

DAILY BREAD

“Grain of Hope : Slice of Heaven”

COMMUNITY

A community of organisms composed of a single species is a sure sign of human intervention. It takes huge energy and management to achieve those monocultural plains of turnips or wheat or acid-yellow rape we see from the train or motorway. Few other species can survive the ferocious assault on soil structure and the deluge of pesticides and herbicides required to maintain this controlled uniformity.

Intensive agriculture (the Green Revolution) was ushered in 70 years ago by Nobel Prize winning plant breeder Norman Borlaug. It has dramatically increased food security and probably saved millions of human lives in the short term. But we are now paying a heavy price for our dependence on fossil fuel driven food production through destruction of soil, water, biodiversity and climate, and our security is again acutely threatened, this time by the global food system itself. It's not the amount of food we can grow that threatens human flourishing, but our attitude to justice and fair distribution, and our ideas about what constitutes 'enough'.

Under gentler conditions other creatures find their way. Our ripening, organically grown wheat crop on Piccadilly played host to several mildew and rust species, probably blown there as spores. We managed this with surfactants which don't have chemical or biological effects.

We have somehow come to see the sterile, desert landscapes of the English countryside as signifying beauty and security. **Rewilding** projects where 'weeds' like ragwort have free rein seem rampant, messy, threatening. On a planetary view, wildness is essential to maintain a thriving biosphere and knowing ourselves as belonging rather than managing is a different kind of beauty.

From Mildew to Skylarks

Crops: a surge of independent life-forms
Tamed for human use. A passive arena
On which man strides triumphant, pesticide-armed;

Or perhaps a flattening wheat-field where a tractor
Roars out its monologue.

But all of a sudden,
those subversive noises, too low and small
to be caught by human ear:

creak of a beetle
against the hard stalks,

a spider's rustle,

a miniscule disturbance of the air
as an aphid lands.

And even sneakier,
those silent organisms:

rust shitting
its brown spots all over *our* wheat;

a powdering of mildew, deathly white.

All at once it's a free-for-all.

Even plants
stranded in the Barbican, safely raised
and enclosed on a balcony, are attacked
by a flap of wings, the rhythmic peck and gobble
of a wood pigeon.

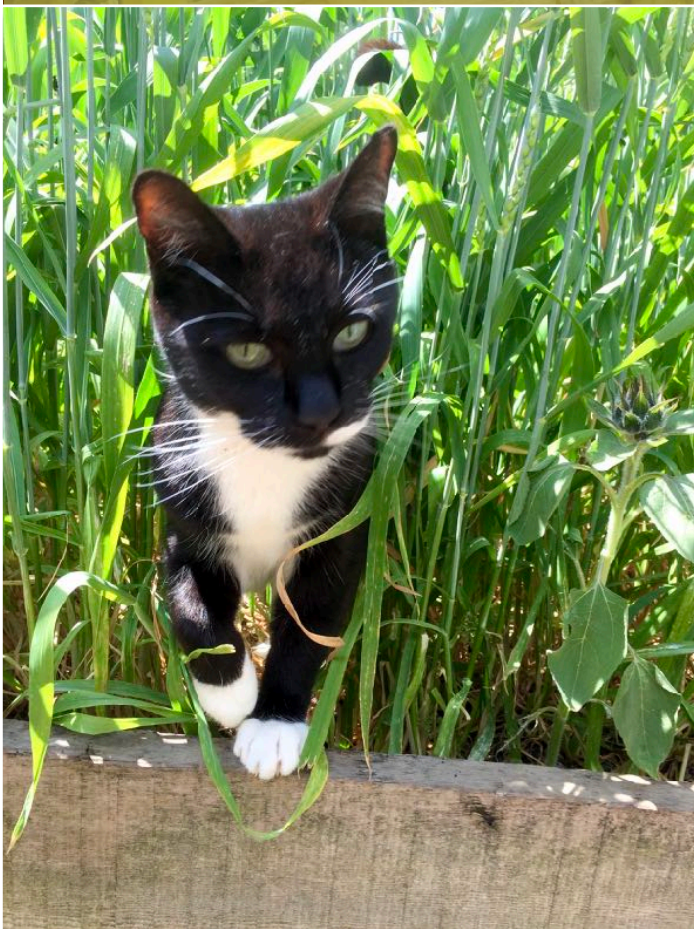
In Bethnal Green,
Dave the cat spots a photo-opportunity,
squashes down on the loved, watched, watered
shoots;
then explores them like a jungle.

That 'crop'
is home, food, host and hiding-place
to so many life-forms:

from the cute
harvest mouse which features in embroideries;
from the soaringly expressive skylark rising
above its low nest, right through the spectrum
to those we label predators, pests, blight;

leaving humankind with a task: to ponder
where we might place ourselves within that scale.

Diane Pacitti, 2020



Left. Dave, Deborah's cat enjoys prowling through the wheat.

Top right. Fungal rust spores were blown in and colonised our wheat in Piccadilly. Rust and mildew can dramatically affect wheat yields but were mitigated by spraying with surfactants (soap).

Bottom right. Pots of wheat grown for members of the SJP community who could not be present on 15 March when the seeds were shared, one week prior to The COVID-19 Lockdown.



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