

knowledgeably into random brightly coloured danglings and musing on the beauty of nature, do they understand that true gardening is nothing but the policing of violence and the management of mass death?

A 27-year-old wins the youngest gold medal ever for his quasi-satirical

You want to see a real garden? You want to stroll idly, hands-in-linen-pockets, among the flora and fauna of a true English yard space? Then come, let's have a tootle round the barely heralded "Coren Garden", not thrown up overnight, but organically evolved over decades. It didn't cost

that is. Whenever it rains, the roof sends all the water down this wall, creating a marvellous furry green beard on the outer brickwork, while on the obverse face, as you will see later, it allows rare mushrooms to grow actually inside the main bedroom, all up the

here. The birds used to eat them, but they soon learnt their lesson. I think it gives them a sort of mad bird disease, makes them fly into walls and stuff.

Of course, now that the birds don't take the bodies they just lie there and rot, which explains all the flies, in case you were wondering. It's like a

... this whole display for the Deloitte Homebase KFC garden at Chelsea 2015.

Now, I dare say you'll be wondering about the pile of rotten planks and wet roofing felt collapsed over a rusted mower in the north corner, well, we call this installation "shed", and if you look very closely...

Simon Barnes Wild Notebook

Heroes and villains in a wetland wonderland

We all love a good villain — and that's a rule that counts double for writers. Grendel and his still more villainous mother, Iago, Hitler, Dick Dastardly, the ARP warden in *Dad's Army*, Kevin Pieterse: find your villain and you know where you stand. Of late in these pages there have been clear and obvious villains at work: the people who illegally persecute birds of prey in the Peak District National Park. But not all conservation problems are so gratifyingly black and white.

So there I was in Sutton Fen in Norfolk, as



extraordinary a place as I've ever stepped on. Set your foot down heavily and the ground ripples. It's like a giant green waterbed. Every move you make has consequences all around you and yet in most places you can still stand upright and feel perfectly safe.

It's a place of great richness. Botanists measure the diversity of a given area by taking a quadrat: a square with four-metre sides. In a healthy environment they can usually get into double figures for species. On Sutton Fen they get an average count of 30-plus.

There are more than 200 plant species here, with fen orchid the superstar. It's been assessed by Natural England as the finest example of unpolluted valley fen in Western Europe. It's an RSPB site and it's phenomenal. As I walked my wobbling way across its glorious expanse I could hear the bugling of cranes.

And next door they're sucking the life out of the place. There was water abstraction going full blast on a field of salad plants. A little further on, at Catfield Fen, owned by Butterfly Conservation

and managed by the RSPB, there is clear evidence that the place is deteriorating. There are suggestions that the decline is now irreversible and that the same thing could happen to Sutton Fen.

The decline appears to be linked with water abstraction but the hydrology of fens is complex. Everything about change here is subtle and long term and elusive of proof. The farmer next door is no villain, he has a licence from the Environment Agency to take water and thinks his salad more important than a few orchids. But Sutton Fen is the best of the best of the best: it seems to me that the Environment Agency shouldn't wait for irrefutable proof of terminal decline before they make a decision that gives this spot a better chance of a future.

Are my neighbours villains? Raveningham Hall is a shooting estate with gamekeepers. But they operate within the law — they don't persecute birds of prey — so there is no comparison with the practices of some of the operators in the Peaks.

I went for a tour of the estate and walked away distinctly impressed by the place, which is owned by Sir Nicholas Bacon and managed by Jake Fiennes. The RSPB and other NGOs do a great job and the reserves they manage are all centres



Sutton Fen is like one giant waterbed

of excellence, but they can't survive as such unless other parts of the landscape are also managed righteously. Islands of excellence are fine; but not in a sea of lifelessness.

On the Raveningham marshes the air was fizzing with the cries of lapwing, and the sky was full of their crazy display flights. Redshanks piped up and among them were avocets. A male marsh harrier cruised by; there are three nesting pairs. It's all done with astute water-management — and this place was once a cereal monoculture. It's farming done in sympathy with nature, rather than as an act of violence.

Out in the higher land (what we in Norfolk like to call a hill) the arable fields were lined with stunning hedges: 40 kilometres were planted over the past couple of decades. Grey partridges — birds in desperate decline — abound here, and not as targets either. There are 140 of them on the estate.

The woodland is managed and commercially viable, but it has been cut with fine rides to maximise that vital woodland edge habitat, a favoured place for butterflies, and the hazel has been trimmed into inviting coppices for nightingales. The place is full of ambition and commitment and birds: it's a triumph of good management. I shan't be begging for a day's shooting at their place, but I have nothing but respect for the fine job they're doing.

Raptorwatch

The peregrines at Snake Pass in the Peak District National Park have hatched for the first time at this site in eight years. Previously healthy adults attempting to breed have "disappeared". The hen harriers look unlikely to breed this year, but individuals are still around. There's a future there for these birds, and an immediate one, if people stop killing them. A peregrine nest on Haddon Estate in the south part of the park (away from the grouse-moors) has failed. The chicks have "disappeared".