

## **Agatha, the Agony Ant**

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If you think personal or emotional issues are strictly a human condition, then think again. Agatha is the 'Oprah' of the natural world. Here's a sneaky look at some of the letters she receives, but be warned, you may not look at nature with the same innocence again!

Dear Agatha, my neighbour is an exhibitionist!! A few weeks ago she started flaunting her – oh I can't bear to write it – her 'blossoms'. She's out there now, flashing her wares to every Tom, Dick and Harry, and bringing down the real estate value of the entire neighbourhood. You'd think a Crab-Apple like her would have a bit more respect for herself, and some level of decency considering her proud Irish roots. And worst of all, my innocent young saplings (and many others I could mention) idolize her, and want to be like her. How did our neighbourhood sink this low and where do we go from here?  
Yours, Guelder Rose.

Dear Guelder Rose, there are many who will argue that this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and we should embrace this kind of liberal behaviour, and let people express themselves however they want, but you, like me, are obviously not of the opinion that if you've got it, flaunt it. There needs to be some level of decorum in the world, and just look at the direct impact this attitude is having on young saplings. My advice is to make some placards, round up the girls and march on government buildings until somebody answers your calls. 'We want apples, not tarts!!!' Yours, Agatha

Dear Agatha, I think my wife had an affair with the cuckoo!! I never saw it coming. It was pure bliss from the start. We built a nest and had four beautiful eggs. But when the first one hatched, out came this monster – there is no way it could have been a dunnock chick. And then the evil little hatchling pushed all the other eggs out of the nest and smashed them on the ground. That was three weeks ago. He's now twice the size of both my wife and I, but of course my wife insists on feeding it!! She keeps calling it 'our little miracle', but I've a feeling it's someone else's 'little miracle', if you know what I mean! What do you think I should do? Yours, Disheartened Dunnock.

Dear Disheartened Dunnock, this really is a delicate situation you've found yourself in, but you're not the first bird who's been blindsided like this, and you won't be the last. It's not natural for two different bird species to crossbreed (can you imagine the freakish consequences if they did), so it's more likely the cuckoo temporarily usurped your nest when you and your wife were away and laid its eggs, leaving you and your poor wife to raise their evil offspring. The little monster will fledge soon, so just hang in there, and next time, try to be more vigilant. Yours, Agatha.

Dear Agatha, I've been layered!! There I was, standing proud, when some lunatic came along and cut my trunk nearly the full way across and pushed me over on my side. Then he gave me this sob story that I was helping to fill a gap and that I'd start putting up new

growth from the cut stump in no time. I know what gap I'd like to fill. I feel so violated right now. What should I do? Yours, Hapless Hazel

Dear Hapless Hazel, you poor dear, that sounds horrendous. However, I have heard of something like this before. Apparently, it's the buzzword for those involved in hedgerow management. They say it helps rejuvenate the hedge and extends the lifespan almost indefinitely. This may not be of much comfort to you, but just be grateful you weren't coppiced!

Dear Agatha, I'm up to my eyes in squatters. A little while back a pair of wrens asked if they could build a nest on my branches and stay for the summer. Being the kind hearted soul that I am, I said yes. Big mistake. There're now loads of birds taking advantage of my good nature. They're robins, blackbirds, blue tits, sparrows, thrushes and even a couple of finches. I didn't sign up to this. And the racket they make every morning. And now there are chicks hatching from nearly every nest. I'm not running a day care centre here you know. What should I do? Yours, frazzled furze.

Dear frazzled furze, there is always someone who will take advantage of a kind hearted soul like yours. Unfortunately for you, they can probably claim squatter's rights, and given that there are chicks involved, it'd be a very cruel hearted judge and jury who would kick them out on the street. My advice is to hold tough until they fledge, and the next time someone comes knocking, tell them where to go! Yours, Agatha

Dear Agatha, I've got legs where I've never had legs before!! I've noticed my body changing over the last couple of weeks. Normal changes though. I've been getting longer and my head is getting bigger (it's probably my brain growing as I get smarter and smarter). But I noticed two little bumps on my body a couple of weeks ago, and now I have two tiny legs and a huge urge to start hopping. What's going on? Is there something wrong with me? Yours, terrified tadpole.

Dear terrified tadpole, there is nothing wrong with you. It's a perfectly natural thing. Everyone goes through changes as they get older, some more than others. Some of us start off life all cute and cuddly, and end up being ugly, while others start off life ugly and end up being beautiful. Unfortunately for some, they start off ugly and simply never recover, but that's another story. My advice is to relax and enjoy this stage in your life cycle. Trust me, one day you'll look back on it with fond memories. Yours, Agatha

Dear Agatha, our kids are eating us out of house and home. Literally!! My wife and I found our home in a beautiful garden. We're talking cabbages, carrots and potatoes, friendly neighbours, and even a lovely lady who comes every few days and checks that all the vegetables are ok and that the rabbit fence is still doing its job. Needless to say it wasn't long before we heard the pitter patter of tiny grubs, and for a while. Life was bliss, but now all they do is devour the cabbage walls of our home. They've turned into little beasts. What can we do with them? Yours, concerned cabbage white.

Dear concerned cabbage white, that's generally what our children do. Lounge around the house all day stuffing their face with anything that's remotely edible, thinking the good life will last forever. They will have little respect for you or the beautiful home you have provided until you kick them out on their own and they suddenly have to fend for themselves. My advice is tough love. You may think you're being too hard on them, but sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind. Yours, Agatha.

Dear Agatha, My sons are out of control! All they ever want to do is act the eejit and mess around in the water. I didn't raise such irresponsible boys. When I think of all I did for them! Looking after them when they were helpless little cubs. Trying to impart the same wise lessons my mother thought me. Tending to their every need. And what have I achieved? Nothing, only two foolish sons who take after their idiot father! How did I ever fall for such a Dog? Yours outraged otter.

Dear outraged otter, its not your fault, stupidity has a habit of being genetic, whereas nobility has to be earned. We've all been disappointed in our children at one stage or another, but generally this disappointment turns to pride as they mature, though boys generally take a good bit longer to reach any level of maturity. My advice is to keep doing your best, for the sake of the next female in their lives, if for nothing else! Yours, Agatha.

Dear Agatha, everybody keeps laughing at me and calling me a clown. Are they laughing at my beak or is it the way I walk? I have a very distinctive beak, but I always thought it gave me a flamboyant persona and I can't help but waddle! Or is it that I'm not like other birds and I made a burrow for my home instead of building a traditional nest. It's not my fault that I'm not architecturally talented. I'm very upset with the whole situation. I'm not the only one with flaws, am I? It's a horrible feeling to be ridiculed like this. If you look closely enough, you can see that I'm almost always sad. How can I go on? Yours, paranoid puffin.

Dear paranoid puffin, this is indeed a sad situation to be in. There is no excuse for anybody to belittle you or call you a clown, and you should not view these attributes as flaws, but rather as quirky benefits. We are all beautiful in our own individual ways. If you believe you are flamboyant, then you are flamboyant, so my advice is, hold your beak high and waddle on! Yours, Agatha