



WILDLIFE GARDENING FORUM

E-newsletter: February 2020

www.wlgf.org

@WLGForum



Headlines

- **Hold the date: [Welsh Wildlife Gardening Weekend: 27–28 June 2020](#).** Following our successful Wildlife Gardening Days in London in 2018 and 2019, we are now joining forces with the National Botanic Garden of Wales for a weekend of activities, talks and workshops. Full programme and booking available soon at the [Wildlife Gardening Forum website](#).
- [Plants for Bugs study – Results, part III](#). We are now getting a fuller picture of the relative value of native and non-native planting for invertebrates in the garden, thanks to the publication of the third set of results from the RHS/WLGF study.
- [Favourite flowers for pollinators](#) research published, revealing top plants for different insects.
- Check out our new [Facebook Page](#), which complements our Facebook Group.

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Brimstone on English bluebell

You are receiving this newsletter because you are a member of the Wildlife Gardening Forum. If you would like to be removed from our membership list and cease receiving this newsletter, please email members@wlgf.org.

Forum news

Welsh Wildlife Gardening Weekend: 27–28 June 2020

The Wildlife Gardening Forum and the [National Botanic Garden of Wales](#) will jointly host a wildlife gardening weekend at the Botanic Garden on Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 June 2020. The garden is located between Swansea and Carmarthen, close to the famous Gower peninsula. A full programme will be available on the [Forum's website](#) and the Botanic Garden's website soon.

It is anticipated that admission to the event will be the standard [admission price to the garden](#), which allows entry to the whole garden for seven days. Visitors who travel by public transport will get half price admission if they show train or bus tickets at reception. The National Botanic Garden of Wales also boasts an amazing Mediterranean biome housed inside the largest single span glasshouse in Europe, and it is adjacent to a National Nature Reserve, so if you plan to travel to this event from a distance, why not make it a weekend or longer break? Some details of local accommodation are [here](#), and travel details are [here](#). A [bus service](#) will be available from Swansea station on Saturday 27 June.

Plants for Bugs study – Results, part III

The [third set of results](#) from this major study by the RHS, in collaboration with the Forum, has been released. The overall aim of the study was to investigate whether UK garden invertebrates prefer British native, near-native (Northern Hemisphere) or exotic (Southern Hemisphere) plants.

The latest report analyses which plants are preferred by ground-living invertebrates, and concludes that:

- you are likely to support more ground-active invertebrates when you plant densely (the exception was ground-dwelling spiders, which were found in greater numbers among sparser plantings)
- native and near-native plants support more ground-active invertebrates than exotic plants
- planting schemes based on native plants may support a greater abundance of ground-active herbivores than other planting schemes, but ground-active detritivores show no preference.



Forum new Facebook Page

To complement our [Facebook Group](#), which now has 9680 members and still rising, Johan Ingles-Le Nobel has created a [Facebook Page](#) for the Forum. For anyone not quite sure of the difference, a Facebook Page enables charities like us to create a public presence on Facebook, visible to everyone on the net. We, as the Forum, post there, and every person on Facebook can connect with these Pages and receive updates in their News Feed and interact with them. Meanwhile, our Facebook Group allows people to join, post content around our common cause and discuss issues; we moderate that content, with as light a touch as possible.

New Forum trustees

Following our call last year for volunteers to become Trustees of the Forum, we are delighted to announce the recruitment of three excellent new board members.

- **Mary Jackson** has a strong background in environmental education with [Learning through Landscapes](#).
- **Karen Murphy** is Features Editor for Garden News magazine
- **Johan Ingles-Le Nobel** has 20 years' experience as a Marketing Manager with special skills in using social media and websites to build influence.

We will need to recruit up to three more Trustees later in 2020, plus there are other opportunities to volunteers with us (we are all volunteers at the Forum!) so please consider if you might contribute some of your time and experience, with hopefully plenty of enjoyment and reward in return.

Forum Website – insect pages complete

In something of a landmark, we have now uploaded the latest 12 pages of insect content. These include small but completely fascinating groups like the mayflies. Visit the [page](#) and find out about creatures with turban-eyes and flying sub-adults! There are now 74 insect pages, and the next groups to be tackled will be the remaining arthropods, spiders and centipedes.

Research

Favourite flowers for pollinators

In 2018, the Forum visited Rosi Rollings' plant nursery in Oxfordshire to see her trial 1m x 1m beds of pollinator-friendly flowers. Now, her 5-year study to compare the relative value of 111 different plants for pollinators has been published in the [Journal of Insect Conservation](#).

Overall, lesser calamint *Calamintha nepeta* attracted the most insects. *Helenium autumnale* was the most attractive plant for honeybee, viper's-bugloss *Echium vulgare* likewise for bumblebees, *Geranium* 'Rozanne' for solitary bees, *Verbena bonariensis* for Lepidoptera and Canadian goldenrod *Solidago canadensis* for hoverflies.

Rosi found no difference in the number of insects attracted according to whether the plants were native or non-native, or whether they were annuals, biennials or perennials. Rosi did not include exotic (i.e. southern hemisphere) flowers in this research.

Perhaps the most important take-home for gardeners, however, is how different insect groups and indeed different insect species preferred different flowers. If you want to satisfy pollinators, choose those plants known to have value, but it also helps to grow a variety. And, of course, remember that planting for pollinators is only the tip of the iceberg of planting for wildlife.



Small white on *Verbena bonariensis*

Leafblowers bad for bugs?

In response to a request from the German Green Party MP Steffi Lemke, the [German Environment Ministry warned](#) that leaf blowers can be ecologically damaging and fatal to insects caught up in the foliage. You can read a short summary in English [here](#).

While his statement was not apparently based on scientific research, it does seem logical that using leaf blowers (and garden vacuums) can remove an important decomposition component of habitats if the leaves are then discarded. The use of the machines can also be fatal for the insects and spiders that are picked up and blown around, plus there is the noise and pollution impacts of petrol-powered commercial blowers. Furthermore, in public areas the blowers broadcast dog droppings into the air, potentially risking the health of the operators and public.

The ministry isn't proposing a ban but advises both the public and local authorities to avoid blowers and vacuums and go back to using brooms and rakes.

Access to nature 'triggers' eco-actions

A [study](#) led by the University of Exeter analysed the extensive data from Natural England's *Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment* study to find out whether having access to greenspace makes you more likely to act in environmentally responsible ways.

They found that this does appear to be the case – people living in rural areas, near the coast, and in urban areas with high levels of greenspace reported higher levels of recycling, buying eco-friendly and seasonal/local products, walking/cycling for short journeys, environmental organisation membership, environmental volunteering, and green travel.



Photo: Helen Pugh (RSPB Images)

Do products sold to encourage pollinators work?

Karin Alton and Francis Ratnieks have published a [hard-hitting article](#) which questions the majority of products sold to encourage insects. For example, they looked at some of the existing research into bee hotels and bee bricks, for which a Canadian study showed them to be “not entirely positive or straightforward in terms of helping native bee species”. ‘Seed-bombs’ for pollinator-friendly flowers are attractive as gifts, but much pricier than seed packets, and have poor germination success. Butterfly overwintering houses are equally poor because few species overwinter as adults and there are masses of hibernation sites (eg ivy and sheds) in most gardens.

The authors' advice is summed up in the title of the paper: “Caveat emptor...” (Buyer beware). You should also take a look at our [web page](#) on the subject, and its associated pdf paper.

Policy

Insect declines highlighted.

Back in November, an important report commissioned by a group of Wildlife Trusts was released which we should all read. Entitled [Insect Declines and Why They Matter](#), it was compiled by Professor Dave Goulson, and it details the evidence for a massive global decline in wildlife – especially in the invertebrates. One slightly alarmist [2019 paper](#) even stated *“This review highlights the dreadful state of insect biodiversity in the world, as almost half of the species are rapidly declining and a third are being threatened with extinction”*

Goulson’s report is measured and readable. As might be expected, he puts considerable emphasis on the role of pesticides, but this is not unreasonable, since this is an area where – with good will and common sense – major improvements could be made rapidly.

He concludes that:
“We urgently need to stop all routine and unnecessary use of pesticides and start to build a nature recovery network by creating more and better-connected, insect-friendly habitat in our gardens, towns, cities and countryside.”



Mixed group of insects on hogweed

New GCSE exam in Natural History

News is leaking out that the OCR exam board will be offering a [Natural History GCSE](#) to bolster environmental awareness. The new GCSE is aimed at teaching students “about specific organisms, field observation skills, conservation, and how nature has influenced art and culture.”

This comes at a very timely point, as society becomes increasingly concerned with [Nature Deficit Disorder](#) and the alienation of young people from nature. Furthermore, the UKs stock of professional and amateur taxonomists [is ageing](#) and it is vital that younger generation is recruited to provide the scientific resource to cope with the big changes we expect through climate change. We look forward to seeing the first drafts of structure and syllabus for the new qualification.

Stopping the carnage of bird-strike

The birding website, *BirdGuides*, [reported](#) how New York City looks set to pass a law requiring new builds to be glazed with bird-friendly glass to try and ensure that they do not add to the estimated 90,000–230,000 bird deaths that happen in the city each year through striking windows. San Francisco already has such laws in place.

Bird-friendly glass typically has a pattern within the glaze barely visible to the human eye or uses ultraviolet coatings. Here in the UK, the first bird-friendly glazing was installed in 2012, and companies such as Pilkington are developing new products.

With 25 million residential properties in the UK, not to mention all the other glazed buildings, the death and injury toll here must be staggering. With 300,000 new homes due to be built each year, should the UK be considering such laws, and urgently?



What birds see



What we see

[ORNILUX bird protection glass](#)

Garden centre plant pot recycling

Dobbies, which has 26 stores mainly in northern England and Scotland, now has a recycling scheme for all colours of plastic plant pots, as long as they are washed clean. We believe this is the only major garden centre chain currently offering such a scheme, but please let us know if you are aware of others. Of course, the ideal is to reuse any pots you have, but it is important that there is a scheme for old pots rather than them ending up in general waste.

Ban peat extraction to combat climate change

The Committee on Climate Change's [Land use: Policies for a Net Zero UK](#) report published at the end of January makes sweeping recommendations to reduce carbon emissions. These include increasing forest cover by 30% and big changes to agriculture, but for us the most important section deals with [peat](#). Peatlands should be net absorbers of CO₂, but emissions from our damaged peatlands were estimated at 23 million tons in 2017. The report calls for a complete ban on peat extraction and its sale, *including of imports*, before 2023.

There are now excellent peat-free composts available, but despite a 2011 government White Paper calling for the use of horticultural peat by amateurs to end by 2020, we are importing nearly half a million tons each year from Ireland. We hope that this latest report, which emphasises the climate change benefits, will put some teeth into legislation originally more concerned with saving biodiversity.

Metaldehyde ban overturned

Last year, in a surprise move, the UK government was forced to abruptly reverse its recent (2018) ban on slug pellets containing metaldehyde. This followed a High Court action brought by Chiltern Farm Chemicals which concluded that the [ban was unlawful](#) because the government's decision-making process was flawed. This doesn't mean that metaldehyde is now considered safe, but it is legal to buy and use again. We could expect further attempts to ban it now that various parliamentary diversions such as Brexit and elections are past us.

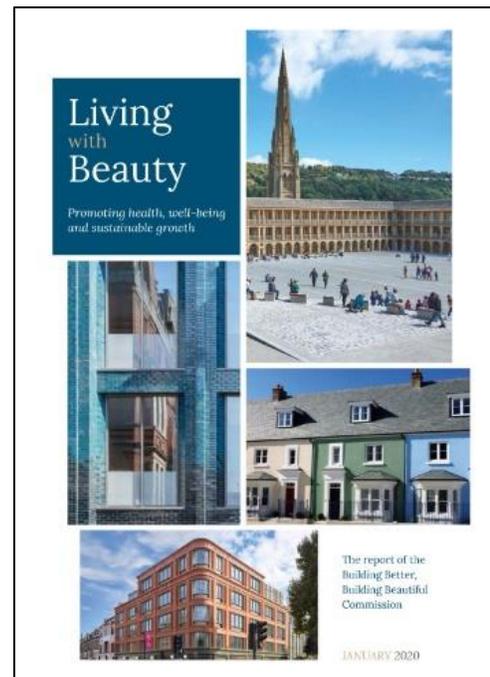
New report recommends major greening of built environment

On 30 January 2020, the *Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission* published its [final report](#), 'Living with beauty' for the UK government.

Its policy proposals included:

- requiring developments to have a greater focus on easy access to nature and green spaces
- planting two million new street trees
- planting urban orchards – one fruit tree per house
- re-greening streets and squares
- installing bricks for bees and birds in new build homes
- planting new hedges
- the designation of some streets as 'green corridors'
- creation of garden squares
- and sustainable drainage systems (SUDS).

All these features would of course be beneficial for wildlife, and for the connection that local communities have with them. All these features are currently being built into the standard-setting Barratt development at Kingsbrook, Aylesbury, in collaboration with the RSPB.



Sadly, in what seems to be starkly at odds with the report's contents, the cover shows a built world almost devoid of greenery.

Bristol is the first UK City to declare an ecological emergency

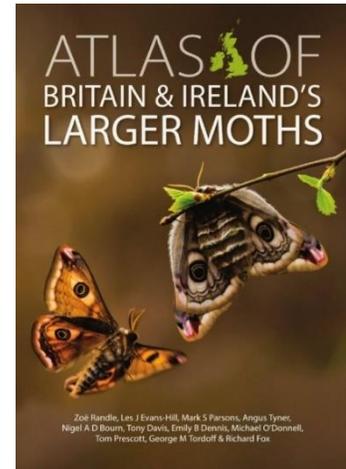
Back in 2018, Bristol was the first UK city to declare a climate emergency. On 4 February 2020, the city took another step by declaring an [ecological emergency](#). In recent years, massive declines in insects, birds and mammals have been seen in the UK, with once common species like starlings and hedgehogs in sharp decline. The initiative, backed by the City Council, Wildlife Trust and others, aims to extend beyond just parks and green spaces to buildings and streets. Although gardens are not mentioned as priorities, this is where the greatest opportunities will lie. It will be interesting to see what action materialises, and whether other cities follow their lead.

Resources

Atlas of Britain and Ireland's Larger Moths published

This publication marks the [culmination of 275](#) years of collecting moth records, and a huge effort of work to compile and produce, aided financially with an “eBay moth auction”. The detail of information is remarkable, and some of the conclusions surprising.

While the population of many moth species has seriously declined, climate change has facilitated the northern range expansion of some species, and let some continental species appear in southern counties. Overall, 38% of the species analysed had increased their range, while 31% showed a range decline.



Intriguingly, in another [study](#), the overall biomass of moths as measured by the Rothamsted Insect Survey revealed increasing biomass between 1967 and 1982, followed by gradual decline from 1982 to 2017, but representing a 2.2-fold net gain in mean biomass between the first (1967–1976) and last decades (2008–2017) of monitoring. Insect population changes are clearly complex.

Wildlife gardening in action

DIY Turtle Dove Reserve

Two Kent couples have [bought and created their own small nature reserve](#) to safeguard fast-declining turtle doves. When they moved to Staple in Kent, David and Bridget Burrige discovered a pair of the birds nesting behind their house. In 2015 the land on which the birds relied came up for sale, and with



Turtle dove (Ben Andrew, RSPB Images)

David and Ann Tingey and donations from friends, they bought the half-acre.

Since then, with advice from the RSPB's [Operation Turtle Dove](#), they have dug a pond, planted a hedgerow and sown plants for forage. There were eight birds on the site in 2019, raising two broods, while other species including yellow wagtails and linnets have also appeared.

This must be one of the best examples to date of effective community-based conservation.

Keep on the grass

Kings College Cambridge has [decided to turn](#) its Chapel Lawn, currently tended to the standard of a bowling green, into a wildflower meadow. The ‘Keep off the grass’ signs will be removed, and temporary paths will be mown through the meadow.

Citizen science

Want to be a slug surveyor?

For many gardeners, a slug is a slug, and many people do not realise that there are 40 species of slug in the UK. While some are nibblers of seedlings, prize blooms and potatoes, others concentrate their feeding on decaying matter and are vital cogs in the process of recycling organic material in the garden. However, about half of the species are non-native, and many are thought to be invasive and potentially having an impact on native species, so the Royal Horticultural Society is looking for at least 60 volunteers from across the country with access to a garden to take part in a one-year study.

You must:

- Be interested in learning more about slugs and how to identify them
- Be able to survey a garden at night for 30 minutes once a month for a full year
- Be willing to collect slugs and send them to the RHS.

If you are interested in participating in this project, please answer a SurveyMonkey questionnaire [here](#). Applications close 9am on 2 March 2020.



Winter bumblebee survey



You have until 1 March 2020 to submit [records of winter-active bumblebees](#) to the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society (BWARS). The information it is hoping to glean includes where in Britain and Ireland such winter activity is occurring, whether it is just an urban phenomenon, and which plants are being visited.

Submit your sightings here, and our Trustee, Marc Carlton, has some excellent extra information at his website [here](#).

Queen buff-tailed bumblebee

Health & wellbeing

Green prescribing is cost-effective

Researchers from Leeds Beckett University have analysed the [health and wellbeing impacts](#) achieved by the Wildlife Trusts' volunteering and targeted programmes for people with wellbeing and mental health issues. It found that most participants felt significantly better after the programmes. Using special analysis methods such as the [HACT social value calculator](#) the team were able to put a monetary value on the benefits. For people with low wellbeing there was a return of £6.88 worth of benefits for every pound invested in the programme. For people with average to high wellbeing, the return was even greater at £8.50. Money talks with government, so this could be a lever to increase public investment in 'natural health services'.

Second thoughts about urban trees and air pollution,

It is generally accepted that green infrastructure such as grassy areas, trees and green roofs and walls are good for city-dwellers' health, wellbeing and social cohesion, as well as biodiversity. One of the much-quoted benefits is for the role of trees and vegetation in mitigating air pollution.



A [study](#) by an international team headed by Prashant Kumar of the Global Centre for Clean Air Research in Guildford has concluded that planners need to be more careful in how they use vegetation in this way, suggesting that the evidence base for the causal impact of urban vegetation on human health is unclear.

Here at the Forum, we accept that more research would be helpful to establish the designs and policies, but in the meantime, the other benefits of hedges and trees to biodiversity and the greening of our towns and cities feels like a good enough reason to keep planting them.

Chelsea will focus on health and the environment



The M&G show garden design for Chelsea 2020

The RHS has [announced](#) that a key theme at the Chelsea Flower Show this year will be health and the environment. Show gardens will include: a communal residential garden promoting the need to incorporate and maintain beautiful, sustainable green spaces in our growing cities for the benefit of the planet and people; another city garden that balances the needs of both people and wildlife; a garden that looks at the benefits of increasing the UK's tree cover; an organic garden; and a plant health garden highlighting the risks posed by plant pests and diseases.

Campaigns

Peat-free April

Well, we have experienced Movember, Dry January and Veganuary, Now you can all sign up to [PeatFree April](#) and campaign for a ban on horticultural peat – not just in April but for ever. You can also Tweet at [#gopeatfree](#).



Bovis Homes hedgehog highways

Bovis Homes is the latest developer to embrace an element of wildlife-friendliness in its new developments by pledging “to install hedgehog highways to its existing developments and all future sites wherever possible”. The Barratt Kingsbrook development has been installing them since 2016, and in 2019 they were added to guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework for developers.

And finally...

Nature conservation in the digital age

Writing in [Science News](#), Les Firbank from the University of Leeds School of Biology and Global Food and Environment Institute argues that “Our growing digital connection to wildlife, aided by broadcasters such as David Attenborough, may be crucial to securing broad public support for the protection of wildlife”.

He lists examples of digital innovations that are helping make this connection, such as fitness apps that compare people to wild animals, live wildlife webcams and wildlife hubs linked through social media. Here at the Wildlife Gardening Forum, we accept the ever-increasing role that the digital world provides but believe that using this as the starting point for connecting people to real nature through their gardens and local greenspace may be even more powerful than that.



The newsletter is sent to all the members of the WLGF; you are welcome to forward it to friends or colleagues. Do encourage them to join the Forum (it's free!) by visiting www.wlgf.org and filling in the simple form.

The Wildlife Gardening Forum is a consortium of the UK's leading wildlife, conservation, gardening and horticultural organisations, from both the private and the public sectors. We now have over 1,000 members. Formed in 2005, our core aim is to help gardeners and decision-makers understand just how important our gardens are for wildlife.

Newsletter compiled by Adrian Thomas and Steve Head, with support from Marc Carlton, Andy Salisbury and Ken Thompson. All photos by Adrian unless stated.