

**M**Y LITTLE lad is six years old and smart as many damn MPs. After long hours musing on the bottom step over the last year or so he's learned to listen and modify his behaviour to avoid further stints.

His big problem used to be sharing: toys, sweets, cake, attention. No longer.

Fortunately, as just as important as changing, he's never lost the ability to ask questions.

His favourite query is 'what if?'

Luckily he was tucked up in bed during the floods last Friday night.

I don't think my wife could have coped with an hour of 'what if?' as she helped our neighbours with their (ultimately losing) battle against rising flood water. "What if the rain doesn't stop?", "What if the flood reaches my bedroom?", "What if a boat hits our TV aerial?", "What if I went to school wearing a snorkel?", "What if we had submarines instead of buses", "What if we had a whale in our garden?"

I was having a tussle of my own, with the steering wheel and my dim memory of alternative routes home, as I tried several roads, finding each blocked by floods, mud and rubble or fire engines pumping out water from rapidly submerging homes.

Blissfully unaware of the trauma endured by my neighbours, I arrived home an hour late ready to tell of my nightmare commute – and found the remnants of a mini Boscastle-style flood where our road ought to be.

My wife didn't have to say anything. Her soaked and mud-stained jeans and coat were slung over a chair in the kitchen and she was slumped on the sofa drowning slowly in a bottle of wine.

"Sorry," I said, apologising for being late and unavailable either to muck in with the mud and water or keep our hysterical nine-year-old at bay.

Our daughter was upstairs, still awake. "Dad there's been a flood and there was a fire engine and Jet was barking and there was water and mud and stones and Mr G's house is all wet and so is Peggy and Ted's and Meriel's and Charity's gran's and mum was helping and I was crying and you weren't here..." The words gushed out like the torrent she'd witnessed.

She'd never seen anything like it and, more worryingly, neither had one of our neighbours who has lived all her seventy-something years in the vicinity.

That's not quite right – the born'n'bred neighbour said something similar seven or eight years ago and last year, too. She was being truthful in each occasion: storms are getting worse, she reckons.

The Herald doesn't make a habit of shoving doom'n'gloom down its readers' throats but our front page that day was as dark as the rain clouds.

The headline on the splash (sorry, that's what newspaper people call the front-page story) was 'The dying planet'.

The story underneath warned of a crisis in the variety of plant and animal life on Earth. Within 50 years the planet would be a grey monotonous place wracked by violent confrontations as nations competed for dwindling water supplies and declining natural resources, a scientist warned.

Now it's all very well for boffins in Australia and America and or even some high-powered economist in London to warn that the planet is well on the way to being wrecked by mankind.

When some scientist in Plymouth starts saying the same thing, though, I start to take notice.

Add in a rising tide of murky water at my own doorstep and I begin to think it might be serious.

The appropriate phrase is 'hitting home'.

As it happens, I wrote the story about the Plymouth scientist's warning over the biodiversity (variety of life) crisis.

I thought the sub-editors who laid out the story in the Herald did a pretty good job of delivering the shock of Professor John Spicer's message.

But you can't beat face-to-face contact. I was privileged to sit in Professor Spicer's office at the University of Plymouth as he spelled out the

# Martin Freeman



You can contact Martin Freeman by letter or email at: [mfreeman@eveningherald.co.uk](mailto:mfreeman@eveningherald.co.uk)

## Huge wave of greed will sink our planet



**FLOUNDERING:** A motorist struggles in the floods but our refusal to share threatens to unleash greater forces of nature that may destroy the planet

danger which he believes is greater than global warming.

As he ticked off the list of horrors to come – fresh water more valuable than oil, no seafood in the oceans – he became increasingly emotional.

The marine zoologist is so convinced and so worried that when he stopped he was on the point of tears.

Prof Spicer's fear rises like the flood waters because he is a father of three and he knows – *he is absolutely certain* – that his children and grandchildren will be living in a world that is very different and very dangerous.

There are many causes including pollution, over-fishing, intensive farming, unsustainable use of other natural resources such as oil, and global warming.

You could sum them up in one word: greed. At the rate we use resources, we'd need three Earths to sustain Britain's consumption.

My six-year-old has learned to share, but the rest of us clearly haven't.

We like to throw up our hands and say, "What can one person do? The politicians should act."

And politicians like to say, "What can one Government do? The global market has to react."

Perhaps I should let my lad loose in Westminster.

"What if public transport were free?"

"What if the Government said no to airport expansion and pushed the money into rail instead?"

"What if all packaging had to be minimal and recyclable?"

"What if mini wind turbines didn't carry VAT and the cost were subsidised?"

"What if all you lot do nothing and I and all my friends grow up and sort you out?"

We're going to need a very big bottom step.

■ Biodiversity – A Beginner's Guide, by Professor John Spicer is published by One World Books at £9.99

### Man pleads guilty to series of theft charges

A MAN has appeared in custody before Plymouth magistrates and pleaded guilty to making off without paying a £334 bill at a Torquay hotel on June 17.

Shane Kyle, of Wolseley Road, Ford, also pleaded guilty to stealing 400 cigarettes, worth £96, from the Spar shop in Wolseley Road on October 19.

He also admitted another shoplifting charge and failing to surrender to custody.

Kyle, 26, was given conditional bail to return to court to be sentenced on January 2.

### Royal honour for diving researcher

A RESEARCHER at the city's Diving Diseases Research Centre is to travel to Buckingham Palace today to receive the coveted British Sub-Aqua Club's Duke of Edinburgh Prize for the second time.

Marguerite St Leger Dowse has built an international reputation for her work on effects of diving on human health, including a pioneering scientific study looking at diving and the menstrual cycle.

She has also collaborated on groundbreaking research into the effects of flying and high altitude on divers treated for decompression sickness.

The award means the DDCRC, based at the Tamar Science

Park, has won the award every other year since 1995.

The Duke, a former president of the British Sub-Aqua Club, instituted an annual prize for the best underwater scientific project by a BSAC member. The Duke personally selects the winners from a shortlist.

Marguerite will be accompanied by colleagues from DDCRC when she accepts her award at the palace today.

She said: "It's a great personal honour to receive this award but, more importantly, it serves to enhance DDCRC's reputation and reinforce the work done at the charity's Hyperbaric Medical Centre by a totally dedicated team."

### Schools throw down enterprise challenge

FOUR Plymouth schools are challenging groups of students to enter the Business Adventure 2007.

Last year, the Dragons Den-style competition was won by Lipson Community College students for their 'Hand Hugz' business.

The business, producing hand and neck warmers made from performance fleece material, is still running in school where the youngsters have diversified into producing waistcoats and theatrical costumes.

The competition will see pupils go head to head with teams from 10 other schools from across Cornwall and Devon.

This year Lipson kicked off their challenge to keep the title when 40 Key Stage four students watched a theatrical performance.

The students then competed to try and convince a panel of judges of their entrepreneurial ability to run a successful business or social enterprise that will benefit their school or local community.

Debbie Sweet, the Lipson Community College teacher who mentored last year's winning group, said: "The whole process gave this group of young people loads of confidence and it has turned out to be a real inspiration for some of them."

### Seasonal fun at school's festive fair

SANTA will be putting in an early appearance at a Plymouth primary school later this week.

Plym View Primary School in Efford is holding its Christmas Fair from 3.30pm to 5.30pm on Friday, December 1.

Attractions at the school in Blandford Road are expected to include all the usual festive excitement, as well as appearances from a line-dancing group, members the local Fire Service, and of course Father Christmas himself in his grotto.