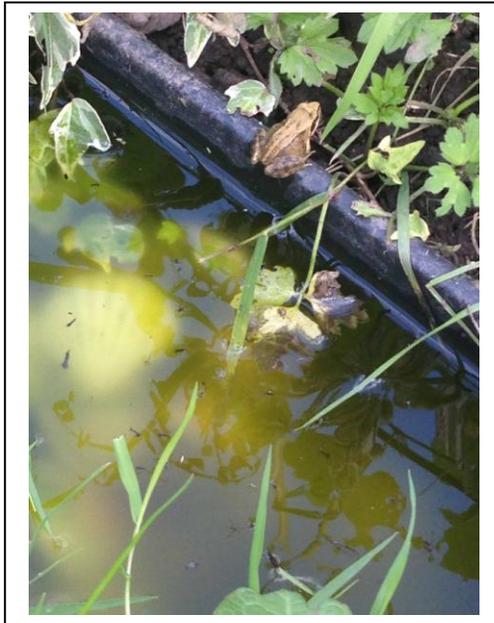


## *Site Profile*

### **Carbery Allotments**

I walk down the Avenue, amidst the relentless, deafening din of the traffic and turn the key in the lock of the big wooden gate, walk through and along the leafy lane. I turn the corner at the end, into the allotment. Peace and quiet reign .. noise, all but gone, replaced by a deafening silence, broken only by a singing blackbird, swaying high in a tree or, later in the year, a robin's sharp trill, as he stands, quite near, eyeing me from the top of a cane. Carbery, comprised of only 28 plots, has a unique atmosphere. We sort out any problems together and are lucky to count among us some very kind, willing and capable men, who make light work of any repair or maintenance jobs in the site. We used to have a big problem with intruders, but since Stephen Cole organised the building of a high metal link fence, plus spikes on the top of the gate, there have been no more break-ins or thefts of produce, touch wood. This year, one of the tenants arranged for huge mountains of wood-chip to be delivered, but we still can't persuade anyone to bring us manure! I found a stable, that was willing to deliver, but their popularity was our downfall. They invested in a larger truck, which couldn't get through our gate!

The enthusiasm for combining vegetables and flowering plants has been infectious and so many of us see the beneficial results of attracting bees, butterflies and other insects to the site ponds, big and small. The ponds are also a magnet to frogs, newts and insects and the frogs keep the slug population down. However, one large pond has attracted the attention of passing herons, which land and pluck their unfortunate lunch of tadpoles and frogs from the water. A pair of ducks also drop-by for a swim and a walk of inspection round the plots, muttering to each other.



*Recruits to the anti-slug campaign*

This summer, we had a very sick, mange-ridden fox, which staggered about, half bald, dragging its hind leg. It would come up very close and gaze, pitifully, straight at you, then lie under a tree, just watching people. I rang the RSPCA, but they said they didn't collect and could we take the fox to the clinic?!! Finally, one tenant called a fox-protection place in Twickenham and the woman came out, on a busy Saturday, with a special antibiotic medicine, which she fed to the fox on a bit of bread and jam. He took it straight away. She left, leaving instructions with one trusty tenant, to feed him, at the same time each day with dog food, for ten days. The fox came, each evening, bang on time, polishing off a tin a day with gusto and soon showed signs of recovery. After his second dose, he was healed and now comes back for a chat and a bit of supper, coat glossy and tail bushy. He has now resumed his hole-digging on the plot of the man who fed him!



*The recovered patient!*

In the past few weeks, wasps became a problem on two plots, building nests underground and in a compost heap, stinging one man twelve times on his head. The pest control man arrived. He was very serious, like someone in a James Bond movie. It took about five seconds to spray the entrance to the nest.

"Stand back," he said to me – adding, "they'll probably go a bit mental"

I asked him what would happen now.

"They take it down to the queen," he said, darkly, ".. then they all die"

"Do you come and take the nest and bodies away?" I asked

"No, leave 'em there", and added, with a triumphant grin "...Fertiliser!"

Allotment plot holders have one thing in common, besides being slightly eccentric, which is back problems. These have not been made any better by the introduction of the hosepipe ban. The concept that tiny droplets containing bacteria from compost can find their way backwards up the pipe and thence into the tap and enter the mains drinking water of the people of Ealing takes its place in the realms of elfin safety, but.. We must obey. We staggered back and forth, heavy cans causing a kind of nautical gait, with cries of "Ooh, me back!", etc. So, I devised a safe way of transporting water the considerable distance from water butt to my plot. It is by means of wine maker's syphon, placed nozzle end into water butt and other end taped to very long hose pipe. Works perfectly and with added practicality of only directing water into the roots of the plants, not splish-splashing all over.

Finally, rent-time. This is when some people become suddenly invisible. I sit in the rain and sun, twiddling my toes, like someone who has been stood up on a date. Not everybody suddenly has people to see in Ipswich, or is stricken down with slipped malaria, but it does mean that weeks can go by, before all is safely gathered in. But this is the time when I get

the chance to have a conversation which doesn't contain the words "woodchip" and "blackfly" and perhaps learn the Russian for "fluid on the knee

As apples drop on my head and it's coming on to rain, I stagger off home, pulling a wheelie basket full of things I forgot to use and jars of other people's jam. Happiness is the most important achievement in life and that is why allotments are important, because, when someone takes an allotment, you see their eyes light up, tension melt away and the gradual appearance of that daft grin on their face.

*Diana Crawshaw*