Summer Issue 10

NEWSLETTER of the Medlock & Tame Valley Conservation Association

(Registered Charity Number: 504558)

"Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass on a summer day listening to the murmur of water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is hardly a waste of time"

-- John Lubbock

Sustainability is now a much used buzz word with regard to environmental issues and simply means the capacity to endure. Summertime, when days are long and the nights are warm, is a good season to double our efforts and go that mile further to help protect this good earth for generations to come. We can do this in many 'small' ways and here are some ideas for you to think about!

- **Bike more - drive less.** Much easier to do in the summer. Why not get the bike out of storage and do a few miles or just do short errands if you really don't feel fit! Don't forget to take some drinking water though. You will have saved some carbon emissions in the meantime.

- **Compost your organic waste.** This is very easy to do and benefits the environment. Pick a corner of your garden where you can put your scraps/gardening waste (no meat or dairy, but most other things can go in) and then turn them over every so often with a pitch fork. You'll get wonderful fertilizer in the process and reduce methane release in landfills.

- **Get rid of disposables.** In the good weather we eat outdoors more so use reusable, outdoor-friendly plates that are dishwasher safe and look great. Whatever food is left over - put into your new compost heap!

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- **Water your garden preferably in the late evening**. Otherwise, most of the water you use is evaporating in the sunshine. You'll save water and a large bill!
- **'Kick the cup' habit.** When you go out for ice cream, buy a cone! If you are a regular drinker of take-away-coffee, why not buy a reusable/non-disposable cup from your favourite coffee shop - most shops sell them now.

There are so many simple things we can do in our daily lives to minimize a negative impact on the environment WITHOUT detracting from any fun this summer, so let's do it!

YOU ARE INVITED TO A

GARDEN PARTY/FUN DAY

(jointly hosted by Medlock & Tame Valley Conservation Association and Tameside Green Interest Group (TGIG))

On Saturday 20 August

2.00 pm – 4.30 pm

Admission 50p

in "Burlinson House"
5 Oaken Clough Terrace, Ashton under Lyne, OL7 9NY

There will be lots to see and do with stalls from
Local nature/environmental groups, nature quizzes, pond dipping
Sale stalls including herbs/plants/ white elephant, teas/coffees

Come and bring your friends and family for
A great day out!

All cars of those attending MUST park at the Oldham Road end of Oaken Clough as parking is restricted with priority given to residents.

'YOU CHOOSE' Ashton awards

Tameside Council have recently launched 'You Choose', a new fund to support local community groups. Funding for You Choose comes from the efforts of local people to recycle more. The more residents recycle the less money is spent on landfill.

You Choose

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MTVCA recently made an application for an award and our application was for monies to help equip our cellar (our workshop) with tools, to enable us to re-use materials no longer of use to people. Lee (our webmaster) and Carl his brother, are heading up the projects.

(Lee and Carl clearing the cellar to make it a workshop to be proud of!)

To date, our projects include a wind turbine, a solar radiator and a solar panel to discharge power into a portable battery, which can be taken from place to place, inside and outside the house for energy. We already have solar lights in our wildlife hide operating via one of these batteries and there are many more projects in the pipeline to reduce our drain on electricity.

Yesterday we made our presentation at Ashton Town Hall, an event which has recently been publicised in the local newspaper. There was a healthy turn out of supporters for 35 groups as they presented their need for funding. Most of the groups were successful in their applications and I am pleased to report that MTVCA was amongst them, having been given the award applied for. You will be able to see in the forthcoming weeks, what we have been able to achieve with these monies to enable us to improve the workshop and purchase equipment for use in our replenishable projects. Thank you for recycling, and keep at it!

Carl and Lee would like to make an appeal to all of our members for used or dysfunctional solar garden lights, black paint or anything that might be useful to recycle for their energy projects (see www.medlockandtame.org.uk/renewable.html) Just let us know if you have anything and we can arrange collection or you can leave them at Burlinson House.

SUMMER RECIPE – ICED MOCHA DESSERT

A scrumptious dessert for eating on a hot sunny day – you know you're worth it!

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- 85g plain chocolate (70% or 80% cocoa is best)
- 1 tbsp coffee granules
- 700ml milk
- 4 scoops vanilla ice cream , plus extra to serve (optional)

Method

1. Roughly chop 75g of the chocolate and put into a large jug with the coffee. Bring 300ml of the milk just to the boil, then pour over the chocolate and coffee mix, stirring to melt. Once melted, cool.

2. Tip the cooled mocha milk into the blender with the ice cream and remaining milk. Blitz until blended, then pour into 4 tall glasses. Add an extra scoop of ice cream to each, if you like, then grate a little of the remaining chocolate on top.

HEDGEROWS

Half of Britain's land mammal species live in or travel along hedges. Three quarters of the country's breeding birds are known to have nested in them. 1000 different flowering plants thrive in hedges attracting 20 butterfly species.

The earliest hedges date from Anglo-Saxon times (450-16 AD) when woodland strips were left as boundaries between settlements.

More than half of today's hedges were planted during the 18th century Agricultural Revolution when millions of acres of common land were divided into fields and miles of hedge were planted. The 20th century has produced a second Agricultural Revolution. Field patterns have altered once again in response to farming changes. But this time the effects on hedges are disastrous.

Some animals rely on hedgerows as corridors more than others. Hedges provide the only route along which smaller mammals such as voles, shrews and mice can travel in safety. Stoats and weasels also take advantage of the shelter offered by stalking in its shadows for their next meal.

Many birds such as wrens, yellowhammers and linnets for example now rely on hedgerows for nesting and feeding. Hawthorn hedges are particular favourites.

About 50% of British insects are also of woodland origin. Lush hedgerow vegetation provides food for butterfly caterpillars such as orange tip, brimstone and holly blue and flowers which burst into bud in spring and summer attract bees in search of pollen. With so much wildlife dependent on hedges there should be concern about the effects of hedgerow destruction on wildlife. The shift towards intensive arable farming in the east makes hedges redundant as stock barriers and many are destroyed to make more land available for cultivation. Arable farmers also claim that hedges are a liability in corn growing areas because they shelter cornfield pests such as aphids, weevils and moths but hedgerows also harbour the enemies of these pests. Insect eating birds, ladybirds and ground beetles are all effective pest controllers. Again we see that nature is self-regulating when we do not interfere with its system.

Miles of hedgerow have been bulldozed not just for arable farming but even in dairy and sheep farming. Often farmers find barbed wire or electric fences more convenient to maintain. It is all well and good to have fertile land in which to grow crops to feed our nation, but when that corn is destined to join Europe's mountain of surplus grain, you cannot help questioning the wisdom of these farming policies when at the same time our wildlife are being deprived of their natural habitats.

For the red fox, hedgerows are a valuable hunting ground. Small mammals such as voles, hedgehogs, mice and rabbits, young birds and insects are an important part of its diet, as well as the fruits and berries which cover the hedges in autumn.

The Government could help in this by offering a better grant system for hedges which might encourage more farmers to restore their hedgerows. Of course, those of us who have gardens, can keep some ‘rough’ edges in which small mammals and insects can enjoy some old logs, wildflowers and vegetation to provide shelter and food for them in these days when many parts of our land are being taken over for development purposes.

USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS

Bryan Stringer: 0161 620 2496;

Susan Stewart 0161 3309959 and 07989 147095

Jean Lythgoe: 07711 388468

40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION!

2011 is the **40th Anniversary** of the founding of the MTVCA – actually the **14th Aug, 1971** to be exact. The inaugural meeting was held at Werneth Park Study Centre in Oldham. In those days it was known as the Medlock & Tame Valley Conservation

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Committee as it was formed as an offshoot of the Oldham Microscopical & Natural History Society. Thanks to our Chairman for passing on that information to us!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

On: Saturday 10 September 2011

In: 5 Oaken Clough Terrace, Ashton under Lyne OL7 9NY

At: 2.30 sharp

(All relevant documentation for the AGM will be sent by email/post to members at least 14 days before the meeting). ***High tea will be provided (but optional) following the business meeting to include a selection of sandwiches, fruit loaf, scones and biscuits at a cost of £2 per person. All proceeds will go to MTVCA funds.***

****Please ensure that all cars are parked at the Oldham Road end of Oaken Clough due to restricted parking****

NATURE'S NUMBERS

Mathematics is perhaps not the first subject that springs to mind when thinking of nature, but many modern researchers have endeavoured to explain nature in mathematical terms, and some inroads have been made. There are certain areas of mathematics that impact upon various aspects of nature. In particular, the following areas are worthy of note:

Fractals - A term contracted from the words 'Fraction' and 'Dimensional'. Fractals explain why some systems in nature are 'self similar', such as ferns.

In our world we are used to measuring things in the three dimensions of length, width and depth. Some of the things we find in nature do not succumb easily to such measurements and we are forced to explain their shape using fractional dimensions.

Mountain landscapes are a good example of a fractal, as, if we use a one metre rule to measure around a mountain surface we would miss out all the gaps less than a metre in length. If we then used a shorter rule to measure the surface we would find that it would fit in all the gaps and we would end up measuring a longer distance. Fractals are also representative of those types of structure which exhibit "self similarity". In the case of a mountain face, it is made up of smaller and smaller rocks which are vaguely similar.

A better example of such self similarity in nature is a fern, which can readily be seen to be made up of what appear to be copies of itself at smaller and smaller scales. Cauliflower heads and Broccoli also exhibit patterns where copies of a main pattern appear at smaller and smaller scales. Benoit Mandelbrot discovered fractals whilst working for IBM and now has a set of numbers named after him.

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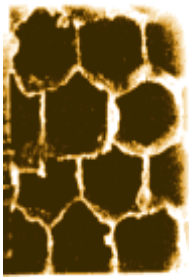
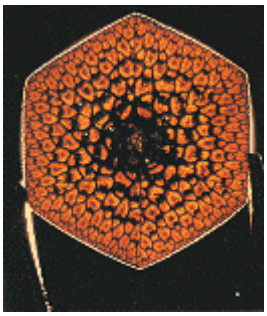
Symmetry - It is obvious to us as human beings when we look in the mirror that, to a large degree, our own bodies have an axis of symmetry and that the left and right hand side of us are, to within a degree of error, mirror images of each other. Elsewhere in nature we can see other such symmetries. The most obvious is the six-fold symmetry of a snowflake crystal. The same symmetry can be found in the combs of the social insects such as bees.



Many fruiting bodies such as tomatoes or apples have rotational symmetries or carry segments such as those of an orange which break the circle up into fractional parts. The propensity of symmetries and geometries to show up in natural objects can sometimes be traced to the molecules that make up the object, or possibly because the arrangement of matter takes up the least space or minimises the use of energy, or maximises the use of space whilst creating structural strength.

Fibonacci numbers are those that create a sequence, by adding up successive numbers starting with 1 which is added to itself to get 2, then 2 is added to 1 to get 3 and then 3 is added to 2 to get 5 and so on. This sequence - which continues 8,13,21... -very often is behind the arrangement or number of petals in a flower head or the number of seeds or spirals in a fruiting body.



Because it is a relatively simple sequence where the next term is generated from the previous one, it is something plants can do easily, and also easy for computers to copy. Such sequences can also be behind the spiralling arrangements often seen in biological forms.

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The terms of the Fibonacci sequence are also present in a pine cone and the reproduction rates of rabbits, which may account for the surprising increase in the populations of them, so much so, that they are often used as a symbol of fertility as when Easter cards carry images of them.

So next time you look at a flower in your garden, or lift a pine cone, remember Nature's numbers and be amazed!

PARK BRIDGE FOCUS GROUP

Park Bridge Focus Group are looking for people to 'man the Centre' from 11.00-4.00 (it's obviously easier for us to manage if people can do whole days, but if not, they would be grateful for any cover they can get!). Basically the role would be to stand behind the counter, answer queries which are usually to do with walks in the area, and to sell a few refreshments. Ideally the best situation would be for two people to cover as there is upstairs and downstairs display area, and there is no guarantee that there will be a ranger or other member of staff around. (There will be a member of staff on duty, who can be called for emergencies, queries etc).

If you are interested, please contact Park Bridge and either speak with one of the staff covering or leave a message for one of the Rangers who will contact you.

TAMESIDE GREEN INTEREST GROUP

Tameside Green Interest Group (TGIG) has been 'up and running in Ashton under Lyne' now for 2 years. Most of their members are members of the MTVCA and there are mutually shared aims and objectives such as keeping an ongoing watch on the environment and informing/advising the public with regard to green spaces for wildlife habitat.

MTVCA are delighted that TGIG have agreed to use one of the upstairs rooms in Burlinson House for their committee meetings and general resources, and they are currently redecorating and refurbishing the room.

Our first joint venture together will be in the form of a **Garden Party/Nature Day** on Saturday 20 August *(see notice in this newsletter)* from 2.00 – 4.30 pm in 5 Oaken Clough Terrace woodland garden and house. Do try to lend your support if you can. It promises to be an interesting and fun-

filled day for all the family. We hope to have various wildlife organisations with their stalls, pond dipping, tours of the woodland garden, nature quizzes, cake stall, white elephant stall, plant stall and afternoon tea and coffee.

OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE WILDLIFE OBSERVATION HIDE

We had a small (but quality!) crowd to celebrate the official opening of the wildlife hide; one of our main garden projects for 2010 – 2011. All of the members attending came with bird feeders and bird seed – which no doubt we will be running short of in about a month's time again! We met at the house at 2pm and proceeded to walk to the hide for a photocall. Don't we all look well!

Thankfully it was a dry bright day when we began with the Chairman's speech. Bryan thanked the Duchy of Lancaster Fund, whose funding helped to secure the hide. He also paid tribute to Paul Heaton who put most of the physical work in to the foundations and sowing of the grounds around the hide. He also thanked David Borrell who, at short notice, completed a shelf around the inside of the hide. The Chairman encouraged the members to use the hide, which would be kept open, to observe and record any and all wildlife seen. Then, the ribbon was cut!

The members then made their way inside to sign the visitor's book and also looked at the lovely telescopic camera which our Vice-Chairman Paul had put inside. After everyone had signed the book we walked up to the house for afternoon tea and had some lively discussion. The borrowing library was on display showing many books which had been donated to us on the subject of mammals/birds/amphibians/fungi/gardening/herbs. A power point presentation on British mammals and the projects of MTVCA was looped throughout the day.

It was a memorable day enjoyed by all to celebrate the completion of this important project which can be enjoyed by all future members of the MTVCA for many years to come!

IN THE SPOTLIGHT – LACEWINGS

Lacewings are common flying insects about 12 - 15mm and with green bodies and lovely delicate green lacy wings which lie folded on their back when at rest. They usually have prominent, golden, metallic eyes and green veins on delicate, transparent wings. However some species are browner in colour. There are 14 species of lacewing in the UK, although they are less common in Scotland. Both the adults and larvae are carnivorous and often feast on aphids. They are best known as a predator of aphids, and fully deserve the nickname "aphid lion" as a single insect can consume 100-600 aphids in its lifetime. The adults eat only honey, pollen, and nectar, which they need to reproduce. The larvae, on the other hand, consume aphids, mealybugs, spider mites, leafhopper nymphs, caterpillar eggs, scales and whiteflies. They suck the aphids' juices and may even use the

drained bodies to hide under!

Lacewings court by 'tremulation', a low frequency sound produced by vibrating their abdomens, which in turn causes the substrate they are standing on to vibrate. The males and females will take turns tremulating; this duet is an essential prerequisite for mating. The common green lacewing was thought to be one species, but recent research has shown that they are several closely-related species, which can only be distinguished by their courtship songs.

Female lacewings lay each egg on a thread of mucus that hardens in the air, leaving the egg on a slender stalk. Generally some adults hibernate, although many perish.

Adults hibernate over winter, and breed in the summer. The first larvae to emerge are brown, about 4mm long, with sharp nipping claws at the front (beware!). The older larvae are paler, about 13mm long, with bristles on their back.

Greenside Lane Primary school (featured in one of our previous newsletters) Have kindly made the lacewing hotels for us which have now been Hung up in our small greenhouse in the side garden, as the picture shows.

If you have children/grandchildren in whom you would like to encourage an interest in nature/conservation, please contact me and I can send you details of the plans used for making these. Email: mtvca@yahoo.co.uk

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MAGPIES

Latin name

Pica pica

Family

Crows and allies (Corvidae)

Overview

Magpies seem to be jacks of all trades including scavengers, predators and pest-destroyers. Their challenging, almost arrogant attitude has won them few friends. With its noisy chattering, black-and-white plumage and long tail, there is nothing else quite like the magpie in the UK. When seen close-up, its black plumage takes on an altogether more colourful hue with a purplish-blue iridescent sheen to the wing feathers, and a green gloss to the tail. A very attractive bird indeed and instantly recognisable. Non-breeding birds will gather together in flocks.

Where to see them

Magpies can be found across England, Wales and N Ireland, but are more localised in Scotland although absent from the Highlands. They are seen in a range of habitats from lowland farmland to upland moors.

When to see them

All year round.

What they eat

Omnivore and scavenger.

Estimated numbers

Europe	UK breeding*	UK wintering*	UK passage*
-	650,000 territories	-	-

With its aggressive behaviour and appetite for young chicks, the magpie doesn't have a particularly good image when it comes to compassion. But, according to some experts, the predator has a tender side, feeling grief and routinely holding 'funerals' for fallen friends.

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Dr Marc Bekoff claims the rituals - which involve birds laying 'wreaths' of grass alongside roadside corpses - are proof animals feel complex emotions.

The claims are likely to reignite the debate about whether emotions are a uniquely human trait. Other studies have shown evidence of mourning in gorillas, empathy in rats, and friendship in cats.

Animal behaviour expert Dr Bekoff, of the University of Colorado had an encounter with four magpies alongside a magpie corpse as proof that animals have a 'moral intelligence'.

Birds such as this yellow-billed magpie may have a more sympathetic side to their character than their notoriously harsh image *'One approached the corpse, gently pecked at it, just as an elephant would nose the carcass of another elephant, and stepped back*,' he said. '*Another magpie did the same thing. Next, one of the magpies flew off, brought back some grass and laid it by the corpse. Another magpie did the same. Then all four stood vigil for a few seconds and one by one flew off.'*

After publishing an account of the funeral he received emails from people who had seen the same ritual in ravens and crows.

'*We can't know what they were actually thinking or feeling, but reading their action there's no reason not to believe these birds were saying a magpie farewell to their friend,*' he writes in the journal Emotion, Space and Society.
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1221754/Magpies-grieve-dead-turn-funerals.html#ixzz1RMVHvH1i

APPEAL

Do you have anything on the list below which you could donate to MTVCA? If so, please let us know and we can arrange to collect from you if necessary!

Garden furniture
Bird table
Bird feeder
Wildflower seeds
Garden plants
Bookcase
Carpet tiles

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Binoculars
Cushions (for the seats in the hide!)
Garden utensils
Flower pots
Or anything else you think we could use in the house or garden!

We would appreciate any and all donations and even if your items are in a state of disrepair we will bring our skills to bear to restore to their (almost) former glory!

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