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On the fourth day of Christmas... [1]

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My true love sent to me: four calling (or colly) birds, which in A Partridge in a Pear Tree are said represent the four gospels or the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Emvironmentalists have been very agitated of late by the government's plans to build a barrage over the estuary of the River Severn, in order to generate power from tidal movements. The argument is that the estuary is home to many species of wading and migrating birds, who could no longer survive there.

Birds aren't actually as dim as we think, and if they lose one habitat I've no doubt that they will fly off and find another. But the barrage idea is pretty bird-brained in that the amount of power that it would actually generate is tiny in relation to its cost, including the largely unknowable costs of maintenance. An even more bird-brained plan emerged last week - a massive programme to build offshore wind farms that might produce up to 20% of the UK's electricity within just a few years. When you look at the sums it means building and installing two generators the size of the London Eye every day, but politicians were never very good at questions of feasibility (or cost - remember the Scottish Parliament).

Frankly, these renewable energy sources are viable only because of the £1bn or so electricity customers are forced to stump up for the 'renewables obligation'. Though I'm not sure whether marine installations will ever be viable (how do you even get to them when they need a spot of oil? And who's going to pay for strengthening the grid to take all this extra power they're supposed to generate. And when we've all got our turkeys in the oven and the wind isn't blowing, what then?). We'd be better, cheaper and cleaner building new nuclear power stations. There - I've said it. Otherwise, a light near you will be going out soon.

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