

## GARDEN BIRDWATCH

My last bird in this long running series is one I have only seen twice but in the same place; the garden of White Lyon House. It is the Treecreeper. From its BTO description, it's amazing that anyone just happens to see it as I did on both occasions!

Streaky brown above, pale below, thin downcurved bill. Blue Tit size but looks slimmer. Shy, mousey, tree trunk climber, undulating flight from tree to tree with thin, quiet 'tsee' call. Works up and around tree bottom to top then repeats on next tree.

Sexes and juveniles similar. Secretive, especially in the breeding season. The text goes on, Treecreepers creep on trees, although they sometimes risk a little creep up an old wall and may even nest in old sheds or woodpiles. They do fly, of course, but only to the next tree (although Treecreepers in the far north of Norway have to migrate in winter).

The garden of White Lyon House is the ideal spot for Treecreepers, that is, mature tall trees with the Wellingtonia being a favourite for them to roost, tucked



behind flakes of the spongy bark. Sometimes Treecreepers join winter flocks of tits but in general they are very sedentary. This saves an identification problem as just over the Channel lives a virtually identical but distinct species, the Short-toed Treecreeper. No need to worry though as it lives in the Channel Islands.

Research has shown that for Treecreepers tree trunks are a relatively stable, predictable 'microenvironment' in which the density of food is fairly constant.

Such a specialist bird may seem beyond our help in a garden and the BTO suggests fat smeared on tree trunks and peanuts wedged into the bark will be taken in winter.

Small nesting pockets can be fixed to the trunk, about three metres up. Nests behind loose bark or cracks on tree trunk or behind ivy, sometimes in wall or building crevices. Twigs, moss, grass, lined with feathers and bits of wool. Usually 6 white eggs with red-brown spots at big end. April to June; may be second brood. Species name *Certhia familiaris*.

EDITH DAVIS

*For detailed information about the village don't forget to visit Marden's very own website Marden Online at [www.marden.org.uk](http://www.marden.org.uk)*

The Parish Pump is distributed free to members of The Marden Society every two months



For details of membership please contact the Hon Secretary Edith Davis on 01622 831904

# The Parish Pump

The Journal of The Marden Society

May 2008

## Digging for Victory

Why do we garden – pleasure, exercise, de-stressing, freedom from food miles? Whatever! We probably wouldn't say that we were digging for victory.

Yet during World War 2, this is what we were exhorted to do. Russell Bowes, our speaker, discovered that this subject was poorly covered by history books and thence advertised for people to tell him of their personal experiences.

At the start of the war we were an exporter of manufactured goods and an importer of cheap food – 70% of our needs. The Germans were far better prepared by growing 80% of the produce, which they needed.

To resolve this, the Ministry of Agriculture granted £2 for every acre of new land put under cultivation, thus making the shortfall of labour 50,000. So the Women's Land Army evolved. Lady Denman, a leading light in the Women's Institute, had already run a pilot scheme in the first war and she didn't allow her

organisational skills to be thwarted by the lack of ministerial enthusiasm.

Many of these new recruits worked on dairy farms, having practised on plywood cows with rubber gloves attached!

One former member of the W.L.A. remarked that you have never been cold until you've cut Brussels sprouts in February. It is also true that famine can achieve what no bombs or invading forces can.

So, in spite of unworthy remarks about Eve and the apple-picking season by the National Union of Agricultural Workers, the toil of the "Land Girls" was vital to the war effort.

Eleven girls from Canterbury worked together on a local farm. After a night of bombing they still arrived on time apart from one, who apologised for being late but she'd had to be dug from the rubble first. Another had cycled during the night to be with her cows in case they were frightened. Yet it was only after 1980 that these ladies were invited to take part in the Remembrance Day parades.



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Thousands more acres came under cultivation in gardens, encouraged by the Government and the Royal Horticultural Society. (Evidently a recent poll of memorable advertising quoted the Dig for Victory as second best recognised – coming after the Wonderbra adverts.)

If you scrutinise the poster with the leg and spade, you will see there is only a left leg. Russell had to dig deep to uncover the fact that it was the leg of a tailor's dummy! If John Reed has a demand for hair clippings, it's reminiscent of the hairdressers who grew runner beans behind their salon and fertilised them with newspaper and hair (evidently high in nitrogen).

Leaflets galore were available & advice bureaux were set up. The first BBC radio outside broadcast came from their own allotment and Vita Sackville West of Sissinghurst wrote in The Observer "How to dig for Beauty". She thought some flowers were still important. Growing things on or over them could beautify even Anderson shelters.

Onions were like gold dust and when a packet was found, 74 people claimed them. One tip – a gas mask is good to wear when

peeling onions! The W.I. was paid 1d per lb of rosehips.

Growing cucumbers under glass was forbidden (because of the heat needed) and you needed a licence to grow asparagus. Tomatoes were in short supply so the USA sent us \_ million tons of seeds. Gardening entered the school curriculum and the cabbage white butterfly became more hated than Hitler.

The Luftwaffe was part of a dastardly plot to destroy the potato harvest, then centred in the Isle of Wight. They dropped boxes of Colorado beetles, either of 50 or 100. Children were sent out to search for the enemy and if 51 were discovered lessons were abandoned until all the beetles were safely harvested.

Allotments sprouted everywhere, even in Hyde Park and the dry moat of the Tower of London. And so to animals – pigs were popular as it was said that you could use every part except the squeak. However, many others became family pets and who wanted to eat Fluffy or Clucky?

Eventually war ended and was celebrated with a French bred rose renamed as the popular variety – Peace.

EUNICE DOSWELL

## PICKING FOR VICTORY

*A memory from Peggy Skelton, arising from Russell Bowe's talk.*

After I went to University, the following summer the National Union of Students asked for female volunteers to pick the soft fruit crop ripening in June and July 1942. We had to produce knife, fork, spoon, enamel plate and mug, blanket, sheet, pillowcase, 2 pairs of trousers -I don't think we had jeans then – a straw hat (old school Panama), cotton dress for Sundays, toiletries, sleeping bag and towel. All these necessities had to fit into a

rucksack and the other main item was a bicycle. Mine was 1920's vintage known as a "sit up and beg". It had been passed on to me by an aunt.

Encumbered with all this clobber and a special railway pass from Manchester to March in Cambridgeshire I began negotiating the railway network already full of the army, the navy and the airforce and all their kit. It took the whole of one Sunday and at last,

about 8.00 p.m. we arrived at March where the farm lorry met us.

Priory Farm was just in Norfolk, about 8 miles from Wisbech. We were some of the last to arrive and Celia and I were allotted the tiny spare room in the Cooks Dom Sci student's cottage. There was just enough space for 2 rows of wooden pallets on which were sacks of straw with just enough room to walk, Charlie Chaplin style between them. A large hook on the back of the door was our wardrobe and what wouldn't hang on it had to stay in the rucksack outside on the miniscule landing for the cooks to keep falling over.

Thus we toiled picking strawberries, 7.30 a.m. – 9.00 a.m., then breakfast, mug of tea and a hunk of bread; 9.30 a.m. – 12.00 noon lunch, mug of tea and a sandwich, really a repeat hunk and 1.00 p.m. to 3.30 p.m. then the lorry took us back to the farm for our main meal produced by the Dom Sci cooks, usually something from a large cauldron hanging over a fire in the yard and very good it tasted followed by gallons of tea in our enamel mugs.

There was a picking session from 6.30 p.m. to 8.30 p.m. but that was optional. We were paid 2d (old money, obviously) a pound – or was it a punnet – I can't remember. I think there were 15 – 20 of us at Priory Farm from all corners of England.

It was very tiring and hard even on our "young" backs and most of us went around

manifesting "strawberry stoop". Standing up straight was impossible for the first week. The weather was glorious and it was my first acquaintance with the vast East Anglian skies.

Saturday we finished work at 12.00 noon and spent the early afternoon endeavouring to bathe in a little tin bath with a piece of sacking across the window for modesty. By 2.00 p.m. we were ready to cycle into Wisbech for shopping, not that there was much to buy, and later go to a dance in the Corn Exchange, no lack of partners as we were surrounded by airfields

Sunday was a whole day off. Celia and I cycled to Sandringham and admired the large ornate gates. We leaned on them for support without dismounting as we admired them; lo and behold they swung open! We didn't say a word but by mutual consent cycled up the drive and all around the house, expecting every minute to be accosted by guards of some kind, but nothing was stirring, after all it was Sunday morning.

Our next port of call was Ely Cathedral. We were overcome by its splendour in the early sunshine. War and utility were unwelcome encroachments compared with the everlasting serenity of the Cathedral.

It was a long ride back, but well worth it. We were glad to go to bed early to be ready for the next week's picking and we hoped, the safe transport of strawberries to the jam factory. This was how the soft fruit crop was harvested in wartime, Picking for Victory.

**NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY 28 MAY 2008**

AT 8PM IN THE MEMORIAL HALL, OLD SCHOOLROOM

**Gary Enstone (NT)**

*Putting Bateman's to Bed*