

Mysterious Matters

It was not a news item that could have caused a stampede of TV cameramen and reporters or indeed get a line or two in our local newspapers. And those sharp-eyed newspaper readers who saw the headline – more of a small toeline really – and read the item probably thought it of little importance and turned the page. Nevertheless, it was The Newspaper of the Year – the Daily Telegraph - which carried the item. It was headed HOLES IN FENCES HELP HEDGEHOGS.

Really keen gardeners know that this inoffensive spikey little creature spends the nocturnal hours snuffling through the undergrowth, sniffing out and eating slugs, snails and other small invertebrates that would otherwise feast on most growing things a gardener cherishes in his area of endeavour.

Why am I telling you this? First, because the report was instigated by the realisation that hedgehogs (they're not hogs nor are they hedge dwellers) are on the decline to the degree that they have now been listed as an Endangered Species. Hence, the special plea for garden-owners to make ground level holes in fences to ensure the Hedgies have unencumbered passage to their nightly snuffling and eating grounds.

Secondly, I draw attention to this little problem because some years ago my wife and I had a mysterious experience which eventually led to our taking out life membership of the then recently-formed British Hedgehog Protection Society. I frequently wear the BHPS tie in acknowledgement. We didn't tell our friends at the time lest they thought that we were in need of medical attention.

It came about one morning when, as was our habit, we looked out of the window into the garden and saw a very puzzling black marking on the lawn. It was some six inches wide and ran from the left-hand border over to our little pond and right round the pond. What's that? Who dunnit? And why? Could it be a fox? A rabbit? A dog or cat? We considered the possibilities and ruled them all out.

Over the next few mornings we noticed that the muddy track was getting darker each day until it looked as though it had been done with brush and paint. Our curiosity was so roused that we resolved to stay up on a clear moonlit night (we did have some in those days) to see what was going on. We were greatly rewarded.

Just after midnight, we vividly remember, a hedgehog suddenly appeared out of the shrubs in the border. He paused for a moment, sniffed the air, looked about him and then, like a hovercraft, he stretched his tiny legs, rose up another inch and set off at speed towards the pond. Reaching the pond he continued to race round it, clockwise, completing a couple of circuits before taking the marked track back to the border.

We duly reported this strange behaviour (with a photo of the marking) to the Hedgehog Society who said they had also had a similar report from the Master of one of the Cambridge Colleges and they had sent my letter on

to him to see. The gentleman wrote to me to say he had no more idea why hedgehogs do this but, to make it even more puzzling, his hedgehog ran round his pond in an anti-clockwise direction.

From that moment our hedgehog became known as "Scuttler" – but where did he sleep during the early daylight hours? We could only stay up another night and watch him return home. And that we did. To our amazement, we watched him close down his spikes and, with some difficulty, squeeze under the slightly worn door of the garden shed. Next morning I was out with my saw making his entrance and exit more comfortable. But – another puzzle – where did he bed down in a shed with a concrete floor devoid of any foliage or any sort of nest? In fact, the only possible comfort we could see available to him was a heap of half a dozen empty plastic compost and fertilizer bags under the bench.

We watched "Scuttler" fairly regularly after that and became very fond of him. But we have never discovered how and why he behaved as he did.

We were privileged to have him for nearly seven years. The average life of a hedgehog is eighteen months

One day he appeared on the patio in broad daylight in a sort of stupor and we knew that was a bad sign. Within an hour he died. He was buried in the garden, in a grave lined with rose petals.

R.I.P. "Scuttler", you gave us a lot of pleasure.

Related to Birds or not?



Road sign – for an unmade road in Heswall

The Quillet – Little Neston, nothing to do with a feather quill – it means a small plot of land. Historically it's a strip of land that together with others like it formed a larger field.

Cuckoo Lane a sandstone track from Chester High Road to Little Neston

Wirral Pubs – The Swan Hotel in Prenton, The Stork Hotel in Birkenhead and White Swan Inn at Great Sutton

SUMMER OUTING JULY 9th HAWARDEN
A guided tour of St Deiniol's Library
founded by Gladstone.
£5.00 Entry
More Information to follow



WIRRAL MATTERS

NEWS and VIEWS from THE WIRRAL SOCIETY - FOUNDED 1928
THE WIRRAL COMMITTEE OF THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND (CPRE)

President: Professor John Tarn OBE DL FRIBA FRSA FRHistS FSA

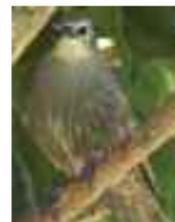


*Some days on the coast the tide is out, the still rain melds with sea mist
Two seagulls converse in a left behind pool; bait searchers dig on the far banks
A crow bends to pull a cockle; razor shells litter the edge
A pair of pied wagtails peck and preen on the prom*

This scene changed dramatically when controversial commercial cockling was allowed in November. The council had less than a month to organise practicalities. In January all is calm again.



Channels are being dredged in Parkgate marshland – an ecological attempt to control the mosquito problems. Allowing sea water to flush out their habitats is in contrast to the mass spraying of pesticides in the 1980s. Grey heron use the improved fishing opportunities.

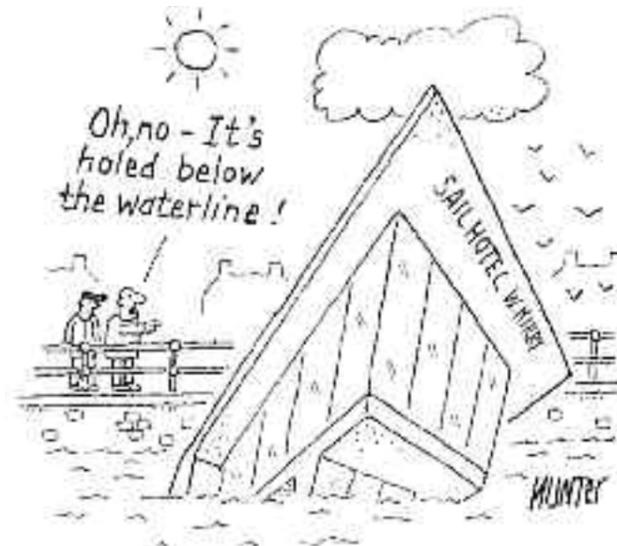


In the garden -Left to Right – juvenile starling (photo by Bruce Middleton); robin; tiny feather. Long tail tits rely on collecting hundreds of feathers to line their nests, mainly from dead birds

**Butterfly Park Open Day
May 8th 11 till 4 pm**

The site is still threatened by a developer - legal wheels are turning very slowly. Dedicated volunteers expect the park to be open all summer on Sundays, and are planning to keep the park running for as long as possible.

In New Ferry at the side of Bebington Station



Neston Market update

While the Sainsbury's supermarket outer walls look huge, out of place and like defensive castle walls, the new market square is working well and the stallholders are happy.

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SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Some people are ecstatic over these proposed monoliths. Artists' impressions look like sets for a sci-fi movie. As no people are ever pictured, we need more explanation on how people will live there - shops, schools, parks etc

The Wirral Society Golden Jubilee Glass Goblet from 1978 depicts a heron. You can see it now at the Williamson Art Gallery, Slaty Road, Birkenhead



Thanks to Mike Tate and Doug Speechly who identified this long gone building by the M53 as holding water storage tanks aloft for Bowaters Paper Mills, at Ellesmere Port. The structures were re-used cement factory silos dating from the First World War.

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What have the Committee been doing?
Discussing issues at monthly committee meetings, sending letters, liaising with other groups, lobbying MPs, councillors and council meetings.

Recent topics - Mersey Barrage proposals: Wirral Council's Strategic Housing Land Assessment Report, Open Space Assessment and Core Strategy; historic buildings protection; Wirral Waters proposed developments; Cheshire West and Chester draft local transport plan; National Grid underground power cable

Contacting Members for lectures and hotpot suppers is more efficient by email. Send your – Surname, First Name, Email address to wrlsoc@googlemail.com

For other enquiries, contacts, up to date news and views – our website by Nick Lauro www.wirralsociety.net

Editor and production: Judith Railton, 22 Bracken Lane, Bebington, CH63 2LZ TEL: 0151-608-4498
Hon. Secretary: David Casement, 5 Cornwall Drive, Prenton, CH43 0RW TEL/FAX 0151-608-3039
Membership: Avril Wilmshurst, 6 Robins Croft, Great Sutton, Ellesmere Port CH66 2LQ TEL 0151-200-3920

HELP SUPPORT OUR WORK

send your name and address and tel.number to Avril with a cheque for £7 (£10 for a society) for one year's membership

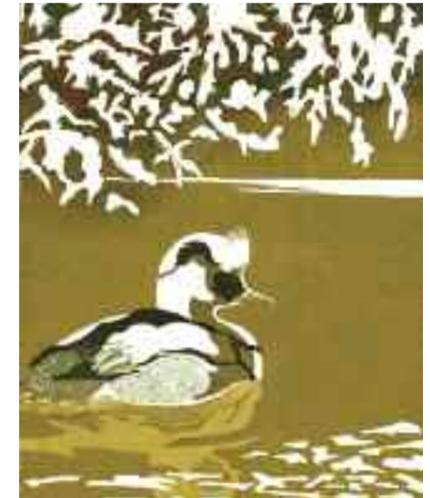
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Birds have been spotted

Two swans sliding on a frozen golf course pond: a jay landing on the Wirral Way: A chaffinch in a thorn bush: A bird of prey swooping silently through the sunset woods: Talkative sparrows jostling on a fat ball: Six white ducks clamouring to be fed on Raby Mere: A pheasant running down a country lane.....and



Many birds are drawn to our back gardens by fat-balls and seeds. Photo of a greater spotted woodpecker by Bruce Middleton



Placing a figure of an owl on your roof is thought to deter pigeons. But pigeons know a real owl when they see it and tend to just perch on top. This one spotted in Parkgate



Purple breasted roller at Chester Zoo. Ambitious plans for a huge bio dome to house gorillas, chimps, tropical birds, amphibians and reptiles have been passed by Cheshire West and Chester Councils. Given the scope of the project the plans have been sent to Government Office North West. A 90 bed hotel on the Shropshire Union Canal, a Conservation College and new entrance are also on the agenda.

Recent refurbishments at Parkgate URC church – corner of Parkgate Road and Moorside Road include estuary and bird murals, designed by Kay Andrews and made by 28 ladies from the church. Services on Sundays – 11- 12 and 6.30pm →

Thelma Sykes is an internationally known artist who lives near Chester. Her sketchbook drawings of a drake Smew were made at the RSPB Reserve at Inner Marsh Farm, Burton and inspired her linocut, 'Icebreaker'. Smew nest in tree-holes in the northern forests south of the Arctic Circle. They leave before the cold of winter and just a few will reach Britain. Wirral was fortunate to have this drake which spent six successive winters on the reserve at Burton. The image appears by kind permission of Thelma. For more bird information

www.deeestuary.co.uk

Snow evidence - a bird walking in suburbia



An owl flew into a reflection - local woodland on a suburban window - leaving a perfect print of its shape – outspread wings, talons and eye sockets. Birds are often injured or killed as they don't understand glass.

