October 2010 Issue 7

NEWSLETTER
of the
Medlock & Tame Valley
Conservation Association

(Registered Charity Number: 504558)

"Autumn burned brightly,
a running flame through the mountains,
a torch flung to the trees."

(Faith Baldwin)

As I finalise this quarter's newsletter it is a bright, frosty autumnal day. It struck me how easy it is to engage all of our five senses in this season when outside - seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling. The wonderful colours of gold, orange, yellow and red leaves swirling around in gusts of wind; the sights and sounds of carnivals, festivals and fairs; the shows of high drama in the air by migrating barnacle geese; the taste of home cooked hot stews and soups, the smell of garden fires and the sight of pine cones and conkers; the cool dry 'nip' in the air; the weight and warmth of our warm woolly clothes again. All of these remind us that autumn has arrived. So go on – have a lovely walk, kick up a few leaves in the air and pick up some pine cones and conkers. Enjoy the season!

AGM 2010

Our AGM this year was held on Saturday 11 September and it was an enjoyable day for all. The day commenced with a warm welcome from the Chairman who then handed over to our Vice-Chairman for a slide presentation of the various events we held throughout the year. In the business meeting which followed the subscription fees were discussed and increased as shown below. When the work over the past year was reviewed it was felt that much had been achieved. Some changes in our committee also took place.

Anne Slater, was elected as a new committee member. Anne has been a member of the MTVCA for 9 months now and is actively involved in other various organisations in the community, including membership in Friends of the Earth Oldham, and the Tameside Green Interest Group. We give Anne a very warm welcome and we are sure she will have much to offer to the life of the MTVCA.

It is with sadness, however, that we have accepted the resignation of Carolyn Blain from the MTVCA committee. Carolyn has been involved with the work of the MTVCA before it was even called the MTVCA (!) and has seen many changes over the years. Carolyn has been a hard worker, motivator and encouragement in the work and we shall miss her input at committee meetings and her ever present and 'always at the ready' mobile phone! Thank you Carolyn for all you have done over the years and we look forward to your further contributions as a member of the group at our future events.

When the business meeting had concluded we had a lovely selection of food with tea and coffee which gave us an opportunity to mingle and catch-up with each other. Another enjoyable and important day in the life of the MTVCA for another year.

MEMBERSHIP

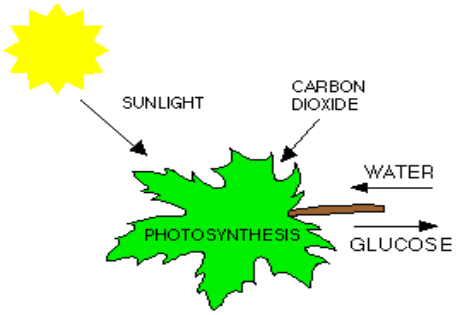
We now have 55 members and growing! It was decided at the AGM, due to a rise in the cost of living generally, that our annual subscriptions for 2010-2011 are as follows:

Individual	**£10.00**
Household	**£15.00 (For 2 or more people at the same address)**
Concessionary	**£7.50**
	£2 extra charge for postage costs (if not on email)

Please find enclosed your membership renewal form for 2010/2011 and, if you haven't already done so, please complete and return it to 5 Oaken Clough Terrace, Ashton under Lyne OL7 9NY to ensure membership of the MTVCA for another year. If your membership is not renewed then we will have to remove your name from our mailing list. Please don't let this happen! We WANT you to stay with us! If you have completed your form then please pass on the one provided to a friend or family member.

THE COLOURS OF AUTUMN

We all enjoy the colours of autumn leaves which never fail to surprise and delight us, but did you ever wonder how and why leaves change colour? Where do the yellow, read and orange colours come from?



Leaves are nature's food factories. Plants take water from the ground through their roots and take

carbon dioxide from the air. Plants use sunlight to turn water and carbon dioxide into oxygen and glucose and then use glucose as food for energy and as a building block for growing. This process is known as photosynthesis (meaning "putting together with light.") A chemical called chlorophyll (which gives plants their green colour) helps with this process.

As summer ends and autumn comes, the days get shorter and shorter. This is how the trees "know" to begin getting ready for winter. During winter, there is not enough light or water for photosynthesis. The trees will rest and live off the food they stored during the summer and begin to shut down their food-making factories. The green chlorophyll disappears from the leaves and as the bright green fades away, we begin to see yellow and orange colours. Small amounts of these colours have been in the leaves all the time but we just can't see them in the summer because they are covered up by the green chlorophyll. In some trees, like maples, glucose is trapped in the leaves after photosynthesis stops. Sunlight and the cool nights of autumn cause the leaves turn this glucose into a red colour.

So now you know!

UPDATE OF PROJECTS FOR 2010

Hide

The foundations for the hide have now been laid and by the time you receive this newsletter the hide itself will have been purchased. Next Spring we will be putting the hide in place in a corner of our 'middle' garden facing toward the centre so we can view 360 degrees.

We have also been able to purchase a portable hide. This will be useful when we want to see what mammals reside in, or pass through, the bottom garden (beside the stream) which remains undeveloped and uncultivated by us and will remain like this.

Wildflower gardens

The site of our meadows have been marked out and we hope to have 2 wildflower meadows in the 'middle' garden. Members have allocated seeds and together with the existing seeds we have we will sow these at the next work day (21st November) into the prepared ground.

Bog Garden

This is the final outdoor project for 2010. A well stocked bog garden makes a natural partner for any pond, and enables a far greater variety of plants to be grown around the water than narrow marginal shelves alone would allow. Having a successful bog garden (which ours now is) demands an understanding of how pond and bog differ. When the water reaches a certain level in the pond, it

overflows into the bog garden, watering the plants contained in it. While ensuring the pond stays healthy and algae-free involves removing some algae out of the water, bog plants thrive surrounded by all the nutrients and organic matter they can get – so managing the two side-by-side requires a little bit of careful planning which our Outdoor Project Manager does very well!

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A very BIG THANK YOU to Paul Heaton for taking charge of and doing much of the groundwork and preparation involved in all of the above outdoor projects. They have not been easy tasks to accomplish and are really a great success and a credit to the MTVCA.

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HOMES & REFUGES

Insects will make use of man-made structures in which to lay eggs or hibernate throughout the winter either as an adult or larvae. These range from woodpiles, garden canes and furniture to holes in brickwork and garden sheds. Artificial chambers help serve this purpose. Some use natural materials, while others make use of recycled household items. There are lots of corners, nooks and crannies within the garden of No. 5 and so we have put together a 'bug house' ready for some tenants (maybe ten ants!) over winter. It has natural features and is made out of wooden pallets which contain plastic pots of gravel, herbaceous plants, leaf litter, shrubs and various grasses. We have also drilled varying sizes of holes for insects of different shapes and sizes to inhabit. Hopefully this will provide a shelter for hibernation and perhaps be used for breeding sites in the months to come. 5 star accommodation for free!

LACEWING HOTEL

We now have our very own chain of lacewing hotels –not ONLY for lacewings but for ALL tiny guests! A class of children in Greenside Lane Primary School in Droylsden, (whose teacher is our very own committee member, Anne Slater) has made 6 lacewing hotels for the MTVCA's small greenhouse in the side garden. Made from old lemonade bottles, rolled up cardboard and straw these can be hung upside down for any flying insect but especially for lacewings to take shelter.

Do you recognise any of these very hard workers?

Thank you to all of these enthusiastic willing workers who have made this project a great success!

WHAT IS CONSERVATION?

Conservation means preservation and protection. In the case of MTVCA this means nature and biodiversity within the Medlock and Tame Valleys and our own woodland garden with the aim of protecting species, their habitats and ecosystems from excessive rates of extinction. The problem of conservation in the world has arisen because people are using the world's natural resources in greater quantity and variety than at any time before. As the world's population grows, and as more people live to a higher standard, there is a greater demand for resources. However, these resources must be "conserved" so there will be enough for the future.

There are 3 basic types of resource:

1. Renewable resources. Farmland, forests, water and grazing land, even while they are being used, can be improved and renewed through good farming practices. This would include protection from erosion, irrigation, and fertilization.

2. Non-renewable resources. These are used up once they are taken from the earth. These include coal, natural gas and oil. Someday the planet will have exceeded the supply.

3. Natural resources. e.g. climate, solar, wind energy and oceans cannot be increased, decreased, or damaged by man. However, man CAN destroy the beauty of all of these things and cause damage to the creatures, which inhabit the oceans and shorelines.

Drawbacks to conservation

- Bad Farming methods
- Use of chemicals on the land
- Effects of felling trees and uprooting hedges
- Recreation
- Killing animals (e.g. plant collection, over fishing, over hunting, egg collecting, insect collecting).
- Blood sports (e.g. fox hunting, badger baiting, hare coursing, wildfowling, game bird shooting).
- Accidental killing of plants and animals (e.g. careless fire lighters and campers, flower pickers, litter spreading etc.)
- Industrialisation
- Building houses, factories, towns, cities and roads
- Disposing of the by-products of industry such as slag heaps, waste heaps, air and water pollution, dangerous chemicals and nuclear waste
- Using renewable materials (e.g. trees for making paper, crops)
- Using non-renewable resources (e.g. minerals, coal and oil)

How can we help conservation?

- By protection and conservation laws
- Giving protection to animals, plant species and habitat
- By finding alternative energy sources to replace coal and oil etc.
- By restoration of the countryside from being used as waste tips
- By having nature reserves and zoos preserve rare animal species
- By recycling materials and reprocessing unwanted products e.g. newspapers, scrap metals, glass and sewage etc. Many local Councils have organised schemes to help do this
- By education and making more people aware of the need to protect and preserve the environment through whatever means available.

The work of MTVCA is concerned with all of the above to help protect the wildlife and land of the Medlock and Tame Valleys and its own woodland garden and to help and work alongside any person or group who share these goals.

DON'T FORGET to keep up to date with all of our projects and events on the MTVCA website…

www.medlockandtame.org.uk

and please let us know if you change address or your telephone number.

FORWARD PLANNING – dates for your diary

Saturday 6 November – "Fungi Walk & Talk"

An audio visual presentation and guided walk
in and around our woodland garden
with Nigel Rolland
1.30 pm
5 Oaken Clough Terrace, Ashton under Lyne OL7 9NY

£2 per person; £5 for families including tea, coffee and biscuits.

NEXT MAJOR WORKDAY
21 November 2010
Lots of jobs to be done – big and small, inside & outside
From 10.30 onwards
Please wear strong footwear and bring a packed lunch!

If you are unsure of the directions to 5 Oaken Clough Terrace, just telephone - 07989 147095 for directions.

(Owing to restricted parking, when attending events, please park at the Oldham Road entrance to Oaken Clough. Please respect the privacy of our neighbours when walking across the front of the terrace).

BECHSTEIN'S BATS

One of our events this year was a visit from a representative of the South Lancashire Bat Group. It was a very informative evening and this piece of news caught my attention recently. One of the UK's rarest mammals has been found roosting in Fifehead Wood, Dorset. The discovery was made

during a four year project by the Bat Conservation Trust to map the UK's distribution of this elusive creature whose status internationally is near threatened. Not much is known about the species so surveys of trained bat-group volunteers have been continuing over the last three summers to find out more.

Until now Bechstein bats have been hard to detect as they rarely leave the canopy of their favoured habitat and are good at avoiding humane traps. They also have a very low intensive call that easily escapes standard ultrasonic detections. The development of an acoustic lure during a pilot study in Sussex has ensured that 17 individuals have been picked up. As always, systemic surveys are needed to establish the distribution of a species across an entire range. This information is being collected by the Bat Conservation Trust. Visit their website http://www.bats.org.uk/. They depend heavily on the public to provide data to them, so keep your eyes open and your bat detectors on!

BRIEF ENCOUNTER

Thursday 9th September 2010 was an unremarkable day, a day just like any other really. A day at work, a meeting of our social club committee in the evening - just pretty standard fayre. Little did I know that later that evening, an event would occur which would ensure that a few moments on Thursday 9th September 2010 would remain with me for the rest of my life.

It was 9.50 pm. I had taken three of my four dogs for their final walk and was in the process of giving the fourth (Charlie, our miniature Dachshund) the opportunity to "cock his leg" before retiring for the night.

As I stood silently at the end of the garden path, I became aware of movement to my right. I turned my head and there it was - in all its majesty - a magnificent badger shuffling quietly along the Clough. I stood there, open mouthed, not quite believing what I was witnessing.

Clearly oblivious to my presence the badger continued along until it drew level with me. It was no more than six feet away. Not wishing it to come into contact with Charlie, I spoke to it softly. On hearing my voice, it looked up at me then scuttled off back from whence it came.

The whole encounter probably lasted for no more than ten seconds but what a magical moment! I feel so privileged to have witnessed it.

A remarkable end to a very ordinary day! ALAN CAINE

UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

Common Rough Woodlouse
Scientific name: Porcellio scaber

Woodlice belong to the Phylum Arthropoda in the Order Isopoda. They are Crustaceans related to crabs and lobsters. In a damp corner where they have been around for a while, there can be slight 'fishy' smell! They are also known by other names including bibble-bugs, sow-bugs, cud-worms, tiggy-hogs, shoe-laces, sink-lice, pill-bug and slaters. There are about thirty five species in the British Isles but no more than twenty nine of these can be considered native to these islands. Some of the others have been imported with plants and have become well established.

Woodlice have calcareous shells made up of segments which cover their bodies. They are liable to water loss so require damp conditions. Constantly running the risk of dehydration, they need a moist atmosphere to breathe, but are also able to absorb moisture from the atmosphere. In dry conditions they shrivel up, becoming dried out corpses when they venture into the modern heated home and become mere husks. Some species are on the way to solving this problem however, through the development of minute breathing tubes in the outer flaps of some of the abdominal limbs. A tiny pore on the surface allows air to enter the tubes which spread through the limbs to a greater or lesser extent. The walls of the tubes are always moist, and so oxygen can easily pass through the walls of the tubes and into the bloodstream. These tubes are called pseudotracheae and they show up as little white patches on the underside of the animal. Woodlice possessing them can certainly tolerate dry conditions far better than those species without them, but they still depend to a large extent on their gills.

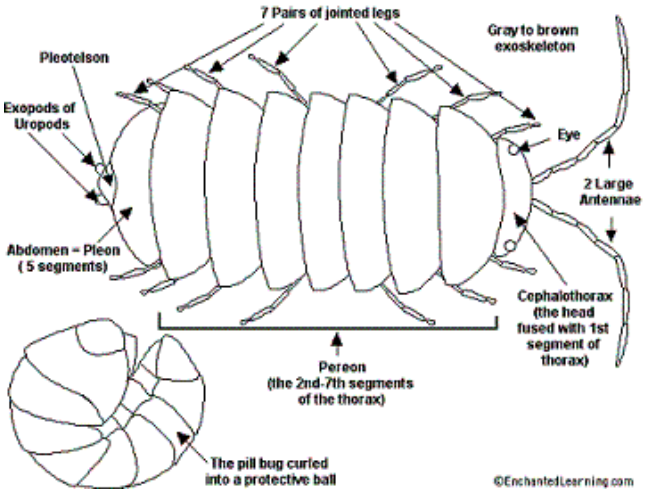
They reproduce by giving birth to live young. The female develops plates at the base of the front five pairs of legs which meet together under the thorax to form a water-filled cavity. Studies indicate that the eggs take about a month to hatch. The fluid then gradually disappears from the pouch and the little woodlice, about the size of a grain of rice, leave after a few days. They are very pale and only have six thoracic segments, but they soon moult to reveal seven. As the woodlouse grows, it sheds its exoskeleton in two halves which split across the centre, and the front separates from the back.

Like millipedes they are detritovores (organisms that eat organic matter, while helping the matter decompose). Their ability to break down larger particles of organic material makes them an important part of the rotting process in composting. In the commercial glasshouse they will damage the stems and lower leaves of cucumbers, but are only a problem in the domestic setting around young seedlings. Rotting timber and brickwork provide a suitable hiding place, so removing these from near vulnerable plants is helpful. Removing plant debris to discourage them is all that is required in most gardens.

All woodlice are much more abundant on lime rich soils, than in other regions, as they need the lime for making their shells. Although they now live on land, the woodlice have not completely shaken off their aquatic habits. Their skins are not completely waterproof. This is why almost all of them are confined to damp places and why they only come out to feed at night, when the air is cooler and damper. Many of the species can breathe only if their bodies are covered with a thin film of moisture.

Woodlice are treated harshly by gardener and housewife alike and as soon as they appear they are squashed underfoot. In fact, in many areas it is considered to be unlucky to have a woodlouse in the house. They are, in fact, harmless creatures, and certainly don't deserve to be slaughtered whenever they are found. They may occasionally nibble young seedlings, but they are generally more interested in dead leaves and decaying material and their presence in the garden is probably more beneficial than harmful. Those species that can roll up into a ball were once thought to have a medicinal value and were swallowed whole, alive, in attempts to cure digestive problems! They were also given to cattle and this is probably why they are called cud-worms in some areas.

A woodlouse's body consists of three main regions, although these are far less distinct than the three regions of an insect's body. The head is small and sunk back into the rest of the body to give a smooth, rounded outline. It carries two pairs of antennae or feelers, but only one pair is obvious. As in most other arthropods, the antennae are sensory organs which help the animal to feel and smell its way about. The tough jaws and the rest of the feeding apparatus are concealed under the head. The central and largest part of the body is called the thorax and it is roofed over with seven broad overlapping plates. It bears seven pairs of legs on the underside. The hind most region, which is called the abdomen. It has six segments, but only four of the dorsal plates or shields are very obvious.



The first five pairs of legs are quite unlike normal legs. Each leg consists of two leaf-like flaps lying on top of each other. The inner flap is very thin and well supplied with blood. It acts as a gill, enabling the woodlouse to absorb oxygen from the air, but it will only work when surrounded by a thin film of water in which the oxygen can dissolve.

The last pair of legs are much more like legs than the others. They stick out from the hind end and they are called uropods. Each one is forked, with the outer branch usually much stouter than the inner one. The uropods probably act as sensory organs, analogous with the hind legs of some centipedes and they also secrete repellent fluids which protect the animals from some of their enemies. Repellent fluids are also secreted from most segments of the body

Although protected to some extent by their repellent fluids, the woodlice are eaten by a wide range of other animals. Shrews, toads, ground beetles, centipedes and some spiders are among their most numerous predators. The animals also suffer from attack by parasites of several kinds. Among the

most common are several kinds of blow-fly. Stimulated by scent, the female blow-fly seeks out the woodlouse haunts and lay their eggs there. The maggots which hatch from the eggs bore their way into the woodlice and remain there, feeding on the tissue of their hosts. There is normally only one maggot in each woodlouse and by the time the maggot is fully grown the woodlouse is nothing more than a shell.

What an interesting creature which we take so much for granted in our gardens as just a pest!

ITEMS NEEDED for our H.Q.

MTVCA believes in recycling a second/third/fourth time around!

If you no longer have use for any garden tools or furniture, please don't dispose of them before checking with us if we can use them! Our workdays are times of restoration for a lot of these things and some of our members are very good at these little 'labours of love'!

Things we currently need include:

Bird feeders	**Binoculars**	**Garden tools of any kind**	**Wood preserve**
Garden benches	**Nature books**	**Bird tables**	**Paint (for touching up)**
Bird baths	**Grass rakes**	**Water butts**	**Paint/paste brushes**
Microscopes			

BIRDS AND US

We all see birds everyday of our lives – in the early morning when we walk our dogs, through the windows of buses and trains on our way to work, a lunchtime visit to the park – they are all around us. They are probably the first encounter with wildlife that we have all had. Being able to identify birds depends on what we know about them and how we look at them and there is a sense of achievement when successful identification is done.

When identifying birds, size, shape, general colouring, behaviour, song and location all give important clues. When looking for birds, wear dark clothing so they won't see you and use trees and hedges as cover – or a hide!

Binoculars with a magnification of 8 x 40 are best for general bird watching. If good binoculars are purchased these should last the whole of your life.

Even in these days of digital technology a notebook is best for recording your sightings. When an unfamiliar bird is spotted write down as much information as possible. The key facts are below:

Size – is it similar in size to a Sparrow, Blackbird or Woodpigeon for example?

Shape – is it squat and dumpy or slim and elegant?

Features – take note of the bill size, colour distribution and field marks such as wing bars and eye stripes.

Flight path – look for the shape of the wings and tail. Does it fly in a straight line or in an undulating fashion?

Location/time/date – record where you have seen the bird and when. Some birds are only found in

particular places so note down the habitat too. Good field identification often depends upon knowing in advance what to expect in a particular habitat.

(Ack.cartoon by Roger Smith)

The Birdwatcher's Code

ALWAYS remember that the welfare of the bird must come first. The five points outlined below summarise your responsibility as a birdwatcher.

- Avoid disturbing birds and their habitats
- Be an ambassador for bird watching
- Know and obey the law and the rules for visiting the countryside
- Send your sightings to the Country Bird Recorder and the Bird Track website www.birdtrack.net
- Think about the interests of wildlife and local people before passing on news of a rare bird, especially during the breeding season.

THE CROW FAMILY

Over the next few newsletters we will be considering members of the crow family; a family of birds which are with us in the UK all year round.

Corvidae is a cosmopolitan family of birds that include the crows, ravens, rooks, jackdaws, jays, magpies, treepies, choughs and nutcrackers. The common English names used are corvids (more technically) or the crow family (more informally), and there are over 120 species. The genus *Corvus*, including the jackdaws, crows and ravens, makes up over a third of the entire family.

They are considered the most intelligent of the birds having demonstrated self-awareness in mirror tests (European Magpies) and tool making ability (Crows, Rooks)—skills until recently regarded as solely the province of humans and a few other higher mammals. They are medium to large in size, with strong feet and bills, rictal bristles (stiff feathers which come of the side of the mouth) and a single moult each year (most passerines (perching birds) moult twice).

Corvids are found worldwide except for the tip of South America and the polar ice caps. The majority of the species are found in tropical South and Central America, southern Asia and Eurasia, with fewer than 10 species each in Africa, Australasia and North America.

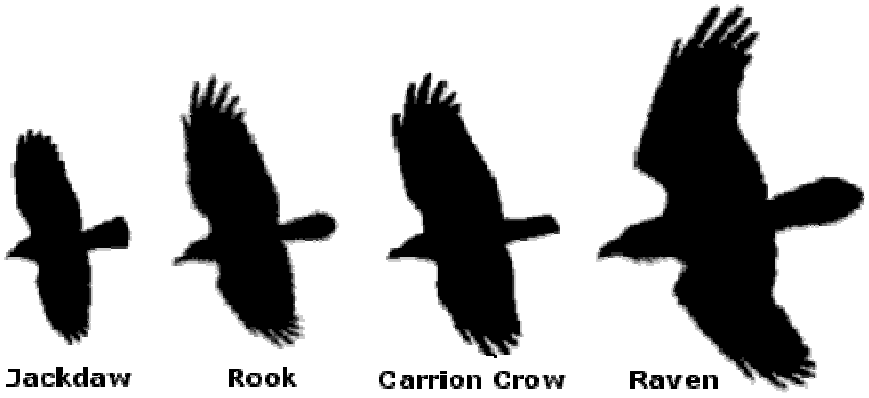
CARRION CROW

Corvus corone
Length: 45-47 cms (18-19")
Wing Span 93-104 cm (37-42")
Weight 370 – 650g
Breeding Paris (800,000)
Present: All year

Description

The Carrion Crow is a medium-sized member of the Crow Family. It can be seen in a variety of places such as city centres, towns, woodlands, moorlands, farmlands, sea cliffs, open fields, parks, gardens and perched on t.v. aerials and chimney pots. Although Carrion Crows sometimes fly into gardens, they still seem to be quite shy and nervous garden visitors.

The Carrion Crow is an all black bird almost the same size as a rook. In strong light its glossy black feathers have a slight purple or green sheen to them. It can be recognised from other black birds because it has brown coloured eyes and neat little feathers around the base of its beak. The Carrion Crow has a powerful black beak which is slightly curved at the top. They are sometimes called 'thieves' because they steal eggs and chicks from other birds. They also eat mice, voles, worms, beetles, seeds, grain, fruit and even dead animals. Carrion Crows are not as sociable as other members of the Crow family and can be seen flying alone, although pairs are more common. Sometimes Carrion Crows join flocks of Rooks and young Carrion Crows form small flocks in summer before flying off to find homes of their own.



In flight, the Carrion Crow has a shorter head than the Rook, as well as having slower wing beats. The tail is squarer in the Carrion Crow, and the "fingers" at the wing tips are less splayed.

The Hooded Crow is the same species as the Carrion Crow but is a different race, which can be mostly found in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man, though some wintering continental birds may be seen in eastern England. The Hooded Crow has a grey back and under parts and a black hood, wings and tail.

Juvenile Carrion Crows have duller, browner plumage and pale blue eyes.

The Carrion Crow has many calls but the most common is "kraa-kraa-kraa". **(PLEASE TURN ON YOUR COMPUTER SPEAKERS AND CLICK TWICE ON THE MP3 BELOW TO HEAR THE CALL)**

carrion_crow.mp3

Feeding

Carrion Crows have a diverse diet: worms, insects, fruit, seeds, kitchen scraps, eggs, and young birds.

Nesting

A Carrion Crow's nest is built in the fork of a tree, cliff edge or even electricity pylon and is a large construction of twigs lined with hair and bark. It is built by both birds.

The duties of incubating the eggs are performed by the female. The eggs are about 43 mm by 30 mm, smooth and glossy, pale bluish-green with dark brown and grey markings. Both adults feed the young birds.

The two races inter-breed, resulting in Carrion x Hooded hybrids.

Breeding Data

Breeding Starts	Number of Clutches	Number of Eggs	Incubation (days)	Fledge (days)
April	1	4-7	18-20	28-35

Movements

British and Irish Carrion Crows (and Hooded Crows) are quite sedentary, never venturing far from their nests. In the winter, our population may be joined by continental birds of both races.

Conservation

Both crows are thriving and are considered by some to be pests, particularly by gamekeepers, as they take the eggs and chicks of game birds.

QUOTES ON CONSERVATION

It's a moral question about whether we have the right to exterminate species.
David Attenborough

The only way to save a rhinoceros is to save the environment in which it lives, because there's a mutual dependency between it and millions of other species of both animals and plants.
David Attenborough

We should preserve every scrap of biodiversity as priceless while we learn to use it and come to understand what it means to humanity.
E. O. Wilson

The old Lakota was wise. He knew that man's heart away from nature becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too.
Chief Luther Standing Bear

Our next newsletter will be in January 2011.

Please feel free to submit any articles you think will be of interest to the wider membership via
mtvca@yahoo.co.uk
or
write to 5 Oaken Clough Terrace, Ashton under Lyne OL7 9NY.