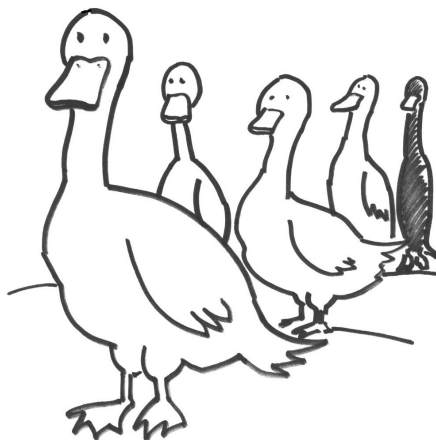


## Special Feature

# A Life With Ducks

It was I who felt our new home with its lazy millrace stream and grassy riverbanks needed ducks. Now they had arrived and emptied out of their cardboard box, they were busily exploring their new home rounding on unsuspecting worms and flies. My then husband was holding back on his thoughts: he was seeing the trials and tribulations ahead but I was firmly in Beatrix Potter land with images of Jemima Puddle Duck in my head.



Sidney and his 'girls',  
Hewie, Dewie, Lewie and Bahji

### Ragtaggle Mob

They were a ragtaggle mob. There were three Aylesbury types: Hewie, Dewie and Lewie and their shy and retiring friend, Bahji, a pencil slim, Indian Runner. 'In charge' was the baffled and easily bewildered drake, Sidney. Sidney was not the assertive type; leadership had been very much thrust upon him. Each morning he would go from wife to wife asking for his conjugal rights and, with each attempt, he was firmly rejected. After an hour of trying very hard to stamp his authority, he would give up and go to the river to wash his head, as if it didn't really matter and he hadn't lost face.

At this time, during Sidneys' eternal struggle for respect, we owned a six month old Lurcher. Norman was supposed to be a Labrador when we selected him under the watchful eye of his broad-headed, thick-necked, gorgeous gun dog mother, Pruney. Little did we know that on the day of destiny Pruney had got it together with the whippet across the road, just before her intended, Moley, came on the scene!

### 'Stormin' Norman

Norman was the result! He had telescopic, tripod legs and a long, skinny tail. He also had the awesome ability to move like greased lightning. Needless to say, Norman was a little horror and would find all kinds of mischief in which to dabble. One fateful day we were watching him out of the bedroom window entertaining himself with a white carrier bag which he was happily throwing in the air, trapping with his skinny feet and then carrying round the field in super-fast circles. "He's not so bad", I said to my husband with misplaced pride, "At least he's the sort of dog who can entertain himself." My husband was unconvinced and, having searched out his field glasses, was able to inform me that the white, floppy

thing in Norman's mouth was actually Sid! We watched in horror as our poor drake was thrown into the air and carried around the paddock by Norman who was thoroughly enjoying every minute!

### **Ducks in Distress**

We rescued our poor, bedraggled drake, who was (thankfully) intact owing to Norm's soft, Labrador mouth. We placed him gently back in the duck pen under the disconcerted gaze of his girls. As Sidney fluffed up his feathers and shook his head, the girls rounded on him asking him where he had been for so long. With their heads bobbing up and down they chattered away pestering him for answers. Sidney ignored them, washed his head and pretended it had all been part of his plan for the day.

The duck flock grew and grew. I couldn't resist ducks in distress that needed a home. There was Daisy with her deformed wing; Hatrick with his extraordinary feathered crest so lopsided it covered one eye; Gertrude because she was the wrong shade of brown according to her breeder and Hymie with his non-existent crest that looked like a skull cap.

### **Scooby, Myrtle and Myth**

We are down to three now in my much smaller garden here at Shipton-under-Wychwood. We lost our drake, Bluey,

this year. He had never been the same since his partner died. Ducks mate for life and it is heartbreaking to see how bereaved they are when left alone.

We bought three girls to keep Bluey company but he would stand alone by the fence always apart from them. They, being much younger, had very little time for the old chap and used to run rings around him.

### **Tales For the Telling**

Now Scooby, Myrtle and Myth reside at number ten and, wilder than our other more 'cuddly' ducks, they provide endless entertainment. Tom Bartlett at Folly Farm told me he devoted his life to ducks because they are so 'interesting'. He is right, they are always busy, always looking for something to investigate and even when they doze one can lose many an hour wondering how they balance on one leg for so long!

Ducks are not good for gardens, in fact they wreck them. They are a bind because you have to put them away at night and they are forever escaping and getting in to scrapes but, I couldn't be without them and, yes, there is no way I could eat one either! A life with ducks is an interesting one, rich in tales for the telling!

**Jan Harvey**

---

## **Cleaner Needed**

Milton-under-Wychwood Village Hall Committee require a part-time cleaner to clean the Hall on a regular basis. Suitable hours can be arranged.

**Please contact Jeff Haine on:- 01993 830078  
or Karen Perry on:- 01451 810433**