

The Natural History of Household Detritus

Have you ever wondered where all those bits of junk go or what they do?

Here's a piece I wrote some years ago to try to shed a little light..

Twenty years ago I was fortunate enough to become master of my own household when my wife of twelve long years decided that she had had enough, packed her bags and left, leaving behind her an enormous amount of junk.

I applied myself to the immense task of clearing away from my living space all those things that had been a source of annoyance to me. The two main sources of annoyance were carrier bags and wire coat hangers.

Hang on to your seats because I am about to let you in on a secret that has been closely guarded by supermarkets and dry cleaners alike.

I have proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that these seemingly mundane articles have a life of their own. My ex-wife would never throw them away. She would even bring home more wire coat hangers to add to the mighty collection.

I started to throw them away but I made the mistake of keeping a few in case of emergency. I have since learnt that there is no emergency worth keeping wire coat hangers for.

Their only use is for lazy people to use as replacement car aerials. There is also one major reason for not keeping them or carrier bags in captivity, namely that they breed prolifically.

I first noticed this when I removed six of the seven bags full of carrier bags from my larder. They were making it difficult to see if I had any food left.

All was well for a few days, until I heard a rustling noise coming from behind the closed larder door.

Thinking that a cat had been shut in I opened the door, only to witness a sight that has only hitherto been seen by the staff at Tesco's secret bag breeding facility, somewhere in the Midlands.

As well as the one carrier bag full of other bags there were now several others lying on the floor. The original bag was still intact. The new ones were a strange cross breed between Tesco and Sainsbury's bags. Their handles were weak and the bottoms were already showing signs of splitting, a sure sign that they were

already mature adult bags ready to start breeding. I calculated the complete breeding cycle to be less than 24 hours, which I am sure you'll agree, is frightening.

Without more ado I pulled all the bags from the larder and started to study them carefully.

I soon noticed that some of the bags, if left to their own devices would slide across the table and attempt to mount others. In this way I was able to identify the breeding pairs, sex them and then cruelly separate them into strong, safe black dustbin liners.

These I placed outside for the dustbin men to collect and in this way narrowly avoided a population explosion.

The wire coat hangers were a different sort of challenge. They had several characteristics that made the job more of a challenge.

Firstly they are hermaphrodites. This was not apparent at first; I discovered it when I found one bent into a very strange shape. I had always thought that they only got bent this way after being installed as car aerials, but I found one that had bent itself after I had placed it in isolation.

It had produced a small litter of poorly developed wire paper clips which fortunately did not survive the birth. Identifying the breeding pairs and separating them was no more successful, unlike carrier bags which are monogamous, hangers will breed freely with almost any other wire product. This can cause huge colonies of wire to develop, which can be very difficult to untangle. They are also masters of concealment. When I thought that I had eradicated the last one from my spare bedroom I shut the door and went out. Upon returning later that night I heard the clink of wire against wire coming from the room. I looked in and saw a new pile of shiny hangers on the floor next to an old suitcase. In the suitcase were three that had escaped the purge. In a matter of five hours they had produced between them over thirty offspring. I removed these from the house in the same way as the bags and since then I have not been troubled by them.

Down at the local tip the story goes on. There is now a colony of feral coat hangers that has taken over a territory of nearly half an acre. This is an area into which the council operatives fear to tread unless in pairs armed with powerful magnets.