Planning Committee visited the site. But even if the council opposes the plans, can local pressure have any effect on British Coal, which has the back-up of central government finance and support?

Mike Savage

## Wildlife Gardening - a trailer.

Many of our members already have established wildlife gardens and find that they give them a great deal of pleasure. Most noticeable is the increase in number and variety of insects but some forms of wildlife are more difficult to attract. Some of you will have noticed a shortage of birds for example, particularly if you live on a fairly new housing estate or one with few mature trees in the vicinity. The problem is that not only is it necessary to plant the wildflowers but create the right sort of habitat in order to encourage the wildlife to breed.

The easiest habitat to create is one of wetland. If you make a pond with a marsh area then frogs will generally find a way to your door. You may even be lucky and attract newts. Even so it is necessary to have areas in your garden where amphibians can hibernate. So you will need rough grassland, log piles etc. and if you have a small garden it may be difficult to provide for such places.

Particularly difficult are butterflies. You may attract them to your garden by providing nectar plants. You may even be able to provide their foodplants, such as nettles. This does not mean that the butterflies will breed. To do this they not only need their foodplants to be present but the habitat must be suitable. Many butterflies prefer a woodland edge type of habitat and a fairly large garden is required for this. For those of you with small gardens and backyards (or even window boxes) it might be best to concentrate on creating a feeding station for wildlife. By providing food for birds in the winter and growing nectar plants for butterflies and other insects during the rest of the year you will be doing your local wildlife a great service. As for areas in which wildlife can breed it would be best to encourage your local authority to landscape some of its open spaces for this purpose. There is plenty of room in parks, on recreation grounds and waste land and of course the wildlife group has already made a start in this direction.

However if you have a garden of anything like a reasonable size it is possible, with careful design and planning, to create habitats which are suitable for wildlife and in which most wild creatures can breed. We have designed such gardens for schools and private houses and if you would like us to provide such a service, then please contact us. If however you would prefer to do it yourself but feel you need a little guidance, then there will be a series of articles in forthcoming editions of this newsletter giving advice on all aspects of wildlife gardening, particularly as regards planning. Previous editions of the newsletter have featured articles on the creation of habitat types, such as ponds and wildflower meadows but most important is how to bring these areas together to make a place suitable for all kinds of wildlife. If this can be done then it will be a great contribution to nature conservation.

So look out for future articles and if any of our readers have any ideas or advice to offer, please let us know. There may even be some of you who would like to write articles on various aspects of wildlife gardening or your experiences of the same, even if you have no particular expertise on the subject.



# "Wildlife Where You Live"

Manchester Town Hall, 27th July

## The Fairbrother Open Conference: A Personal View

This was the first Fairbrother event to be held in Manchester, previously regarded as a bit of a 'black hole' by the urban wildlife movement, so it should have been an inspirational and productive occasion. Alas I can only report that as a shop window for the general public (fortunately there weren't too many of those), or as a swap-shop for ideas and useful information, the day was not up to the usual high standards in both organisation and content. It is very difficult to devise an event which can successfully meet the needs and interests of both 'insiders' and 'outsiders', let alone convert the latter into the former. First impressions are crucial and although Fairbrother regulars will find their way about and make those all-important contacts (while stunned with disbelief at the absence of a welcoming drink), reaching out to members of the public requires very deliberate 'signposting', and a simple, clear message to take away.

If the informal agenda left much to be desired, then the formal programme of talks also lacked coherence and even relevance. Chris 'Buy My Book' Baines leapt to the rostrum, apparently amazed to be the first speaker but well able to rise to the occasion, and soon launched into various themes concerning threats to urban wildspace. Such threats may come from developers, accountants, planners and managers of land on behalf of the public, and where competition for land produces inflated land values, the 'destruction lobby' will show how seriously it takes the conservation of wildlife habitats by employing people (even ecologists) to produce more effective arguments for a development. Chris Baines stressed the overriding importance for the conservation lobby of using alternative but economically valid arguments (taking the greener view of cost-benefit analysis) for retaining or increasing urban green space. He used the example of the demonstrable pollution and energy conservation control achieved around buildings by having substantial vegetated areas, which might incidentally be of greater wildlife value compared to more traditional amenity planting.

From the burgeoning backyards of Lancaster came Chris Whitehead, with slides to show the transformation process, and information about the annual competition for the best backyard. What Manchester needs is perhaps not a competition (there already is one for Council gardens) but a few strategically-sited demonstration backyards?

We were then catapulted into Frank Ferring's view of eastern England dotted with 'pocket parks', using whatever semi-natural features were available to remind village residents of how the ordinary countryside used to be before farming became agribusiness. An understandably concerned member of the audience queried the use of an agricultural chemical company to sponsor the campaign publicity; after all, Chris Baines had earlier referred to the farmed countryside as "beyond democracy".

No trace remains in my notes of the subsequent speakers - there was nothing of note to record. Even though the subjects were about Greater Manchester, somehow the wildlife remained elsewhere.

U.J. Kelly

---

Manchester Wildlife Group aims to protect places of wildlife interest and provide new wetland, woodland and meadowland habitats in our gardens and local neighbourhoods. At present we depend almost totally on our members' subscriptions to cover our running costs. Members receive the Magpie quarterly and can get help and advice with their wildlife gardens. If you want to know more about the group please contact Shaun Wilson at the address below. Articles, letters etc. are also always welcome.

Copyright Manchester Wildlife Group, 31, Stanley Road, Whalley Range, Manchester M16 6HS. Tel. 226 2029. While every effort has been made to make sure that information given in the Magpie is correct, the group cannot be held responsible for any mistake in the text. Likewise any person undertaking any project based on information from this newsletter does so at their own risk.



# Plant Sale

SUNDAY 27th SEPTEMBER 1987 11am - 4pm

31 STANLEY ROAD WHALLEY RANGE MANCHESTER M16 8HS

Native plants for sale including some water plants plus exotics that are good for wildlife. We hope also to have on sale native bulbs, shrubs, bird feeders and boxes, and peanuts. What we don't have on sale we should be able to order for you including pond liners and meadow seed. Tel. 226 2029 for directions.

---

## MEETINGS

Thursday 24th September 1987 82 Crantock Drive Heald Green Stockport

Thursday 29th October 1987 31 Stanley Road Whalley Range M16 8HS

Thursday 26th November 1987 13 Ruskin Avenue Rusholme M14

Please note: All meetings start at 7.30 pm. All members are welcome but if you are not a member and wish to come please 'phone Shaun Wilson first ( 226 2029). Lifts can often be arranged if you 'phone Shaun in advance. Minutes of meetings are sent to all members who regularly attend meetings but if a member does not come regularly and fails to send apologies they may not be sent minutes due to the expense involved. If you do not attend meetings regularly but wish to receive minutes for the year send £5.00 (cheques payable to Manchester Wildlife Trust) to 31 Stanley Road M16 8HS.

---

If you care about our City's wildlife please join us by filling in the form below and returning it with a cheque/P.O. made out to Manchester Wildlife Trust Ltd. to 31, Stanley Road, Whalley Range, Manchester M16 8HS. Members receive "Magpie" quarterly and are welcome to all meetings.

I would like to join Manchester Wildlife Group for one year and enclose the following:-

- \* £6 - Family / Group.
- \* £4 - Individual.
- \* £2 - Unwaged, children under 16, Senior Citizens.

( \* Please delete those that do not apply )

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

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

Address.....

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



# Wild Side of Town "Safaris" -

---

---

Jan Brown.

We held four of these events in June and July as a follow up to Chris Baines' television programme "The Wild Side of Town". I found this a most enjoyable programme but unfortunately it was broadcast at a very late hour, which was probably one of the reasons why it brought forth no response as far as the "Safaris" were concerned. The programme was subsequently repeated in a late afternoon slot, but our safaris were nearly completed by then.

Normally, the main purpose of a wildlife walk would be to show the participants the beauties and wonders of the fauna and flora to be found on the way. In the case of the "Safaris" I thought a slightly different approach should be taken and as the areas chosen were in and around urban sites it was noticeable that human interference, or the lack of it, effected the suitability of such areas for wildlife.

The first "Safari" took place on the 21st June, the longest day, and we were fortunate that the weather was kind. We started at Hough End Clough which though a pleasant spot shows how years of neglect can lead to an area being overtaken by invasive, non-native species. The Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed are a particular problem and because their growth is so vigorous some of the native plants have little chance to survive. At the moment the Himalayan Balsam is about eight<sup>ft</sup> high in places and gives the impression of a jungle. With management and planting of native wild flowers this situation can be much improved.

We left the Clough and by way of the old Midland railway line came to a modern housing estate. Although this estate was quite well planned with open spaces and walkways it was felt that these open spaces could be better used and landscaped, particularly round the edges where more trees and shrubs could be planted to give the estate a better outlook and provide suitable habitat for wildlife. It was however pleasing to see that old hedgerows had been retained within the development.

We moved on from the housing estate to find ourselves on a vast urban desert known as Hough End playing fields. Here there are some 40 football pitches which we have found to be underused. Ideally it would be nice if one or two could be taken out of commission so as to expand the informal area of Hough End Clough. If this was not possible a little sensitive landscaping around the edges would improve this featureless area and tree planting would give shelter to make the playing area a little more hospitable.

The walk finished by returning through the Clough and whilst there were not many participants, those who came thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

The second "Safari" was centred on Hyde and was led by Alan Bamforth who knows the area well. Starting at the Town Hall the first mile or so was in the built up area. It is noticeable how wildlife manages to establish itself where, at first glance, would appear to be the most inhospitable places. Noticeable amongst these was a small cobbled area in front of a factory. Presumably this was supposed to be neat and tidy but in fact all sorts of wild plants were managing to grow in the gaps between the cobbles.

We made our way to the Peak Forest Canal down which we walked in a southerly direction. Canals, like rivers and railways, make excellent wildlife corridors and in this, the Tame Valley we have all three which give the urban areas round Hyde excellent connection with the open countryside. Of particular note on this stretch of the canal are the two bridges which enabled the horses to cross from one bank to the other without being unhitched from the barges they were towing.

Walking on down the canal, on which many interesting plants grow, we came to a fine woodland on the very steep bank between the canal and the river. Although this woodland is in need of a little management, a problem common to most urban woods, there is a feeling here of being deep in the countryside, a feeling rarely experienced when the town is less than half a kilometre away.



This of course is what urban wildlife is all about. The countryside on your doorstep.

Turning about, we walked northwards up the river bank. This is a fine area of woodland and grassland but it was noticeable that in areas accessible by machinery the local authorities have a slight tendency to cut the grass to death. Not only must this be a very costly exercise but it diminishes the variety of flora, which is detrimental to other forms of wildlife.

We walked out of the valley across a recreation ground and came to the headquarters of the local botanical club. This was established many years ago by a local businessman but is now mainly used as a drinking club and as we passed we could see that things botanical were not uppermost in the minds of those present. Returning to the Town Hall, there ended a well led and most enjoyable walk on one of this years most pleasant evenings.

The next "Safari" took place at Moston Brook. This walk was to have been led by Steve Watson but as he was unable to be present, it was led jointly by the Lancashire Trust and the Medlock Valley Wardens. Unfortunately I did not go but I was informed that it was well attended and a successful venture. The area is one which has been recently reclaimed and from what I saw on a visit last year, seemed to be developing nicely.

The final walk in the series took place in the Chorlton Ees area. This was to have been led by David Bishop but unfortunately he had a prior engagement in his native town of Peterborough. Consequently I got the job as leader and with tuition from David, I thought I would be able to give it a go.

This area is full of examples of mismatches between the existing environment and subsequent management. We came across the first example of this as we walked down the cobbled lane leading from Brookburn Bridge to Chorlton Ees. On the right there is an area of old meadow which has been planted with trees thus ruining an important habitat with one which could be established almost anywhere. Further along the lane there is an old meadow which is one of the few remaining in the area. The problem is that it is overgrazed, which means that the variety of wildflowers is limited. This could be much improved by using the meadow for an early summer hay crop and grazing in the late summer and autumn which would increase the productivity of the meadow, increase the variety of flora and remove the thistles and nettles which at the moment predominate.

At the end of the lane is a large area of open land which used to be part of the sewerage works. Here an attempt is being made to create a meadow, with only limited success at present. It would have been more appropriate to plant trees here and the large size of this site would have made quite an impressive woodland. To the north there is a small area of old meadow with a good variety of wildflowers and one of the walkers was pleased to find common spotted orchid growing, which the leader had failed to notice.

From here we crossed Chorlton Brook to Ivy Green. This is a reclaimed tip which was developing into a good wet meadow. Some bright spark of a landscape architect at the G.M.C. must have seen this large open space on a map and in his wisdom decided the best thing to do was to drain it and plant trees. Not many species were used and some were non-native and Ivy Green is now looking a mess. Fortunately there is an area near the river where hawthorns have regenerated naturally and in May, when the blossom is out, this is most attractive. We walked through here onto Hawthorn Lane and after a brief look at the over-managed playing fields of Turn Moss, we returned to Chorlton Green. We feel that if a little less time was spent on the excessive mowing of sports pitches and more time devoted to the management of neglected areas then wildlife would surely benefit.

Our last port of call was an old cemetery, just south of the Green. This is a prime example of how not to "improve" such a place. The gravestones have been used as a pavement and the grass has been made neat and tidy. A better way would be to leave the gravestones in place and the grass managed so as to encourage the growth of wildflowers.

So the last of our "Safaris" ended and we were left with the feeling that the experience was worth repeating. So if any of our readers have any suggestions for areas in which further such walks could take place, please contact us and we may have more "Safaris" next year.

---