

A view from the conservatory

Carol Rouse

Now that the temperature in our conservatory has risen from glacial to mildly hypothermic, we like to take our breakfast out there and look at our lovely garden over the toast and marmalade. Quite often there is a rabbit or two grazing on the lawn and if we are early enough we'll catch the statuesque heron standing motionless eyeballing the (netted) pond.

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Directly outside the conservatory is a small round bed with a neat *Magnolia stellata* as a centre piece. In spring it is surrounded by colourful hyacinths, the final resting place of those given to us in baskets, buckets and pots on various occasions or anniversaries and which still put on a good show each year. When these have retreated under the soil once more they are overplanted with summer

bedding - small begonias, busy lizzy, or something more riotous, such as petunias.

Also in this bed is a 5 foot 5 inch pole topped by a lantern shaped bird feeder with a swivel top through which to pour the grain. I know this pole's dimensions because it is a few inches taller than me, and even by standing on top of the stubby ornamental post by the side of the steps up to the lawn I can't reach the top of the feeder properly when I need to fill it. I should get the step ladder, but somehow life's too short to keep carting

Illustration/ Tom Boulton



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ladders about and so consequently there are spillages which lead to all manner of random germinations. Things aren’t helped by the table manners of some birds - the great tits and sparrows toss the seed about looking for the sort they like. Bigger birds like doves and jackdaws scoop it out by the beak full which is much appreciated by the lumbering wood pigeon who tramps about in the flower bed below, cooing throatily and flattening my plants. Even the pheasant tried his luck up there one day landing on the very top, making the whole thing sway alarmingly.

However, one day, a new visitor joined the party, providing much amusement as he tried to work out how to reach the seed tray. ‘It’s really quite a beautiful animal’ remarked R. ‘If their tails were furry it would be ‘aah’ not ‘ugh’, wouldn’t it?’ Eventually, ‘Roland’ managed to shin up the pole and somehow leap out and hang on to the overhanging tray, hauling himself on board for his reward.

The saying that ‘one is never more than 3 feet away from a rat’ aside, we guessed we had one as there were holes in the compost heap and while taking a pee on it to aid acceleration as recommended by one of the more ‘colourful’ television gardeners, R said he had seen a movement under the layer of grass clippings caused by some activity within. Also, a glimpse now and then out of the corner of an eye of a sleek grey-brown shape or a gentle plop into the pond and the tell tale ripples.

However, the novelty soon wore off when Roland brought two friends along and all three made it up the pole to this gastronomic paradise. Out to his shed went R and after a bit of rummaging emerged with an old tin of evil smelling axel grease.

‘On yer bike’ he said as he liberally greased the pole - and guess what? They must have because we haven’t seen them since.

Carol gardens in Dunfield, near Cirencester in Gloucestershire. She is the winner of the £10 gift token for my favourite article in this issue - with a little help from R! Thanks, Carol.

