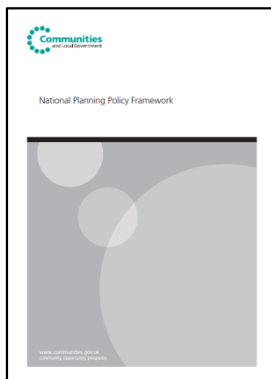




**Planning for a healthy environment: good practice guidance for green infrastructure and biodiversity.**

Readers will remember that the Forum and the RHS have contributed to the creation of the TCPA/ Wildlife Trusts led green infrastructure and biodiversity planning guide – *Planning for a healthy environment: good practice guidance for green infrastructure and biodiversity.*



The guidance document is an essential replacement to PPS9 (and touches on other Policy Planning documents) that were formerly an integral part of UK Planning, but which were discarded during the reformulation of planning guidance under the National Planning Policy Framework. How seriously the new guidance will be taken by Government remains to be seen, but it (and no doubt subsequent revised and improved editions) should be of great value to Planners and Councillors.

The Forum is a signatory of the guide, which is being formally launched on 9<sup>th</sup> July at the House of Commons. I cannot reveal any details until after the launch, but it would be fair to say that the importance of general green infrastructure will be much higher in this document, and that the importance of private gardens is extensively referenced.

I will give a proper summary of the document in the next newsletter, hopefully with photos of Government staff attempting to look enthusiastic at the launch.

**Wildlife Gardening Project carries the torch for the Olympics**



Loyal Forum Member Anna Williams who works with the Wildlife Gardening Partnership based within the North Wales Wildlife Trust was nominated and chosen to carry the Olympic flame through Caernarfon on 28 May, as part of the Round-Britain Torch Relay.

This is Anna's nomination story:

*“Anna was born in Sweden, moving to Wales in 1987, she trained in Forestry and met her husband David. Living in Gwynedd, Anna has learnt Welsh and the family, a daughter and 2 sons, are all bilingual. Since 2004 Anna has been the volunteer leader of an award winning wildlife club for local children. Their exciting programme of activities inspires young people about nature. Anna works for the Wildlife Gardening Partnership based with North Wales Wildlife Trust. She organizes the annual Wildlife Gardening competition encouraging schools, businesses, communities and private individuals to make room for wildlife in their gardens. Anna has secured funding to employ 3 staff promoting wildlife friendly gardening in North Wales. This helps over 150 schools create gardens with the help of parents, staff and pupils. Anna is an inspiring enthusiast for wildlife and home grown produce. She shares her skill and knowledge with her local community and far beyond. I would love to see her carrying the torch in 2012.”*

Here are a couple of shots revealing that rarest of events in early 2012 - Sunshine!<sup>1</sup>



Anna was interviewed by Roy Noble at Radio Wales, and the interview is still available at: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01j73vp/Roy\\_Noble\\_28\\_05\\_2012/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01j73vp/Roy_Noble_28_05_2012/)

(The interview with Anna starts at about 34 minutes in). It was broadcast on the day of the run, 28<sup>th</sup> May.

Anna also appeared on the Jeremy Vine show broadcasting from Colwyn Bay – Eirias Park on Radio 2 on the 29<sup>th</sup> May, but this is unfortunately no longer available.

---

<sup>1</sup> In Wales!!

## Adrian Thomas's Blog on the RSPB website



Forum Member (and author of the much recommended RSPB Book *Gardening for Wildlife*) Adrian Thomas now has his own well-illustrated blog on the RHS website.

[www.rspb.org.uk/community/wildlife/homesforwildlife/b/gardeningforwildlife/default.aspx](http://www.rspb.org.uk/community/wildlife/homesforwildlife/b/gardeningforwildlife/default.aspx)

He also produces an e-newsletter which goes out to everyone who has registered for the RSPB Homes for Wildlife Scheme - see <http://www.rspb.org.uk/hfw/>



*BlogMeister Adrian.*

His current recommendation is “*What we'd like you to consider this month is allowing parts of your grass to grow long. Now before you run a mile, don't worry - this isn't about making your garden scruffy. We've got all sorts of creative ways for you to do it that make your garden look good, and which offer all sorts of benefits for wildlife.*”

## Great Crested Newts Losing Ground in London

Wildlife charity Froglife is calling for better management of urban ponds following results of their recently completed Great Crested Newts Revisited project.<sup>2</sup> “We surveyed 73 sites across 16 London Boroughs between 2010 and 2012 and the mixed findings highlight the



importance of wildlife-friendly pond management”.

*A male Great Crested Newt*

Many of the ponds have not been managed for Great Crested Newts for more than 5-10 years. For some sites, as local communities and volunteer groups change, people have forgotten that these species ever used the

<sup>2</sup> [www.froglife.org/gcnrevisited/index.htm](http://www.froglife.org/gcnrevisited/index.htm)

site,” explains Sivi Sivanesan from Froglife. “It would be a shame to see this trend continue across London, and for us to slowly lose this wonderful and protected species from all but a few key sites.”

“Great Crested Newts Revisited” was enabled with £101,370.00 funding from SITA Trust to revisit sites known to have newts, pulling together fresh information, creating and restoring ponds for newts as well as training local volunteer groups for surveys and pond management. Froglife have shared the results with GiGL (Greenspace Information for Greater London) and Record Centres to facilitate planning and the protection of wildlife habitats.



*Froglife has been improving ponds and terrestrial habitat for newts in London*

#### **The good news:**

- Sites which contain more than one pond were best for newts. Animals were found to have abandoned some ponds but were found in others, meaning an overall increase in the number of ponds occupied by newts across London. In each of the 16 Boroughs at least 1 site has been found to contain Great Crested Newts.
- The project has also left a legacy of improved habitat, with Froglife staff and volunteers improving ponds in 13 sites across the Capital.

#### **The not so good news:**

At the site level the overall picture was more worrying. Of the 63 sites that had data to compare (comparison data from 1984-2008) there was an overall decrease in occupied sites by 6.3%<sup>3</sup>.

The causes of these losses were often clear - a combination of fish introductions and lack of management of the pond, including allowing a pond to become completely overgrown or shaded by trees. These factors had the biggest impact on sites which only contained one pond.

---

<sup>3</sup> This is a very low figure given the estimated national rate of decline of 2% of colonies per year over the last few decades, suggesting London is a better than average area for GCNs. I also wonder about the newt frequency in private garden ponds. [Ed.]

These findings reinforce the predictions from the London-wide survey in the mid 1990's by the London, Essex and Hertfordshire Amphibian and Reptile Trust (LEHART) published in the London Naturalist (Atkins and Herbert, 1996).

“Looking after the City’s ponds is vital, not just for the future of this species in the London area but also for other amphibians, the brilliant pond invertebrates and other creatures that use our ponds,” concludes Sivi. “Let’s not “forget” this wonderful species into disappearing.”

## Duchess Park – History and Natural History.

This section is taken from material sent to me by David Cudby, a Board Member on the Duchess Park Residents' Association.

Duchess Park is a community of 70 properties on land between Duchess Drive and Centre Drive in the parish of Cheveley just outside Newmarket. It is unique due to the incorporation of areas for the benefit of wildlife and public enjoyment of the flora and fauna.



The project is about the gradual creation of an interesting and in due course reliable record of the history and natural history of the site now known as Duchess Park. What began as a monthly *list* we hope will eventually become an illustrated record in the form of a book produced by residents of Duchess Park and knowledgeable contributors from the wider community and other sources. You can contact David at [davidcudby@btinternet.com](mailto:davidcudby@btinternet.com)

Species numbers so far recorded at Duchess Park:

Birds	<b>46</b>
Mammals	<b>12</b>
Reptiles and amphibians	<b>3</b>
Insects and spiders	<b>38</b>
Plants and grasses	<b>75</b>
Fungi	<b>2</b>
Trees, hedges and shrubs	<b>24</b>
Lichens	<b>2</b>
<b><i>Total species recorded to date</i></b>	<b>202</b>

## Village SOS Funding Opportunity



*Thanks to Jan Miller for bringing this to my attention. It could well be a route for small communities to get together to create a better green infrastructure in their village.*

We are now accepting applications for Village SOS funding. Village SOS will be awarding grants of between £10,000 and £50,000 (including VAT) for truly enterprising and original community enterprises. So if you live in a rural village or small rural town with a population of no more than 3,000, read on.

Village SOS Active is a Big Lottery Fund small grants programme that hopes to encourage people set up their own community enterprise in their village. We have launched a second round of this funding by popular demand.

A community enterprise is a business that is owned and run by the community. With time, a community enterprise should be able to sustain itself without having to rely on grants or other public funding and any profit is reinvested back in to the community. To find out more, go to [www.villagesos.org.uk/get-involved/good-ideas/what-community-business](http://www.villagesos.org.uk/get-involved/good-ideas/what-community-business)

We can fund a whole range of community enterprise ideas, such as village shops, community transport, training schemes, cafes and tea rooms, woodland projects, broadband initiatives, energy schemes and much more besides. Check out [www.villagesos.org.uk](http://www.villagesos.org.uk) to see what other villages have already one.

We are interested in original ideas that really take advantage of your local assets, whether human or physical. You should think carefully about the skills and experience local people have; one residents' hobbies or skills could become a successful and sustainable enterprise. And why stop there when you could have a whole range of products or services, all produced or delivered by local people with unique skills. You could also take advantage of local natural resources, technology or buildings. To apply, first register at the sign-up page on the Village SOS website [www.villagesos.org.uk/user/register](http://www.villagesos.org.uk/user/register)

## Bees for Everyone



The Bees for Everyone campaign is funded through generous grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage and others, and is run by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BBCT).

*Bees for Everyone* is an ambitious new UK-wide project that aims to:

- 1) support rare bumblebees throughout the UK through active conservation work to safeguard, restore and create valuable bumblebee habitats.
- 2) raise public awareness of the importance of bumblebees and the problems that they face, inspiring individual action.

The project includes:

- **A new look** (this didn't cost hundreds of thousands of pounds and will make big a difference to the breadth of our appeal and enable us to do more to help bees)
- **A new website** <http://bumblebeeconservation.org> - please enjoy exploring. There are lots of new additions, to complement the original content. Hopefully it is all much easier to navigate.
- **Our Bee kind tool** - get a bee-friendly score for your garden, plus recommendations for further improvements. Oh, and plot your patch on our Bee kind map of the UK. Please do this today! It will only take you a few minutes and it will put a smile on all of our faces. Prizes are on offer for the most Bee kind gardens.
- **A web forum** - long overdue - meet other BBCT members and volunteers, learn from one another, share experiences, make friends
- **New printed materials** - all new, very shiny, very readable and 100% informative
- **Volunteering opportunities galore** - you can really help here. We have a whole store room full of brand new awareness-raising materials. Could you put up a poster for us in a local library or garden centre? Could you hand out factsheets at a local event?
- **Walks, talks and other events.** Opportunities to get involved throughout the UK, with the support of a growing team of volunteers. More on this in a future e-newsletter.
- **Regular updates** - keep track of our conservation and outreach work through our blog, news page and social media. Unlike the old website, these will be kept up to date!
- **Safe, easy, online payments** - join, donate, or buy merchandise to show your support. Maybe today is the day to finally get around to joining? We are also pleased to offer online membership renewal.

You can 'Listen again' to BBCT CEO Dr Ben Darvill talking on BBC Radio Scotland's MacAulay and Co on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> June. The interview starts about 52 minutes in:

<http://t.co/nvOMKIY7>

## Wild bees and not honeybees are the main pollinators of UK crops.

Researchers from the University of Reading have shown that wild bees are the unsung heroes for our food security and not honeybees as previously thought<sup>4</sup>. The study, led by Professor Simon Potts from the Department of Agriculture, examined how important insect-pollinated crops are to UK agriculture and how much of this work is done by honeybees.



*Simon Potts*

There has recently been mounting evidence that honeybee hive numbers are in a long-term state of decline in many developed nations. Analysis of hive numbers indicates that current UK populations are only capable of supplying 34% of our pollination needs, falling from 70% in 1984. In spite of this decline, insect-pollinated crop yields have risen by an average of 54% since 1984, casting doubt on long-held beliefs that honeybees provide the majority of pollination services.

Professor Potts said: “In the early 1980s honeybees provided most of our pollination services, however, following severe declines in hive numbers over the last 30 years, there are no longer enough honeybees to do the job and it is now our wild insects, such as bumblebees and hoverflies, that have filled the void to ensure that our crops are pollinated and our food production is secure.”

Many of the UK’s most valuable crops, including apples, strawberries, runner beans, and, increasingly oilseed rape, are pollinated by other insects. Tom Breeze, who conducted analysis for the study, said: “The total monetary value of pollinators to crop production in the UK is estimated at £430 million per year. This research suggests that the majority of this value is derived from wild pollinators and not honeybees.”

Stuart Roberts, Chairman of the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society, said: “We welcome this research from the University of Reading. Though many beekeepers still believe that honeybees are the most important pollinators, they can only pollinate a third of crops at most, and in reality they probably only contribute to 10-15% of the work. Wild bees are the unsung heroes for our food security and so it is these species on which we need to focus our conservation efforts.”

As insect-pollinated crops are likely to become increasingly important to UK agriculture in the immediate future, the study will help direct new developments in effective pollination management at a field and landscape scale.

---

<sup>4</sup> Breeze T.G., A.P. Bailey, K.G. Balcombe and S.G. Potts: 2011 Pollination services in the UK: How important are honeybees? *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment* 142: 137–143



## The pollinator crisis: What's best for bees?

*The text below is adapted from an article published online by Sharon Levy in late 2011 summarising some recent US work on pollinator species in relation to habitat change and non-native plants<sup>5</sup>.*



PhD studies of the amino-acid content of pollen by Alexandra Harmon-Threatt of the University of California, Berkeley have shown that bee foraging behaviour can be driven by a craving for nutrients rather than an evolved attachment to a specific plant. Although many conservationists assume that introduced plants are always destructive, her work shows that it's not necessarily so from a bee's point of view. What matters to most bee species is the abundance and quality of pollen — and if an introduced plant, such as the red vetch, offers more protein-rich food than the natives around it, the bees will collect its pollen.

What bees need most, the new pollination studies have shown, is a diverse community of flowering plants that bloom throughout the spring and summer. Abundance and diversity matter more than whether species are native or exotic. These findings could inform conservation strategies used by farmers and other land managers. Park managers tend to target invasive weeds such as red vetch with herbicides because they can outcompete native plants. But for bees, “just taking all the vetch out might not be the best idea”, says Harmon-Threatt. “It might take ten to fifteen different species of native plants to support this array of pollinators.”

But not all altered landscapes are equal for bees: modern agriculture has taken a severe toll on wild bee numbers. Vast monocultures — such as the almond orchards of central California and the soybean fields of Argentina — bloom for only three or four weeks each season, offering no food for bees the rest of the time. “The expansion of these crops destroys habitat for bees,” says Marcelo Aizen, a pollination biologist at the National University of Comahue in San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina.

Claire Kremen, a conservation biologist at Berkeley, has shown that the diversity of pollinator species drops with increasing distance from wild habitat, as does the number of visits by wild bees to flowering crops<sup>6</sup>. This can reduce yields in pollinator dependent crops. Another study (using FAO data) documented a drop in the yield per acre of pollinator-dependent crops since 1961, even as total global production has increased<sup>7</sup>. In part this is due to increasing land take for agriculture reducing the natural habitat needed to support wild bees.

---

<sup>5</sup> [www.nature.com/news/the-pollinator-crisis-what-s-best-for-bees-1.9308#auth-1](http://www.nature.com/news/the-pollinator-crisis-what-s-best-for-bees-1.9308#auth-1)

<sup>6</sup> R. Winfree et al, 2007 Native bees provide insurance against ongoing honey bee losses Ecology Letters 10: 1105–1113

<sup>7</sup> Garibaldi et al 2011, Global growth and stability of agricultural yield decrease with pollinator dependence. PNAS 108:5909-5914

The highly specialized pollination systems of orchids or yuccas can make people assume most pollination relationships are exclusive and highly evolved. “Until the past five or ten years, people thought that exclusive pollination relationships were more common,” says Rachael Winfree, a pollination biologist at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

By studying entire networks of pollinators and plants, biologists have learned that most native bees are far less picky than was imagined. Winfree and her colleagues have investigated the ways in which bees use flowers growing in agricultural, urban and natural areas — ranging from woodland to farm fields and suburban gardens — in central California and southern New Jersey<sup>8</sup>. The study found that bees collect pollen from both alien and native plants in proportion to a plant's abundance in the landscape. In highly disturbed habitats, bees make greater use of alien plants — not because the bees prefer them, but simply because introduced plants are more common where people have transformed the landscape. That makes sense to Winfree. “I don't see why bees would know or care whether a plant was native or exotic,” she says.

In another study Rachael Winfree<sup>9</sup> was surprised to find that in New Jersey pine–oak forest, bee populations are more abundant and diverse near sites of human disturbance — where backyard gardens or farm fields add to the range of blossoms available. But the picture is likely to vary from one area to the next. In a recent review of the literature, Winfree and her colleagues concluded that land-use changes such as urbanization and deforestation can affect native pollinators differently, depending on whether they increase or reduce the numbers and diversity of flowering plants<sup>10</sup>.

*[This study is of course focusing on the relationship between plants and pollinators, and indeed most of the garden evidence suggests that nectar and pollen rich non-native plants can provide excellent support for bees capable of collecting from their flowers. The evidence is less clear for the role of non-natives in supporting larval stages of insects. I suggest we need more research here, leading perhaps to a sister campaign to the RHS “Perfect for Pollinators” labelling scheme - which could be called “Catering for Caterpillars” Ed.]*

## **Managing the urban environment for pollinators**

This course organised through Flora Locale with the Moelyci Environmental Centre is running on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> July in Conwy, North Wales. The course description reads:

*“Urban environments present interesting opportunities to combine food production with recreation and community engagement, and bring real benefits for both*

---

<sup>8</sup> Williams N., D. Cariveau, R. Winfree and C. Kremen 2011. Bees in disturbed habitats use, but do not prefer, alien plants. *Basic and Applied Ecology* 12: 332–341

<sup>9</sup> Winfree R., T. Griswold and C. Kremen 2007 Effect of Human Disturbance on Bee Communities in a Forested Ecosystem. *Conservation Biology* 21:213-223

<sup>10</sup> Winfree R., I. Bartomeus and D. Cariveau 2011. Native Pollinators in Anthropogenic Habitats. *Ann Rev. Eco. Evol. Syst.* 47:1-22

*pollinators and wildlife more generally. This day is based at a fascinating and compact site which combines an old orchard under restoration with areas of recently established wildflower meadow. The focus of the day will be on the ecology and identification of pollinators and plants, and how these are linked by structure and management of both vegetation and the site itself. The site is a small-scale wildlife haven nestling under the ancient town walls of Conwy; site management is shared between Conwy Borough Council and Conwy Orchard volunteers.”*

The course fee is £100.00 / £75.00 Concessions are available to employees and volunteers with charities, parish councils, fulltime students and those not economically active. You can book through the Flora Locale website at:

[www.floralocale.org/Managing%20the%20urban%20environment%20for%20pollinators](http://www.floralocale.org/Managing%20the%20urban%20environment%20for%20pollinators)

## **Sex discrimination. Hay Fever and Urban Mess**

*Jan Miller has sent me the following snippet posted by Laura Olney on the LinkedIn Group: Garden Industry Pros, Garden Media & Gurus*

Male shrubs and trees are causing big problems in most urban areas. The problem begins with landscapers and homeowners who decide that they don't want to deal with dropping fruit. The result is the choice to plant males. Pollen blows away in the wind. The unfortunate repercussion is air filled with pollen at many times of the year.

And yes, pollen is important as insect food, but fruits and berries might be of more significance when you consider the food that comes from petals, leaves, seeds, and such. It is part of the problem that we have created in our urban areas - cesspools of trash that should be recycled and reused, and materials released into the air and water that should be controlled, reduced, and ultimately, in many instances, eliminated.

A balance is needed, and will perhaps be achieved, when people realize that sweeping up berries and raking up fruit makes for great compost materials - ha!

Jan comments:

Hayfever and other respiratory problems plus fruit-dropping mess in urban areas means that the male or females of different species are being selected out. A similar thing already happened on farmland 100 years ago with Black Poplar apparently, because the females produced massive drifts of floating down-seed. Now it is an endangered species.

## Doctors should prescribe gardening, says top physician and Thrive Patron

Doctors should prescribe gardening to people experiencing depression and other forms of physical and mental ill health<sup>11</sup>.

That's the view of Sir Richard Thompson, President of the Royal College of Physicians and Patron of the Charity Thrive, a Forum member.



Sir Richard said: "I have, for some time, thought doctors should prescribe a course of gardening for people who come to them with depression or stroke. The new commissioning structures about to be introduced might allow more innovative treatment approaches to be put in place, including the opportunity to try gardening rather than prescribe expensive drugs. I would much rather a doctor had time to listen to their patients and instead of prescribing anti-depressants, prescribed a course of gardening, whether it is at Thrive or another garden project in the country."

Sir Richard is not downplaying any serious mental ill health condition, but firmly believes that gardening could do so much for so many people. He said gardens are restorative environments and credits Thrive, and other organisations with producing evidence showing gardening and being outdoors in a natural environment is good for you. "I always wonder why people go to the gym when there is a 'green gym' outdoors for us all, and what's more it's free. Gardening burns off calories, it makes joints supple and is fantastic exercise. Gardening as a physical activity has been shown to be helpful in the treatment of anxiety, depression and dementia."

Thrive's research with Mintel shows 31 per cent of disabled people surveyed believe that gardening has on-going health benefits, while almost one in five report that it has helped them through a period of mental or physical ill-health.

Sir Richard says Thrive's research and programmes with stroke patients is exciting and has produced positive results. On the stroke programme held at Thrive's gardens in Battersea Park, five out of seven participants reported outcomes experienced which reduced their dependence on NHS funding:

- no need for speech or physiotherapy sessions
- reduction/elimination of pain control medication
- reduction/elimination of sleep medication

The participants now meet for monthly gardening sessions at their homes. Six out of seven have changed their eating habits to include more fruit and vegetables and four now garden regularly and grow their own vegetables.

Sir Richard added: "Horticultural therapy is a sub group of occupational therapy but is more holistic. Research is key to standardising Social and Therapeutic Horticulture."

---

<sup>11</sup> [www.thrive.org.uk/news/news/news-259.aspx](http://www.thrive.org.uk/news/news/news-259.aspx)

## The return of Heritage fruit and veg varieties

*This is an article by Hannah Briggs & Matt Bardo from the BBC website<sup>12</sup>. "Heritage" crops and garden ornamentals are important biodiversity components in danger of dying out if they are not actively conserved - ideally in a garden environment.*

There are signs that near-extinct varieties of fruit and veg, so-called "heritage crops" are making a comeback.



Cast into the sea by an 18th Century shipwreck, the legend goes that the speckled dwarf-French Brighstone bean was washed up on to the shores of the Isle of Wight and saved for posterity. Now it is one of hundreds of almost-extinct crops that have moved out of the history books and back into vegetable patches, gardens and orchards. Purple-mottled and relatively small, the

Brighstone bean does not immediately live up to the folklore, but it was carefully nurtured by generations of gardeners on the Isle of Wight because of its history, rarity and distinctive taste.

Traditional types of fruit and vegetable have been forced to the margins in recent decades by EU rules and commercial agriculture. Now the law and consumer attitudes are changing. Open-pollinated and passed down through the generations, "heritage" or "heirloom" crops such as the Brighstone bean are making a comeback.

"It results from the fact that people want to grow a variety of flavours that are good for the garden," says Chris Smith, co-owner of Pennard Plants, which specialises in heritage vegetable seeds. "They're remembering what their grandparents grew and they want to do the same. Many varieties up until the 1920s, maybe later, were bred for gardeners rather than for growing 20 acres of it... we're going back to a time when most people grew their own food and that's when most of the varieties were developed. A variety that is going for 300 years must have something going for it mustn't it?"

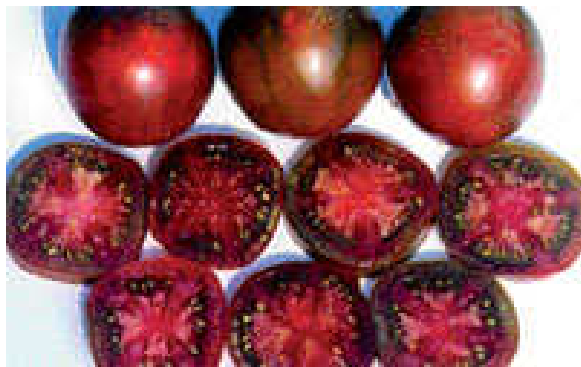
With the shift towards large-scale agriculture, intensive farming focused on a small number of crop varieties. In addition, rules introduced by the EU in the 1970s restricted the trade of seed that had not been through an expensive registration process. The result was that thousands of heritage varieties became extinct while many others significantly declined.

---

<sup>12</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17912734#story\\_continues\\_1](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17912734#story_continues_1)

But the outlook for heritage varieties has changed. Last year EU laws surrounding non-commercial seed were relaxed to make the registration process more affordable. Many said the reforms did not go far enough and French seed company Kokopelli recently entered a legal battle over the laws. Earlier this year, the German advocate general of the EU courts, Juliane Kokott, said EU rules governing seed trade breach a range of principles surrounding free enterprise. "There is a likelihood that the regulation will become (even more) relaxed," says Bob Sherman, director of Garden Organic, a vegetable conservation charity.

Champions of heritage varieties have reported renewed interest in old-fashioned seed varieties, driven by the recent trend for sustainability and home-grown vegetables. But they say it is also because many of the crops just taste better.



Smith recommends a tomato variety called the Black Russian. Whereas mainstream varieties are bred with a thick skin to protect them in transit on their way to the supermarket, this traditional variety has a very thin skin, from an era when crops were eaten straight from the garden.

Claims about long-lost flavours are receiving growing support. "New varieties are often developments and/or crosses of older varieties, bred for greater reliability and resistance to disease. Flavour is often lost in that process," explains Mark Diacono, food writer and gardener.

The fascination with heritage crops also extends to their history, says Toby Musgrave, author of *Heritage Fruit and Vegetables*. "It takes it beyond being just a fruit or vegetable. It becomes an object with a story."



The crimson-flowered broad bean also has a fascinating survival story, says Bob Sherman. "It's a bean known for its beautiful deep crimson flowers... and the red colour of the flower is the result of a recessive gene... so in order to preserve it, it has to be kept absolutely pure." The bean, which dates back to 1778, faced near extinction in the 1970s, when Rhoda Cutbush in Kent donated her last few remaining seeds to Garden Organic for conservation.

But the biggest contribution of these historical varieties may actually lie in the genetic variety they have to offer in the future. As controlled pollination has increased and farmers have concentrated on producing few select varieties, the gene pool in general circulation has shrunk. "It is essential that we preserve the varieties and cultivars because we may well need them if one of these big commercial varieties fails," explains Musgrave. "There is the responsibility to maintain the genetic diversity."