

Waggle dancing



We should have had more head butts and waggle dances. If we had, the election result might have been very different, writes **Richard Barr**



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Whether you call it chaos theory, the butterfly effect, or just 'normal for Norfolk', it is clear that the events in our corner of this flat county were highly relevant to the election result on 7 May.

A snake escaped, the ducklings diminished, the Alexanders marched in, and the bees swarmed.

Snakes alive

We have been the guardians of my stepson's snakes for years. Tom acquired them while he was still at school. When he went off to university, his snakes, having failed to get the required GCSE grades, had to stay at home. When Tom graduated, we hoped that he would be able to set up home and take the snakes. He has done the former and not the latter.

A few weeks before election day I made a casual check of the snakes and found that two had

vanished.

It was very odd. The doors to their cage were closed and the finger of blame pointed at our small grey cat, who relishes in teasing the snakes. She was once seen to open one of the snake cage doors, but if she shut the door after letting them out, that would have displayed a resourcefulness not even shown by the most slippery politicians when faced with difficult questions during their election campaign.

Whoever or whatever did the deed, we had a race against time to get them back inside. One was recaptured almost immediately, curled up beneath its cage. Of the other, there was no sign. I crawled into roof spaces, peered under every piece of furniture, rifled through drawers, and quizzed the cat.

It was nowhere to be found.

Liberal Duckocrats

Our first crop of ducklings appeared – 13, fluffy, yellow, baby ducks. They were the liberal duckocrats. Then in the countdown to the election, the numbers of ducklings reduced. Every day there were one or two less.

Invasion of the Alexanders

As soon as the election was announced, the Alexanders arrived. They moved on to our land and refused to budge. We could not persuade them to leave. The police were not interested. The Alexanders

dug in their roots and stayed. Despite their name they are not an invading horde from north of the border; they are tall flowering weeds, hell-bent on taking over our land and country.

Election day came. We went to our polling station and voted in the privacy of makeshift booths built out of cardboard. The place was swarming. Normally when I vote there are three bored officials and one old lady with a fox terrier. But there was a buzz in the air as the good people of our constituency flew in from every quarter.

Buzz from the bees

When we got home there was a different buzz in the air – a loud menacing noise that crackled with energy. There was a cloud of bees hovering above us. Gradually, as we watched, they settled high up on a laurel bush and formed themselves into a tight ball.

We donned our bee suits and grabbed a sheet, a step ladder, some secateurs, and a cardboard box. Gingerly my wife (she is head beekeeper; I am the beekeeper's assistant) climbed the ladder and snipped the stem on which they were clustered. With more buzzing they were released into the box and then carried over to a waiting hive, which had been newly refurbished, rewired and decorated with the best bee products from IKEA.

As many bees as possible were poured into the hive.

The rest were put on the sheet and shown the front door. Immediately the voting process started. The choice of a new home is, we now know, a democratic process for bees. The scout bees that choose the homes do a waggle dance to show their enthusiasm. If there are several choices, the bees express their disapproval of the ones they do not like by head butting the scout who chose the wrong one.

As we watched, there was plenty of waggle dancing and a little head butting; the bees seemed to approve.

By 10pm when the polls closed the following had happened

- Only two of the liberal duckocrats remained.
- The Alexanders continued to grow and spread.
- All was calm in the new bee hive.
- My wife heard a scraping noise above the conservatory and saw the snake slithering up it. In one bound she grabbed it. It may have been my imagination, but it did look as though it was wearing a little blue rosette. And was that a little duckling fluff sticking out of the corner of its mouth?

The election result was a surprise to us all. Next time it might be a lot easier to choose if our politicians simply do a waggle dance when they want us to vote for them – and we can head butt those to whom we wish to show disapproval. **SJ**