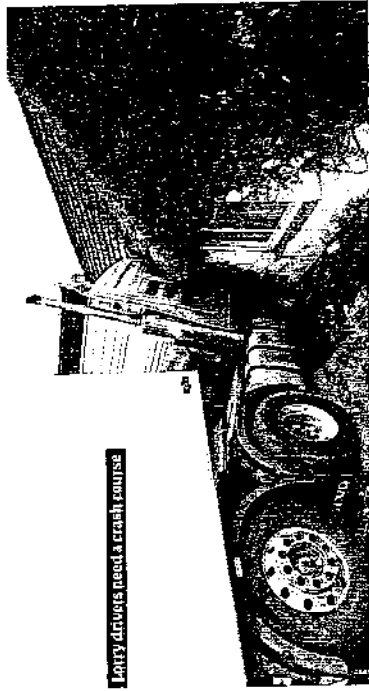


# They come... over here...

... take our jobs, eat our carp and lose all our £50 notes. They even steal our unwanted clothes. But can all that be written about eastern Europeans really be true? **Tim Dowling** looks at the outrageous claims made about Britain's newest arrivals



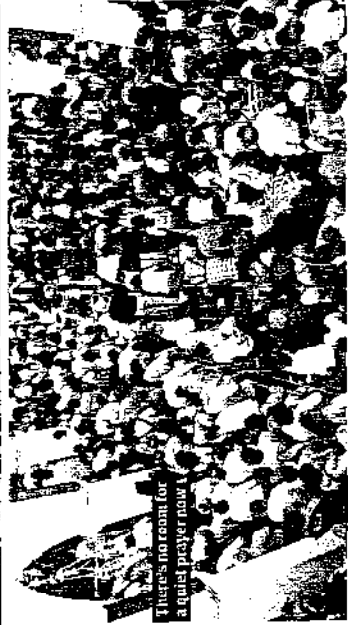
Lorry drivers react a crash course



Where have all the £50 notes gone? Back to Lithuania



You'll be lucky to find any mushrooms in our woods



There's no room for a quiet prayer now



Not even our swans are safe



The people are full of sympathy



The waitresses aren't what they used to be

**Taking all our benefits**  
Yesterday's Daily Mail announced that benefit claims by eastern Europeans had doubled in the past year, resulting in an annual payout of £1.5bn. A closer look however, reveals that well over half of this amount is child benefit, which can be claimed by anyone with a child. In fact, just over 4,000 eastern European immigrants (out of the Mail's preferred steady estimate of 743,000 in total) claimed either income support or jobseeker's allowance, 5% are on housing support and 2% claim pension credit. And the Mail has added all the claimants together (wouldn't some of the 74,850 claiming child benefit and the 1,189 on income support be the same people?) to get an inflated total of 128,592.

**Catching all our carp**  
This is becoming a bit of an annual story, largely because carp is a traditional Christmas

**dish in Poland.** Eastern Europeans are treating our British carp as a food source rather than a bit of harmless sport. Just as one sometimes hears that greedy immigrants are denuding our forests of wild mushrooms, there are claims that organised gangs armed with spear guns are fishing bin liners full of carp. These stories are always long on outraged anecdote and short on fact: a recent survey claimed that 34 out of 60 fishery owners thought theft by eastern Europeans was a bigger threat to their stocks than global warming or disease. This year, in anticipation of a yuletide lish of eastern European carp poaching, the Fisheries and Angling Conservation Trust has produced a sign which explains Britain's catch-and-release tradition in three bold graphics: Don't Spear the Carp, Don't Cook the Carp and Don't Dare the Carp.

**Since the first immigrants from the new European Union member states of the old Eastern bloc arrived in 2000 (actually, from before that, when they were known collectively in the tabloids as "bogus asylum seekers"), eastern Europeans - Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Slovaks, et al - have been blamed for virtually every crisis that has beset this nation, and a good few that haven't. Many of these problems have been proven not to be their fault, some have proven not to be problems, but a lot of the myths and rumours still persist. Here, then, are just a few of the things the tabloids have blamed eastern Europeans for recently.**



Who's the cop? (1) Street evangelist

### Stealing our unwanted clothes

Recent reports have told of "Lithuanian gangs" who distribute fake charity leaders door-to-door asking householders for old clothes, implying that they will be shipped to the third world and sold to poor people, when in reality they are shipped to eastern Europe and sold to poor people. Some of the gangs are so ruthless that they steal clothes left out for legitimate charities, leading one, Clothes Aid, to place tracking devices in the bags. And some say they even take clothes out of recycling bins. Stealing our recycling? What next?

### Eating our swans

Well, they're the Queen's swans really, though she has yet to make an official claim. In August, however, according to a report in the Daily Mail, the Luton Angling Club felt moved to produce a sign which communicated the message: "The swans are not for eating" in pictographic form. There is no evidence that an eastern European has ever eaten a British swan, or indeed that these signs were ever posted anywhere. The Sun was roundly criticised in 2003 for a story about eastern European "asylum seekers" eating swans, which proved to be a curiously factless evocation of a weary urban myth.

### The recent increase in corporation tax for small businesses

When the then-chancellor Gordon Brown faced the Treasury select committee last March, he asked him why he had chosen to increase tax on small firms from 19p to 20p (rising to 22p by 2009) when he had seen fit to lower the tax on larger businesses from

30p to 28p. In his defence Brown cited a rash of "schemes that have been marketed right across eastern Europe" which encouraged individuals from those countries to set up as companies before they came to Britain in order to avoid paying income tax. In other words, foreigners were being appraised of an existing legal loophole which previously only British people knew about. They've come over here and spoiled it for everyone.

### A shortage of £50 notes

Apparently, Poles working in Britain sent almost 800 million of their families - instead of spending it here! - in the first quarter of 2007. A good deal of this was said to be in

cash, and a good deal of that cash is assumed to be in the form of £50 notes, hence the shortage. That is why you never see them anymore. And you thought it was because bank machines didn't issue them and cab drivers didn't take them.

### A sharp rise in hate crimes in Scotland

Polish bar workers have been blamed for a two-fold increase in the number of racist incidents in Scotland, largely by being victims of them. Eastern European bar staff and doormen are now among the most common victims of racial abuse and assault in Edinburgh.

### Increased unemployment

Last August, the Daily Express blamed the "flood of workers from eastern Europe" for unemployment figures that had reached their highest level for six years, after a rise of 52,000 over the previous quarter brought the jobless total to 1.68 million. A year on, and still they are flooding in, and unemployment has, erm, fallen back to 1.67 million.

### Bad service in restaurants

This one comes from chef Antony Worrall Thompson, who claimed that immigration had resulted in "appalling" service in British restaurants. "Lots of people from eastern Europe and elsewhere come here and work in restaurants," he said, "without having the level of English or the skills they should have."

### Drunk driving

In March, the Daily Mail reported that "in some areas" of Scotland, "more than half"

## Eastern Europeans are accused of driving as they would at home, despite Poland having the strictest drink driving laws in Europe

of motorists stopped during police crackdowns in eastern Europe, without saying in which area, "how many people were stopped, or whether they were actually drunk. It did, however, list three examples of Poles arrested for drink driving, including one who was four times the legal limit. Eastern Europeans are sometimes accused of behaving as they would at home on the roads, but Poland has the strictest drink-driving laws in Europe, so perhaps they were just trying to adapt to Scottish custom.

### Car crashes

The sharp increase in cross-border driving since EU expansion has led to a corresponding rise in foreign vehicles being involved in accidents on British roads - an alarming 47% rise over five years. The number of crashes involving Polish drivers has risen from 361 in 2001 to 3,132 in 2006, but it is hard to tell how much of this increase is due to the increase in the number of Polish drivers. Lithuanians have had a 745-fold increase in accidents over five years - from 1 to 745.

### Driving down wages

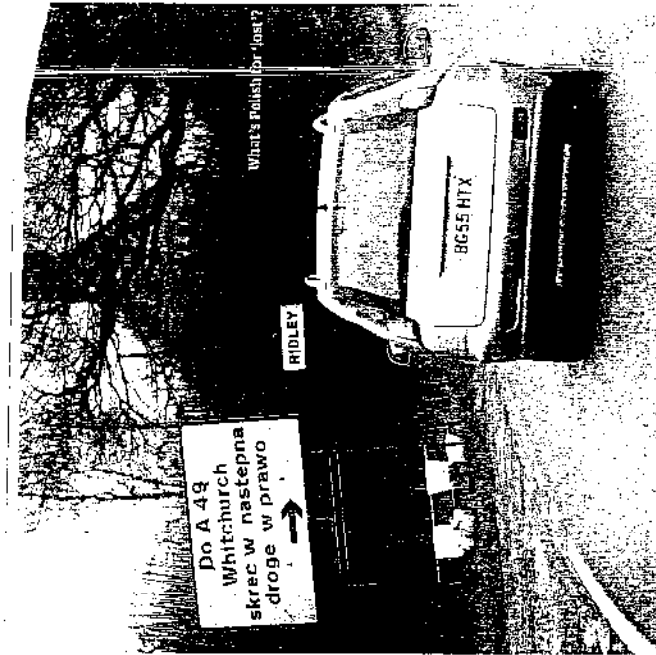
According to Professor David Blanchflower, of the bank of England's monetary policy committee, "fear of unemployment" (measured by asking how they expect the number of unemployed to change), which has increased over the past year (although unemployment hasn't), has a "downward impact on pay" equivalent to a reduction in annual pay rise of £210 for someone earning £9,000. He appears to be saying that workers are willing to accept less money because they are afraid they are going to be replaced by migrants. What about robots? What happened to being replaced by robots?

### The rise of the far right

Hostility to eastern European immigration has been seized upon by the RNP, which has made it a campaign issue, particularly in rural areas. Meanwhile, cells of racist Polish nationalists in London are being supported by migrants in London are being supported by "British nationalist and Nazi groups," according to one Warsaw academic. There seems to be some sort of communication problem. Can the racists not make up their minds?

### Groping women

Last November, a Polish immigrant named Thomasz Stepiowski was arrested for groping nine women. In his defence he claimed that he hadn't realised that he had done anything wrong, because such behaviour was normal in his country. During his police interview, his female interpreter backed him up, pointing out that in Poland such behaviour wasn't strictly illegal. An epidemic of



What's Polish for 'fish'?

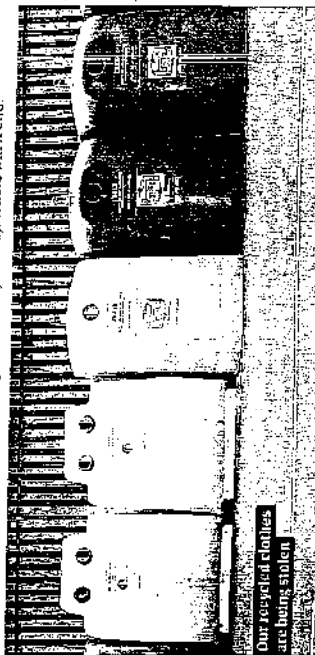
eastern European public-fondling failed to materialise, however, and Stepiowski gave up his word defence in favour of admitting four counts of sexual assault.

### Cheap guns, cheaper heroin and counterfeit money

We were promised all three would arrive in bulk as soon as Bulgaria entered the EU and vicious gangsters poured over the border. It would be like living in an airport novel. It was also alleged that thousands of pregnant women would be smuggled into the UK to give birth in NHS hospitals before selling their babies. It's almost time for the year-end tally. How many smuggled Bulgarian babies have been sold so far? Should the NHS get a cut?

### Road signs in Polish

When they first appeared in Cheshire, they were denounced as another example of political correctness gone mad, according



Our respect clothes are being stolen

### Overcrowding in churches

Once you could always find a seat in a British Catholic church - sometimes you had a whole pew to yourself. Now they're packed every Sunday. Where will it end?