



GUILDFORD ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

newsletter

[www.gefweb.org.uk](http://www.gefweb.org.uk)

**JUNE 2011**

## ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSIDERATE GARDENING

*Text and photographs by Peter Smart, winner of three Guildford in Bloom awards*

SPENDING SEVERAL YEARS in the air, water and noise pollution of Hong Kong, is enough to turn anyone bright green. Even the subsequent "clean and green" years in Singapore were occasionally interrupted by several days of a smoke-haze from the burning of forests in neighbouring Indonesia. So by the time we returned to England in 1995 and bought a home in East Clandon with 2 acres of land, the instinct was already ingrained in us to care for and protect the soil, air, water and wildlife in the microcosm we would be stewarding for the foreseeable future.

Sixteen years later we were delighted to receive two Guildford In Bloom 2010 awards for "Best Garden for Wildlife" and "Best in Competition" with the complimentary remarks from the judges that: "This garden is in a different league, and serves – indeed is intended to serve – as an exemplar." They are right. As temporary custodians of our land we care deeply that it is kept and managed in an environmentally considerate way, to ensure healthy soil, plants and wildlife, sustainable food chains and as diverse a wildlife family as the natural conditions should offer. We aim to set a good example of environmentally sustainable garden care.

Our land is just sufficiently large to provide a variety of habitats for wildlife; the traditional front and back garden you might find anywhere in England is supplemented by an acre of meadow grassland, hedgerows, mature trees, orchard, wildflower area, vegetable garden, woodpiles, shrubby thickets and a



pond is planned for next year. These areas are managed in a way that balances our needs - to retain some lovely views over our hedgerows, accessibility to all areas and a "cared for" feel to the garden - with the needs of wildlife to be left to themselves in areas that provide food, shelter and nesting to get on with being part of a healthy food chain in an oasis of environmental calm. Getting this balance between our contemporary perception of an aesthetic garden and the needs of nature is the key. We try to take the visitor from the contemporary end of the spectrum to the wildlife end and back again in the one garden.

The "contemporary" part hides a large number of man-made habitat features that aim to compensate for the lack of natural facilities. Hedgehog boxes, homemade and bought-in bird nesting boxes and roosting pockets, bumblebee nest, insect shelters, beetle bank and log piles provide nesting and shelter. Bird tables, feeders and numerous flowering shrubs provide food, while birdbaths, a tiny pond and other ground and raised watering facilities quench the thirsts of insects, mammals and birds. These all encourage wildlife within our sights so we can appreciate and record their presence and build up a profile of wildlife that can be sustained in the environment we steward.

In the 100 square metre wildflower area, over a few years we have replaced the couch grass with a



wildflower haven of about 32 wildflower species that peak in May and June, attracting insects and human beings alike. In the grassland meadow, 'sub-habitats' are being devised by rotating the area cut each year and by alternating the type of cut each year between mowing and hay-making. Small hayricks are being left as insect, spider and reptile habitats. In various places around the garden log piles provide shelter and a micro-habitat for insects, mosses and lichens.

For 15 years we have recorded sightings of wildlife on our two acres, initially on spreadsheets and subsequently on a database, and have so far identified 432 species (see box). We know there are large numbers of insects and spiders yet to be identified and look forward to gradually expanding this list to include them. As we are only amateur naturalists, we are indebted to the lepidopterist, botanist, ornithologist and mycologist who have visited and "revealed" some of our hidden treasures.

But the main benefit we bring to wildlife and this environment is by what we do not do, and by what we do not have. No pesticides, no fertilisers, no herbicides, no fruit protection netting, no bonfires, no hosepipe watering, no unnecessary lawn mowing, no flower cutting, no hedge-cutting before August, no leaf blower, no artificial plant propagation outside natural seasonal cycles, no unsustainable plant species, no greenhouse, no cold frames, no cats, no peat, no waste. What we do not do determines our level of environmental stewardship, more than anything else.

And still the garden is healthy, plants flourish,

nature abounds and it is a pleasant place for us to feel close to nature. There are no plant diseases but if any should arrive Mother Nature deals with them. Most importantly we protect our soil which is the foundation of a healthy environment and sustainable food chains.

Take a more detailed and colourful look into the garden at [www.cherry-cottage.org.uk](http://www.cherry-cottage.org.uk)

#### Recorded in the garden:

- 8 species of mammal
- 3 species of mollusc
- 2 species of snake
- 133 species of moth
- 2 species of lizard
- 1 species of frog
- 6 species of fly
- 20 species of butterfly
- 21 species of bug and beetle
- 49 species of bird
- 1 species of aphid
- 7 species of bee and wasp
- 3 species of spider
- 15 species of grass
- 25 species of tree and shrub
- 128 species of wildflower
- 8 other species

#### GARDEN GUIDED TOURS – June 2011

Four tours of up to 10 visitors each are planned over two weekends in June 2011:

- |        |                    |                |
|--------|--------------------|----------------|
| Tour 1 | Saturday 11th June | at 17:30 hours |
| Tour 2 | Sunday 12th June   | at 10:00 hours |
| Tour 3 | Saturday 18th June | at 10:00 hours |
| Tour 4 | Sunday 19th June   | at 17.30 hours |

To get the numbers right and make sure there are no wasted journeys, visitors will be welcome to tour by personal invitation only. Visitors should contact Peter Smart on [p.smart@virgin.net](mailto:p.smart@virgin.net) or telephone 01483 222710 to request an invitation for their preferred tour. By return they will receive a personal invitation with relevant joining instructions.



### In Surrey

Manor Farm at Byfleet, formerly intensively farmed agricultural land, has been transformed by Surrey Wildlife Trust into wildlife-rich meadows and pasture for the Trust's cattle. It now attracts skylarks, linnets and pied wagtails.

(Source: *Natural World, Spring '11*)

### In Cornwall

Friendly local inshore fishermen are completing Cornwall Wildlife Trust's 12-month trial of acoustic deterrent 'pingers'. The pingers seem to protect dolphins, porpoises and whales from getting tangled up in nets and lines.

(Source: *Natural World, Spring '11*)

## FACTS & FIGURES

### Sky lanterns

Chinese-style sky lanterns, a fashionable party accessory, are causing chaos. In July last year, a flying lantern started a 16-acre blaze in unharvested barley in Oxfordshire, causing thousands of pounds worth of damage. And they create problems for coastguards, with concerned members of the public mistaking them for flares and dialling 999.

(Source: *Waitrose Weekend/The Week, 12 Aug '10*)

### Tough on wildlife

Twelve square miles of front gardens in London are now paved over.

(Source: *Natural World, Spring '09*)

## Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2011 were due on 11th April, and we are delighted at the positive response to the new subscription rate. The rate for one member is £10 pa and the joint subscription is £15 per household. We are most grateful to all those members who have renewed their membership recently and especially those who have completed standing order and Gift Aid forms and/or included donations in addition to their basic subscriptions.

We are also most grateful to Guildford Borough Council for their grant of £1,000, which was received in early April. This has enabled us to reduce our deficit for 2010/11

to £508 and, as a result of the increased subscription level for 2011/12 and the recovery of Gift Aid, this will enable us to become more active in supporting projects again in the future.

For those whose subscriptions remain unpaid, we have recently sent out reminders, but should you have any query about your subscription status, please e-mail me on [adrianthompson46@talktalk.net](mailto:adrianthompson46@talktalk.net). A copy of the standing order mandate and Gift Aid form is available on our website [www.gefweb.org.uk](http://www.gefweb.org.uk) and I would ask that any outstanding subscriptions are sent to me as soon as possible. *Adrian Thompson, Hon Treasurer*

## Energy advice and money management from Guildford Citizen's Advice Bureau

**Guildford Citizen's Advice Bureau has recently been awarded funding by the EDF Energy Trust to provide money and energy advice to clients in the Guildford area.**

Our primary target is to increase the number of applications to the EDF Energy Trust, a charitable trust fund that can help pay the energy arrears of vulnerable customers, as well as other household debts and costs.

We can also assist with applications to the other energy trust funds, whilst providing advice and ongoing support when a trust is not an option. This can include debt management, debt relief orders, bankruptcy, bill checking and dispute resolution.

Of course, beyond the issue of a client's present debt is the issue of preventing future debt occurring. On this front we aim to promote better energy efficiency and

money management with a combination of education and home improvement measures.

To ensure re-funding of the project we must meet the target of 50 EDF Trust applications and 35 other trust applications in the 5 months remaining. Once we have met these targets we will be able to expand the project more freely, and we hope in conjunction with other providers in the area to promote a holistic service that ensures a better quality of life for our clients, whilst helping to reduce their carbon footprint.

We are open to take referrals immediately, and are keen to explore collaboration with all organizations in the area in combating the various facets of fuel poverty.

If you would like to know more please contact Derek Kirkup, Guildford CAB, on 01483 230846 / [derek.kirkup@guildfordcab.org.uk](mailto:derek.kirkup@guildfordcab.org.uk) – available Mondays and Wednesdays.

## Surrey Green Homes Open Days

Guildford Environmental Forum and Transition groups in Surrey helped to make these Open Days on 26th/27th March a success. A total of 295 people visited 30 homes where the owners invited them in to see and discuss the energy-saving and renewable energy systems they had installed.

The event was organised by Guildford Borough Council (GBC) across the borough and by Action Surrey across the rest of Surrey. Nine of the homes were in Guildford. The feedback indicates that a significant number of those who visited intend to take follow-up action. To see full details of the

homes and an analysis of the feedback go to: <http://www.actionsurrey.org/latenews/sggh.pdf>

More than a third of the energy used in Surrey is in homes, and 80% of these homes will still be standing in 2050 by when the UK must cut carbon emissions by at least 80%. Therefore we have to find ways to substantially reduce fossil energy use in our homes.

GBC is running a similar energy-focussed Open Green Homes event from September 8th to 11th during Heritage Open Days. The Surrey-wide event will be repeated in March 2012.

Following our mention in the March newsletter of the plan to plant trees at Pewley Down, Peter Osborn (a Forum member), expressed his concerns. He said, ***“One of our rarer habitats is of course chalk grassland, and the last thing to do would be to plant trees on it.”***

John Bannister reassured him with the following: ***“I can understand your alarm but I think I can put your mind at rest. We were given a large number of whips of native wild fruit and nut species by the Woodland Trust and were looking for suitable locations for planting them. The hedges around the 14-acre field at Pewley Down had gaps that we realised could be filled with these trees, to provide further habitat for birds, mammals, insects, etc.”***

The field owners, a brother and sister who live in London, had contacted Transition Guildford to discuss options for the field. John said, ***“We have walked the site with them, and managing it to create good quality chalk grassland would be a very attractive option.”*** Arrangements are in hand for experts from Surrey Wildlife Trust and elsewhere to advise on ideas to put to the owners.

## Tree planting at Pewley Down

*Text by Food Group for Transition Guildford and the Forum*

*Photographs by Raymond Smith*

THE MERGED Transition Guildford/GEF Food Group has been working hard on a new and very exciting project. We were approached last year by Mark Brown and his sister Julia asking if we would be interested in helping to manage the 14-acre field they own on the chalk downs east of Pewley Down. They want their land managed in the most wildlife-friendly way. The field runs from the trackway at the top of the Downs right down and across the north facing flank.

Mark and Julia remember corn being grown when they were young. But most of all they remember the

birds and the wild flowers and the tranquillity, and they want the field kept for the benefit of wildlife in perpetuity. In the recent past there has been some grazing by horses and ponies on a small part of the field but most of it has been kept as grass and mown for hay.

We hope this will be a long-term project with Mark and Julia over many years to come. A master plan will be drawn up over the course of this year with the help and advice of the Surrey Wildlife Trust.

We were keen to make a start and so teamed up with Bricks and Bread who were successful on





our behalf in applying for over 300 native trees. These came free of charge from the "It's Your Neighbourhood" programme run by the Royal Horticultural Society and The Woodland Trust. They have teamed up to plant as many trees as possible in support of the United Nation's 2011 International Year of Forests, which aims to raise awareness of sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

Our plan was to plant the trees as hedging to plug gaps in the existing hedges around a part of Mark and Julia's field. They enthusiastically agreed to this idea. We had a choice of native trees and elected to go for the "jams, jellies, chutneys and cordials" package, being good for wildlife and good for food foraging. What we got was roughly 350 whips, 30 to 40 cms tall, mostly blackthorn, elderflower and cherry plum. All were in excellent condition and we kept them that way until the day came to plant.

The day chosen was Sunday 10th April, a bit later

than hoped but still alright. It was a beautiful sunny day, and 12 members of Transition Guildford and Guildford Environmental Forum turned out, with Mark and Julia coming down from London. Frances Halstead, Environmental Group Support Officer at Surrey Wildlife Trust, brought tools, water, stakes, tea and, most importantly, her expertise. Frances has been amazingly helpful and she taught us the correct way to plant a hedge and fit rabbit guards. Everyone brought a picnic, there were wonderful cakes and the world was beautiful. A few swallows swept overhead and we basked in the sunshine. After all the hard work, as the ground was very dry, all the plugs had to be well watered in.

Through Frances we are going to apply for another 400 trees from the "It's Your Neighbourhood" project to fill out as many as possible of the other hedges at the site. So please come and join us and put the word around for the autumn hedge party later in the year.



# New efficient heating for Bushy Hill Community Centre

John Bannister

## Origin of the project

In January 2010 a small group from Transition Guildford met with the Management Committee of the Bushy Hill Community Centre, located next to the Bushy Hill estate in Guildford, to discuss our ideas for a community-owned orchard on part of the adjacent public green space. We came away two hours later with a totally different project but one seen to be of greater value to the local people, having been convinced that reducing the Centre's escalating energy costs was critical to its survival and hence the welfare of the community.

## Initial audit and objectives

Through Bricks and Bread we arranged for Richard Weavis to conduct an energy audit of the Centre, for which Guildford Environmental Forum kindly paid £500 from its funds. Richard prioritised the work needed into four sequential and manageable steps, starting with replacement of old, inefficient gas boilers, to be followed by wall insulation, roof insulation and finally improvements to lighting and the electricity-thirsty beer chiller. A further vision beyond these immediate needs of the Centre is, together with partners Bricks and Bread and Guildford Borough Council, to take a programme of advice on energy efficiency and renewable energy to all the residents of the Bushy Hill Estate.

## Sourcing funds

Funding for the boilers had to come from grants. Out of the several grant-funding bodies we applied to, two sources of funding came up trumps and raised the necessary £4,000 to pay for two new high efficiency gas boilers. Our first success was to be awarded £2,000 from local County Councillor Graham Ellwood's discretionary Community Allowance. Graham had quickly agreed to support us and we are very grateful to him and Surrey County Council who, through the Local Partnerships Team for Guildford, notified us of their award in March 2010. The £2,000 balance of the funding came from the Surrey Community Foundation – an excellent local funding source for local community groups backed by money from private individuals, local businesses, trusts and government.

All grant-funding applications are rigorous and demanding. Key requirements for this project were a sound business case, historic energy expenditure records, financial reports, value to the community, number and classes of people benefiting, project management responsibilities, completion dates, capital cost estimates, expected benefits and final reports to

our funders following completion. We are very grateful to Tracy Banks, secretary to the Bushy Hill Community Centre, and to Wendy Varcoe's team at the Community Foundation for Surrey for being so helpful. Equally, of course, the users of the Centre are very grateful to the anonymous donors behind the scenes.

## Boiler installation

Final confirmation of the £2,000 award from the Community Foundation for Surrey came through in November last year, with payment in December. Unfortunately, by this time both the original boilers had failed, although the Centre had managed to stay open and function normally by using temporary electrical heaters. Electrical heating is inefficient, and as it was required for over a month it means the Centre has taken a big hit on its electricity bills at a time of bitterly cold weather. Carbon dioxide emissions will have jumped as well. But the future is looking good.

The two new Valient boilers were installed in December by local plumber William Grigg, who has serviced the boilers at the Centre for many years. We did our very best to move the boiler phase of this project along as quickly as possible and, although I wish we had achieved completion earlier, there were many steps along the way with many different individuals requiring considerable co-ordination. Lessons have been learned and the close working relationships established with the Centre should benefit the next phase of this challenging project.

Transition Guildford and the Forum are now turning their volunteer time and attention to getting wall insulation into the Centre. It is a 50mm concrete panel solid wall construction with little or no insulation at present. Knauf Insulation has visited the Centre and we are waiting for their proposals and indicative cost estimates for the two options of either internal or external insulation.

## The two new 96-97% efficient Valient boilers at Bushy Hill Community Centre.



Tracy Banks

## Recycling rates

Flanders, in Belgium, recycles more than 70% of its municipal waste. That's twice as much as the UK. By 2025, Northern Ireland's recycling target is 45%, England's 50% and Scotland and Wales 70%.

(Source: Earthmatters, Spring '11)

# FACTS & FIGURES

## Stimulating classics

Music by Mozart is being piped into a German sewage plant, to encourage the microbes that break down waste.

Anton Stucki, operator of the Treuenbrietzen plant, said, "We think the secret is in the vibrations of the music, which penetrate everything including the water, the sewage and the cells. It creates a certain resonance that stimulates the microbes and makes them work better."

(Source: Waitrose Weekend/The Week, 17 June '10)

## Helium

A physicist from Cornell University estimates that the Earth's supply of helium will be exhausted within 25 years. Heavily used in medical devices, space exploration and defence systems, helium may be the second most abundant element in the universe, but we can't economically harvest it from the Earth's atmosphere.

It's currently extracted from natural gas deposits.

(Source: BBC Focus, Feb '11)

### Antibiotics

According to the Soil Association, approximately half of all antibiotics in the UK are prescribed by vets, many of them routinely to intensively-farmed animals.

(Source: soilassociation.org)

### Ditch it

The total amount of food and drink thrown away each year in the UK – by households, restaurants, hospitals, schools, etc – is 18-20 million tonnes.

(Source: Earthmatters, Spring '11)

## FACTS & FIGURES

### Greenest government ever? – 1

Jonathan Porritt, former chairman of the recently abolished Sustainable Development Commission, has done a progress check on 78 "green" policies. He found little or no progress on 59, and judged that 30 were "moribund".

(Source: Independent, 7 May '11)

### Greenest government ever? – 2

In April, WWF resigned from the Zero Carbon Taskforce following the government's decision, released without announcement in documents accompanying the Budget, that the definition of Zero Carbon Homes will no longer include the emissions from unregulated energy use (ie appliances) within the home.

(Source: WWF-UK)

## Dunsfold Park solar farm

Jim McAllister has told us that he is confident that his 2 MW photovoltaic solar farm on the edge of Dunsfold Aerodrome will go ahead. He is frustrated, just like a lot of other investors wanting to boost the production of renewable electricity, by the government's U-turn on the feed-in-tariff rules and the very restrictive FIT budget cap. Industry keeps telling government that it needs certainty if it is to invest the massive amounts needed in low-carbon energy infrastructure. We are getting anything but certainty.

When installed, Jim McAllister believes his solar farm will make Dunsfold Park the only business park in the UK to run on 100% renewable electricity generated on-site. The rush to complete solar farms in the UK means that nearly all the equipment and labour needed is imported directly from Germany and other European countries where the green industrial base has been built up over many years. As with major wind projects the contribution from and benefits to UK plc are small.

## Solar farms – why not?

The last government introduced incentive payments for small-scale renewable energy systems that produce electricity. The sort of energy-generating systems you can put on your own roof or in your garden and widely dispersed, unlike our massive and often very inefficient centralised power stations running on fossil fuels and nuclear. The incentive scheme is the Feed-in Tariff or FIT. Very welcome but introduced very late in the day compared to our major competitors in Europe. Other European countries have successfully grown their installations of renewable energy for years on the back of FIT and cornered the market in the development, manufacturing and skills needed to install renewable energy. The UK FIT permitted solar PV systems up to 5 MW – a bit large for your average garden but a great opportunity for landowners such as farmers. Farmers are being exhorted to grow biomass energy so why not grow solar energy too?

There was a lot of interest here in solar farms and businesses spent money developing projects. Then this government, so anxious to save every little bit of money, killed this opportunity and many green jobs with it. Strange mentality when the UK has to produce 15% of its energy needs from renewables and cut greenhouse gases by 34% by 2020 (9 years to go). The result is that very few solar farms will be built in this country. Landowners who moved

fast enough may have got the necessary approvals in time before the guillotine drops. Most have been disappointed.



jplc.co.uk

A typical ground-level solar installation, this one by J R Power Ltd

Solar farms consist of solar panels supported off the ground in large arrays in fields. You may have seen them in Germany, Spain, Italy, Denmark or France, a bit like vineyards only more useful. Or quite possibly you may not have done as the panels only stand about 2 metres off the ground, so are easily concealed behind a hedge. Sheep can safely graze beneath them and there are even plans to grow specific plants that require shade.

Government talks a lot but it is ordinary people and businesses that have to deliver results and, of course, pay the price of failure.

John Bannister

## Motoring costs

It now costs a lot more money to fill up your tank following the steep rise in the oil price. But this is what we should expect if oil (like food and other commodities) becomes scarcer and more expensive to produce. According to the AA's March Fuel Price Report, only in Norway is diesel more expensive than the UK (a massive £1.50 per litre more expensive). For unleaded petrol on the other hand we are only paying the 11th highest price in Europe. The UK market is split roughly 55:45 diesel:petrol.

It is not helping that UK government policy means that the price of rail travel continues to increase faster than the cost of motoring. In some European countries there is a deliberate policy to keep rail fares significantly lower for all the right reasons. Put simply, UK motorists are not paying their full whack for infrastructure costs and environmental damage. Yet the government cut fuel duty by 1p per litre on the day of the budget because of the hard pressed motorist!

Our streets and roads are a 24/7 noise and air pollution nightmare. We may as well let Bernie Ecclestone take charge.

John Bannister

# SWIFT BROUGHT TO EARTH

*John Bannister*

On 8th May my daughter Lisa spotted a swift on her lawn with wings spread-eagled. That it was Lisa's garden was good news for the swift, as once grounded it cannot take off again so becomes easy prey for cats. I happened to have the RSPB leaflet on swifts so I became an indispensable expert and headed down by train to Petersfield and thence to Sheet. Swifts are one of our most adored creatures, harbingers of summer and admired for their amazing skill in the air, their attachment to our buildings, wheeling overhead in excited gangs, and their long-distance migration to and from Africa.

A close examination showed that the bird seemed completely unharmed. I was struck by the very long (relative to the body) primaries that give the wings that distinct crescent shape and the tiny feet with three forward pointing claws. These are designed solely to grip, momentarily, the side of a building or tile when visiting their nest. This long-winged aerial perfection comes at a price. Swifts once grounded can't walk and can barely move, and this was not a young bird as none had yet been born.

Advice from the RSPB for a grounded swift is to check if it is starving by feeling the crop, which didn't appear to be the case here, and to feed it hourly with insects. Since they collect 300 or more insects at a time when airborne this seemed a bit of a tall order. And they are discerning about what insects they do eat. The RSPB says that cat or dog food can provide alternative sustenance – but how to get the tiny beak open? We endeavoured to get some moisture into its maw, with little success.

The other strategy we tried was to hold it at arm's length, as Beatrice is doing in the picture, and gently raise and lower the arm to get some lift under its wings. This merely resulted in the bird gliding a few metres and crash-landing. I was tempted to take it to an upstairs window and launch it from there but the thought of it ending up in another garden to be killed by a cat drove this idea from my mind. We debated releasing it in an open field but in the end took it to Hart Wildlife Hospital near Alton. It got quite excited on the journey and we again considered releasing



it but pressed on as the hospital closed at 6 pm. Hart Wildlife Hospital is a charity run by volunteers and is open 7 days a week – you have to take your hat off to these people.

They kept the swift overnight and fed it with waxworms (larvae of a moth) by carefully opening the beak through the side with a fingernail. The tip of the beak apparently is very soft so great care is needed doing this. It flew the next

day and would have been back in Sheet in an hour or two to join up with its colleagues. The prognosis was that it was tired and needed a rest and was probably a bit hungry.

It was noticeable that few swifts had arrived and one can only put this down to shortage of aerial food (spiders and insects carried aloft). Swifts are totally dependent on weather conducive to airborne insects and will fly long distances upwind to find food. If it's raining hard here they may go to Lille for lunch and Dortmund for tea. Swifts have the capacity to survive 10 or 15 days starvation by going into a low-energy torpor: after all they sleep on the wing after ascending to 3,000 metres or so. Amazingly, the bird born in our summer will, when fledged, fly continuously for three years without ever touching land, and only then will it build a minimalist nest from aerial scraps to raise its own young and put a tiny foot down.

The swift, sadly, is not doing well. It has suffered one of the biggest population crashes of any species in the last few years. In just over a decade it has gone from green to amber on the list of Birds of Conservation Concern, and it is only one shade of orange away from red. As they nest universally, it seems, in tiny crevices in buildings and roofs, the commonly held view is that the loss of older buildings and changes in new construction have deprived the swifts of their nesting sites. However, throughout the country things are slowly changing. At Cherwell in Oxfordshire 'swift bricks' have been neatly placed in a new sports centre. In Glasgow, all new buildings over a certain height in swift areas will now have a planning condition attached to them to provide swift nesting sites. I cannot envisage life without swifts. We must bring this enlightened thinking to planning departments in our area.

## Birds and wind farms

In the USA, wind farms kill about 7,000 birds a year. Now a wind farm in Texas, situated on a flight path used by millions of birds each autumn, has pioneered the use of radar technology to avoid deadly collisions. When bad weather hits in peak migration times, forcing the birds to fly at a lower altitude, a radar system detects their approach and the turbines automatically shut down, restarting once the birds have passed safely.

(Source: *The Guardian*, 1 May '09)

## Cattle power

A quarter of a million cows form part of the biggest methane-capture system in the world. China's Huishan Dairy transforms methane from fermenting cow manure into 5.66 megawatts of power.

(Source: *BBC Focus*, Feb '11)

## Feeding frenzy

The British spend £200 million every year on feeding birds in their gardens.

(Source: *BBC Wildlife*, Autumn '10)

# FACTS & FIGURES

## The lure of sex

The male of that spectacular day-flying moth, the Emperor, follows scent trails over heaths and moors in a quest for the females. Its ultra-sensitive plumed antennae can detect the pheromone cocktail from as far as 8 kilometres away.

(Source: *BBC Wildlife*, May '11)

# The Man upon the Stair

Michael Tanner

DESPITE THE EVIDENT signs of financial stringency which have been nagging us for so many months, we still prove responsive to the signals of early summer and scraps of news which offer silver linings to well established clouds: the Arab Spring, fishermen no longer compelled to dump excessive catch, yet another planet which seems to hold the prerequisites of life. Even so, we remain vulnerable to the bad news, whether or not we have foreseen it: the Japanese misfortunes, devastating tornadoes across a swathe of the United States, erosion of NHS capability, etc. *ad nauseam*.

The swirling cloud of events that we try to interpret may also serve as a welcome distraction but, intermittently, it thins enough to allow us a glimpse of that Man upon the Stair who will not go away and, of course, there are the voices which continue to assert that really he isn't there at all. Yet again this week on sober Radio 4 there was one expert diametrically opposed to another: one held that the future must be one of unrelenting economic development with no fear of world population outstripping the planet's ability to feed however many inhabitants it bore (10 billion would be no problem); the other was an opponent of economic growth which failed to take sustainability and ecological awareness into account. Such episodes are enough to indicate that the distance between the two factions may not have diminished as much as the Greens had hoped.

One factor, however, which seems to be on the side of the Greens is that the majority of reasonably informed people increasingly acknowledge that science and technology are, at their best, bumbling tools and exist in a world where the abnormality of events can far exceed the abilities of those previously recognised as experts. Another factor, equally neglected, is that those in power to implement important decisions are often themselves at the mercy of corporate greed, impatience, political ambition and any number of frailties

to which human flesh is prone. How, otherwise, could nuclear power stations be sited on fault-lines in the earth's crust and have inadequate protection against Pacific tsunamis?

Which is where, perhaps, the small man in his seething numbers may enter – He with feet in contact with the solid ground, having perceptions controlled by common sense, bitter experience and compassion. At least, these days, He also has the technical ability to learn more of what is beyond his immediate horizon.

I suppose the one redeeming feature of the Jeremy Clarkson show (produced in our own backyard) is that it can laugh at its own excesses, although one sometimes has the impression that the switch-on switch-off audience has been brainwashed. But our own backyard is nevertheless the place where we have to begin and, I think, the place where promising things are happening at a slowly gathering pace: notice the increasing use of solar heating not only in houses but in schools, the building of improved installations for recycling (as at Sunbury), the concern for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (like heathland) and for endangered species (bats, otters, bees, for example), the informed management of woodland and creation of natural corridors, the growing number of adult and child cyclists and walkers.

But belief in sustainability is not enough, active participation is vital. Councils need to support that relatively small band of devoted officers who dedicate their energy and expertise to see that good laws and regulations are put into effect. We all know that ticking the right boxes may be fine for persuading government that action is being taken but ticks can easily become meretricious ornaments. The ineluctable CONNECTION between Man, his Environment and Climate Change must be invited into the living room, not left to lurk like Hamlet's father's ghost upon the staircase.

## 👎 **Where are the kestrels?**

While we rejoice at the recovery of most of Britain's raptor populations, two species are a cause for concern. Between 1995 and 2008, sparrowhawks have declined by 7%, and kestrels by an alarming 20%. Indeed, you're more likely to see a buzzard now than a kestrel.

The cause of this loss is a puzzle, since agricultural intensification (formerly a prime suspect) has not increased in recent years and many farms operate agri-environment schemes to help wildlife. The British Trust for Ornithology says that the decline may simply reflect a few bad years from which the population could recover, but if not it could indicate a major downward trend. The Hawk and Owl Trust believes that a lack of nest sites, such as holes in old trees, may be having an impact, and the Trust is carrying out a Kestrel Highways project, installing 240 nestboxes along 385km of road.

Meanwhile, one pair of kestrels has sought out a famous London address – for the past six years they have nested in a disused drainpipe near an office window in 10 Downing Street.

## 👍 **Mega dairy rejected**

Concerned citizens, farming and animal welfare organisations have fought successfully against the introduction of a so-called "mega dairy" in Lincolnshire. Nocton Dairies' planning application – proposing a factory for 3,770 cows (increasing to 8,100 when practicable) to be kept indoors for most of their lives with little or no access to pasture – has been turned down. If it had been allowed, it would have been the largest dairy factory in Europe.

Small dairy farms are closing at an alarming rate across the UK as they are unable to compete with the 'big boys'. Buy British and organic.

## 👎 **Now a mega piggery?**

There are roughly 9 million pigs slaughtered every year in the UK and only about 1.5% of UK pigs are organic. The typical size of existing pig factories in the UK is between 500 to 900 sows and the largest has 1,100. Now there is a planning application for an indoor pig factory for 2,500 sows and around 20,000 piglets in Derbyshire. The Soil Association's campaign against



pigs.org.uk

this travesty is called "Not in my banger". The powerful libel lawyers Carter Ruck are attempting to silence opposition, and you can read their shocking letter asking the Soil Association to withdraw their objections at [www.soilassociation.org/notinmybanger](http://www.soilassociation.org/notinmybanger)

## 👍 **A grand old lady**

An osprey thought to be the oldest breeding female ever recorded in the UK has returned to its nest at a Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve in Perthshire. "Lady", aged 26, has nested at the Loch of the Lowes reserve near Dunkeld for 21 consecutive years, and in that time has produced 58 eggs of which 49 have fledged. Female ospreys usually live for an average of eight years and produce about 20 chicks.

Lady suffered a bout of ill health in June last year, and there were fears for her survival. But she recovered, and is clearly in robust form having completed the 3,000 mile migration from Africa once again, a week



perthshire.blogspot.com

before her mate "Laird" arrived. Despite fears that she may now be infertile, it was reported on 14th April that she had laid an egg. Her progress can be followed via a 'nest cam' at [www.swt.org.uk](http://www.swt.org.uk)

## 👎 **The world's water**

By 2030, if no efficiency gains are made, global water requirements could exceed current accessible reliable supplies by 40%, according to a study by the Water Resources Group. In our High Streets awareness is slowly growing of the volumes of hidden water that go to make many consumer products. According to Waterwise, a cotton T-shirt consumes about 4,100 litres, one hamburger about 2,400 litres and one pair of leather shoes

some 8,000 litres. The average UK person uses directly 160 litres per day of pristine drinking water from the tap, about 30% of this to flush toilets. A typical child in rural Uganda will walk 3 kilometres to fetch water of often doubtful quality for safe drinking.

## 👎 **Great Pacific Garbage Patch**

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a vortex of floating rubbish, mostly plastic, trapped in the Pacific has now reached an area twice the size of Texas or, if you prefer, 67 times the size of Wales.

**GOOD NEWS**



**BAD NEWS**

compiled by John Bannister

## Entrepreneurs – 1

### Black Forest pioneer wins “Green Nobel”

The Chernobyl nuclear accident was 25 years ago and the debate still rages over the number of cancer deaths it has caused. The post-Chernobyl “clean-up” in Germany was extremely thorough because feelings about nuclear are so strong. Germany’s electricity even today is very dependent on coal and nuclear plants, with roughly 50% more nuclear output than the UK. The Chernobyl disaster sparked renewed anti-nuclear demonstrations throughout Germany.

In the small Black Forest town of Shönau, 35 km south of Freiburg (Guildford’s twin city), the campaign was led by Ursula Sladek, a teacher and mother of five. Her sustained commitment had outcomes that would be inconceivable in this country. She ran an action group “Parents for a nuclear-free future” promoting energy efficiency, reduced dependency on grid electricity and installing micro-hydroelectricity and co-generation

plants. She fought the local grid company KWR over many years and Shönau ended up buying its own local grid, helped by a national fund raising campaign. She then sued KWR for overpricing the grid and millions were repaid.

Sladek and her partners founded EWS, Elektrizitäts-Werke Shönau, owned by 1000 shareholders, who receive small annual dividends. Surplus profits are reinvested in local renewable energy in the form of subsidies. Today EWS sells electricity to over 110,000 customers across Germany and Sladek aims to have 500,000 customers by 2015. In March EWS successfully helped Titisee-Neustadt, 35 kms east of Freiburg, take control of its grid.

For her visionary leadership Sladek has been awarded the 2011 Goldman Environmental Prize, often referred to as the “Green Nobel”.

## Entrepreneurs – 2

### The Wey Valley Solar Project

Mike Smyth is about to start delivering a vision on a not dissimilar scale to Ursula Sladek. Mike is a member of both the Forum and Guildford & Waverley Friends of the Earth (FoE) and is a Director of National FoE and of Energy4All, the community co-operative renewable energy company.

His project is to set up a community renewable energy company for our community which will install about 200 kW of solar PV panels (and related educational packages) on four local secondary schools in Waverley and Guildford. Preliminary work has been proceeding at the four schools for some time and detailed surveys have been completed. Of the £600,000 target, £200,000 has already been promised, so the project will definitely take place at two schools; as more money is raised more schools can be involved.

A 46 kW PV system at Rodborough School is expected go live in August 2011 and it is hoped similar-sized systems will follow at Broadwater, Godalming Sixth Form College and The County, with other local schools added as funds permit. Individually each system will be less than 50 kW.

Mike’s proposal is to obtain the funding from the local and wider communities, with investors receiving the FIT (Feed-In Tariff) plus tax relief under the EIS (Enterprise Investment Scheme) for those who are income tax payers. JoJu is the selected PV installer and

the scale of the project offers economies to the benefit of schools and investors. The government recently increased the EIS from 20% to 30% tax benefit, but at the same time announced that local energy generating schemes will cease to qualify under the EIS if they were installed after 5th April 2012 (removing yet another incentive to green the economy). The aim therefore is to complete the school PV projects before the EIS deadline is reached.

Mike calculates that if £600,000 or more is raised, the financial return for investors in the first full year will be about 5% (equivalent to 7% if you are able to take advantage of the EIS tax relief), increasing to 6% in the fourth year (equivalent to over 8.5% with EIS tax relief). Half the electricity generated by the panels will be given to the schools (or sold on their behalf if they do not use it); the other half will be sold either to the schools or via the Grid at wholesale price of about 4p per kwh. Any investor returns over 6% will be shared 50:50 with the schools – the sharing is expected to start in Year 4.

The project has received the blessing of Surrey County Council. You can register an interest in investing now at [www.weyvalleysolar.co.uk](http://www.weyvalleysolar.co.uk)

This is a really exciting project which needs financial support from our community – in return for a fair but attractive financial return – to reach its maximum potential, so do please consider investing and tell anyone you know who might be interested about it.



**Guildford Environmental Forum aims to improve the environment in and around Guildford for wildlife and for people and to build a sustainable future.**

Join us in our work for the town and have this newsletter posted to your door four times a year. Forum membership costs only £10 per year or £15 for a couple, and new members are warmly welcomed.

Please contact Adrian Thompson on 01483 222687 or e-mail [adrianthompson46@talktalk.net](mailto:adrianthompson46@talktalk.net)



# CALENDAR



All the Forum's Group meetings are open to the public

**Saturday 11 June, Sunday 12 June,  
Saturday 18 June, Sunday 19 June**

**Guided tours of Peter Smart's garden.** By invitation only. See page 2 for details.

### Thursday 23 June

GEF Sustainable Energy Group. **Visit to Harvest Wood Fuels Ltd to see their commercial wood pellet production.** Led by Managing Director James Little at The Timber Yard, Grange Road, Farnham, GU10 2DQ, starting at 1800.

*Grange Road runs west from Tilford Road midway between Rushmoor and Tilford.*

See [www.harvestwoodfuels.co.uk](http://www.harvestwoodfuels.co.uk) or telephone 01252 794958 for precise location.

Contact John Bannister for car pooling.

### Tuesday 12 July

GEF Sustainable Energy Group. **Visit to Oak Tree House, Woking's Eco Demonstration House showing all kinds of energy-saving options for retro-fitting in a domestic dwelling.**

Led by Ben Wood, Project Manager for Action Surrey. Tours at 1000 and 1900.

*Oak Tree House is on the A322 just north of Brookwood on the left going north.*

Please register and book at [www.actionsurrey.org/house](http://www.actionsurrey.org/house) where you will find precise directions.

### Sunday 4 September

Transition Guildford/GEF Food Group. **Apple pressing at National Trust Winkworth Arboretum Community Day "Live Local Love Winkworth Too".**

Free entry. 1100 to 1600. Bring your apples for pressing and join in the fun. Lots of other events.

### Thursday 8 to Sunday 11 September

**Guildford Heritage Open Days – Open Ecohomes.** Book guided tours to see first-hand how homeowners have implemented energy-saving measures and renewable energy systems in their homes.

Find out how you can reduce your fuel bills and increase the comfort of your own home.

To book please visit [www.guildford.gov.uk/ecohomes](http://www.guildford.gov.uk/ecohomes)

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(Adrian Thompson pro tem)

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**Please send contributions for the next issue to Clare Windsor by Monday 15 August.**

**The views expressed in this newsletter are strictly those of its contributors and Guildford Environmental Forum.**