

## Special Feature

# The Fluffy Little Object

### Knock Knock?

It was late at night, a week from Easter, and I was snuggling down to watch *Vertigo* with a hot chocolate when there was a knock on my door. It was my neighbour carefully holding a one-day-old baby duckling in her cupped hands. The tiny ball of fluff



had been found under a car at Beaconsfield Hall and was likely to be run over.

My heart sank. Baby ducklings never last in captivity! They are best left in the place you find them. Mother will be nearby and, if not they have an uncanny resilience in the wild.

### Adopting a Duckling

However, suddenly I was an adoptive parent to a duckling. It was now 11.00pm and I was to be seen in the garage finding the appropriate materials to make a small duck house. An upturned storage basket sufficed. I found an old towel and a spotlight. Inside the 'house' I put a tiny, flat plate of water, a bowl of chopped up egg, crumbled up brown bread and a tot of olive oil. Luckily, I had read about this in a book called *Keeping a Few Ducks in your Garden* a few weeks before.

I had no sleep that night as the duckling was in my bedroom... Fortunately, my husband was in Germany! I constantly woke up worrying that it had expired.

Instead, it moved happily between its food, bed and the sun-lamp which it loved. At 6.30am, a bright "peep-peep-peep" woke me up and the baby had survived the night... We called her Flo

(Fluffy Little Object).

The next few days were very nerve-racking. Every morning, we would come down to the office, where we had set up an indoor pen, thoroughly expecting to find Flo keeled over but she was peeping away each time demanding breakfast.

### Duck Heaven

Cutting a very long story short, Flo stayed in the office for a couple of days. She spent many an hour asleep on my F keys or tucked into the roll neck collar of my jumper. Then, she moved on to board and lodgings in the shed and finally, overcoming the infamous pecking order in gradual stages, into the pen with Scooby and Oscar our ducks in residence.

In the meantime, we visited the vets once, changed the feed to chick crumbs and worried that this gutsy little character would still die from drowning, strangulation, a visiting cat, rat, owl or

fox. Ducklings are very vulnerable and everyone's idea of lunch. On that subject, the sweetest aspect of the whole story is how Flo decided that Boris, our huge black, Flat Coated Retriever, was her mother! They could often be seen lying down together, Boris giving her a wash and sharing duck food from the same box... I have to say, Boris, invited himself to dinner on such occasions.

### Schum Mishtake?

Then, we went on holiday... We left the ducks with their usual carer but, when they came back, Flo had turned in to a drake! It was a real shock. For over four months we had thought we had a girl. Suddenly, we had a bird with a fine grey plumage and iridescent green head with a bright yellow beak. Flo is now **Flow** (Please read that in a deep, manly accent). We are now coming up to a year since *he* arrived. Boris and Flow are still

devoted to each other although sometimes, for the former, there is a fine line between 'adoptive offspring' and 'dinner!' Even so, they still share a bucket of food from time to time. It still makes us laugh when, on a warm afternoon, Boris will give Flow an all over wash culminating in a perfectly crafted 'DA'... on his head!

### Advice if you find a Duckling

Initially, leave well alone, mother duck will probably be close-by. If, after an hour, it is still alone take it to a sanctuary such as the one at Wigginton. Chipping Norton Veterinary Hospital will also advise you, they are good with wildlife. Unless you have experience with fowl, trying to hand-rear a duck is fraught with problems and often leads to heartbreak especially for children.

**Jan Harvey**

## Saving Oxfordshire's Milestones

Helpers are urgently required to save Oxfordshire's milestones. Many of these historic monuments have already fallen down, been hit by traffic or are just rotting from the effects of roadside chemicals.

"We need more members who are prepared to go out there and help save them." said Derek Turner, the County co-ordinator, at a recent meeting of Oxfordshire members of the **Milestone Society**. "There are only about 15 of us in Oxfordshire so far." There are 186 known milestones in the county, of which 80 are Grade II listed monuments. Half of them have been classified as in a poor or very poor



condition in the Milestone Survey during 2001/3. Restoration work has so far been focused in the south of the county in the Vale of White Horse. "We need more helpers in other areas," says Alan Rosevear, who has been rescuing and repairing milestones for several

years. "If we had more volunteers we could do so much more."

If you feel you would like to help in the rescue work or learn more about the County's endangered milestones, contact **The Milestone Society**, The Secretary, The Oxleys, Tenbury Road, Clowes Top, Kidderminster, DY14 9EH.

**Celia Haddon**