

Thanks to everyone who supplied material for this newsletter. Don't forget to keep Friday November 27th clear so you can come to the next full Forum Meeting at RHS Wisley.

Garden Netting impacts - Can you help ?

Natural England has received a letter asking about the misuse of netting in gardens and allotments and its detrimental effect on wildlife. I have myself rescued birds caught in pea-netting, or in fruit cages (if they can find a way in why can't they get out again ?), but I don't know if this is a significant problem. If Forum members have any experience, knowledge or views on this could you please contact me, and I will pass the emails on. (wlgf@stephenmhead.com). Are you concerned about other bits of gardening kit being a wildlife danger ? – it would be good to hear from you.

Press release: Get cracking with the Great Nut Hunt!

This October, members of the public are being asked to help save the rare **hazel dormouse** by taking part in a nationwide survey of woodlands around the country. The Great Nut Hunt enlists the help of the public to ferret out gnawed nuts to determine the distribution and numbers of this rare woodland mammal.

The Great Nut Hunt is run by the **People's Trust for Endangered Species** (PTES) and supported by **Natural England**. To encourage would-be 'nutters' to take part in the survey, PTES has hidden 21 specially-commissioned nuts, 20 in silver and a single gold one, across counties in England and Wales.

"The best time to conduct the survey is over the autumn and winter when discarded nut shells are easiest to find on the woodland floor, before the leaf litter is too dense," said PTES Chief Executive Jill Nelson. "The survey uses simple techniques requiring no specialised skills, making the Great Nut Hunt a fun activity for young and old 'nutters' alike as well as an ideal family expedition. With the help of the public, this year we hope to exceed the 250 000 nuts found in 1993!"

"Nut Hunts are a great way of monitoring dormice and this method has now been copied in other countries," said Dr Helen Phillips, Chief Executive of Natural England. "The nuts you send in really do make a difference to dormouse conservation by helping us understand how well dormice are surviving and where they still occur so that steps can be taken to ensure their long term survival. What better excuse to get out and enjoy our fantastic woodlands and help save these rare mammals."

So, if you go down to the woods, make sure to look for signs of dormice and you may just find a gold nut!

To take part in the Great Nut Hunt 2009, which will run from October 2009 until March 2010, register online at www.ptes.org/greatnuthunt. Participants will receive a survey pack which contains more information about the silver and gold nut prizes and clues as to their whereabouts, as well as more information about the hazel dormouse,

a recording form, the Countryside Code and guides on how to identify hazel tress and nibbled nuts.

To receive your free survey pack, including our guides to identifying hazel and gnawed nuts, visit: www.ptes.org/greatnuthunt

Background information

Once widespread in England and Wales, dormice are now vulnerable. Nationally they have disappeared from more than half of their historic range due to the loss and fragmentation of their habitat as well as their sensitivity to climate. In addition to being so rare, the hazel dormouse is a small, elusive, nocturnal, arboreal, hibernating mammal, making it a singularly difficult creature to spot!

The best indicator of their presence is opened hazel (*Corylus avellana*) nut shells on the woodland floor. Dormice open these nuts by making a neat round hole on one side, leaving characteristic toothmarks around the edge of the hole and providing a reliable method for identification. PTES can make use of these nibbled nuts to gather data about the presence or absence of dormice and improve knowledge about the distribution of the species as well as the general health of our woodlands and hedgerows.

The first Great Nut Hunt was launched in 1993, with over ¼ million nuts being found by members of the public, of which 13 171 were submitted to PTES for verification. The second Great Nut Hunt survey, which took place in 2001, involved over 1 200 volunteer 'nutters' and resulted in over 50 000 nuts being found! As a result of this latter survey, 60 new dormouse sites were discovered, bringing the total of known sites nationwide to over 800. The wildlife charity is particularly keen for the public to search woodlands which haven't been visited in the past to see if they can find any signs of dormouse presence as well as revisiting sites where dormice were located at the time of the last Great Nut Hunt to see if they are still there and to collect information about the quality of the woodlands.

Plantlife's Invasive Aquatic Plants survey.

Plantlife has produced a new leaflet for gardeners (supported by the RHS and Garden Centre Association) covering 'everything you need to know' about **non-native invasive aquatic plants**: how to dispose of them, how to avoid buying them (including the names they are often sold under), how to manage your pond, how to look for good labelling, a suggestion of native plants to try, and a note on looking out for hitchhikers. The leaflet can be seen on the Plantlife website at: <http://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/assets/saving-species/saving-species-publications/Whats%20in%20your%20pot.pdf>

By covering all these topics in one leaflet, it will be easy for retailers or NGOs to display (as it takes up little space). If Forum members would like to order copies to distribute to their members or display for their customers, they can do so by calling Plantlife at 01722 342 730, emailing: sophie.thomas@plantlife.org.uk or writing to: Plantlife, 14 Rollestone Street, Salisbury, SP1 1DX. The leaflet is free of charge, but depending on the numbers ordered Plantlife would be glad to recoup the postal costs.

Plantlife has launched a nationwide public participation **survey on non-native invasive aquatic plants**, in partnership with the RHS, Garden Centre Association, National Trust, Non-Native Species Secretariat, Angling Trust and Ornamental Aquatic Trades Association. The survey launched on UN International Biodiversity Day (22nd May), but will run into the autumn. Here is the survey form – itself a mini-guide

Plantlife are asking people to report invasive plants they see on sale or in the wild, and to look in their own garden ponds to see if they have invasive plants in them.

The survey form can be downloaded from : <http://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/assets/saving-species/saving-species-publications/AGAINST%20THE%20FLOW%20Invasive%20survey.pdf>

or there is a convenient on-line submission form at : <http://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/plantlife-get-involved-againsttheflow-surveyform.html>

Please contact Sophie Thomas at Plantlife if you would like copies of the form.

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation

It is great to report the completion of Froglife and The Herpetological Conservation Trust's merger, even if this reduces the number of organisations in the Forum by one.

Many people feel there are too many competing conservation charities, and that by merging, small charities can save costs and be more effective.

**amphibian and reptile
conservation**



Here is the new logo – and I particularly like the temporary merger logo with the two old names, and the strapline “*we have metamorphosed*”

The Frogbites news service is being maintained, but the new charity would like old recipients (and anyone who would like to receive it) to register at:

<http://www.arc-trust.org/news/frogbites.php>

Pond Conservation’s Garden Pond Survey and blog

Although the Pond Conservation Big Pond Dip investigating garden ponds asked for submission of results by 1st August, the website is still accepting reports. We know very little about how garden ponds compare with average countryside ponds, but the very poor state of the latter was revealed by the 2007 Countryside Survey. Only 8% of the ponds surveyed nationally were in good condition, and the trend is downwards. (See <http://www.countryside.gov.uk/pdf/reports2007/CS-UK-Results2007-Chapter08.pdf>)

If you would like to contribute to the garden pond survey, go (soon!) to <http://www.pondconservation.org.uk/bigponddip/>

You may also be interested in Dr Jeremy Biggs’ Garden Pond blog on <http://thegardenpondblog.org.uk/> - all your garden pond questions answered !

OPAL Project

At the spring Forum meeting we heard a lot about the exciting OPAL (OPen Air Laboratory) project coordinated by the Natural History Museum. The first public participation survey, of soil and earthworms, has already attracted nearly 3000 data submissions, including apparently one from Palo Alto, California. The results to date are available at <http://www.opalexplornature.org/?q=soilsurvey> within a very impressive interactive website. It is notable how many results have come from people in urban areas. You can still take part in this very useful survey – go to <http://www.opalexplornature.org/?q=soilsurvey> to find out how.

The next OPAL survey, using lichens to study Air Pollution, launches in September this year. Details are available on <http://www.opalexplornature.org/?q=AirSurvey>