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**Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances**  
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**Spitting Feathers**

**By Chris P Bohn**

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It's 4.41 a.m. and I am listening to the birds singing in the nearby park. Few people hearing the Dawn Chorus could guess at how highly organised and politically motivated birds have become over the past few years. . .

It all started with a campaign by owls to secure extended rights for night workers, including enhanced rates of pay, regular meal breaks and assurances that they would not be penalized for refusing to work overtime. Some employers tried to get owls in trouble in certain parts of the country. They did this by contacting their local branches of the Health and Safety Department and complaining about the owls' unsavoury habit of regurgitating their food where it could be likely to cause contamination. But after a long court battle the owls won on a technicality.

Union activity has become increasingly important for birds. A landmark ruling has seen a Bill of Rights for chickens and turkeys become law in England and Wales. This will ensure enforcement of

- 1) The right to be anaesthetised (or preferably deceased) when plucked and
- 2) The right to be cooked at the correct temperature as well as the more controversial
- 3) Right not to be covered in grease and sold in truckers' cafés.

Pigeons have been keen union activists for a long time. Six years ago they broke away from the birds' Musicians Union claiming that other birds (and approximately 90% of humans) were discriminating against them. Things came to a head after a series of complaints about pigeons' monotonous calls (we are not allowed to refer to these calls as birdsong as this has been outlawed under an adaptation of the human "Trades Descriptions Act"). Larks and warblers and others calling themselves "proper" songbirds managed to put together a large petition calling into question pigeons' status as musicians and insisting that their rights and privileges be renegotiated. The "proper" songbirds described pigeons' calls as "nothing more than cheap and repetitive sampling which contributes nothing to the music industry . . ."

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Seagulls are being seen in greater numbers these days in some of our more inland towns and cities. This is because, due to the dramatic fall in fish stocks in the North Sea, many seagulls have been decommissioned. The gulls who have remained in the industry have found their activities severely curtailed. A major contributory factor to the gulls' problems has been unfair competition from human fishing "trawlers" which are equipped to handle vast quantities of raw fish. A spokesman for the Seabird Federation said:

"We have passed the point of no return. Young birds have seen the problems their parents have had to face. They have decided not to go into fishing. It's very sad. They just spend all day walking round town centres eating out of discarded fish and chip wrappers. . ."

There is an organization in Britain called the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) which is the political wing of the NDBLA (National Dickie Bird Liberation Army). For a long time there has been

controversy over where the money goes from the RSPB. Many suspect that some of it has been funding terrorist operations by militant pigeons. Older readers may recall the start of a long-running pigeon sponsored campaign involving defecating on cars which had just been washed. Small garden bird splinter groups were later formed and these groups attacked domestic washing lines, causing havoc in inner city areas.

A sinister development occurred in the summer of 1976 when the previously easygoing insect fraternity became involved in the birds' campaign in mainland Britain. The flying insect lobby organised suicide missions, aiming (and maiming) themselves at car windscreens. Readers may remember seeing picketing by thousands of ladybirds during that notable hot summer, especially at seaside resorts, where the Seabird Federation was still in its infancy...

Cuckoos have been getting themselves a bad name in bird union circles for many years. And it appears to be thoroughly well deserved by all accounts. Cuckoos, the pariahs of the bird community, have been closely associated in many bird brains, with the human British Horological Institute, where they signed a deal to accept free indoor housing in exchange for agreeing to tell the time for their landlords every hour on the hour. Mainstream bird groups saw this as "selling out" and banned cuckoos from membership of several important bird institutions. Normally mild-mannered blackbirds started what became known as the "Every hour on the hour" campaign, which aimed to throw a cuckoo's egg out of a nest every hour of the day. This was an extension of the backlash against cuckoos which had originally begun in 1831 with the advent of the campaign against the Cuckoo Squatters Movement. The CSM itself had begun as a protest movement after cuckoos had been refused free crèche facilities by pigeons. This was unfair treatment against the cuckoos, but few remember the details nowadays; cuckoos were effectively sidelined from that day on, and the situation – and with it, cuckoos' reputation – has spiralled out of control ever since.

As a result of their previous unfair treatment by other birds, cuckoos have, since 2001, opted for devolution, allowing them to set their own agenda. Hopefully this will result in productive high-level talks which should eventually see an end to the strike-breaking activities of cuckoos which has got them into even more trouble in more recent years.

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But not all birds are members of unions. Mallard ducks, who make up a large proportion of the waterborne Home Guard militia, have vowed never to jeopardise the security of our inland waterways by opting for the right to form unions and thus for the possibility of strike action. They have instead accepted a ten year pay and conditions package giving them sole rights on or within fifty metres of any body or stretch of water in the United Kingdom and any of its dependent territories. It is a little known fact that swans are part of the Home Guard and may therefore class themselves as honorary ducks.

And that leaves us firstly with swallows, swifts and other summer visitors from warmer climes. As these are not strictly speaking domestic birds they are not subject to the same rules as other birds, although international conventions do nevertheless apply.

And finally with budgerigars, canaries and the rest of our overcrowded prison population. Their case is complicated. On the one hand some have been freed by NDBLA pigeons. But others are not convinced by the plight of the budgies. As one cuckoo said, preferring to remain anonymous:

"They may be in long-term confinement, but they've all got colour TV's. And that's something a lot of us wouldn't mind swapping places for . . ."

Article writer, baking enthusiast, chaos magician, self-styled 'darkside philosopher' and joint owner of <http://www.darchangels.com>

### **Peacock Feather Wreath**

**By Dawn Keadic**

Making a peacock feather wreath is a very easy project and will result in a beautifully elegant finished product. This sort of wreath makes a beautiful adornment for your home at any time of year and can be enhanced by the addition of ornaments or left in its natural splendor.

For this project you will need a straw wreath base. The size of the wreath base which you choose to use will be a part in determining the size of the wreath. There is no right or wrong in a lot of this, it depends on what seems right to you as the creator. After you have chosen your straw wreath base, you will need to buy peacock feathers. The amount of feathers you buy will be determined by the size of your straw wreath base, the larger the wreath base, the more feathers you will need. There are great sources of peacock feathers on the internet or you may choose to visit a local craft supply store and pick out your own.

In buying a product of this kind, I usually buy a few more than I think I will actually need for my project. I find running short of supplies before a project is finished to be very frustrating and I've found that I can always add the surplus to my craft supply box and just knowing that they are there usually brings to mind some sort of fun project for which they can be used. You may also want a sharp pencil to help make openings in the straw wreath in which to place the feathers.

Before you start your wreath, you will want to look at your feathers and see if you want to cut them off

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at all. If you do, you will want also to trim the feathers at what will now be the quill end so that you can insert the quill itself into the wreath base. Insert the feathers into the wreath base about two thirds down. You may need a pencil at this point to create the openings for you. Set the feathers about three to four inches apart. When you have gone completely around the wreath base, you will want to go up about a half an inch, and repeat the same thing, setting these feathers over a bit so that they don't come directly over the other feathers. Repeat this for about two more rows. Then you will want to do one more row with slightly shorter feathers. This will give your wreath a fuller layered appearance.

Congratulations, you have just created a beautiful work of art wreath which is ready to be hung. Now you may decorate it if you so choose or leave it in its natural beauty. There is no right or wrong to this decision. What seems right to you as the creator is what is right.

Dawn Keadic enjoys decorating with wreaths, both indoors and outdoors. For more information on wreaths, including wreaths you can make at home, visit

<http://www.unique-christmas-wreaths.com>



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