

Ingham's WORLD

WE ARE getting good at recognising the signature tune of back-garden developers round where I live. It is the whining of chainsaws on a Saturday morning.

It happened again last weekend. A friend found workmen clear-felling a large garden bought by our friendly neighbourhood developer. Mature trees came tumbling down – even though this is the nesting season.

Why is this done on a Saturday when the chainsaw gang is presumably on overtime? Because the council offices are shut so busybody neighbours cannot get a tree preservation order. When the council wakes up on Monday morning all those inconvenient trees will be firewood. And another big house with a lovely garden will be replaced by yet more shoeboxes and gardens the size of postage stamps.

This matters not just for the residents who face the noise, extra traffic and a drop in their own property values. Gardens are vital havens for wildlife. Just ask Britain's hedgehogs – or Pat Morris, who has studied them for 40 years and is author of *The New Hedgehog Book*.

He says that for years hedgehogs have coped well with suburbia and even the inner city, but they are disappearing. In Croydon, hedgehogs were abundant in the Sixties. When Pat gave a talk in 2004, only two of the 120-strong audience had seen one in their garden.

A major problem is that most new gardens are too small. Pat writes: "Hedgehogs wander widely. An average home range is about 90,000 square metres. Most newly created housing areas have gardens of less than 90 square metres."

If the hogs can move freely between gardens, they have a chance but so many plots are fenced in and covered with patios and decking. These and other barriers create small, isolated populations that slowly inbreed and become extinct.

You can help Mrs Tiggywinkle. Leave piles of leaves and an area of long grass and don't rake under hedges – all areas where hogs like to rest. Use garden chemicals sparingly, make sure hogs can climb out of ponds, look out for them when strimming and put out dogfood with biscuits. Remember – hedgehogs are a gardener's ally: they love eating slugs, bugs and caterpillars.

● *The New Hedgehog Book* by Pat Morris, £12.99, Whittet Books, Annabel@whittet.dircon.co.uk

WHEN Emily Ada Story sold Nottinghamshire County Council some land in 1938, she apparently included a covenant restricting its use to sport, recreation or permanent open space. Presumably that is why developers now plan to build 820 homes on the Hucknall site in defiance of objections from residents.

And from Nottingham to Westminster, politicians wonder why the public is so disillusioned with them.



ANOTHER week, another development. This time 1,000 homes may be coming to Thanet, Kent, despite objections.

Across Britain, councils have their hands tied. If they reject an application, the developer can appeal. If they lose, they pay his costs from taxpayers' money. As the Government has increased the density of development it wants built, councils know they are likely to lose. So well done, Mr Blair. You've stripped local authorities of the right to decide what is built on their patch.

GREEN TIP: Put drip trays or saucers under pots to catch the water that drains out.



THE past 25 years have been hotter than any comparable period in the past 400 years – and probably the past 1,100 years,

according to America's National Research Council.

Meanwhile, Inuit have been catching Atlantic salmon for the first time, 600 miles further north than they should be.

This week, Canada's £90million Ocean Tracking Network took its first step to finding out what is going on. It plans to tag fish, seals, whales and dolphins and follow them with seabed tracking devices from the Canadian Arctic to the Straits of Gibraltar.

The scientists hope this will reveal the mysteries of Earth's final frontier – the deep sea.

● **YOU** expect new species to be found in the jungle – but in Warwickshire? Botanist Ann Boucher found Britain's first ever membranous nettle growing in Warwick – a species that should be residing in northern France. It is thought to have made the journey north and survived thanks to climate change. It makes you wonder what else is out there.