



# It's all hands to the sands

They do like to be beside the seaside. **Jacqui Morley** joins beach-comber kids

**B**ob the lugworm has finally found a friend. Three of them, to be precise: Bailey Wright, Thomas Allen and Ryan Beresford, 11, who have spotted "Bob", looking sadly deflated, beached on the sands.

The pity is it's come too late to save him from a fate worse than death by a herring gull. The same goes for the glutinous mess branched with great glee by the boys while sundry school girls chorus, as of one: "ugh."

Wyre Countryside ranger Len Blacow is called upon to identify the grisly find. Even Len baulks at taking too close a look, although he's held Bob the lugworm aloft by this point, along with sundry dead or ailing green crabs, and some fairly smelly seaweed. "It's anglers' bait, I think," he surmises. "Best to leave it on the beach and let the gulls finish it off."

Forget Springwatch. This is Beachwatch, Wyre style, hosted by Rossall Beach Residents' Association, and supported by Wyre Countryside Rangers, which will also run a Strandline survey on much the same spot, soon part of the crusade to encourage locals to look after their beaches, help clean up the sands, and also understand more about the delicate balance of nature here.

Len is big on food chains, and uses the various empty shells, located by some 60 willing helpers from Manor Beach Primary School, Cleveleys, to make the point. The giant whelk's shell drilled into by a smaller creature, the contents sucked out, even telling them of strange sea beasts who turn their stomachs inside out – another collective "ugh" at that – to ingest their prey. And so on.

And it's all happening here, the small deaths, fights for food, and territorial tussles, of Nature red in tooth and claw, on the beach so many of us take for granted. Rossall Residents don't take it for granted. The group,



chaired by Jane Littlewood, was set up less than two years ago, to campaign for CCTV to deter some of the less savoury activities that occur after dark on the beach, and along the expanse of car parking. They have yet to get the CCTV, as secretary David Hewitt laments, but they have proved themselves a formidable community force with which to be reckoned, mobilising locals to make changes for the better, rather than assume the local council will do all the leg work. Their first beach clean-up a couple of years ago produced 40 syringes and countless condoms. Today the kids find just one. Of both items.

Manor Beach Primary School pupils are already environmentally conscious. They are probably far more worried about the BP oil spillage and its impact upon the marine and allied environment than many adults are – other than fears for the security of their pension schemes.

No oil on this beach, declares Hannah

**SHORE THING:** Manor Beach pupils: Katie England and Georgia Rushton, 11, assist with the Rossall beach clean-up, while (above left) Bailey Wright, 11, brandishes his catch of the day, "Bob" the lugworm, and, left, Tallulah Grimshaw, 11, holds a tower shell

**Are you behind the big beach clean-up campaign? Have your say on [www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk](http://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk)**



Whitehead, 10, with relief. And as Len points out, nature has a great propensity to fight back, even against seemingly insurmountable odds, and re-establish itself. "You hardly hear people talk about the Torrey Canyon now, and look what a disaster that was at the time."

Len's delighted by the enthusiasm of the Manor Beach year five pupils, particularly as he helped create the conservation area at their infants' school several years ago. Key stage two teacher Heather Davies says there's no substitute for hands-on learning when it comes to ecological studies, and the youngsters take their lessons home, too. "This is very much our local beach so the children have all been here with their families – but this is making them realise they have a sense of responsibility towards it too."

Indeed, it's quite telling that several pupils

confide "we don't really do lessons" – which shows just how much fun they are having in the process.

A leatherback turtle was spotted on this stretch by a local dog walker only the other day – the turtle travelling thousands of miles to feed on jellyfish in the shallows.

But as Len points out, there are some 250 species living out there, from tiny barnacles anchored to mussels, cockles, razor clams, fish, seaweed and more.

By the end of the morning, youngsters are able to identify the lot, by dint of the debris left on the strand line, finding the egg cases of dogfish, the carapaces of green crabs, whelks which graze, snail-like, in the sea, and matching hornwrack, all that remains of a colony of tiny critters, against the charts provided by the Wyreside ranger, while gulls circle above, ready to sift through their own finds.

The kids also learn that balloons, devoured, can cause birds and fish to die of starvation, and cotton bud sticks can clog the machinery at the Fleetwood water treatment works. "It really makes you think," says Bethany Faulkner, 11, who cherishes the "cool" haul of shells. "Just wish we'd seen a turtle..."

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**N**obody, except possibly the Labour Party, would want to see the Coalition Government damaged while still in its infancy. But hawk-eyed Westminster watchers are detecting just the murmurings of a situation which, if not quickly checked, could lead to some dissent, if not open warfare, in the ranks.

The problem could be the Liberal Democrats' economics guru, Vince Cable, now the Business Secretary, who, it is said, is not happy about coalescing with the Conservatives and whose relations with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, are not of the warmest.

The scenario is nowhere near so serious yet as to derail or even affect the Government's policies to sort out the country's economic crisis, but the Prime Minister will

certainly be keeping a beady eye on the situation to ensure that what is no more, at the moment, than a little local difficulty, does not escalate into anything worse.

He is well aware that an open clash between the Treasury and Mr Cable's department would be unhelpful, to put it at its mildest, in furthering the Government's aims.

Mr Cable is already at loggerheads with the Treasury over which of them should be responsible for banking reforms. That is difficult enough. But what could be more serious is that he has left his name on a report compiled by the Future of Banking Commission. This is at odds with the convention that ministers do not lend their names to independent policy reports which cover their remit. Neither the Prime Minister nor

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the Chancellor can be happy about this.

Mr Cable, before he became a Liberal Democrat, was a Labour Party member, and so the idea of a coalition with the Conservatives must be anathema to him.

Nor was there any prospect of reining him in by making him a Treasury Minister because he and Mr Osborne would almost certainly not have hit it off.

So Mr Cameron can do little more than watch and pray that internal problems do nothing to bedevil the smooth running of a fragile coalition.

■ When the promised bonfire of useless quangos is eventually lit, I trust that the pointless Equalities and Human Rights Commission will be among the first to be consigned to the flames.

This body has criticised the use of the term WAGS, ie wives and girl friends (of footballers) because, it is claimed, it is "sexist", could be "offensive" and is usually used in a "pejorative" sense. It is an expression they would like to see avoided.

Well, so what? A little mockery did no one any harm. Who are these people who sit solemnly round a table (I assume) adjudicating on this word or that and at the

same time picking up large wads of cash from the already hard-pressed British taxpayer? If they haven't got anything better to do than to offer unctuous advice on things that absolutely do not matter then they should be humanely exterminated – metaphorically, of course.

The television presenter, Christine Bleakley, incidentally, who is reportedly stepping out with England footballer Frank Lampard, insists that she is not a WAG. Well, I am afraid that she fits the description.

Meanwhile, the abolition of the regional development agencies cannot happen soon enough. Their demise, it is reported, will save £2.3 billion a year. I hope that in a few weeks' time, we shall be bidding good riddance to the quangocracy as it goes up in flames.