

CLERK'S COLUMN

October 2011

What's in a name?

Coccinellidae have been observed in our gardens in larger than usual numbers this year. They are tiny red beetles with black spots, and are much better known as Ladybirds. Most gardeners welcome them, because they are never happier than when they're munching up the nasty little aphids we know as greenfly, though this is an odd name, because they often come in shades of pink and brown. Birds hate them because they taste foul. In the winter, the native ones with two or seven spots (and there are 40 other kinds. Someone must have got a Ph.D. from counting them) are liable to go to sleep in nooks and crannies in your house or shed. In Devon recently entomologists, aka bug-hunters, have been jumping up and down with excitement about the discovery of some thirteen-spotted ladybirds, which were thought to have gone into extinction 60 years ago. But I doubt if any of them ran down the streets of Exeter shouting "I've just found a *Hippodamia tredecimpunctata*!"

Unfortunately, however, the peaceful world of these beneficial bugs is under threat, and so are we, because someone failed to learn the lesson from rabbits in Australia or grey squirrels here and introduced the Harlequin, which (and they should have been warned) is yellow and has black splodges rather than spots. It was thought that they would gobble up all sorts of pestilent insects, but it turned out that their favourite meal consisted of red ladybirds. Why they're a threat to us is because they too like to hibernate in places where they have central heating; and one of the secrets of their survival is that they smell horrible. You have been warned.

Consequences.

The story of the Harlequin is another illustration of the Law of Unintended Consequences. If only our politicians, and nature-lovers, wouldn't keep forgetting this. Remember the notorious Rent Act? This was meant to protect tenants against predatory landlords; but it ended up making it almost impossible for honest landlords to get rid of difficult tenants, so that the supply of rental property dried up. As you know, there's a lot of anxiety about the Government's Draft Planning Policy Framework – my computer nearly printed Draft without the r – because if the intended results seem bad enough, what on earth might the unintended ones turn out to be? Much more "What if...?" thinking is needed.

Lots of us foresaw the consequences of the development of the airfield site, and our Parish, Borough and County Councillors, not to mention our MP, all worked hard to prevent the predictable problems. I'm not sure that when our doughty Councillor David Paffett moved into Upper Cottage, he foresaw being woken up at 2 a.m. one night to find an enormous articulated lorry stuck on the bend of West Hill. Over several generously-offered cups of tea, the embarrassed driver explained that he and his satnav were trying to find the Co-op megashop. It wasn't until 4 a.m. that the Police were able to come to the rescue.

Since then we've heard of other dramas, including tales from Sunnybank. Residents here have been bleeped awake at all hours by juggernaut-drivers foreseeing the consequences of going any further and trying to turn back to Red Post Bridge by reversing into their driveway. Let's hope that these painful episodes will turn out to have beneficial results; emails have since been whizzing around between Councillors and officials in Abbotts Ann, Monxton and north-western wards of the Borough and the County, to try to find ways of spelling it out that Monxton Road is not just *unsuitable* for HGVs, but *impassable*.

Willing and able.

As for the Community Consultation, the Parish Council is carefully keeping an open mind about the consequences. We don't know yet what the responses to the promised questionnaire will be, or whether the process will end in the production of a formal Parish Plan, but we do know that its success will depend on volunteers, and some of its findings will indicate the amount of voluntary activity that keeps the world of Abbotts Ann going round. The meeting on 21st September showed that there is a lot of interest in the project and a heart-warming number of people ready to lend a hand. No formal resolutions were passed, but the main object was achieved, namely to give an idea of what was involved and to get an assessment of the level of enthusiasm for the project. So the next task is to form a steering group and to start making things happen.

A very visible example of voluntary activity is the annual Fete; this year's was as spectacular as ever, and raised a record sum. We're all most grateful for the efforts of the committee and all the other contributors. But don't forget the many individuals and groups who give up free time for the benefit of the community and do so more or less invisibly. We would certainly notice it if they stopped; they deserve our thanks, too. There is one big event which will need attention soon, namely the Queen's 2012 Jubilee. This will be on the Agenda of the next Parish Council meeting, and any bright ideas for making this a truly memorable occasion would be much appreciated. Do please exercise the little grey cells, and let the Council know what you have thought.

Parish Councillors are also, of course, volunteers, and much of what they do is more or less invisible. Their meetings, however, are not secret, but always open to the public, and any parishioner is welcome to listen in, and/or contribute to discussions. We've just heard, with great regret, that Alison Barham is resigning from the Council due to other pressures on her time, including voluntary work. She will be sadly missed, and the Council is urgently looking for someone to take her place. Councillors do find their work interesting; so if any resident is interested in joining the Council, please get in touch with the Chairman or any other Councillor, or, indeed, with the Clerk. Soon.

It would be great if we could have a new Councillor in place at the next meeting, which is on 3rd November.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk