

Wildlife Gardening Forum



Newsletter: June 2010

PLEASE – send me your news and articles for the next Newsletter!!

Forum News – call for Steering Group Volunteers

Hope you like the new Forum logo. I am very pleased to announce we have been given core funding through Natural England's Big Wildlife Garden and from the Countryside Council for Wales, to continue for a further year, with strong hopes of two more. During the next year we must decide where to go with the Forum, what its Vision is to be, set realistic targets in the shorter term and create a Business Plan.

The Steering Group for the Forum meets 4 times a year, usually at the London offices of Natural England. We would like to **invite one or more Forum Members to join and strengthen the Steering Group**. There are no specific criteria, but we need people with a passion for communicating wildlife gardening, and a readiness to help move Forum projects onwards by themselves or through their organisations. At present the Steering Group consists of:

Helen Bostock	RHS, leading the Plants for Bugs Project
Simon Davies	Sevenoaks Council
Pete Frost	Countryside Council for Wales
Chris Gibson	Natural England (Chair)
(other Natural England Staff often attend meetings)	
Steve Head	Forum Coordinator
Ken Thompson	Consultant Garden Ecologist
Caroline Ware	Natural History Museum Wildlife Garden
Amanda Morgan	People and Wildlife Officer RSWT (standing in for Laura Brook)

The areas of expertise currently unrepresented include the gardening media, the horticultural industry, gardening and health, and the sustainable building industry. A practical experience of business planning and fund raising would also be very useful. If you would like to help move the Forum onwards, please contact me by email or phone (see the end of the newsletter) to discuss what would be involved.

Natural England's Big Wildlife Garden Website.

We are very grateful, not only for the support the Big Wildlife Garden (BWG) is giving the forum, but also for its willingness to let Forum Members suggest ways of making the site better and more useful for all visitors. With the help of Natural England we have been able to update the Forum pages, accessible from the BWG front page or at www.naturalengland.org.uk/advice/wildlifegardening/forum.aspx. These now have simple links to all organisations represented in the Forum Membership. **Please check that these links work properly, and let me know if there are errors.** *What other Forum information would you like to see on the site?*

The Big Wildlife Garden is growing! From Jim Burt and Dan Healy, NE.

The Wildlife Gardening Forum was instrumental in testing the Big Wildlife Garden (BWG), and helped us to launch it back in September 2009. Since its launch, the site has grown considerably and now has more than **2,000 members** including nearly **1,000 schools**, 500 taking part in our national schools competition. The BWG (www.bwg.naturalengland.org.uk) is also proving a hit with community groups and we've lots of scout troops registering their grounds as part of gaining their Natural England sponsored Naturalist badge and hopefully their Big Wildlife Garden Green Garden Award too.

With your help - after all, you're the experts! - we want the BWG to now become *the* portal for everything you need to know about wildlife in your garden and what you can do to make it a greener place.

With an initial focus on children, our next generation of green-fingered champions, we want to expand and promote the benefits of doing something for wildlife in your garden, balcony or patio to everyone wherever you may live – anyone can catch the wildlife gardening bug. In fact, over fifty per cent of our members are private gardeners eager to learn more about wildlife gardening.

As members of the Wildlife Gardening Forum, you know the benefits of gardening and giving wildlife a helping hand along the way, but we can do more together to encourage and support new gardeners.

Many of you will already have your own excellent programmes and reward schemes in place and we'd like to help you to promote your offer to the wildlife garden community through the BWG site. We've already done this very successfully with a number of partners, big and small, including Eco-schools, EDF Energy's The Pod, Beekeepers Association, Plantlife, Kew Gardens, RSPB and the Scouts.

So, if you have any new offers, events or information that you would like us to promote through the BWG site, please send them to headgardener@naturalengland.org.uk. We would also really like to receive your feedback and suggestions as to how we can improve the site.

Help your garden spring to life – Natural England Press release

Natural England's Big Wildlife Garden website is giving a helping hand for wildlife this spring and summer through a school competition to encourage wildlife friendly gardening

The weather is warming up and insects and birds are back and waiting to be invited to wildlife havens around the country. Natural England is working with schools to encourage wildlife friendly gardening this summer with the Big Wildlife Garden - a budding wildlife friendly gardening website. Since the website's launch in September 2009 it has reached over 30,000 children from over 1,000 schools, getting kids outdoors and creating wildlife friendly gardens across the country.

So far over half of these schools are taking part in a competition to find the best school garden in England. The competition is well underway and it is time to get the trowels out for the final touches in the race to the finish line.

Schools have until 9 July 2010 to make as many wildlife-friendly improvements as possible to their garden or green space. Children can create a wildflower meadow, build a pond and install nests for bumble bees – whatever it takes to collect enough points to reach the Gold or Green Award level. Your school may already have what it takes to qualify - does your garden have any attractive, innovative features or an array of flowers and plantlife? A few simple steps could put you in the running for this prestigious garden award.

Poul Christensen, Chair of Natural England, said: “The number of schools we have engaged through the Big Wildlife Garden is really encouraging. Bringing education outdoors to promote wildlife friendly gardening not only gets kids outside, enjoying the fresh air and learning about the importance of our natural environment, it provides much needed support for biodiversity. Gardening in a wildlife-friendly way can considerably increase the diversity of plants and animals and create an oasis for species in decline such as hedgehogs, holly blue butterflies, song thrushes, bumble bees and stag beetles.”

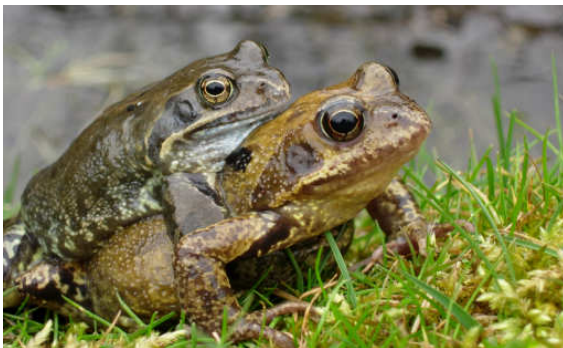
Poul Christensen continued: “The Big Wildlife Garden aims to inspire children to enjoy the natural world and learn how to enrich outdoor spaces. Natural England’s *Big Wildlife Garden* website is the perfect place for children to learn how to invite wildlife into even the most humble garden this summer.”

Entries to the ‘*Big Wildlife Garden, School of the Year*’ competition close on 9 July 2010 – ENTER NOW AT: www.bwg.naturalengland.org.uk/news/show/2

Pond Conservation’s Big Pond Thaw Survey Results

(adapted from the Pond Conservation Website at

www.pondconservation.org.uk/aboutus/News/latestnews/bigpondthawsurveyresults)



The winter of 2009/10 was the hardest for 30 years in the United Kingdom, and many ponds froze for much longer than usual, with ice cover persisting for a month or more in many places. As the ice melted, Pond Conservation started to receive reports from distressed pond owners about dead amphibians, mainly frogs that had been over-wintering in their ponds.

We already had evidence that the usual advice given to protect wildlife in garden ponds in cold weather – ‘make a hole in the ice’ – was having little effect. So we asked Pond Conservation’s supporters, and other pond lovers, to tell us more about their ponds during the freezing weather.

Most respondents found less than ten dead frogs. However, a few people found very large numbers of dead amphibians, and the worst case was 300 individual frogs in a single medium-sized garden pond.

Holes in the ice?

The results showed that making a hole in the ice didn't make any difference to the likelihood of mortalities, 63% of ponds where a hole was made suffered deaths compared with 64% where no hole was made. The same was true for fish mortality.

Clearing snow?

Detailed studies of one of our garden ponds showed that a blanket of snow can seriously reduce oxygen levels, and snow clearance can reverse this. However, across the survey as a whole, clearing snow did not appear to affect the likelihood of amphibian deaths. This may be because only a small number of people cleared snow – so there is little information to work with. But it's perhaps more likely that snow clearance only works where ponds have lots of plants under the ice to produce oxygen when the snow is cleared back.

Running a pump?

Running a pump did seem to reduce the likelihood of amphibian deaths, although as with the snow clearing, there were only a small number of ponds with pumps so the result should be treated with caution.

Oxygen levels in the water

There is a hint that more amphibians died in deeper ponds, and in ponds where the snow lay for longer. Fewer amphibians were found dead where a pump was run, and/or where there was a greater variety of wetland plant types. Overall these results suggest that many deaths in garden ponds are probably associated with lack of oxygen in the water, although at this stage we can't rule out build-up of toxic gases as a contributory factor.

The Big Pond Thaw survey doesn't tell us what proportion of ponds suffered amphibian mortalities because people who found dead amphibians were more likely to reply than those with no problems. However, detailed surveys of ponds in Abingdon, suggests that amphibian mortalities occurred in about a quarter of garden ponds.

Practical implications of the survey

- Ponds shouldn't be too deep for their surface area. Shallow ponds – less than 30 cm are more likely to have higher oxygen levels in the water which helps amphibians, so a good pond shape is wide and shallow – a saucer rather than a tank. This is the exact opposite of the standard advice, that 'ponds should be deep to protect them from freezing solid'.
- A large build-up of leaves and sediment on the pond bottom is probably not good news – almost certainly because this de-oxygenates water. This is especially a problem in small but deep ponds.
- Having plenty of plants in the pond throughout the winter is a good way of improving oxygenation. Underwater plants, including mosses (which don't die-back in winter) are ideal, although it's worth remembering that algae, both filamentous and unicellular (the sort that colour the water pea-green) also produce oxygen.

- There's no evidence that making holes in the ice, or breaking the ice, can prevent amphibian deaths. This is not surprising, as most amphibians hibernate at the bottom of ponds. Oxygen diffuses very slowly into undisturbed water.
- BUT - If you have a pump, and you think the pond might have low oxygen levels, it is worth making a surface hole and keeping the pump running so that the water is stirred up – this can move oxygen from the surface to deeper waters. A shallow pond with lots of underwater plants won't need a pump.
- If the pond freezes and then snow falls on top of the ice, clearing some snow off the ice to make a 'sunlight-hole' can help. But this is only likely to work if your pond has lots of underwater plants (or algae) which can then oxygenate the water.

The full Big Pond Thaw Survey report is at:

www.pondconservation.org.uk/Resources/Pond%20Conservation/Documents/PDF/Big%20Pond%20Thaw%20Report%20-%20-%20March%202010%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf



National Insect Week

The Royal Entomological Society is organising National Insect Week, with 28 partner organisations giving people the chance to learn more about the insect world in all its fascinating diversity. Visit www.nationalinsectweek.co.uk to find out about the impressive range of surveys, events, activities and advice available throughout the country.

An uncertain future for our wildlife?

www.froglife-frogbites.blogspot.com/2010/05/uncertain-future-for-our-wildlife.html

Froglife was delighted to hear that many new MPs are from the charitable sector. But with no representation from wildlife NGOs, and the potential for the coalition to repeal the hunting ban and reintroduce badger culls in England, just how committed is the new government to protecting wildlife?

The coalition's policy states: "*We will introduce measures to protect wildlife and promote green spaces and wildlife corridors in order to halt the loss of habitats and restore biodiversity.*" It remains to be seen just what these measures will be.

"The work of some of our colleagues within the wildlife sector looks like it's about to get a lot more challenging, even those working with the traditionally more popular animals than our species," says Kathy Wormald, Froglife's CEO. "I hope the new government puts its money where its mouth is, and that the good work we have all been part of in pushing wildlife conservation and outdoor education up the agenda continues to develop."

Wildlife lover and Liberal Democrat deputy leader on Peterborough council, Cllr Nick Sandford, is optimistic. "There is a lot of good stuff coming out of the government of potential benefit to wildlife, including tree planting, habitat protection, and devolution of power to local authorities," said Nick. "There are also a number of new commissions to look into various more contentious issues, so let's hope they deliver results."

Why not contact your MP to find out how they stand on the issues that affect our wildlife, and ask about their visions for the future of biodiversity? You can find your MP's details at www.direct.gov.uk/en/Di011/DoItOnline/DG_4018047
(Yes that really IS DOLTonline – Ed.)

*In opposition, several conservative MPs backed the protection of garden space from over-development. Now in government, will they take action?
The much advertised deep cuts in government spending, and the “Bonfire of the Quangos” are inevitably going to fall heavily on those important areas like biodiversity traditionally at the “softer” edge of spending where cuts will not irritate as many voters as in for example the NHS. We are all going to have to shout very loudly to make sure that sustainability and conservation don't suffer disproportionate cuts.
Steve Head*

Scotland's Garden for Life Forum

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/about-scotlands-nature/habitats-and-ecosystems/greenspaces-and-gardens/wildlife-in-gardens-and-allotments/garden-for-life-forum>



Garden for Life is a partnership of 20 organisations working in Scotland. It is a close parallel to (and predates) the Wildlife Gardening Forum. Its key aims are similar :

- To increase enjoyment and understanding of biodiversity
- To support action by gardeners for the benefit of Scotland's biodiversity.
- To promote the benefits of gardening for health and well being

Forum organisations meet on a regular basis to agree plans and strategies, share information and to work together on projects. They have produced a series of six free Garden for Life leaflets which are distributed to the public both through garden centre plant promotions, as well as at shows, schools, community events etc. They are also available to download:

- [Garden for Life](#)
- [Garden for butterflies](#)
- [Garden for birds](#)
- [Garden for life in pots and containers](#)
- [Garden for Food](#)
- [Garden without peat](#)

For further information or advice on Garden for Life please contact Naomi Knights (0131 623 7058). To obtain leaflets please contact Pam Moncur at Scottish Natural Heritage on 01738 444177.

Juniper – down the hatch?

Plantlife has launched a new project and survey to halt the decline of the wild plant that gave gin its name and distinctive flavour.



Juniper berries © Andrew Gagg/Plantlife

Juniper is an important part of our ancient landscape and culture – one of the first trees to colonise Britain after the last Ice Age - but today it is in serious trouble.

Juniper has steadily declined over the last few decades, and many counties in southern England have lost 60-70 per cent of their juniper populations. This spring, Plantlife is launching a new conservation project and survey across the lowlands of England to help save this charismatic species.

“Without action now, juniper faces extinction across much of lowland England by 2060,” says Tim Wilkins, Plantlife’s Species Recovery

Coordinator. “The loss of juniper would represent more than the loss of a single species: it supports more than 40 species of insect and fungus that cannot survive without it. The special conditions thought to be necessary for juniper seeds to germinate are also beneficial to a host of other wild plants, many of which are also under threat. By focusing on the habitat, our new project aims to help many of these species too.”

A Plantlife survey of 44,000 upland junipers in Scotland, North Wales, Cumbria and Northumberland in 2004-5 found that many populations were small and ageing, with only 13% of sites having juniper seedlings present. ‘Sex ratios need improving’ was an unusual conclusion of the report, as the isolation of male and female juniper bushes could severely limit pollination. The situation is made worse as most juniper stands comprise old bushes of similar age. Although these populations can persist for a long time, they can decline quite suddenly when all bushes start to die of old age at around the same time.

A new public survey has been launched covering lowland England to provide an up-to-date picture of juniper sites. You can download a survey form by going to visiting www.plantlife.org.uk/uploads/documents/24502_JUNIPERSURVEYcor_.pdf

There are 41 species/varieties of Juniperus listed in the RHS Plantfinder, and they are popular garden plants. It would be interesting to look into the potential role of juniper in gardens in supporting associated species declining with wild juniper in the countryside. Ed.

Pony paddocks and flower-rich wild meadows www.floralocale.org

Pony paddocks may be beyond the reach of most wildlife gardeners, but usually sell with a house as an extension of the garden. For those lucky enough to own one, Flora Locale has produced an important new guide to management, which emphasises the benefits of diverse flower-rich meadows for horses as well as wildlife.

Unlike productive cattle, horses require a high fibre and low protein diet, so there are many advantages to grazing them on wild flower-rich meadows. The herbaceous wild flowers stay more digestible for longer in the season than do grasses, while some of the herbs have medicinal properties that will benefit health.

Grasslands containing a good diversity of wild flowers are also higher in fibre and lower in sugar, protein and calories than paddocks that have been resown with conventional ryegrass and white clover forage seed mixes. Wild meadows more closely resemble the original grasslands that equines, especially native breeds, are adapted to, so it isn't surprising that the risk of obesity and laminitis is likely to be lower in these near-wild grasslands.

London Schools can win a wildlife garden worth £10,000 – act soon!

Funded by the Veolia Environnement Fondation, The Veolia Wild Green Schools project is encouraging primary schools to create or improve wildlife areas in their school grounds.

All primary schools in Hackney, Islington, Camden, Southwark, Lambeth, Richmond, Newham and Lewisham can enter a competition to win a wildlife garden worth £10,000. They have until 24th June to create a garden design that will improve biodiversity in the school grounds and provide an outdoor classroom for school teachers and pupils. Schools are strongly encouraged to involve pupils in the design.



The winning design will be chosen by London Wildlife Trust and Veolia Environmental Services and constructed by Veolia. For details go to:

www.wildlondon.org.uk/Portals/0/News/tabid/71/mid/414/newsid414/195/Default.aspx

Foxcam at the Natural History Museum

The children's section of the NHM's website now has a live webcam to watch a family of fox cubs that have settled into the Museum's Wildlife Garden, underneath a garden shed.

Go to: www.nhm.ac.uk/kids-only/naturecams/foxcam/

Forum Members win Gold at Chelsea Flower Show

In the last newsletter it was revealed that the Forum Member Thrive was submitting a garden for this year's Chelsea Show. Thrive is a small national charity, founded in 1978, that uses gardening to change the lives of disabled people.



Thrive's garden won a Gold Medal, and was the Best in Show for the Urban Garden class.

“The Unexpected Gardener” is a small urban garden created by Thrive with award-winning designer Jo Thompson, which demonstrates how the charity helps people with disabilities change their lives through gardening. Both practical and restful, this garden shows that age and disability are no barrier to gardening, and incorporates raised planter beds for ease of access, an outdoor fireplace, fountain and a seating area, whilst the trees offer support and shade.



On the RHS website, Chris Young & Phil Clayton of The Garden magazine described it as

“Great little garden with lovely planting. Raised planters are vivid white and quite stark, but the planting really helps soften it. The seating area in the corner gives a focus to the space and makes it feel homely, while the white slatted area makes it seem much bigger. The two large multi-stemmed prunus serrula, with beautiful coppersy bark, have been toned in brilliantly with the rest of the planting.”

Meanwhile, Capel Manor College was associated with three medal-winning gardens.



“The Upwardly Mobile Garden” by John Woods Nurseries & Capel Manor College won Gold for a garden designed for a “garden belonging to a young professional couple who have bought their first home together and who have invested in their garden to improve the value of their property.

Capel Manor College also won a Silver Lindley Medal for its display **“Plants against crime”** in the Continual Learning section, showing how greening urban areas can reduce crime rates. The College claims recent research shows that estates with good tree cover often have 50% less crime than estates without trees.

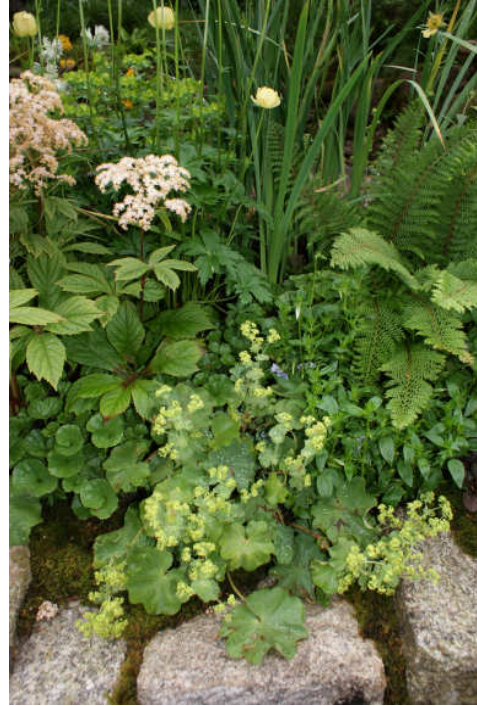
Former Capel Manor College design students Patricia Thirion and Janet Honour won a Bronze Medal for their design **“Christian Before Dior”**, inspired by the Pool Garden at Les Rhumbs, Dior’s childhood home in Granville, Normandy. Dior shared a love of plants with his mother, and as a 15 year old boy he designed the pergola, ornamental pool and furniture for their garden. He went on to revolutionise the fashion world by creating the New Look in 1947. The features designed by the young Christian are reinterpreted here; true to the original, the planting is full of fragrance.

And Finally

I have been rather quiet in the last month, because I too was part of a team creating a garden at Chelsea this year. The Two Moors Festival Garden **“Music on the Moors”** was designed by Christina Williams, and supported in part by the Exmoor and Dartmoor National Park Authorities. As well as music, it celebrated the natural beauty of the moors, and of the moisture loving naturalistic wildlife-friendly planting common in Moorland valley gardens. As such it certainly represented a highly wildlife friendly garden, and was continually visited by a hen blackbird and a robin, even during the height of the show crowds.

We won a Gold Medal, and like Thrive, Best in Show in our category. On the RHS website, Chris Young & Phil Clayton of The Garden magazine described it as:

“This is a beautiful, beautiful garden with very interesting planting. There’s a wind-blown and gnarled specimen hawthorn in the middle, and very naturalistic planting. A purple-leaved hazel, Corylus avellana ‘Purpurea’, and a few ferns sober the colours a little. Overall the garden has a really serene, tranquil feel.”



Moorland wild planting, and naturalistic garden planting in the “Music on the Moors” garden



Robin bathing in the stream in the Moors Garden, hoping Alan Titchmarsh or Rachel de Thame were watching.

Please! Don't forget to send articles and news about Wildlife Gardening to Steve Head at wlgf@stephenmhead.com or call 07923 473907