It's me against the mystery dawn chorus

Y ET again, I've been awoken by a bird doing an impression of a police siren and a mobile phone. It's bad enough having the yellow glare of camp security lights beaming through our married-quarter curtains without added sound effects. A dawn alarm call is quite normal for my husband, but for me, a new military bride, there's only one five o'clock in the day, and that's when Come Dine With Me is on.

'I wish that starling would shut up,' I moaned. Ed turned over and whispered: 'I think it's a blackbird, and I know a song about one.' I begged for mercy as he broke into The Wurzels' song in a full Somerset accent. It was impossible to get back to sleep, so I fired up my laptop to try to identify the noisy bird via the RSPB website. It wasn't a starling, nor a blackbird—so what was it?

6 That trumps the time you called the Rear Admiral of the Fleet "Mr Submarine Man"

On Tuesday, I travelled to the London Wetland Centre to hook up with Bill Oddie, who I met at a World Land Trust (WLT) biodiversity event. The WLT is dedicated to saving land in some of the world's most vulnerable habitats, and we're both ambassadors. Bill wanted to test my knowledge of British wildlife after I claimed, emboldened by wine, to be hot on birdwatching. Having demonstrated a good knowledge of ducks but a poor discernment of geese, I asked Bill about my annoying alarm clock. 'If it's not a starling, it could be a song thrush,' he said. My heart rose. I hoped so.

I'd hardly seen anything but corvidae since leaving Gloucestershire. 'I spotted 23 magpies in a tree when walking the dogs the other day. I only knew the rhyme up to seven,' I told Bill. 'I've since learnt up to 10. "Eight for a wish, nine for a kiss, 10 for a bird you must not miss... with a shotgun".' Bill scolded me for disliking magpies. 'They have a right to be here, too.' I agreed, but only in managed

E d and I drove to Somerset for a few days to see his parents. Given all the burst pipes 'on the patch' during the freezing weather, I thought it wise to leave the keys with a neighbour. Unfortunately, the family next door had been sent to a new posting, the Smiths had just had a baby and Diana and Daisy, opposite, were skiing. So I decided to use my initiative

numbers, or other species suffer.

and ask Tom and Sarah Gallus. I knew they were great mates with Ed, so the fact I hadn't met them didn't faze me.

I knocked on their door. Sarah readily agreed to keep an eye on our quarters, even offering to water the plants. I popped a set of keys and an invitation to Sunday lunch in an envelope. Ed picked it up.

'It's not Major Gallus; it's Major-General Gallus,' he said. 'Are you inviting them over?'

'Oh God, I've asked them to look after the house.' He rolled his eyes.

In Somerset, I received a text from Sarah saying the house was fine, but the upstairs lights had fused. Confusingly, she signed the text with Sue. I asked who Sue was. 'This is Sue Orpington,' came the reply. 'You knocked on my door and asked me to look after your house. I realised there'd been

a mix-up when we received the envelope addressed to the Galluses. LOL. Didn't think it appropriate to pass the task on!'

Who needs an alarm clock

when you have corvids

outside your window?

Ed sighed. 'Sue is the wife of Nick Orpington, a three-star general in the Paras. So, to recap, you, a lowly Lt-Col's wife, seemingly made a bit of a boob by asking a one-star general's wife to "get round your admin", but, in reality, asked a threestar general Paras' wife to do it instead. That trumps the time you called the Rear Admiral of the Fleet "Mr Submarine Man".' Ed then explained the longestablished rivalry between the Parachute Regiment and the Royal Marines. Oh...

¬ he new bird table looks like ■ a piece of modern art set against the camp razor-wire. Ed has hung extra feeders on it to create the avian equivalent of a salad bar. We sit in front of the dining-room window and wait for the birds to flock. Three magpies, two jays and four pigeons later, joy of joys, we spot a coal tit. Ed creeps away and returns with some binoculars. I watch the tit until, suddenly, everything goes blurry. I adjust the focus. All I can make out are whiskers. Of a moustache. The Orpingtons are early for lunch.

Polo-playing Gloucestershire girl Charlotte Reather and her retrievers are adjusting to life behind the razor wire

Next week: Wendy Holden