

## Forum for Gardening with Wildlife in Mind

Forum Newsletter: May 2009

Welcome to the latest Forum Newsletter, and many thanks to the people who responded to my call for “copy” after the very successful Forum Meeting at the London Natural History Museum in March.

This Spring has been as beautiful as any I can remember, after the first decent winter for many years, and today the Met Office are suggesting a phew-wot-a-scorcher summer to follow. I hope you have had plenty of time out in your wildlife-rich gardens. I have recently moved into a house with a somewhat neglected garden near Abingdon, and it has been a huge pleasure to see a succession of carpets of spring flowers. The best year for snowdrops I can remember, then primroses in abundance, wood anemones, bluebells and now ladies smock. If there was ever an argument for allowing biodiversity to thrive in your lawn, this has been it. And this morning, I saw the first Speckled Wood butterfly sunning itself on a primrose leaf.



Ladies Smock *Cardamine pratensis*  
Both taken in my garden this April

Wood anemone - *Anemone nemorosa*

I am working on the date for the next full Forum meeting, almost certainly back at the Natural History Museum, in either late September, or more likely mid November. As soon as the date is fixed I will let you all know. Meanwhile, if anyone (other than those who have already volunteered) would like to give a presentation – especially of a good case-study, please get in touch and I will put you on the growing list.

Likewise, I will send out further newsletters as the copy accumulates, so PLEASE send me your news – including if you wish photos and logos. I would also welcome any suggestions about the newsletter and how to improve it, but its future ultimately depends on you providing me with material!

Steve Head [shead@stephenmhead.com](mailto:shead@stephenmhead.com)

## Cheshire Wildlife Trust's Wildlife Friendly Garden Award Scheme

Cheshire Wildlife Trust has launched a Wildlife Friendly Garden Award Scheme for Cheshire residents. Householders submit photographic evidence of wildlife friendly features in their garden, and are awarded Bronze, Silver or Gold awards depending on the number of features provided.

Bronze            4 features, at least one from each column below  
 Silver            8 or more features, at least 2 from each column  
 Gold              12 or more features, at least 3 from each column

| HABITATS                          | PLANTING                   | MANAGEMENT                        |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Wildlife Pond                     | Wild flower Meadow / patch | Compost Heap / bin                |
| Bog or permanently wet area       | Climbing plants/Trellises  | Long Grass area                   |
| Bird Bath                         | Nectar rich flowers        | Avoid pesticides & slug pellets   |
| Bird Box                          | Mixed Native Hedge         | Avoid chemical weedkillers        |
| Log pile / Dead wood              | Vegetable patch            | Use Peat free composts            |
| Invertebrate habitat              | Berry-bearing shrubs       | Use a water butt / recycled water |
| Green roof on shed or outbuilding | Fruit tree or bush         | Use organic mulch                 |
| Bird feeding station              | Mature tree                |                                   |
|                                   | Drought-resistant plants   |                                   |

Hyperlinks on the web page from each feature lead to useful short explanations and links to information sheets.

To receive the awards printed or emailed photos must be provided. Entrants receive:

- Free downloadable advice from the website
- Plaque to display in the garden
- Award certificate
- Seasonal e-newsletter containing gardening tips
- Your garden included in the Cheshire Living Landscapes map
- Garden wildlife recording card

Full details are at: [www.cheshirewildlifetrust.co.uk/garden\\_awards.htm](http://www.cheshirewildlifetrust.co.uk/garden_awards.htm)

Mark Sparrow of Chester Zoo (who sent in details of the scheme – thanks Mark) says that Chester Zoo has applied and received a Gold Award and will be publicising the scheme with the CWT at their Plant Conservation Day event on May 17th.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust is also running a “wildlife friendly garden planter” competition with cash prizes, to make the point that even small gardens or window boxes have a value. They are challenging gardeners across Cheshire to pack as many wildlife friendly features as they can into a 50x50cm planter! The most Wildlife Friendly miniature garden will be taken to the RHS Show at Tatton Park in July.

The competition rules are at :

[www.cheshirewildlifetrust.co.uk/documents/Planter\\_competition\\_entry\\_rules.pdf](http://www.cheshirewildlifetrust.co.uk/documents/Planter_competition_entry_rules.pdf)

## Amphibian charity says “Just Add Water”

Pond numbers in the UK’s countryside have dropped sharply, but **Just Add Water**, a new campaign launched by Froglife, is hoping to help lessen the impact to Britain’s biodiversity by encouraging people to dig ponds closer to homes, in the UK’s towns and cities.



These new ponds, it is hoped, will provide new breeding places for some of the UK’s widespread amphibians, many of which are thought to be disappearing in some regions. Some species, like the Common Frog and Smooth Newt, are known to colonise new ponds quickly if present locally. Common Toad is also known to frequent garden ponds, particular larger ones. Yet many of these species are disappearing from sites across the UK, often driven by loss of crucial breeding ponds. The Common Toad is now listed on the Government’s

Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) ‘watchlist’ due to recent declines.

**Just Add Water** will provide information to the public on how to build ponds, through a new advice booklet and website at [www.froglife.org/justaddwater](http://www.froglife.org/justaddwater) .

“85% of the UK population have gardens, and many of these can be made frog-friendly by adding a pond.” said Daniel Piec, Froglife’s Head of Conservation. “Within months, ponds often become an oasis for local wildlife – providing feeding and breeding grounds for a host of amphibians, and many important invertebrates, mammals and birds.”

The **Just Add Water** campaign is centred on a new booklet called ‘**Just Add Water – how to build a wildlife pond**’. The free booklet offers advice on a variety of subjects: from what shape to dig, how deep to go, and where to get the water; to technical advice on making ponds safe for young children.

The **Just Add Water** campaign is supported by a number of organisations including The Environment Agency, the UK government agency concerned mainly with flood risk and water resource management and environmental protection, but which also has a key role to play in promoting conservation of water and wetland wildlife.

Alastair Driver, the National Conservation Manager for the Agency said “Ponds are very special places for wildlife and for people, but so many have fallen rapidly into disrepair due to bad design. The expert guidance in this excellent leaflet can change all that, and we are sure it will ‘spawn’ many new frog habitats that are built to last!”

For further details on **Just Add Water** visit: <http://www.froglife.org/justaddwater>

## HCT and Froglife to merge

Two long-term Wildlife Gardening Forum members, The Herpetological Conservation Trust and Froglife have announced their intention to merge, forming one single strong conservation NGO.

The new organisation will be called the **Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust** and will continue the range of activities currently undertaken by Froglife and the HCT, while providing a stronger basis for conserving amphibians and reptiles in the future.

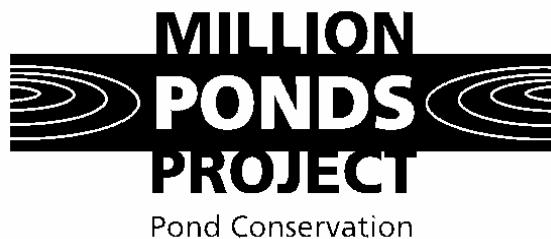
Both Froglife and The HCT have worked closely on key issues in recent years, including the Government's Biodiversity Action Plans, on issues like amphibian disease and on advice and guidance for the public and land-managers. Throughout this time it has become increasingly clear that the two organisations could be many times more effective if united as a single organisation with the full range of skills and projects that could not be achieved in any other manner.

Although the decision has been made to merge, the details, and timescales, of the necessary processes have not been finalised. While this is happening, the two charities will continue to exist as separate entities but will be working increasingly closely with each other to a common set of goals. *[With charities increasingly under financial pressure, and to avoid duplication of effort, it would be good to see more of the smaller environmental charities getting together in this way – Ed]*

Websites: [www.herpconstrust.org.uk](http://www.herpconstrust.org.uk) and [www.froglife.org](http://www.froglife.org)

### **Pond Conservation (1) – The Million Pond Project**

Pond Conservation recently launched the **Million Pond Project** which aims to create an extensive network of new ponds across the UK, reversing a century of pond loss, and ensuring that once again the UK has over one million countryside ponds.



A critical element of the project is that these new ponds will have clean water. This is important because most countryside ponds are now badly damaged by pollution, and evidence shows that pond wildlife is declining across the UK. Making clean new ponds is one of the simplest and most effective ways to protect freshwater wildlife.

Phase 1 of the Million Ponds Project runs from 2008 to 2012 and aims to create the first 5,000 clean water ponds in the countryside of England and Wales. Around a quarter of the ponds will be targeted to support some of the 80 or so pond species that are national priorities for conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan

The Million Ponds Project is a collaboration of major landowners and land managers, co-ordinated by Pond Conservation. Partner organisations including Defence Estates, the Environment Agency, RSPB, Ministry of Justice and the Forestry Commission are creating hundreds of ponds on their land and elsewhere.

The Tubney Charitable Trust, Natural England, and the Countryside Council for Wales are funding project officers to help provide training and advice. The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation is also supporting the project. Wildlife organisations like Buglife and the Aquatic Coleoptera Conservation Trust are providing information about pond creation for rare species. The Herpetological Conservation Trust (The HCT) is co-ordinating part of the project, in



association with the Amphibian and Reptile Groups (ARGs), to encourage the creation and management of ponds for BAP amphibians and the pond-loving grass snake.

Find out more at [www.pondconservation.org.uk/millionponds](http://www.pondconservation.org.uk/millionponds)

## **Pond Conservation (2) – Garden Pond Survey**

Although the Million Pond Project is concentrating on substantial ponds in the countryside, Pond Conservation is keen to encourage people to install and maintain ponds in their gardens. They have set up a new website section at: [www.pondconservation.org.uk/gardenponds](http://www.pondconservation.org.uk/gardenponds) and launched a new leaflet at the RHS Greener Gardening Show in April. Later in the year the charity will be launching a national Garden Pond Survey. This will build on a recent quick survey of garden ponds in the village of Waddesdon in Buckinghamshire. An encouraging number of species were found, including a pond in a *bucket* which had beautifully clean water, water mosses (a great wildlife habitat) and six different types of diving beetles.

### **I fed the newts today, oh boy –Lennon's wild past *Guardian* (17th March)**

Four different beetles and an oasis of urban wildlife have been found by a detailed survey of the Liverpool back garden where John Lennon played as a child. Ecologists minutely checked out the unpromising L-shape of lawn and a dead cherry tree at Mendips, the suburban semi where Lennon lived with his aunt Mimi and Uncle George from the age of five to 23. The National Trust, given the house in Woolton by Lennon's widow, Yoko Ono, in 2002, said the data showed the importance of town gardens to sustaining Britain's varied ecology, sometimes more successfully than the countryside.

## **News from the Royal Entomological Society: Insects in Gardens (and Beyond):**

### **Insect Festival, York, 4 July 2009**



The RES is organizing an Insect Festival in York on 4 July 2009. The event is being held at the York Museum Gardens, with exhibits and a trade fair in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Hospitium and with talks and presentations in the Yorkshire Museum itself. The Insect Festival will be a celebration for anyone with a fascination for insects.

Although the event is not focused solely on garden insects, many of the exhibitors who will be present have a strong interest in insects in gardens, including (among others): Buglife; Butterfly Conservation; British Dragonfly Society; Bumblebee Conservation Trust; National Biodiversity Network; People's Trust for Endangered Species; and the National Bee Unit of the Central Science Laboratory (who will be bringing a live bee colony). In addition, the organizers plan to run insect hunts in the Museum Gardens during the day. For more information, visit the Insect Festival web pages at [www.royensoc.co.uk/events\\_ifest\\_body.php](http://www.royensoc.co.uk/events_ifest_body.php).

## Garden Entomology booklet

The RES's popular *Garden Entomology* booklet by Amanda Callaghan and Mark Fellowes has been revised and extended. The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition is 40 pages long in full colour and can be downloaded in PDF format from the home page of the RES website at [www.royensoc.co.uk](http://www.royensoc.co.uk).

The free printed booklet in A6 format can be obtained from the RES (The Registrar, Royal Entomological Society, The Mansion House, Chiswell Green Lane, St Albans, Herts AL2 3NS): if you require multiple copies for an educational project, please contact the Society ([info@royensoc.co.uk](mailto:info@royensoc.co.uk)).



## National Insect Week, 21-27 June 2010



The next biennial National Insect Week will be held on 21-27 June 2010, with the theme “Discover Diversity in the World of Insects” and with insect-awareness events countrywide. Our last National Insect Week in 2008 involved 28 official partner organizations with an interest in raising public awareness of the importance and fascination of

insects, and a multitude of event organizers in natural history societies, schools, wildlife trusts, scout troops, etc, all around the UK.

NIW2010 will encourage everyone to explore insect diversity in all its aspects – body form & colour, taxonomic variety, function & behaviour, ecological role, and interaction with the environment & humans – and to appreciate that biodiversity can be just as relevant and fascinating to examine in one's garden or the local countryside in the UK as it is in the savannahs, deserts, wetlands and rainforests of the tropics. The website at [www.nationalinsectweek.co.uk](http://www.nationalinsectweek.co.uk) will be relaunched for NIW2010 in the summer of 2009 and will be progressively updated with additions to the calendar of events as the Week approaches.

## Conference news: Insect Biodiversity and Conservation in Gardens

A one-day joint meeting on insect biodiversity and conservation in gardens is being organized by the Royal Entomological Society and the Royal Horticultural Society in the Lecture Theatre at RHS Wisley in Surrey on 30 September 2009 from 10:30 to 17:00, followed by a tour of experimental garden plots.

Surprisingly few scientific studies of insects in suburban gardens have been undertaken. The meeting's aim will be to review the existing data sets and investigate the links between garden size, design and floral diversity with insect composition and abundance. Ways to enhance conservation of insects in gardens will be explored.

The provisional speakers include: Dr Ken Thompson (Sheffield); Mr Andrew Halstead (RHS); Dr Alvin Helsden (Ruskin); Dr Juliet Osborne (Rothamsted); Dr Katharine Parkes (BDS); and

Dr Jason Chapman (BBSRC). Once the programme is finalized, details will be announced on the RES website ([www.royensoc.co.uk](http://www.royensoc.co.uk)) by the early summer.

The convenors are John Badmin ([jbadmin@btinternet.com](mailto:jbadmin@btinternet.com)), Les Allen-Williams ([ljaw2@hotmail.com](mailto:ljaw2@hotmail.com)) and Andrew Halstead ([andrewhalstead@rhs.org.uk](mailto:andrewhalstead@rhs.org.uk)).

### **PTES: Endangered mammals alive and well near you?**

Wildlife Gardening Forum member the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), is asking all wildlife lovers to take part in what will be the 7<sup>th</sup> annual survey of mammals in the urban environment; *Living with Mammals*.



Since 2003, *Living with Mammals* has asked volunteers to look out for mammals, and their signs, around their homes, places of work and recreational land. By continuing this work we can gain a better understanding of our wild neighbours and spot changes in their numbers before it is too late to act.

Analysis of the first five years of data has shown that garden features such as berry or seed producing plants, or gardens with a shed, pond or woodpile support more mammals. Considering gardens make up between a third and a half of the green space in urban areas their significance for wildlife and biodiversity is clear. Almost half of Britain's terrestrial wild mammal species have been recorded in the survey, including 17 *Species of Conservation Concern* and seven *priority* species such as water voles, hedgehogs and otters.

Particularly encouraging were records of otters within the survey. Otters are good indicators of water quality in rivers and as the species increasingly makes use of urban waterways, they are becoming a flagship species in recognising the importance of the built environment in conservation.

PTES is now urging more people to get involved so they can achieve an even more robust set of results. The survey runs throughout April, May and June 2009 [*still two months to go – ed.*] and PTES needs volunteers to look out for mammals in spare moments each week, at sites such as gardens, allotments, cemeteries and parks, whether you are walking the dog, getting a breath of fresh air from work or looking out of your kitchen window.

PTES Chief Executive, Jill Nelson, commented “Only by careful monitoring can we gain a picture of how wildlife is faring and take action if a species looks in decline. By taking part in our survey, and telling us which mammals you have seen, not only are you helping conservation in the UK but you may surprise yourself with the fascinating wildlife right on your doorstep.” David Wembridge, Surveys Coordinator for People's Trust for Endangered Species added “The presence of these species so close to home is of enormous value and highlights how our urban green spaces blur the distinction between natural and built environments.”

Wild mammals are often difficult to spot and looking for signs such as tracks and droppings is an alternative way to identify their presence. PTES is encouraging people to become animal

detectives and to discover which animals share the environment around our homes and places of work. It is not difficult to identify hedgehogs from droppings, wood mice from stashes of hidden nuts, or tracks of deer or badger.

All those who contact PTES for a survey pack will receive an exclusive full-colour *Spotting Wild Mammals* booklet containing information of how to identify species and recognise the field signs that they leave behind.

Anyone interested in taking part should contact David Wembridge at PTES, either by phoning 020 7498 4533 or emailing [LwM@ptes.org](mailto:LwM@ptes.org) , Further information can be found on the website – [www.ptes.org/surveys](http://www.ptes.org/surveys)

### **RHS – Plants for Bugs – Project update**

*Forum members will be pleased to read this update on our first research project, provided by Steering Group member Helen Bostock of RHS Wisley.*

Just a very brief shout to keep everyone up to date with progress. I'm pleased to say we now have a presence on the RHS website for the project where we will aim to post any findings/developments on there as and when available - [www.rhs.org.uk/News/PlantsForBugsProject.asp](http://www.rhs.org.uk/News/PlantsForBugsProject.asp)



*The Wisley plot site in late winter !*

Contractors have been hired to build the beds at the two Wisley sites, ready for planting up in the second week of May. If anyone from the WGF is at a loose end that week... well, put it this way, we are not short of trowels!

Due to the complexity of the trial, the plant sourcing has not been easy but, thanks to the work of Colin and others in the Curatorial and Science teams we are well on the way.

We are still looking at recruiting volunteers for the project to assist with weeding, sampling and plant observational tasks. The volunteer programme will most likely get going slightly later in the summer.

*We will try to keep you posted – if anyone living near Wisley would like to help, please contact Helen at [helenbostock@rhs.org.uk](mailto:helenbostock@rhs.org.uk)*



## **RSPB Homes for Wildlife Project**

The RSPB's Homes for Wildlife was launched in October 2007. The main impetus for the project is the recognition of the value of gardens for biodiversity. Three species of bird for which gardens are important (house sparrow, starling and song thrush), are in serious decline. If enough people make provision for wildlife in their gardens, we stand a good chance of helping them.



The project pulls all the RSPB wildlife gardening advice together and is available on and offline. We've been promoting the project to RSPB members and other contacts and have been very pleased with the interest so far. Thanks to the success of our annual Big Garden Birdwatch, we've been able to spread the word to an even bigger audience by ushering people towards Homes for Wildlife when they submit their garden bird sightings. At time of writing, 95,000 people are now involved and we hope many are taking action for wildlife in and around their home - from large mature gardens to balconies.

We keep people informed, encourage action and feedback via a monthly Homes for Wildlife newsletter. For more information, simply visit [www.rspb.org.uk/hfw](http://www.rspb.org.uk/hfw)

Richard Bashford  
Senior Project Manager - People Engagement Department RSPB

### ***And Finally***

From the Jokes section of Paul Pearce's increasingly useful website "The Wildlife Garden"

*A bird suddenly appears at a chemist's counter. "Some lip balm please" it asked. "Would you like to pay by cash or cheque", asked the assistant. The bird replied "Just put it on my bill please"!*

[www.thewildlifegarden.co.uk/more/wildlife\\_jokes.htm](http://www.thewildlifegarden.co.uk/more/wildlife_jokes.htm)