



Autumn Issue 11

NEWSLETTER
of the
Medlock & Tame Valley
Conservation Association
(Registered Charity Number: 504558)



Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter of 2011.

This year marks the 40th Anniversary of the founding of the MTVCA, a remarkable achievement for an organisation which has relied solely on voluntary contributions and support.

In 1971 two members of the Oldham Microscopical & Natural History Society, Leonard Kidd & Bert Hodson corresponded with councillors & the press regarding the use of weed killers by Saddleworth PC to eradicate Rosebay Willow herb. This dialogue sparked the formation of a group then known as the Medlock & Tame Valley Conservation Committee (MTVCC).

The inaugural meeting was held on 14th Aug, 1971 at Werneth Park Study Centre with the objectives to protect the natural, industrial & local history of the two valleys. By the end of 1971 there were 100+ members.

In 1975 the MTVCC opened the museum in the Stables at Park Bridge by a volunteer effort. The name was changed to the Medlock & Tame Valley Conservation Association (MTVCA) and was registered under that name with the Charity Commission. In that year the Association was given advisory and observer status on the Joint Valley Committees (Local Authority Body) responsible for policy in the Medlock & Tame Valleys.

In 1976 the peak membership was reached at 500+ individuals & affiliated groups.

In its first decade the Association completed three major achievements:

- Shaping the policy of Daisy Nook Country Park
- Establishing a nature reserve at the Royal George in Greenfield
- Restoring the Stables at Park Bridge

By the end of the first decade despite the large membership the MTVCA was relying on a very small band of volunteers. Throughout the '80s the membership declined steadily to around 100+.

In 1995 the Association moved its HQ from Werneth to No 5 Oaken Clough Terrace by kind permission of Mildred Burlinson (then Secretary & Treasurer). A wildlife garden was to be established in the grounds. The Joint Valley Committees were dissolved in this year and the rivers became the responsibility of the relevant Local Authority. The MTVCA was still given observer status at these meetings. Also Oaken Clough was served with a Tree Preservation Order by Tameside Council this year.

During the '90s membership remained steady around 50 – 60. The original members were becoming older and new, younger people were not being attracted to join. Official bodies were now effectively policing the environment (e.g. Countryside wardens, Environment Agency, etc.).

In 1997 a plaque commemorating 25 years of the MTVCA was unveiled at the John Howarth Centre (Daisy Nook). The garden at No 5 was declared a site of Special Biological Interest (SBI) because of, among other things, the presence of the great crested newt in the pond.

The last AGM before Mrs Burlinson's indisposition was held in 2002.

The Association was reinvigorated with a new committee in 2005 and in 2008 the present house became the property of the MTVCA (bequeathed by Mrs Burlinson) and became the main focus of the Association's activities.

We still hold as our objectives those set out 40 years ago. They are still relevant today.

Optimistically we wish that the Association will still be around in another forty years with the continued support and help of members and friends!

Bryan Stringer
Chairman

USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS

Bryan Stringer: 0161 620 2496;

Susan Stewart 0161 3309959 and 07989 147095

Jean Lythgoe: 07711 388468

Wildlife challenge: England's lost and threatened species

Centuries of conservation records go under the microscope

Lost Life: England's Lost and Threatened Species identifies nearly 500 animals and plants that have become extinct in England – practically all within the last two centuries. On top of this, nearly 1,000 native species have been given conservation priority status because of the severity of the threats facing them.

Dr Helen Phillips, Chief Executive of Natural England, said: “Coinciding with the International Year of Biodiversity (2010), this report is a powerful reminder that we cannot take our wildlife for granted and that we all lose when biodiversity declines. Every species has a role and, like rivets in an aeroplane, the overall structure of our environment is weakened each time a single species is lost. Biodiversity matters and with more and more of our species and habitats confined to isolated, protected sites we need to think on a much broader geographical scale about how we can reverse the losses of the recent past and secure a more solid future for our wildlife.”

The Lost Life report highlights how habitat loss, inappropriate management, environmental pollution and pressure from non-native species have all played a part in the erosion of England's biodiversity. All of the major groups of flora and fauna have experienced losses, with butterflies, amphibians, and many plant and other insect species being particularly hard hit – in some groups up to a quarter of species have been become extinct since 1800.

Despite these pressures, conservation efforts have achieved many notable successes in protecting priority species and habitats – including the return of the red kite and the large blue butterfly. Nevertheless, losses continue and 943 native species are now classed as a conservation priority, while the numbers of several hundred more are in significant decline. Some of England's most familiar species – including the red squirrel, common toad, and European eel – face an uncertain future.

To provide long-term support for our wildlife, Natural England is working with a range of partners in the England Biodiversity Group to adopt a “landscape-scale” approach to conservation which goes beyond the conservation of small protected sites and individual species and embraces the management of entire landscape areas and the ecosystems that operate within them. Wide-scale restoration of habitats and ecosystems and linking of habitat areas are seen as key to taking the pressure off the biodiversity hotspots of individual sites and reserves and giving broader support to wildlife in the wider countryside.

Dr Helen Phillips continued: “Current conservation programmes have been central to supporting England's biodiversity and they show that we can reverse some of the losses of the past. But fire fighting to rescue species in severe decline can never be a long-term solution. We need a step-change in conservation that goes beyond the targeted work that has gone on to protect individual sites and species, and which focuses on restoring the health of ecosystems across entire landscapes. We have to give wildlife and habitats more room to thrive and only by tackling the problems of environmental decline in this co-ordinated way, and at this sort of scale, can we succeed in halting and ultimately reversing many of the recent declines in biodiversity.”

We in MTVCA are very fortunate to have had a woodland garden, of some one and a half acres, bequeathed to us under the Will of Mildred Burlinson. In this small corner of England we CAN make a difference, to protect and provide habitat and an environment where the fauna and flora of the Medlock and Tame Valleys can thrive and multiply for future generations to enjoy in order to avoid a situation like this:

'TO SEE A RABBIT'

by Alan Brownjohn

**We are going to see the rabbit.
We are going to see the rabbit.
Which rabbit, people say?
Which rabbit, ask the children?
Which rabbit?
The only rabbit,
The only rabbit in England,
Sitting behind a barbed-wire fence
Under the floodlights, neon lights,
Sodium lights,
Nibbling grass
On the only patch of grass
In England, in England
(except the grass by the hoardings
Which doesn't count.)
We are going to see the rabbit
And we must be there on time.**

**First we shall go by escalator,
Then we shall go by underground,
And then we shall go by motorway,
And then by helicopterway,
And the last 10 yards we shall have to go
On foot.**

**And now we are going
All the way to see the rabbit,
We are nearly there,
We are longing to see it,
And so is the crowd
Which is here in thousands
With mounted policemen
And big loudspeakers
And bands and banners,
And everyone has come a long way.**

**But soon we shall see it
Sitting and nibbling
The blades of grass
In - but something has gone wrong!
Why is everyone so angry,
Why is everyone jostling
And slanging and complaining?**

**The rabbit has gone,
Yes, the rabbit has gone.
He has actually burrowed down into the earth
And made himself a warren, under the earth,**

Despite all these people,
And what shall we do?
What can we do?

It is all a pity, you must be disappointed,
Go home and do something for today,
Go home again, go home for today.
For you cannot hear the rabbit, under the earth,
Remarking rather sadly to himself, by himself,
As he rests in his warren, under the earth:
'It won't be long, they are bound to come,
They are bound to come and find me, even here.'

NEXT MTVCA EVENT

Tour with RSPB

Dovestones Reservoir (meet at main car park)

Sunday 27 November at 10.30 am

**BRING: Warm waterproof clothing and sensible footwear.
Warm drinks and a packed lunch**

TIN CAN TURBINES by Carl Borrell (An update on our recyclable energy projects)

For those of you who are new members, a little summary might be in order! The cellar at Oaken Clough has recently been set up as a workshop with the purpose of building alternative energy projects.



At a recent presentation in Tameside's "You-Choose" event (which allocates money made from recycling by Tameside Council to charitable causes) thanks to Lee's power point skills and Susan's assured delivery of the presentation, our project was a success and we were voted fifth out of a field of thirty-five entries resulting in a grant for the purchase of tools and equipment and good publicity for

the MTVCA. Lee and I have a number of projects planned covering solar power, wind power and hydro electric generation as far as possible using recycled materials.

Photo voltaic cells (solar cells) are already supplying a low voltage lighting circuit in the hide and we have started to look at wind power projects. Initially we constructed a large wind turbine around two metres in diameter, whose blades are constructed from drainage pipe, with the intention of driving an alternator.

However finding an appropriate site and constructing a device of this size is likely to be quite a lengthy process so we decided to look at more small scale devices as well. A quick calculation revealed that a device about the size of a desk fan could in theory develop enough power to charge AA sized batteries. The range of devices which use power in this form is large and growing from mobile phones and digital cameras to remote controls and battery powered clocks. We discard millions of batteries every year and even when we use rechargeable cells charging them from the A.C. mains, this is a very inefficient way of using energy as much of it is lost in the transformer. We obtained some of the new style Nickel-Metal Hydride [NiMH] cells which do not contain harmful chemicals and set about designing a device to charge them.

The design goal was to produce a small scale portable wind turbine which can charge AA size batteries from wind power. Also we wanted our construction to be from recycled materials and have a repeatable design which we can publish on the web-site to allow anyone to build one. We hit upon the idea of using discarded tin cans for this purpose as they are a source of light but strong metal components available in a standard size and are in plentiful supply! Cutting them in half and mounting them on a spindle results in a device called a Sevonius which works in a similar way to the rotating signs seen spinning in the wind outside garages. Alternatively three well placed spiral cuts and a bit of bending can turn the humble tin can into quite an effective propeller [see photo]. These can be made with simple hand tools in just a few minutes. Coupling these to electric motors salvaged from old cassette players will generate a small electric current. The devices can easily rotate in light wind conditions and we tested them using just the breeze from a desk fan. There is a bit of work to do to improve the efficiency but the results so far look quite promising. We should be able to showcase these at future public events to create interest in alternative energy technology.



Carl and Lee would like to make an appeal to all of our members for used or dysfunctional solar garden lights, old tape cassette recorders/players; 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. Alternatively, you can leave them at Burlinson House.

COMMITTEE

At the AGM on 10 September, we sadly lost three committee members. Paul Heaton, Judith Wood and Anne Slater. Anne had just joined the committee in the past year and due to time constraints and a change in her personal circumstances, she felt she had to resign from the committee. Paul Heaton and

Judith are two long-standing committee members and both have contributed significantly to the outside work in the garden. Paul has overseen the garden projects and has initiated all of our garden projects to date including the herb tablet, the rockery, the bog pond, the alpine garden, the wildflower gardens and the hide. Judith has maintained the herb tablet and planted up a small fruit garden as well as overseeing growth in the greenhouse! As well as all of this they have been fully committed to our evening events and rambles and they will be really missed by those of us on the committee who have worked alongside them and appreciated their input. Thank you so much for all you have contributed to the work of MTVCA and we are glad you will still be on our membership. Two new committee members were recruited at our AGM on 10 September. We welcome on board Bev Jackson and John Gore and look forward to working with them in the months to come.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Caterpillars – (Order: Lepidoptera) and how to observe them



A little known passion of Sir Winston Churchill's was his concern for the diminishing numbers of British butterflies. In 1946 he planned a butterfly garden to increase the numbers of common species around his house at Chartwell, Kent. About 1,500 chrysalids were hatched each year in a summer house. Churchill would spend hours waiting for the moment when the butterflies emerged. Once on the wing he set them free.

There are over 140,000 species of Butterfly and Moth in the World. They include some of the largest and most beautiful insects to some of the smallest and most easily over-looked (unless you're an entomologist). Caterpillars are the main feeding stage in the life cycle of butterflies and moths, and make one of the best "Creepy Crawly" pets.

Obtaining caterpillars

Caterpillars of many different moth and butterfly species can be obtained by post from many good entomological suppliers. However, many excellent caterpillars can be found by searching plants or bushes during spring and early summer. When you find a caterpillar remove the plant stem that it is feeding on and place this in a suitable carrying vessel (eg. jam jar or sweet jar - with a lid!). Do not try and pick up the caterpillar with your fingers as they are quite delicate and many possess urticating hairs or secretions that will irritate your skin - collecting the stem they're on is much safer.

Do not take lots of caterpillars from a particular site, five is probably a maximum and the number taken depends on the size of enclosure you have prepared at home before collecting the caterpillars. It is also important that you identify the food plant the caterpillar was found on and also take some stems to put in the enclosure.

If you find a caterpillar wandering along the ground then it is either searching for a food plant or looking for somewhere to pupate. If it is small then it is best not to collect it unless you know the species of caterpillar and the plant that it feeds on. **Note: there are many, many species of "small green caterpillar" and unless you know exactly which one it is then it is likely to starve to death because you can't provide it with the correct food plant.**

Housing

This depends on the size of your caterpillars and how big they grow - you may need to re-house your pets as they get larger. Normally a tall sweet jar will be ideal, drill some small (i.e. smaller than the caterpillars) holes in the lid (get an adult to help you) and place the stems of the food plant in a small jar full of water. It may be a good idea to block the top of the small jar with cotton wool to stop your pets falling in and drowning. If your caterpillars are very small then you can use a block of oasis (a type of hard green sponge used for flower arranging) soaked in water and with the stems pushed into it instead.

Once the food plant is placed in the larger jar then you can gently introduce your caterpillars - again using the stem they are sitting on. It is also an idea to place a twig in the large jar so that should the caterpillars fall of the stems they can climb up the twig back to their food plants.

If you have a tropical species which you ordered from a supplier then it is best to keep them indoors and they may even require more specialised conditions (consult your supplier). If you found your caterpillar outside your house then you can keep your cage outside however you must be very careful that it will not blow over in the wind or fill with water when it rains.

You should spray the cage lightly with water once a day or so, however avoid large quantities of condensation forming on the inside of the container. Caterpillars can easily drown in condensation. Remember that to caterpillars, a blob of water is very much like a lump of syrup.



Feeding

The majority of caterpillars are herbivores (ie they eat vegetation) although many will become cannibals if not given enough food plant. Aside from cannibalistic tendencies some caterpillars will kill and eat caterpillars of other species of moth and butterfly and it is best to keep them singularly (e.g. *Anthocharis cardamines* - the Orange Tip Butterfly).

Caterpillars are very particular about what they eat. Individual caterpillar species have a particular type of food plant (or family of plants) that it is associated with. Caterpillars will only eat very specific plants, which is why you **must** remember what plant you collected the caterpillar from - it is a good idea to identify the plant from a book or collect and press a stem for reference as your caterpillar grows.

As your caterpillars grow they will require more and more food so it is a good idea to make sure you have a good supply of the food plant before contemplating keeping the caterpillar. Remember that the larger the caterpillars get the more they will eat. Caterpillars increase in size by moulting so don't be concerned if you see some with small bits of their old skin still attached.

As soon as most of the food plant has been eaten or if it starts to wilt you must change it for fresh leaves etc. The replacement food should be exactly the same plant as before otherwise your caterpillar may not eat it. It is also a good idea to wash the food plant thoroughly before giving it to your pets.

N.B. It is extremely important that you feed your caterpillar the correct food plant, usually the one you find it on!

Pupation

Butterflies and moths undergo complete metamorphosis and caterpillars must pupate as a chrysalis (or pupae) before becoming an adult (imago). During pupation almost all of the caterpillar is broken down and the resulting 'nutrient soup' rebuilt into the body of the adult insect.

When the caterpillars are full-grown they should be provided with suitable pupation sites. Butterfly caterpillars should be given stems and branches from which to suspend their pupae. Many moths produce larvae that burrow into the soil to pupate so these species should be provided with a thick layer of damp earth. Other larvae should be provided with foliage or bark depending on the species. If you are unsure of your caterpillar's requirements it is best to present them with a choice of pupation sites.

Pupae that have formed during the spring or early summer should hatch within a few weeks. Pupae that formed during the autumn will overwinter and should be removed from the cage and stored to prevent them drying out or going mouldy. The pupae should be placed in layers of earth in small sealed containers; these should be kept in a cool but frost-free place (such as an unheated shed) until the following spring. In spring the pupae should be slightly embedded into a layer of earth or placed between the grooves of a sheet of corrugated cardboard. They should be misted with water occasionally to produce a humid atmosphere and this can be used to induce the emergence of adults.

Emergence

When the adults are about to emerge you should place a number of twigs and stems in the emergence tank. The twigs are required by the butterflies and moths to climb up before expanding and drying their wings. If no suitable supports are available then your butterflies and moths will have deformed wings and be unable to fly.

If you collected your caterpillars from the wild then you should release the emerged adults (or imagos) in the same area as you collected the caterpillars. When releasing butterflies, and especially moths, during the day make sure they are released in secluded areas so that they are not immediately eaten by birds.

If you obtained your caterpillars from an entomological supplier you could try and breed them to produce another generation of insects - you should not release them into the wild. Information on breeding butterflies and moths will be available from the supplier of the caterpillars and from a number of our publications.

A GENTLE REMINDER

If you have not renewed your subscription for membership during the remainder of 2011 and throughout 2012, it's not too late. Simply make your cheque payable to "MTVCA" and post, with the application form (see end of this Newsletter) to Jean Lythgoe c/o 5 Oaken Clough Terrace, Ashton under Lyne OL7 9NY.

CORVIDS – The Jay



The Jay is a colourful crow that is about the same size as a Jackdaw.

They are mostly a pinkish brown, the underparts being slightly paler. The head has a black and white flecked crown, black moustache and white throat. The white rump contrasts starkly with the black tail. The iris of the eye is a pale blue, the bill is black and the legs are pink-brown. The wings are mostly black with white patches but also have striking blue patches, but close to these wing patches are actually bands of graduated shades of blue:



The Jay can raise its crown feathers to a crest when excited or displaying. Perhaps for this reason, novice birdwatchers sometimes confuse Jays with Hoopoes.

Jays are very sociable birds and so have many different calls, and can imitate other birds, especially other crows. In the garden, we are more likely to hear their "krar krar" alarm call.

During the latter part of the winter, you may be lucky enough to hear their song, which comprises squeaky, clucking sounds.

Feeding

Jays feed on acorns, beech mast, fruits, insects, small rodents, bats, newts, birds' eggs and young birds. In the garden they will take peanuts and kitchen scraps.

Food, especially acorns, is hoarded and may be hidden in crevices or buried in the ground. Research has shown that Jays can store and, more importantly, retrieve several thousand acorns.

Nesting

The untidy nest of twigs is built by both birds in a tree or shrub. Roots, hairs and fibres are used to line the nest. The male and female usually pair for life.

The eggs of the Jay are about 32 mm by 23 mm in size, and are smooth, glossy, and pale blue-green or olive with buff-coloured speckles. The duties of incubating the eggs are performed by the female. The newly-hatched young are fed by both adults.

Breeding Data

Breeding Starts	Number of Clutches	Number of Eggs	Incubation (days)	Fledge (days)
late April	1	3-10	16-17	19-20

Movements

The majority of the British population is sedentary, but Continental birds are irruptive when there is a poor acorn harvest and may arrive in large numbers along the east coast of Britain in the autumn.

Conservation

Like other crows, the Jay was persecuted by gamekeepers in its traditional habitat where it took the eggs and young birds of game birds, but also by fishermen who used its brightly coloured feathers for fly-fishing.

The move into urban woodlands has provided them with a safer habitat and, compared with the Jays in the countryside, Jays in towns are doing well. The downside is that Jays may soon be hated as much as Magpies as more people witness them taking eggs and young birds.

One explanation for the increase in Jay visits to local gardens is that they had depleted their stores of acorns, etc., and moved into the gardens in search of food. The Magpies used to chase them off, but then the Jays started to stand their ground and even retaliate. Nowadays, the Magpies rarely bother the Jays when they are visiting the garden.

The Jays tend to visit the garden in pairs, though there are often three or four birds and then some rivalry becomes apparent - one or more birds of an assumed pair chasing the others.

Like most crows, the Jay is intelligent and, after a few weeks practising and watching smaller birds, the Jays mastered extracting peanuts from a red peanut bag hung from a clothes post. The peanuts were either eaten straightaway or carried away in their crop to stash away for later when times are hard; we have seen a Jay take as many as twenty-one peanuts in its crop. The red peanut bag has eventually been replaced with a wire basket, see photo below.

(Article taken from website of British Garden Birds)

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

Annual subscription renewals are due at the AGM in Autumn each year

Individual: £10 each year Concessionary: £7.50

Household: £15 each year (For 2 or more people at the same address)

Donation (Optional): £.....

Name(s):

Address.....

.....Post Code.....

Phone No.....Mobile Phone No.....

Email

Signature:

If you are a taxpayer and complete a simple Gift Aid declaration we can reclaim the tax paid on your donation and significantly increase the value of your gift at no extra cost to you.

I would like the MTVCA to treat all donations I make on or after the date of this declaration as Gift Aid donations until I notify you otherwise.

Signature..... Date.....

Do remember to tell us if you no longer pay an amount of income or capital gains tax equal to the tax we reclaim on your donations.

Please send your completed form and cheque made payable to: "MTVCA"

To: The Treasurer, MTVCA, 5 Oaken Clough Terrace, Ashton under Lyne OL7 9NY

www.medlockandtame.org.uk

mtvca@yahoo.co.uk

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

Tel: 0161 343 7100