



October 2010

New Forum Developments

Thank you everyone who replied to the August Newsletter request for feedback on the future of the Forum. All the replies were solidly in favour of the Forum working to assist and coordinate partnerships among its members, rather than becoming a mass-membership organization. We will provide information for everyone, and welcome organizations and individuals as members, but not set up in competition for members with existing wildlife charities.

We also received strong support for the Forum becoming a Charity, and this has come to pass earlier this month with the creation of "The Wildlife Gardening Forum" as a small charity. With a projected income of under £5,000, we cannot yet become a registered charity, but will operate in the same way and enjoy the same tax benefits. Our first Annual General Meeting will be at the Forum conference we are planning at the Natural History Museum, probably in May next year.

The Forum is setting up its own bank account, so if there are any eccentric millionaires in our readership who would like to make a donation, please write your cheques in favour of "The Wildlife Gardening Forum", and ensure plenty of zeros after the leading figure.

Big Wildlife Garden Website

It is a great shame that the "the greenest government ever". (David Cameron at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, 14 May 2010) has found it necessary massively to cut the budget of Natural England, and hence the leadership and resources for biodiversity conservation in England. One casualty is the Million Children Outdoors programme, and within this the Big Wildlife Garden website. In the year it has been operating, the BWG has registered: 2645 individual members and 1227 schools registered: – in the region of 36,800 children.



The good news is that Natural England has generously agreed to donate the site to a not-for-profit organisation, and there has been a good response to their invitation, so we have reason to be confident the project will survive. The Forum's web pages and relationship are protected in the offer, and we hope to work constructively with whichever organisation or partnership takes on the BWG. Unfortunately, at this stage of

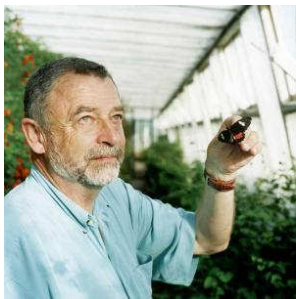
our development, we don't have the human or financial resources to do this ourselves.

Conference News

Places are still available for what is shaping up to be a very important conference at the RHS Horticultural Halls on 17th November. Two garden celebrities are signed up to attend, and there will be the National Launch of Jennifer Owen's important new book "Wildlife of a Garden: A Thirty-Year Study", with discounted copies available to purchase. Jan Miller-Klein will also have copies of her excellent new book "Gardening for Butterflies, Bees and other beneficial insects" available.

The next conference will be at the Natural History Museum, probably in May 2011, featuring their impressive wildlife garden, and possibly taking a theme of Education and Communication. If any reader would like to give a presentation on their work in this or a more general area of wildlife gardening, please let me know at wlgf@stephenmhead.com.

Oops – editorial apology



Several people contacted me after the last newsletter to point out that the photo allegedly of Clive Farrell was not in fact him, but one of the Dorset's Wildlife Friendly Gardening Competition winners and his wife.

My apologies to all involved – the photo to the left IS Mr Farrell, who runs Ryewater Nursery in Sherborne, Dorset, and is behind the inspirational Butterfly World opening soon at St Albans.

LEEF Evening Urban Gardener's Question Time *! ACT NOW !*

Anna Portch of the London Environmental Education Forum (LEEF) invites garden lovers and school or community gardeners to this event at the Garden Museum Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 7LB on **Thursday 4th November 2010**. Doors open at 5:00 with questions to panel from 6:00– 8:00 pm. There is a bar!

The event costs £5 for members and £10 for non-members. Please email to book your place to aportch@wildlondon.org.uk

The impressive panel includes:

- Community gardens – **Catherine Miller** from the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
- Flower beds – **St.John Stephens** Gardening expert from BBC London
- Green roofs – **Dusty Gedge** and **John Little** London's Green Roof experts
- Guerrilla gardens – **Richard Reynolds** author of "On Guerrilla Gardening: A Handbook for Gardening without Boundaries"
- Urban gardens – **Lia Leendertz** the Guardian's gardening correspondent

- Trees – **Lydia Davis** Trees for Cities’ Landscape Design and Projects Manager
- Wildlife corners – **Elaine Hughes** London Wildlife Trust’s Wildlife Gardening Expert
- Window boxes – **Helen Babbs** writer and journalist; author of My Garden, The City and Me: Adventures in the Wilds of London and an aerial, edible gardener

Find out more about LEEF at www.leef.org.uk

Wildlife Gardeners Wanted

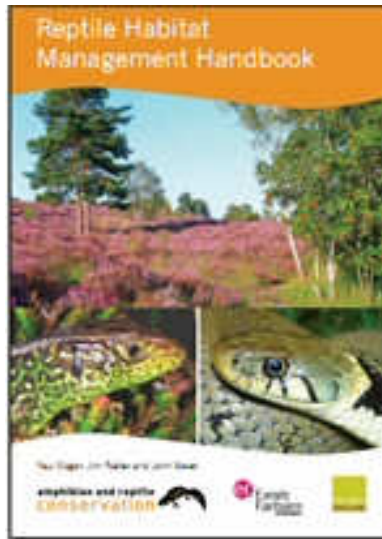
The Oxfordshire charity The Northmoor Trust has a project called “Connecting Naturally” and is looking for professional wildlife gardeners to help develop 10 wildlife gardens in the Oxford and Banbury areas.



The garden contracts will need to be completed by the end of March 2011. The gardens will be used as play areas for young children and their carers.

If you are interested in finding out more please contact Phil Pritchard at the Northmoor Trust Philip.Pritchard@northmoortrust.co.uk The Trust’s website is at www.northmoortrust.co.uk

Reptile Habitat Management Handbook



Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) are delighted to announce that the new Reptile Habitat Management Handbook by Paul Edgar, Jim Foster and John Baker is now available to download from www.arc-trust.org/resources/RHMH.php

Hard copies are available from Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, 655A Christchurch Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 4AP, 01202 391319 (£3.00 to cover postage and handling)

This handbook is the first attempt to bring together habitat management advice for all native UK reptiles. The half dozen species here have experienced population declines, and are now all

Biodiversity Action Plan priorities. The handbook is aimed at site managers, and those who advise on management. It gives advice for a range of settings, from dedicated nature reserves to farmland and includes a useful appendix of Environmental Stewardship options.

The Reptile Habitat Management Handbook was part-funded by Natural England and produced in conjunction with Amphibian and Reptile Conservation's Widespread Species Project, funded by The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Readers may also be interested in ARC's **Amphibian and Reptile Biology and Conservation** conference, coming up on Sunday 5th December 2010 in Bournemouth. Find out more at

www.arc-trust.org/downloads/ARC_BHS_2010_SciMeetingFlyer.pdf

News from Froglife

Can you suggest a site for a new toad pond?



Froglife is hoping to launch a new scheme that will provide breeding ponds for common toads at sites where populations are being impacted by road traffic.

Bufo Buffer Ponds, a project being developed by Froglife, will add new ponds to a selection of sites where toads are known to cross roads. If funded, these 'buffer ponds' will provide new

breeding locations for toad populations. Over time it is hoped that these actions will help safeguard some important local toad populations.

"The common toad *Bufo bufo* is thought to be experiencing declines in the UK, and in some cases this is caused, or made worse, by the effect of road traffic." said Froglife's Lucy Benyon. "This year alone, we know that 60,986 toads have been reported as rescued from UK roads by volunteers. Sadly 5,290 toads have been recorded dead. *Tuppence a Toad* is a year-long campaign to help save more toads."

In 2007, the common toad was added to the Government's Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) 'watchlist'. Froglife is looking for suitable sites for new toad ponds in the East of England. They would like to hear from groups and landowners within 1km of a UK toad crossing who are keen to have a new wildlife pond created. Known toad crossings can be found at www.froglife.org/toadsonroads/maps_active.htm

For more details about the Toads on Roads scheme: www.froglife.org/toadsonroads

To submit details of a site you know which could benefit from a Bufo Buffer Pond, visit: www.froglife.org/bufobuffer

Great newt news in London

Froglife has exciting results from one of its London projects. *Great Crested Newts Revisited* has had a busy first season, discovering amphibians in every Borough

surveyed so far. The project has been enabled with £101,370 funding from SITA Trust to revisit places known to have newts, pulling together fresh information. Froglife will be sharing the results with GiGL (Greenspace Information for Greater London) and record centres to facilitate planning and the protection of wildlife habitats.



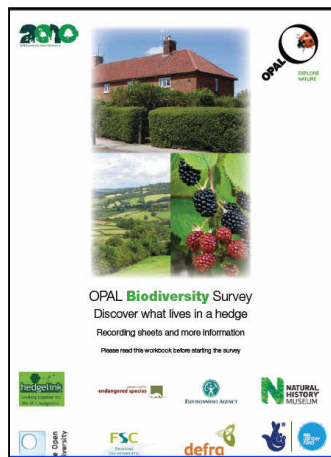
Project Officer Sivi Sivanesan has spotted newts in every Borough surveyed with the help of volunteers, although they are not necessarily in every pond in each Borough. Populations have been found in Bexley, Havering, Richmond Upon Thames, Merton, Enfield, Haringey, Hillingdon, Greenwich and Bromley. More Boroughs will be surveyed so that records can hopefully be developed for the whole City.

“It looks like there are still newts on most of the historical sites, which is really good news,” explains Sivi. “Most people would never spot them, and the volunteers have been surprised to discover a whole new, wild world hiding in the heart of sub-urban London. All Londoners can play a part in looking after these hubs for wildlife. Take your picnic litter home, volunteer to help look after a local pond, or come out newt hunting!”

Ongoing monitoring will be the key to finding out how stable the populations of newts in the City are in the long term, particularly as the project has also found a number of neglected ponds.

Help is always needed surveying and monitoring ponds in London. Find out more and get in touch with Sivi at www.froglife.org/gcnrevisited/index.htm

OPAL Biodiversity Survey



Jonathan Taylor has announced that the 4th of the Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) surveys is available for distribution.

The OPAL Biodiversity survey helps people uncover the diverse range of wildlife in our hedges. You’ll contribute to valuable research and learn more about the importance of hedges and how you can improve them. Hedges support many animals by providing them with food and shelter. Berries and seeds are food for birds, while holes beneath the hedge are often home to small mammals. You’ll also discover caterpillars, shield bugs and many other invertebrates living among the leaves.

To order your **free** OPAL survey packs, email nwopal@uclan.ac.uk with the following details:

- Your name
- Postal Address
- Number of packs required

Find out more about the survey at www.opalexplornature.org/BiodiversitySurvey

Copies of the OPAL Water survey and Air survey are still available. If you missed out first time round or need additional copies, then email nwopal@uclan.ac.uk with the same information as above.

General information about OPAL can be found at www.opalexplornature.org

Do the environmental benefits of gardens outweigh the need for affordable houses?

Thanks to Chris Gibson of Natural England for sending this in

Writing in The Ecologist, this month, Dr Simon Leadbeater has provided a thoughtful rejoinder to John Prescott over the issues around garden grabbing.

Over the last 10 years about a quarter of new houses have been built on residential land (including gardens) – rising to 70% in the Chilterns. A recent study by Kingston University provided evidence that as many as 100,000 gardens were lost in England between 2000 and 2010.

On the Today programme Lord Prescott, former Deputy Prime Minister (in the past accused of undermining the Green Belt when responsible for housing) objected to the new government's anti- "garden grabbing" legislation as preventing much needed social housing. In his view, the benefits of social housing outweigh the environmental benefits of gardens. There would perhaps be some justification here if the majority of houses created were affordable or social housing units.

Leadbeater argues that on the contrary, gardens are hardly ever replaced by affordable homes, except sometimes if a large block of houses is lost to create a major development. Most gardens are lost to one or two high value homes. He discovered that in the last ten years, none of the gardens lost in his home town of Harpenden were replaced with social housing.

Writing to 55 district authorities in the Home Counties, this local finding was backed up by the responses. Planning officers commented 'garden sites are usually small and only accommodate one or two new dwellings and are generally not affordable homes...'; 'for affordable housing any use of garden land would be very low...'; 'no affordable housing has been built on back gardens...' In practice 'detached dwellings were the most common'. This is hardly surprising, since most home-owners seek to maximise the profit they can make on selling their garden, and a smart open-market house will always bring in the most rewards.

Simon Leadbeater argues that "gardens are in certain respects more valuable than

some areas of countryside”, citing Natural England, the government’s declining Farmland Index and Richard Bashford of the RSPB.

He concludes that:

“The reality is that the choice between gardens and affordable homes is a false dichotomy; from the admittedly limited research carried out, garden developments have not made any appreciable difference to the number of affordable homes.”

The Forum has, since its inception, stood against the irrecoverable loss of urban garden space to profitable infill housing. It is extremely pleasing that the recent legislation should significantly reduce this loss. However, the argument of social housing need is powerful, so Forum members should be familiar with Simon’s analysis if accused of putting gardens before social need.

The full text from which this has been summarised, is at

www.theecologist.org/blogs_and_comments/commentators/other_comments/638940/do_the_environmental_benefits_of_gardens_outweigh_the_need_for_affordable_houses.html

or just type “environmental benefits of gardens outweigh” into your favourite search engine.

Responses to enquiries

[The last two articles contain responses to articles in the last newsletter. It is extremely pleasing to see the Forum and the newsletter functioning like this, as a source of contact and exchange of ideas between people with similar interests. Please send in some more queries, observations and deliciously controversial assertions for future newsletters. Ed.]

Garden plants and wildlife

There has been an excellent response to Shaun Wolfe-Murphy’s piece in the last newsletter about non-native garden plants which are good supporters of native biodiversity

Di Blackmore, Project Officer at the Forth Environment Link Stirling (www.forthenvironmentlink.org) writes hoping that Shaun could be persuaded to collate the responses for a future issue “I do think it is perhaps long overdue that public money being input into planting and management schemes should require that biodiversity benefit should have been included – many councils seem woefully backward in this respect.”. Meanwhile Helen Bostock has invited Shaun to view and share ideas with the Plants for Bugs Project at RHS Wisley (Blog now available at http://mygarden.rhs.org.uk/blogs/science_advice/default.aspx)

The article provoked another round of lively correspondence on the relative merits of native and non-native plants in gardens, which can be spared a more general readership. What everyone needs are lists of genuinely garden-worthy (eg attractive and fairly well behaved) native plants that will attract important species (when locally present), and lists of non-native plants already used by gardeners, which genuinely

support wildlife as food plants as well as nectar and pollen sources. Mark Parsons of Butterfly Conservation has suggested some excellent examples of both categories. I hope Shaun will indeed communicate his final Northern Ireland list to a future newsletter, and a really useful task for the Forum in the future could be to assemble regional lists for the rest of the UK, taking account of local conditions and beneficiary species.

Hoverfly abundance in the summer of 2010

Fern Alder (fern.fx@blueyonder.co.uk) raised the observation that there have been unusually large numbers of hoverflies about this year. This has attracted two confirmatory replies. Alan Stubbs, Chair of Trustees of Buglife, has been monitoring hoverfly numbers and species in his garden in central Peterborough for about 20 years. He wrote:

“Around late July/early August there is a big peak in numbers resulting from big movements of some species, in some years including large scale migration from the continent. This year there was a major migration and I have been assembling the data in different places on which hoverflies suddenly appeared in huge numbers, ranging from July on the Dorset coast to August at Stirling. With enough observations across Britain, it should be possible to back-track on the direction and pace of a migration front. The marmalade hoverfly, *Episyrphus balteatus*, is especially distinctive as a low level resident boosted by these mass movement episodes. If you get information that may contribute to an analysis of this year's circumstances, I shall be pleased to hear.”

Alan can be contacted at Alan.Stubbs@buglife.org.uk

Marc Carlton, describing himself as an amateur naturalist and wildlife gardener with a special interest in pollination biology wrote:

“I'm responding to the piece in the Wildlife Gardening Newsletter. I have a 'pollinator border' in my garden in Chepstow, Monmouthshire, specifically designed to attract bees and hoverflies. It is very successful in doing this.

I have noticed lots of hoverflies this year, and this trend continues both in abundance of individual species and in diversity of species. I even saw *Volucella zonaria* here for the first time. However it has also been a bumper year for wild bees here, the garden has just been alive with bumblebees (all of the 'big six') and solitaries. Even though the wild bee season is almost over, I am still seeing various species of small solitaries, some in quantity.

The main bumblebee season finished here about three to four weeks ago when most colonies reached their conclusion and lots of males were produced. On one occasion in early August I counted about thirty *Bombus pratorum* males. Of course this probably simply means that there were one or two *B. pratorum* colonies close nearby, and that they were attracted to my bee-friendly plantings. In built-up areas of Britain some bumblebees, esp. *B. pascuorum* and *B. terrestris*, seem to be double-brooded and produce late summer colonies, but in more rural areas like Monmouthshire that is less common. I assume this reflects the fact that the wildflowers in our countryside

that the bumbles use as forage are mainly early summer flowers, as indeed are most British wildflowers. The lanes around here which are colourful in Spring and early summer are now green, and there is no bee forage except in gardens.

I think bumblebee colonies did well this year because of the cold winter - they are adapted to it. The cold winter meant that queens were not attracted out of hibernation too early by mild weather to then perish when the weather turned cold again, which is what I suspect happens in a typical mild winter. The cold winter was followed here by a very good sunny spring and early summer, with not too much rain. So the bees got lots of opportunity to forage.

The only shortage in my garden is of honey bees, who were conspicuous by their absence, until, surprisingly, very recently. Because of the *Varroa* parasite, honeybees only tend to persist where local beekeepers are making an effort at maintaining colonies by keeping the *Varroa* under control. I assume that there are few or no beekeepers in my immediate area, hence the general lack of honeybees.

I do not think hoverflies compete with bees in general, as hoverflies have different mouthparts and tend to go for different flowers; the hoverflies prefer smaller flowers in bunches such as Umbellifers and those Asteraceae that have flat 'discs' in the middle of each flower such as *Leucanthemum* and *Anthemis*. Bumblebees, honeybees, and the larger solitaires such as leafcutters and mason bees do not visit these flowers as their mouthparts (so-called tongues) are too big for them. On the other hand they do visit those Asteraceae with more substantial discs in the middle containing larger florets such as *Aster*, *Cosmos* and *Solidago virgaurea*. I don't think that hoverflies are thriving because of an absence of bees, because they would tend to forage from different flowers anyway. I suspect that hoverflies are abundant because they had a warm dry spring in which to multiply. They have a completely different life cycle to bees and hoverfly larvae develop in spring and early summer, eating aphids or living in stagnant water depending on species. Also there can be mass migrations of hoverflies across the channel from France in good summers."

Marc has a website at www.foxleas.com and can be contacted at foxleas@phonecoop.coop.

Please send lots more news items to me, Steve Head, at wlgf@stephenmhead.com