

Conservation is now Rod's way of life

ROD BLANCO, chairman and treasurer of Sale and Altrincham Conservation Volunteers, owes his interest in conservation to his daughter Christine.

It was while she was a young Altrincham Loreto Grammar schoolgirl studying biology that he found himself "chauffeur" to various projects organised by Cheshire Conservation Trust (North Group) and soon decided that rather than involve himself in return journeys to take and pick her up he might as well join in.

Once started, he found himself hooked and has continued to work for conservation even though daughter Christine, who obtained a Biology degree, has since switched to publishing, and son Philip with a first class physics degree from Durham University, specialises in astro-physics.

While on the subject of academic achievements in the Blanco household is should be recorded that wife and mother Liverpoolian Joan spent six years working hard to gain an Open University BA in the Arts.

Wembley-born and educated Rod has also achieved much academically with an Hons. Chemistry degree from Aberystwyth before taking a year-long course at Battersea Polytechnic to become a chemical engineer and early retirement, completing a teacher's training course.

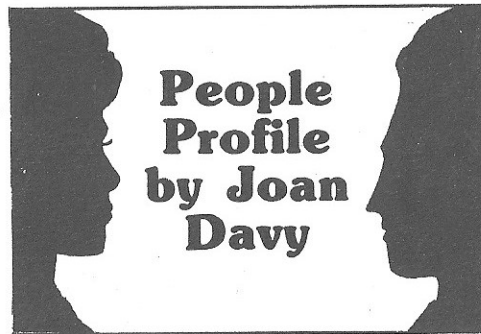
Having retired at just 53 he decided to take up another career and after teacher training taught science and mathematics at Wellacre School for Boys in Flixton for six years. He was also a part-time lecturer in chemistry and chemical engineering at North Trafford College at Stretford.

Explaining that most of his working life has been spent on the physics side, Rod said he thoroughly enjoyed learning more and more about ecology and wildlife the more he became involved as a conservation volunteer.

As a Cheshire Conservation Trust (North Group) volunteer Rod spent a good deal of his spare time at the Delamere Tree Nursery before being instrumental in the setting up in 1978 of the Sale Tree Nursery on New Hall Road, formerly Fairy Lane.

While working with the North Group Rod found the work entailed setting up or preserving existing nature reserves and improving potential wildlife habitat. Perhaps few realise that Brookheys Covet at Brookheys Farm on the edge of Carrington Moss off Sinderland Road, Altrincham, is classed as an SSI site - of special scientific interest.

Backed by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, the Sale and Altrincham Conservation Volunteer's group was formed in February 1985 with Rod as



chairman and treasurer, Shelagh Aston of Apsley Close, Bowdon, as Hon. Secretary, Paul Lewis of Meadway, Sale and Roy Griffiths of Green Lane, Ashton-on-Mersey, taking on the role of task organisers and Jackie Hammond of Marsland Road, Sale, that of Publicity Officer.

The local Conservation Group meets on the second or third Sunday of each month for a variety of tasks in roughly a 10-mile

radius of Sale and Altrincham.

Work undertaken by the Sale and Altrincham group included fencing, tree-planting (and some times thinning), making and repairing footpaths and steps, clearing and improving ponds for wildlife, scrub clearance and such traditional rural crafts as coppicing and hedge-laying.

Recent local jobs have included removing such alien species as rhododendrons

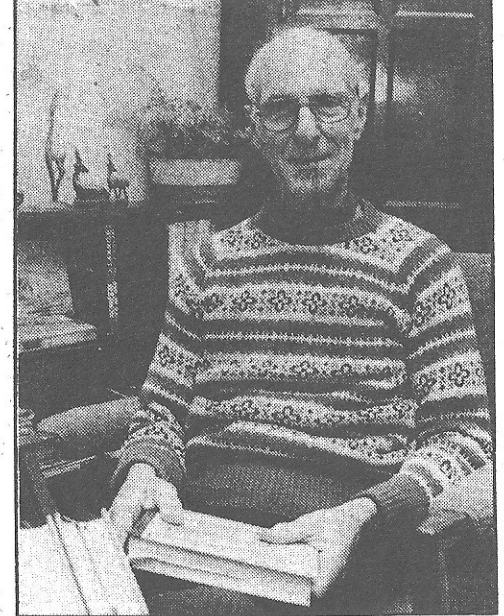
which prevent so many other kinds of trees from growing such as oak and fail to provide the thick on-ground vegetation desirable by many species of wildlife.

From time to time the ever-increasing Himalayan balsam found along the side of streams and bracken have to be reduced and ponds have to be regularly cleared out to enable waterlife and plants to survive.

The coppicing of small trees, particularly hazel, is advisable making for far healthier trees providing the low level thick growth so sought-after by many birds.

Rod was delighted to tell me that most farmers, once they have got to know the conservationists and realise what they are about, welcome them with open arms.

As has Sinderland Road farmer Richard Morton who has don-



Rod finds there's always something to learn when it comes to conservation.

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ated three plots of his Dairy House Farm land for tree planting as has farmer Geoff Newton at Birch Farm at Warburton.

Although comparatively self-supporting with grants over the years from the Queen's Jubilee Trust and Shell with which to buy necessary tools, Sale and Altrincham Conservation Volunteers' group always welcomes donations to buy even more far from ordinary tools for such tasks as fencing and coppicing.

But the one thing they really do want is more volunteers who should be over the age of 12 unless accompanied by their parents or an adult.

"During the summer months we're only too glad to welcome family parties on various tasks", added Rod, "and find more

often than not they thoroughly enjoy themselves, especially the mid-day break for a picnic in a country situation.

So if you enjoy being out in the fresh air, in pleasant surroundings, don't mind getting a bit dirty and like the idea of meeting people, having fun and doing some tremendously useful and rewarding work at the same time, conservation work could well be what you are looking for.

Incidentally, you don't have to be super fit or need previous experience - just a willingness to work and above all, a sense of humour. If you're not quite sure, why not try it out for a day some time.

Rod on 928 4726 would be only too willing to give you details or answer any queries you may have.