

Country Pie.

The coming of August can be an anxious time for farmers as harvesting beckons. Summer storms can create havoc to the cereal crops, driving rain and swirling wind can cause untold damage to a healthy crop. A good, dry, sunny spell with zephyr breezes to ripen the wheat and barley brings a smile of contentment to the farmers as the combine harvesters turn into the fields to set about the task of gathering in. Things have been simplified with modern machinery compared with methods employed in my earliest memories. I can't quite relate to scythes and sickles but I can certainly remember families helping each other out to bring in the harvest. During the summers of the 2nd World War when the men were serving their country, it was the ladies, the Women's' Land Army, the young and older lads who pitched in to do the job. If, like me, you are a 'Dad's Army' devotee you will recall the hilarious episode when Mainwaring's mayhem makers "helped" on such a mission, Corporal Jones managing to get his trousers involved in a threshing machine operated by the dour Scot, Private Fraser. Pure comedy.

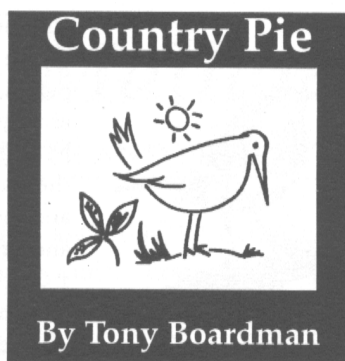
As the fields are cut pandemonium reigns for the vermin that has raised families amongst the protective rows of stalks. With nowhere to go they become victims to eagerly awaiting stoats or weasels who are nimble and adept in killing most things that could offer up. Nor are they free from attacks from the air as that now common bird of prey, the kestrel, with its hovering skills can account for any small straggler.

Encouraging Sparrows

Once the mass of dust from the combining has settled and the workers have gone away the smaller birds move in to gorge on the spilt grain and disturbed insect life lying amongst the stubble. Once we took for granted the hordes of chirping sparrows seen and heard in the cornfields and farmyards. Ask anybody to nominate the commonest bird in Britain and they are bound to say "sparrow". All our gardens, large and small, are full of them aren't they? Sadly the answer is **NO** and their numbers are dwindling at an alarming rate.

Records state that between 1972 and 1996 the house sparrow population was reduced by 64%. Some people consider the constant cheeky chirruping of this little brown bird a distracting nuisance' whilst others, like myself, delight to hear them chattering amongst themselves rather like school kids on an outing! Can you imagine how empty our lives would be without them? I am delighted to report that the RSPB is setting up a survey to establish what is causing

their numbers to diminish so dramatically. Possibly the main contributory factor is the practise of autumn planting of crops instead of the original spring sowing. In winter smaller birds would gather for winter foraging, which gave them invaluable sustenance throughout the difficult months. To encourage these small friends provide a regular supply of food and water all the year round and leave off the toxic pesticides in your garden. Not too many years ago the Chinese tried to kill off as many sparrows as possible as they were ruining the crops. The result was a massive insect infestation that caused a near famine,;nature should be left to take its own course. Finally, where possible, provide thick



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shrub cover for them to roost and some sparrow boxes for them to nest in.

A Tall Story

Sue and I have noticed more instances of deer on the road at night from Chipping Norton towards Shipton, so please be aware as you drive home. We went to fetch our son Lars and his new bride, Clare from Gatwick recently. On the way down, as we approached Bix, near Henley, and soon after we noticed a fatality lying by a pub forecourt and for a moment could hardly believe our eyes: there was no doubt though, it was a wallaby. Like the familiar muntjac, wallabies are also escapees that have survived here. Ernie Akers, one-time Station Master at Charlbury, once told me of a London-bound engine driver reporting a kangaroo on the line as he approached the station. Ernie asked him to pass the information on to the railway authorities, which he did at Oxford, where the poor chap was duly breathalysed! A few days later Ernie was out on the platform at twilight and spotted a small figure hopping down the line towards Hanborough. After investigation it was found that a wallaby had absconded from a private collection, which was eventually returned unhurt.

In amongst the mounds of unwanted post that cascades through the letterbox I occasionally receive packs of postcards offering senior citizens, such as myself, holiday brochure, information about hearing aids, bath aids, vitamins and even Wills. Do you not think it rather in-

congruous therefore, that one of the cards offered what was termed “the loveliest erotic catalogue in the world”? Presumably we would be advised to apply for the Will Information before sending off for this one?

Fond Farewells

You have been reading my load of old codswallop for nearly twelve years and now I'm afraid it is time to say cheerio. Sue and I, her two aunts, our border terriers, Jessie and Rastus, and Amber and the Demented Sisters are leaving the district. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to submit my articles to the local Magazine, which is a credit to the Wychwood district and the editorial staff who produce it. Wherever we put down our roots, for as yet our destination is vague, we shall miss living in the Oxfordshire Cotswolds and our wonderful neighbours who have been supportive, kind and magnificent friends – Reggie Ray, in particular, who took us under his wing from the moment we arrived. As I returned with the dogs from our walk up the Swinbrook Road this week, clutching a discarded Fanta bottle (your influence Jan Harvey), I marvelled at the beautiful local views we have before us and just hope that we can continue to enjoy them indefinitely. Treasure you countryside, once gone it is gone forever. Finally, thank you Marian for converting my scrawl into a pristine, legible art form on the typewriter. Thank you all and God bless you; it's been fun.

Tony Boardman.

The house- to-house collection for Christian Aid in Milton and Shipton raised the magnificent sum of £2250. This money will help the charity support projects in the poorest countries, campaigning for fairer trade, clearing landmines, providing medical care and clean water and much more. Thanks must go to all the collectors who gave their time and to all who gave their cash so generously.

Liz Watts and Ros Wilson