



My apology for the long gap since the last newsletter: in part it has been a somewhat slow period for news, but more significantly I have been infernally busy! I will try to do better provided you all send me your news and articles.



Secretary of State launches Big Wildlife Garden Competition (and the new England Biodiversity Strategy)

On 19th August Caroline Spelman launched the government-sponsored Big Wildlife Garden Competition which runs nationally until 20th May 2012 (see www.bigwildlifegarden.org.uk/wildlife-garden-competition). The launch was held at London Wildlife Trust's Camley Street Natural Park, which was created from an old coal yard back in 1984. It sits in the middle of King's Cross, alongside the Eurostar station at St Pancras.

Secretary of State being reassuring about urban green space

Ms Spelman expressed considerable support for the importance of urban green space, and for the wildlife significance of private gardens. She even agreed to attend the last Forum Conference, but subsequent communications through Defra inexplicably failed to reach her. [*We will try again. Ed.*]

The England Biodiversity Strategy¹ notes the role of gardens for biodiversity at several points, but offers little direct support beyond the BWG Competition. More peripherally, we could note some useful statements:

On community role

“We will be putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy”. “Civil society organisations play a critical front line role directly engaging and enthusing the public about biodiversity and the wider natural environment...” (We will create) “a new green areas designation empowering communities to protect local environments that are important to them.”

On Planning

“The government expects the planning system to deliver the homes, business infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs, while protecting and enhancing the natural and historic

¹ Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services.

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2011/08/19/pb13583-biodiversity-strategy-2020>

environment”. “We will retain protection and improvement of the natural environment as core objectives for local planning and development management”. “...encourage local authorities to promote multifunctional development”.

But read on.....

Gardens set to lose planning protection again

The draft National Planning Policy Framework was published on 25 July 2011 for consultation. As readers of the Daily Telegraph will be very aware, this document reduces over 1000 carefully worded pages of detailed planning guidance evolved through experience and precedent over many years, down to 52 pages which espouse a presumption in favour of development provided the development is “sustainable”. Unfortunately the definition of “sustainable development” is currently extremely weak - in fact undefined in the draft National Planning Policy Framework, which however states unequivocally:

“The Government’s top priority in reforming the planning system is to promote sustainable economic growth and jobs.”

The now cancelled *Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development*² gave the classic Brundtland definition: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This is fine as far as it goes, but what does this mean to a Developer or a Planning Committee member? What and whose are the “needs of the present”? How much do biodiversity and green space count, or landscape or local distinctiveness or space for informal recreation? What do we have to deny ourselves **now** to avoid compromising future generations? Who at local authority level makes the decisions?

The proposed framework also eliminates the entire regional level of planning. This could save money, (by scrapping a lot of jobs), but eliminates at a stroke the strategic level of planning needed to conserve and manage watersheds (and implement the Water Framework Directive), or create and maintain wildlife corridors and buffer zones.

From the Wildlife Gardening Forum’s perspective, we have a general concern that planning protection for urban green space vital for human wellbeing and biodiversity is being weakened at the core guidance level, and will be left for Local Authorities to impose as they wish. At best, this could work rather well, if the LAs have time and help to prepare sound policies that recognise local distinctiveness. At worst there could be chaos, with developers playing one authority off against another.

A specific concern for us is that the “Letter to Chief Planning Officers: *New powers for local authorities to stop ‘garden-grabbing*”³ of 15th June 2010 has been withdrawn along with all other planning guidance. We were delighted when the Coalition banned garden grabbing only three weeks after the election, so it is galling to be back to square one again.

The Forum was able to contribute to the consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework before it closed on 17th October, emphasising the human and biodiversity

² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/planningpolicystatement1>

³ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1615265.pdf>

importance of private gardens, and what is now called “Green Infrastructure” (GI), and their fragility in the face of development. We will see what comes out of the consultation, the final National Planning Policy Framework can hardly be worse than the present model.

In the expectation that little improvement will be forthcoming, the Town and Country Planning Association and the Wildlife Trusts are leading on the urgent production of a Natural Environment Planning Guidance document to put back into planning the guidance lost with scrapping of the detailed previous documentation. We have been able to put the Wildlife Gardening Forum’s perspective into the developing guidance. These are some of the key points:

- It is essential to explain clearly what Sustainable Development must mean in the planning context, including the fact that this may be more restrictive in some areas than in others, depending on the nature of the environmental and heritage assets.
- Define Green Infrastructure clearly, and in general subsume pure biodiversity arguments within the greater GI discussion, or as specifics after the generality of GI. There is a statutory duty to protect the more significant biodiversity sites, not so for GI, so to put too much emphasis or apparent priority on such sites will reduce the impact of the message about GI generally
- Don’t allow the perception that only nationally important rare species and habitats are what biodiversity is about. That’s just the cream on the top of the cake, biodiversity is primarily within GI or “Ordinary Green Space”, not just in reserves.
- Emphasise the importance of GI for human health and wellbeing.
- Centralise the concept of no net loss of GI, with local percentage targets reflecting local conditions. Maintain the important point that GI is delicate, and once lost can rarely be replaced or restored.
- GI areas are important, but so is their management. Much urban GI fails to be multifunctional from lack of imagination or thoroughly negligent/cheap management⁴.
- Private gardens are particularly important for biodiversity and a major part of green infrastructure. We suggest the document should contain a box which at the least could repeat the text from the Environment White Paper :

Domestic gardens are of enormous importance for biodiversity, as well as a key determinant of local distinctiveness, and for human health and wellbeing.

It is estimated that 22.7 million households (87% of homes) have access to a garden. Gardens cover up to a quarter of the land surface in our towns and cities (a total area of 432,924 hectares) and contain about 3 million ponds and 28.7 million trees, almost a quarter of all trees outside woodlands. They support a wide range of plants and animals and support ecosystem processes such as pollination and organic matter recycling in soils. One study identified 2,673 different species in a medium-sized garden

From The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature 2010 para 2.84

⁴ This picks up on the concerns raised by Rose de Falbe on urban green space management voiced at the November Conference.

Forum Trustee Helen Bostock is leading the Royal Horticultural Society's input into the Natural Environment Planning Guidance document, so we hope that the wildlife gardening message will be properly recognised.

How green are our gardens?

Ken Thompson

While you were enjoying the Wildlife Gardening Forum Conference on 23 November, I was at the Royal Horticultural Society's inaugural John MacLeod Lecture. The lecture, which will henceforth be an annual event, was established by the RHS in memory of the former Chairman of the RHS's Science & Horticultural Advice Committee and member of RHS Council. Professor MacLeod died of cancer in June 2010, shortly before he was due to become an RHS vice-president. The lecture will be given by a leading UK or international scientist, starting this year with Professor Diane Pataki, Director of the Center for Environmental Biology at the University of California. Her lecture was entitled "How green



Professor Pataki lurking in natural habitat

are our gardens? Monitoring the environmental costs and benefits of urban greenspace."

Several US cities are currently involved in major tree-planting programmes. Both NY and LA have 'million tree planting' projects; in LA the aim is to get the city's broadleaved canopy cover (apparently LA's signature palm trees don't count) up from 21 % to

27 %, with low-income neighbourhoods a priority. What can we expect these trees to do for the environment? Apparently one thing they *won't* do is lock up much carbon. If LA doubled its tree cover that would reduce its CO₂ emissions by just 0.2 %. A mature tree contains about 250 kg of carbon; if we compare that to, say, London's annual CO₂ emissions of 20 billion kg, it would take 80 million *mature* trees (and trees don't mature overnight) to mop up one year's emissions.

Apparently the much-maligned lawn is quite good at soaking up CO₂. If a lawn is left alone (apart from mowing) for 35 years, its soil carbon store increases by about 4-5 kg m⁻². Of course, that has to be set against the negative effects of water use and the CO₂ from all those powered mowers, fertilisers and pesticides. Not only that, a fertilised lawn is a big source of N₂O (nitrous oxide), a much worse greenhouse gas (molecule for molecule) than CO₂.

What trees *are* good at, which is important in a city with hot summers like LA, is reducing air temperature. Trees do this by evaporative cooling, by shading and by reflecting sunlight. Daytime air temperature is linearly and negatively related to tree cover, and a 5°C reduction in air temperature reduces electricity consumption (on air conditioning) by 15 %. But not all

trees are the same; LA is a dry city, but most of its urban trees come from more humid climates, and these trees lose *much* more water than those from dry climates. In one way this is a good thing, because losing more water lowers the temperature more, but of course they do need irrigating.

But even trees from humid climates aren't all the same. This is where the science gets a bit complicated, but basically ring-porous trees like oaks (which produce a single set of large water-conducting xylem vessels in spring) transpire less water than diffuse-porous trees like planes and maples (which produce smaller vessels right through the growing season). The reason is that large vessels are much more prone to cavitation, i.e. the water column breaking, and drought causes cavitation, so ring-porous trees quickly close their stomata to conserve water in dry weather. Diffuse-porous trees are less worried about cavitation, so they just keep transpiring.

This is all work in progress, with Pataki's current research focused on finding the trees that provide the best combination of cooling, efficient use of water and reasonably rapid growth. Next year's MacLeod lecture, assuming a suitable candidate can be found, will be on gardening and climate change.

As a postscript, the afternoon concluded with the award of the Marsh Horticultural Research Award to an RHS-sponsored PhD student. The recipient was Lionel Smith, who is working on 'flowering lawns', a short version of wildflower meadows, i.e. making lawns either more attractive, or more weedy, depending on your point of view.

Bees for Everyone

Ben Darvill CEO, Bumblebee Conservation Trust



The Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BBCT) has just received £340,000 in funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund in support of their three-year *Bees for Everyone (BfE)* project. Over the next three years this ambitious project will build on the most successful elements of our work to date in order to:

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

In practical terms, this will mean more flower-rich habitat, more events, more opportunities for learning and participation, and significant improvements and refinements in many other areas.

The project aims to support rare bumblebees throughout the UK through active conservation work. This work will make a significant contribution to delivery of the UK Biodiversity

Action Plans (UK BAPs) of six bumblebee species as well as for several UK BAP priority habitats. *BfE* will use innovative approaches to engage with people of varying ages and backgrounds and encourage active public participation in conservation work, wildlife gardening and bumblebee monitoring.

A significant emphasis of outreach work will be through volunteers, with *BfE* investing significantly in the training and support of an expanded volunteer resource. Throughout the project we aim to work in partnership wherever possible, both in the delivery of habitat and public-engagement work.

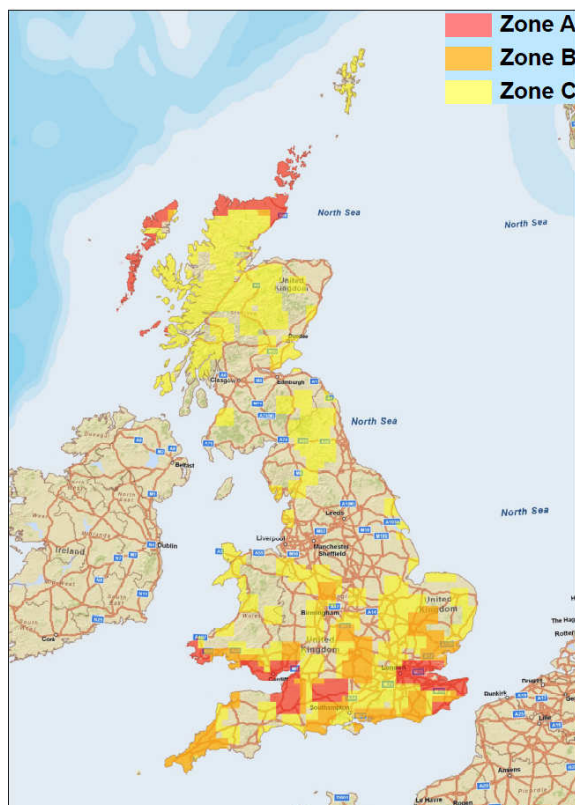
The *Bees for Everyone* project will deliver at least:

- 1,200 hectares of habitat for rare bumblebees through creation or enhancements
- 30 farm-day events
- Three bumblebee conservation workshops
- 12 volunteer training workshops
- 225 talks/presentations
- 90 guided walks/identification training sessions
- 150 displays and shows

In support of these aims, we will:

- Produce and distribute volunteer resource packs
- Distribute a variety of project materials
- Re-launch the BBCT website, including novel interactive elements
- Launch an online community forum
- Make children's activity sheets available online
- Provide information and updates through our website and social media

The project allows BBCT to appoint a Conservation Manager and three regional conservation Officers in England and Wales, and two Outreach staff based in Scotland.



The hotspot map opposite shows three zones for rare bee conservation work. We will be doing most of our face-to-face conservation work in Zone A, working with and meeting with partners etc in Zone B and providing advice and info to interested parties in Zone C. We consider Zone A areas to be the highest priority for consolidating and expanding rare bumblebee populations.

You can contact BBCT at enquiries@bumblebeeconservation.org

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Buglife reports on the biodiversity impacts of light pollution and solar panels.

From Buglife's website:

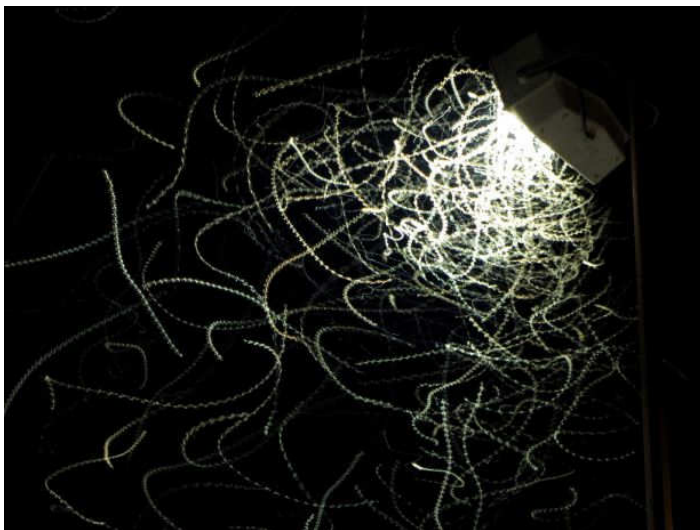
www.buglife.org.uk/News/newsarchive/News+Archive+2011/Save+bugs+from+light+pollution

The report, the first to pull together all the evidence relating to all forms of light pollution and make policy and practical recommendations, says that it is clear that artificial lighting and shiny flat surfaces in the wrong place and at the wrong time significantly disrupt ecosystems, and could be contributing to current declines and extinctions of invertebrates.

Artificial night lighting is the most obvious threat that needs to be tackled. It disrupts the natural rhythms of light and dark which govern the feeding, breeding and migration patterns of nocturnal insects, including moths, beetles, water fleas and lacewings. This can have a profound effect on ecosystems. It is estimated that a third of flying insects attracted to street lights will die as a result, either from collisions with a hot lamp, or being picked off by canny predators.

Another developing problem is polarised light pollution. For the whole history of the Earth all flat shiny surfaces that reflected polarised light were ponds or rivers. Suddenly there are thousands of similar artificial surfaces such as plastic sheeting on agricultural fields, shiny tarmac, cars, and now proliferating solar panels. Expectant aquatic insects are attracted to these surfaces and, believing them to be watery habitats, deposit their precious eggs; sadly the eggs all dry and perish in the sun.

Matt Shardlow, Buglife Chief Executive and report co-author, said: "We are increasingly careful not to pollute our environment with damaging chemicals, but despite being very light aware animals ourselves, we don't properly consider how our changing of the light environment affects animals that see the world very differently. Night lighting and solar panels can benefit people greatly, but we must tread as delicately as possible; simple measures can be taken by people and planners to minimise light pollution damage to the ecosystems on which we depend."



*Insects attracted to a street lamp
© Drew Makepeace*

Recent years have seen a huge increase in light pollution. Buglife says that while more research into the impact of artificial light on biodiversity is required, urgent steps to address serious concerns must be taken now. The report sets out cheap measures that can be taken to avoid negative impacts on humans and wildlife, many measures will also save money on energy bills.

Buglife's report recommends:

- Incorporating patterns of rough or painted glass on the solar panels to break up the polarised light.
- Switching off outdoor lights – especially decorative and advertising lighting – between midnight and 5am when few people are active.
- Incorporating motion-sensors to switch off security and footpath lighting when not required.
- Reducing polarised light pollution by locating car parks away from water bodies and using rough tarmac surfaces.
- Avoiding bulbs that emit ultra-violet light, to which invertebrates are most sensitive.
- More careful planning of lighting schemes in sensitive locations such as conservation areas, ponds, rivers and the sea.
- Routinely including certain light pollution data in Environmental Impact Assessments.
- Identifying and protecting wildlife-important areas that currently have low lighting levels, and designating new Dark Sky Preserves.

The full report can be down loaded here:

<http://www.buglife.org.uk/Resources/Buglife/Impact%20of%20artificial%20light%20on%20in>

As an addendum to this article. Exmoor National Park has been designated an International Dark Sky Reserve, the first place in Europe to achieve this prestigious award and only the second in the world (after Mont Mégantic Observatory Dark Sky Reserve in Canada).

www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/about-us/news/news-2011/international-dark-sky-reserve

Exmoor National Park now joins a select group of places around the world - including Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park in Scotland and the Channel Island of Sark, a Dark Sky Community - which have stunning night skies, and now have lighting controls in place to make sure that man-made light doesn't spoil that view in future.

The Dark Sky Reserves and Parks are designated for views of the stars, but there can be no doubt that preserving the natural light environment will help wildlife too.

Munching Caterpillars – a new education project for kids to get their teeth into...

Kate Merry, Project Development Officer, Butterfly Conservation



Butterfly Conservation (BC) was established in 1968 in response to the growing plight of butterflies and moths since the post war period. We are a registered charity with a Head Office in Wareham, Dorset, and 31 volunteer led regional branches throughout the British Isles. While our regional branches do a great deal of outreach work, particularly in the form of attending local events and shows, BC have never employed an Education

Officer, and we have little in the way of resources and literature for the younger audience. We are looking to put that right with a new project; **Munching Caterpillars**.



Privet Hawk Moth (Butterfly Conservation)

In May 2011 we began the development phase of our application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, having secured a first round pass at the end of last year. If we are successful, Munching Caterpillars will be delivered across Somerset and Dorset and will be aimed at children between 7 and 11 years old. The project is centred on fun, hands on workshops and activities, which will be delivered through primary schools, youth groups, at garden centres and at local events in the project area.

The workshops, which link in with elements of the National Curriculum

(Key Stage 2), are based around the fascinating life cycle of moths and butterflies, which we illustrate with live specimens that can be examined up close. We will also be getting the children to take an active part in improving their gardens or school grounds for moths and butterflies by planting food plants for caterpillars and nectar plants for the adults. The 'Caterpillar Munch' and 'Butterfly Fuel' sections of the gardens will then be monitored to see what arrives... We will also be offering field trips out to our reserves so that the children have the chance to spot some of the rarer species in their locality, and see how we manage the land to benefit them.



Broad-Bordered Bee Hawk Caterpillar (David Green)

It has been great to work with fellow forum member Becky Groves (of Groves Nurseries) who enthusiastically agreed to be one of our Guinea Pigs and host a day of workshops for us! Having advertised the workshops in the local press and through leaflets to local primary

schools, we were inundated with over 60 children and their parents throughout the day. After scrutinizing the contents of the moth traps we had set the night before, the kids got stuck in to potting up their plug plants of Cuckoo Flower and Marjoram to take home. We are really grateful to Becky for all her help – plus all the pots and compost she supplied!

Following further trial events at primary schools, brownie groups, local events plus a trip out to one of our reserves, we have collected lots of positive feedback and are hoping that we will be successful in our second round application. We hope that over the coming years our project will inspire a new generation of butterfly and moth enthusiasts and keen wildlife gardeners!



Field Trip to Lankham Bottom Reserve, Dorset (Kate Merry)

We would be extremely grateful to hear from forum members who have experience in running education projects, particularly those involving wildlife gardening activities for children. We are still in the planning stages of our project and your thoughts and feedback would be gratefully received. Thank you!

Kate Merry

kmerry@butterfly-conservation.org.uk

Pond Conservation's Big Pond Dip – Results from 2009-11

From Pond Conservation's Autumn 2011 Newsletter

First of all, a big thank you to everyone who participated in this year's Big Pond Dip. We've had a great response – with over 1000 people now participating in our online pond surveys since we started them. This has helped us find out more about the ponds that are right outside our back door(s), and beginning to suggest some answers to the many puzzles that surround these apparently familiar habitats. Putting together the results for the past three years - 2009 to 2011 - we're increasingly confident about some of the early trends we saw.

You *can* grow sensitive water plants in garden ponds, if the conditions are right -



This pond has two species of stonewort growing healthily, some of our most sensitive water plants
Photo © Jeremy Biggs

- and plants provide homes

Garden ponds with all three types of water plants (marginal, floating-leaved and submerged) had a greater variety of animals than ponds with only one or two plant groups. We know this is true in bigger ponds in the countryside, but we weren't

sure it would apply in the garden – and it's not really been part of the standard advice up to now.

Garden ponds are supporting a good variety of wildlife

Three quarters of the ponds surveyed had water snails, water beetles and pond skaters, and two thirds of ponds had breeding dragonflies or damselflies. Now we need to know more about which species are visiting our ponds: if we were talking about birds it would be like saying we've got tits and thrushes visiting most gardens.

Nine out of ten ponds were visited by amphibians - and about two thirds had amphibians breeding. These were predominantly Common Frogs. Less often seen were: Smooth Newts (in 34% of ponds), Palmate Newts, (13% of ponds), Great Crested Newts (6% of ponds) and Common Toads (in 14% of ponds).

However, the most sensitive creatures were not so widespread, and the fussiest of these - caddis flies and alderflies, were found in less than a quarter of the ponds.

Good quality ponds are good for amphibians too

A pond with a 'good' or 'excellent' invertebrate score is twice as likely to have newts or toads breeding, compared to a poor or moderate pond. Quality is not so important for Common Frogs: half of even the poorest ponds had breeding frogs. But on the whole, it looks as though the better the quality of the garden pond, the more likely it is to have breeding amphibians. This interesting finding is something we'll be trying to find out more about.

Clear water ponds are good for wildlife

The survey shows that clear water garden ponds had more diverse invertebrate communities than more cloudy and turbid ponds.

Small may be beautiful, but it's harder to keep the tiniest ponds in really good condition

The Big Pond Dip results suggest it's harder to keep small and medium-sized ponds in really good condition than big ponds. Of the tiniest ponds, those that are less than 1 m x 1m - only 2



in every 100 were in 'excellent' condition. This rises to 9 in every 100 medium-sized ponds in excellent condition, and 25 in every 100 bigger ponds. So small and medium sized ponds will probably need more tender loving care to keep them in tip-top condition. For amphibians, the very smallest ponds can provide useful habitat but medium-sized – that is up to 5 m x 5 m and above - are preferred: Common Frogs were most likely to be found breeding in medium-sized ponds, and newts and toads were reported most often in medium and large-sized ponds.

Fish aren't necessarily a bad thing - unless you are a water beetle or a newt

The Big Pond Dip found a small reduction in pond quality associated with fish, but interestingly two of the most sensitive invertebrate groups, caddis flies and alderflies, were as likely to be seen in ponds with fish as without. Pond skaters were even recorded slightly more often from fish ponds. The group that appeared to be most affected by fish was the water beetles. Surprisingly, Common Frogs were recorded slightly more often breeding in fish ponds: though probably most of the tadpoles ended up as fish food.

Newts were less often found breeding in fish ponds, particularly Palmate and Great Crested Newts. Common Toads showed their well-known preference for fish ponds in the Big Pond Dip results. They bred in 20% of fish ponds in gardens but only 11% of fishless ponds. However, given that fish eat frog and newt tadpoles, avoiding only the unpleasant-tasting tadpoles of toads, it seems very likely that fish ponds would still generally produce fewer young frogs and newts than ponds without fish.

What can we do to make garden ponds even better wildlife habitats?

- Plenty of plants: the Big Pond Dip showed that ponds with all three plant groups had a larger number of animal groups.
- Ponds that are good for invertebrates are more likely to be good for amphibians.
- Provide clean water – if your water is clear, you will usually have more diverse wildlife communities.
- Fish and other animals can co-exist, but if you want to encourage water beetles and newts, particularly the less common Palmate and Great Crested Newts, then you will need to create an additional fish-free pond.

Something to think about!

One way of determining the impact of fish and amphibians would be to look for froglets, toadlets and newt efts emerging from the pond during the summer. This would confirm how successful they have been. If you see them, then tell us about it.

You can download a more detailed report from our website at:

<http://www.pondconservation.org.uk/bigponddip/Big+Pond+Dip+results+from+2009-2011>



Two Important Meetings - if you are quick! Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Herpetofauna Workers Meeting - 2012

Due to the increasing popularity of this annual event, we (ARC) are delighted to announce that the Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting 2012 will be held at the Telford International Centre (T.I.C.), Shropshire, Saturday 28th to Sunday 29th January. This venue is just three hours

travel from the majority of the UK population so we are hoping that it will provide everybody an opportunity to attend!

We have a full and varied programme of presentations and updates from ARGs throughout the UK as well as workshops to suit all interests and to inspire anyone with an interest in herpetology for the season ahead. Everyone is welcome, from novices to students and volunteer surveyors to University Professors! There will also be an opportunity to catch up with old friends and make new ones at our Gala Dinner and social evening which includes the return of Britain's premier herpetological quiz – 'Have I got newts for you!'

For more information and to download a flyer, booking form and/or the provisional programme visit www.arc-trust.org/events/HWM.

Butterfly Conservation's National Moth Recorders' Meeting

The date for the second National Moth Recorders' Meeting is **January 28th 2012** at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, central Birmingham. The programme for the day has been drawn up and the line-up features both amateur moth recorders and academic researchers.



We are really pleased to have Professor Gareth Jones from the 'Batlab' at Bristol University speaking about how bats and moths try to out-wit one another in their predator/prey relationship. The draft programme for the day is available on the Moths Count website (www.mothscount.org). This year there is a £5 (per person) registration fee for attendees. This includes morning and afternoon tea/coffee and a buffet lunch all subsidised from Butterfly Conservation budgets. It has been necessary to impose a charge this year as we no

longer have Heritage Lottery Funding to cover holding such an event. Advanced booking is essential, to book your place please contact info@butterfly-conservation.org or telephone 01929 400209. We hope to see you there.

Latest 2011 Woking Garden Wildlife Survey Results

Gill Stribley Woking LA21

Forum member Gill Stribley has sent us a summary of the 2011 Woking Garden Wildlife Survey. This is part of the Woking Local Action 21's (LA21) Gardening For Life project, and has run for 5 sample years now, from its start in 1999. It is fast becoming an important

time-series for garden surveys. You can find the full results (and those of earlier years) at this site (note it is a secure https address):

<https://sites.google.com/site/wokingla21/Home/gardening-for-life/garden-wildlife-watch-annual-surveys/results-garden-wildlife-watch-surveys>

The recordings of the bird species have generally shown good consistency from year to year. Where this has not been the case statistically significant changes have been demonstrated. In 2011 there was some increase in reports of the house sparrow and starling but still lower than the 2007 survey and the maximum numbers of individuals seen at one time illustrate very small flocks compared to previous decades. In contrast there has been an increase in the coal tit, long-tailed tit and ring-necked parakeet. These findings are in agreement with the RSPB and other surveys so it shows our sample sizes are adequate to pick up such trends at a local level and could potentially identify an unusual local effect.

The stag beetle in 2011, as in recent years, still showed significant reduction from 49% in 2007 to 40% (similar to the level it was in 1999). In 2011 hedgehogs had fallen to 19% from 24% of gardens last year which was significantly lower than the 27% in 2007 and more so compared to the 33% reported in the 1999 survey. Unfortunately this is in line with recent further declines nationally so LA21, in collaboration with other conservation organisations, is promoting ways we can help hedgehogs in our gardens.

The results of questions on environmentally friendly garden practices for years 2007-11 were compared with those of 1999. Major significant changes occurred in 2007 compared to 1999. Unfortunately the reduction in use of chemical weed killers and pesticides has not been maintained, although regular use of slug pellets has shown significant reduction of the 1999 use and for the last two years around 40% never using them. Also there has been a consistent reduction in use of inorganic soil improvers compared to 1999, but peat based composts are being used more than in 2007. On the other hand providing water and food for birds, composting and collecting rainwater has remained at high levels of participants since 2007.

Woking Gardening For Life group is debating how the project should go forward with regard to making the survey digital on line and promoting action for example on reduction of harmful pesticides and slug pellets, reduction in peat based composts, increase in use of varied bird nest boxes etc. Greater awareness of the issues and availability of alternative products would be important aims. *[Perhaps this excellent survey could also look into what motivates sustainable gardening behaviour in its correspondents? Ed.]*



Green up! Five ways to work with your council on the environment and sustainability

The Community Development Foundation has published a very helpful guide written by Agnes Gautier.

This indispensable plain English guide explains how community groups can use everything from Local Area Agreements to

Sustainable Community Strategies to get their work supported. The guide also explains all the words and vocabulary commonly used by councils, so local groups can clearly understand ‘council speak’.

Green Up! is packed full of practical examples from Transition Towns, civic societies, faith groups and many more. It also has tips from community group members who are successfully working with their councils on issues relating to sustainability, climate change, the environment and energy.

Whether your group would love to work with your council on environmental sustainability but don't know where to start, or whether you want a clearer idea of what your council is supposed to be doing in terms of environmental sustainability, Green Up! can help you.

You can buy a paper copy of the guide from the CDF⁵ for £6.97, and it can be downloaded as a pdf file from: <http://www.cdf.org.uk/web/guest/publication?id=142955>

Amphibian and Reptile ID iPhone app Released

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) staff have recently been working with popular smartphone and tablet app(lication) developers Isoperla and the Amphibian and Reptile Groups – UK (ARG-UK) to develop a new app for iPhone and iPad platforms.

Based on Isoperla's successful “HerptileId” (which came number 3 in BBC Countryfile's top 10 apps), the new app contains even more ID photos and updated information that will enable users to explore and identify the amphibians and reptiles of the British Isles.



To find the app, type “Isoperla” or “HerptileId” into the search box in iTunes or the Apple App Store. Existing users can upgrade to the new app for free!

Users can keep a log of reptile and amphibian sightings using the app and take a photograph too. Reptile and amphibian sightings provide important conservation information and this can be sent in real time to the ARG-UK Record Pool

database automatically from the app. This information will be used to help conservation of our native species.

We hope that this exciting collaboration will lead to a greater appreciation and understanding of amphibians and reptiles, and that this will deliver conservation benefits.

⁵ <http://www.cdf.org.uk/>

Powdercap strangler: Rare fungi found in UK garden

Brett Westwood BBC Natural History Unit

A north Worcestershire garden is playing host to a very rare fungus - the bizarre powdercap strangler (*Squamanita paradoxa*). The fungus is confined to a handful of sites in the UK, and is equally rare in continental Europe.

Nine of the strange mushrooms were discovered by Worcestershire mycologist John Bingham on a mossy garden lawn in a garden in November 2011. It is called the powdercap strangler because it is a parasitic fungus. It is actually an outgrowth, or gall on another fungus - the earthy powdercap (*Cystoderma amiathinum*). This common orange mushroom grows on old grassland.



The strangler appears to induce a parasitic gall which body-snatches the powdercap and uses its stem to support itself. The result is a two-part toadstool; a fungus body comprising two colours in which the greyish cap of the strangler is clothed below by the orange "stockings" of the host powdercap.

About a dozen or so sites are known for *Squamanita*, from Cornwall to Scotland, though several records have come from Wales and the Welsh Marches.

The Worcestershire finding is particularly unusual and exciting for scientists. The stranglers here are growing in a garden lawn which has not been fertilised for 50 years and now supports more than 70 species of fungi, including 14 species of waxcaps - colourful fungi that are indicators of the quality of species-rich turf.

This is an abridged version of Brett's article, which was based on a fascinating piece on "Saving Species", on Radio 4 on December 6th 2011. You can access the full text at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/16029977>

[The issue of biodiversity in domestic lawns seems ripe for a special session at a future conference. Please contact me if you could contribute a talk or poster, or could suggest a speaker]

Please send your news, events, survey results and stories for the next newsletters to me, Steve Head at wlgf@stephenmhead.com