

WILDLIFE GARDENING FORUM NEWSLETTER JUNE 2014



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FORUM DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Author: Steve Head

Firstly, a big thank you to Dr Catherine Burton who has put this newsletter together. Please continue to send in your stories, news items and events - including anything relevant you might have picked up from the web or newspapers. For now, please continue to send news to wlgf@stephenmhead.com, although this will soon be changing.

The most significant news is that the Forum has succeeded in becoming a registered charity - number 1156608. This means the Charity Commission recognises the national significance of our work, and that we will have added credibility when we go cap-in-hand to the major trusts for project funding.

The web site is moving forwards - with huge help from many Forum Members. The central "Knowledge Shop" section, which contains much of the science and evidence base for wildlife gardening, is the first priority, but much of the rest of the site is under development at the same time. I am still looking for offers of suitable photos - especially very wide ones that would be good for headers, and for portraits of garden wildlife and plants. All photo sources will be acknowledged.

We have been involved with two conferences already this year. The March Forum meeting at Wisley centred on the first results from the Plants for Bugs project. This was a great success, judged by the delegate response to the colossal amount of work that Helen Bostock and Andy Salisbury have coordinated, and by the rather hectic criticisms in national papers that showed the subject of native versus non-native is as contentious as ever. On that topic, I have to recommend Forum Trustee Ken Thompson's remarkable new book "Where do camels belong?: the story and science of invasive species". This is the complete discussion we covered in outline in the last newsletter, based on his 2013 McLeod lecture to the RHS. In his always lucid and readable way, Ken gives a carefully argued and heavily referenced critique of naïve modern concepts of native-ness and the real difference between the hype and angst over some "invasive aliens" and the less dramatic reality. All ecologists should read this book, and question their own attitudes.

The Forum was a joint convener with Snowdonia National Park of an important conference at Plas Tan y Bwlch on human health and wellbeing and exposure to the natural environment. Wales is very much ahead of the rest of the UK in this area, and we have identified some useful case studies for the web site. The conference will be repeated in May next year, and we will give you plenty of warning.

Among other activities, the Forum has contributed strongly to both the Welsh Government and Defra consultations on protecting pollinators, and managing to keep the argument open to species beyond honeybees (important as they are) and issues beyond neonicotinoids. We have also received the results of our first consultancy on training needs and mechanisms for wildlife gardening, which we hope will translate into one or more funded projects. Another consultancy is about to start on assembling evidence for the web site on aspects of human and societal health in relation to urban greenspace and wildlife gardens, and another on planning issues in relation to gardens and green infrastructure.

Finally, we are planning a third conference this year, in late November or early December at the Natural History Museum. The theme will be Monitoring and Citizen Science. If you would like to contribute a talk along these lines please get in touch *asap* before the programme is finalised.

Northern Ireland plant databases

Following discussion at our last conference on the disparity between different lists of plants beneficial for wildlife, Forum member Shaun Wolfe-Murphy has sent links to his extensive database of Northern Ireland plants: <http://www.ecologyni.com/resources> This is a very extensive list of 2,200 plants or cultivated varieties of plants, of which 274 are Irish native species that are suitable for wildlife-friendly planting schemes in gardens, parks and landscaping projects

Every day, opportunities to build ecological value into landscaping and garden planting projects are being spurned. There are usually wildlife-friendly alternatives to the ecologically bankrupt species that are often selected for use. Here two searchable databases are presented in an attempt to make the identification of wildlife-friendly species that are fit-for-purpose, a little easier. There are also useful lists of plants that really should not be used because of ecological problems, and plants that are currently rejected from wildlife friendly planting:

- Wildlife-friendly herbaceous and climbing plants
- Wildlife-friendly trees and shrubs
- Don't plant these in wildlife-friendly projects
- Current list of 'rejects'

Search for herbaceous plants or climbers

You are here: Home -> Search for herbaceous plants or climbers

Search by name:
type any part of the scientific name Search

Or search by variables. (If you do not tick an option we will search all variables).
Height: Minimum height: Any | centimetres | Maximum height: Any | centimetres
Spread: Minimum spread: Any | centimetres | Maximum spread: Any | centimetres

Habitat requirements / tolerance
Soil moisture: dry well-drained damp waterlogged
Soil acidity: acidic soil or peaty mildly acidic soils circumneutral soils slightly calcareous soils chalk/limestone soils

The databases are:

- Designed to be a compendium of wildlife-friendly plants suitable for structural or decorative planting in landscaping and garden schemes.
- Specifically tailored for use in Northern Ireland. They can be used to identify suitable plants for use in other parts of Britain and Ireland, but lack a few species that are not hardy here, which could be planted further South. They are missing a few species that are native in mainland Britain but not native or already widely naturalised here.
- Free to use

Mediaeval Monastery Healing Garden

Author: Jan Miller

Very pleased to relate that my latest project - making a mediaeval monastery healing herb garden (with all the wonderful strange old plants like Costmary, Mandrake, Ploughman's Spikenard etc.) has resulted in also providing a nesting substrate attractive to Tawny mining bees - see attached general view and close up of one of 3 tunnel entrances next to the box hedging I found yesterday.

My usual trick of using Builders 'Crush & Run' limestone chippings and dust to give good drainage has pleased the bees when it's on the flat (same did not happen in rock mound - how do they know what is underneath??)



God's Own Seed

Author: Caroline Uff, Ecologist with the National Trust

This is how, with patience, a friendly church, and a small amount of work, a great deal of pleasure was gained from reverting part of a disused paddock into a wild flower meadow.

I became involved with St Michael's Church at Cwm Head in South Shropshire 10 years ago, and was thrilled to find that with advice from Caring for God's Acre (CfGA) the churchyard is managed sympathetically for wildlife. It is small but full of native flowers including cowslip, oxeye daisy, common spotted orchid and twayblade. The path edges are kept trim but much of the grassland left to grow from April until September. This management has resulted in ever increasing swathes of orchids.

At home, we gradually removed the invasive weeds (dock and thistle) from our paddock, and each autumn strimmed and raked off the hay (with plenty of tea breaks). We scattered yellow rattle seeds (a plant known to weaken grass growth and give space for other plants) and also enquired about taking some seed from the churchyard grassland.



St Michael's Church

Green hay (cut and immediately removed) is often used as seed for restoration projects, but at Cwm Head the cut grass is left lying for a few days to allow remaining seeds to drop. Not wanting to interfere with this clearly successful routine we simply took some hay at 'raking up' time. We 'roughed up' some small patches of paddock to expose the soil, divided the church hay between them and trod it in.

Over the following years the meadow went from strength to strength, managed simply by cutting in autumn and removing the hay. More and more flowers typical of the churchyard became established. In the third year we had our first

flowering common spotted orchid. Now there are many, and the meadow is beautiful with a peaceful atmosphere reminiscent of well, Cwm Head Church of course!

A City Wildflower Meadow at World Museum

Author: World Museum—Progress Report, 3rd January 2014

See blog at <http://blog.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/2014/04/city-wildflower-meadow-at-world-museum/>

A city wildflower meadow is being planted on the upper green lawn in front of World Museum, Liverpool, aiming to create a colourful and diverse natural wildflower meadow that:

- Brightens the existing grassed area and enlivens the visitor arrival to World Museum.
- Promotes strong environmental messages and functions as a small urban wildlife refuge.

Work started in February 2013 to create a sustainable and evolving ecosystem following the principles of traditional meadow management. Native wildflowers and grasses were introduced and encouraged to grow and spread as part of a planned but natural meadow planting scheme in order to increase plant diversity, colour, structure and to encourage wildlife. Existing wildflowers and grasses were conserved and unwanted invasive ones controlled. The aim has been to create an open, flower-rich sward where grass is sparse and not too leafy or tall.

A schematic interpretation of the meadow with its main compartments and a numbered grid is provided in the picture [overleaf]. Four distinct plant assemblages are represented with a total of about 150 wildflower and grass species: Perennial meadow, Cornfield annuals, Arable annuals & Field margin perennials and biennials

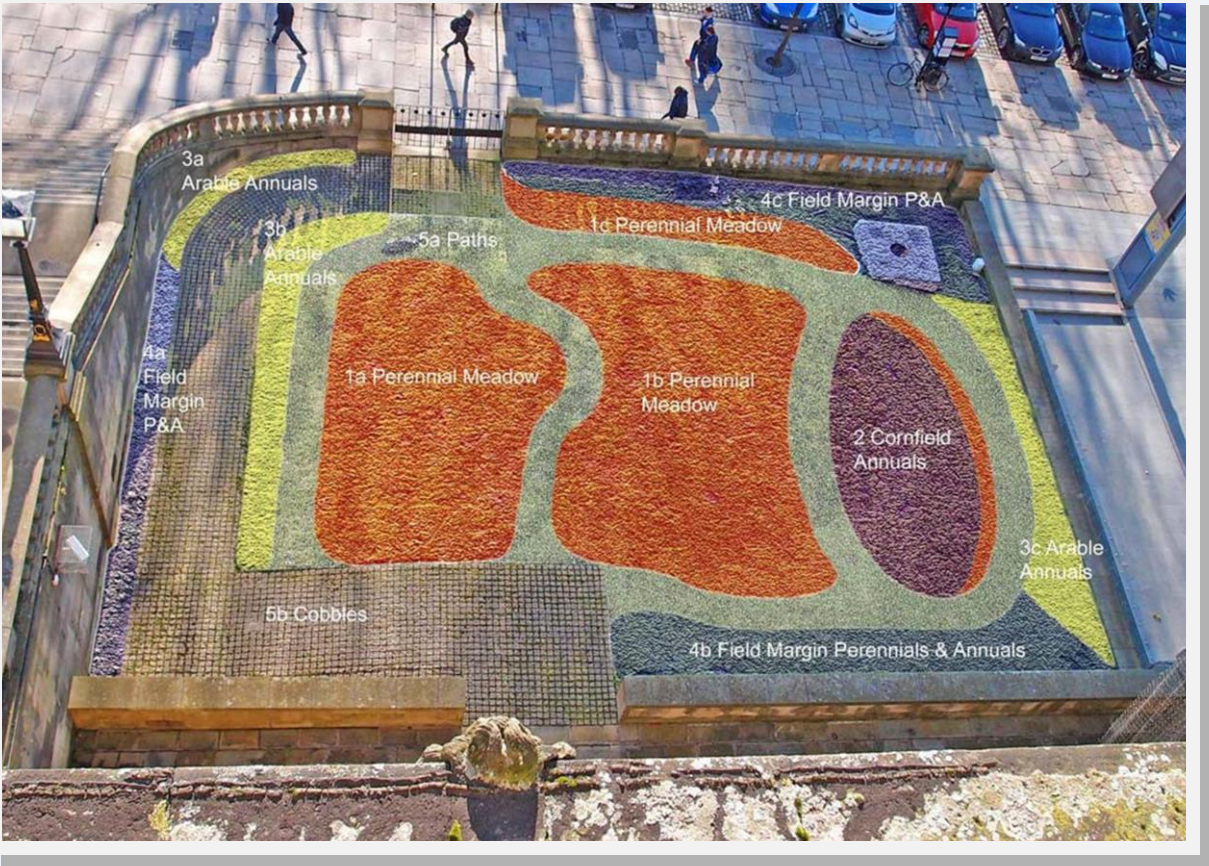
A narrow mown access path was maintained to divide sections and to indicate that 'wild management' is deliberate. Once fully established, there should be significant colour in the meadow for six months of the year. All actions are reversible and the option to return to a mown green space is retained, at minimal cost.

Between autumn 2012 and autumn 2013, ca. 4,000 native wildflower plants were planted. These were either sourced from the wild (with landowner permission) and established in pots, or grown as small plugs from native seed

The reduction of soil fertility took place between March and August 2013 by removing ca 10 tonnes of turf and top soil and replacing this with sand or limestone dust. Soil was scarified in November and December to replicate the poaching by cattle feet that occurs in traditional meadow management. This created bare disturbed spaces for natural seed germination.

The project was co-ordinated by a small team of natural science curatorial staff and relied completely on voluntary assistance.

It is hoped that the wildflowers, introduced to the meadow in 2013 as small plants, will become established, grow, spread and begin to create a colourful, wildlife-rich spectacle between March and October 2014. A further 70 species of native wildflower are being grown from seed and will be introduced to the meadow between March and June. This will mean that over 200 native wildflower species will be present.

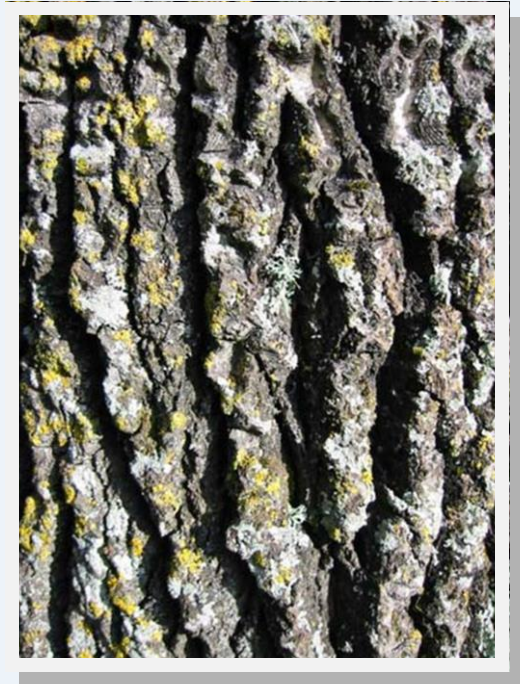


Ecotherapy Proposal

*This article outlines an ecotherapy proposal developed by **Cathy Greenwell** as the thesis within her Master of Science in Environmental Management (Protected Areas), completed at Birkbeck, University of London in January 2014.*

Poor mental wellbeing is becoming one of the principle health issues facing the modern world: depression is predicted to be the second greatest cause of ill health globally by 2020, with significant economic and societal implications. Maximising treatment efficacy and cost-effectiveness therefore continues to be of critical importance.

Over the past couple of decades research has increasingly provided evidence to support the often intuitive belief that contact with nature can have positive physiological and psychological impacts on human wellbeing. Evidence of these benefits has underpinned the development of activities which seek to use exposure to nature in a variety of therapeutic contexts. Such activities typically take place in a 'greenspace', are tailored to a varying degree to the therapeutic requirements of participants and are often, as in this article, generically referred to as 'ecotherapy'.



Participants in 'mainstream' ecotherapy activities, generally recognised as comprising 'green exercise' i.e. physical activity within greenspaces, social/therapeutic horticulture and care farm stays, almost certainly include those diagnosed with depression and some programmes may be specifically targeted at this group.



The proposed ecotherapy seeks to mesh with and enhance the 8-week Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) programme, as developed by Bangor University in the 1990s, which now forms part of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommendations for treatment within the English National Health Service (NHS) to prevent depression relapse. The author focused on MBCT in the belief that nature-focused activities represented an excellent vehicle for mindfulness practice and had the potential to extend and embed MBCT course learning whilst simultaneously delivering other positive but more tangential benefits.

The project aimed to establish the validity in principle of the proposed ecotherapy, explore how it could be used within an MBCT context and consider whether it had any potential mental health applications beyond recurrent depression. Evidence-based support was sought through an extensive literature review of the sectors drawn on. A small number of NHS-based clinicians currently delivering MBCT were recruited to review the proposal, which included a matrix of suggested activities and one which mapped them onto the MBCT programme thematically; feedback was then sought from them via structured, recorded telephone interviews.

The ecotherapy sought to combine the proven psychologically restorative effects of



taking part in an activity within a greenspace setting, the practice of mindfulness which lies at the heart of MBCT, together with elements of the distinctive ethos and practice associated with Forest School. Focusing on outdoor, participant-led activities, the expanding Forest Schools movement is mainly known for working with school-age children; there are, however, a growing number of innovative projects being undertaken with adults, designed to engage with learning or physically disabled clients, or those disadvantaged in other ways. Suggested activities included many which encouraged close attention to the sensory experience of being outdoors in a greenspace, e.g. 'closed eye awareness' and 'micro focus' on particular natural features. A number were, however, designed as indoor alternatives to cater for participants or groups

who might not initially be comfortable with 'outdoors', e.g. meditation on or creating art from natural objects such as a pine cones, shells etc.



Two delivery models emerged as the most promising ways to realise the ecotherapy's potential as an enhancement to MBCT, i.e. as an integrated element within the formal MBCT programme (Model One) or as a more informal, follow-on addition (Model Two).

Whilst highlighting some issues for consideration, such as the need to ensure adequate support for participants, comments from participating clinicians were overwhelmingly supportive of the proposal. A clear consensus emerged among respondents that practice-based evidence of the ecotherapy's efficacy was now required in order to progress the proposal; running a pilot programme was fully supported as the most appropriate way of acquiring this data. Funding options were identified for piloting both models, with Model One potentially being covered by existing MBCT contracts for Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT)

services and therefore the most likely to be undertaken initially. Model Two was likely to require commitment from a partnership which included the NHS and Local Authorities. Use of a venue 'local' to participants was identified as being important for ease of access and to encourage the ongoing use and sense of 'ownership' that can build social capital through increased community engagement for individuals and potentially contribute to enhancement of the greenspace concerned.

In summary, as well as enhancing the existing MBCT programme, the author believes that the proposed ecotherapy has the potential to bring a new treatment dimension to a wide range of mental health issues, in addition to benefitting the wider human and 'natural' communities. The proposal may also contribute to new and ongoing initiatives to encourage a more integrated approach to public health care and to improve the quality, accessibility and use of 'local' greenspaces.

The ecotherapy proposed also appears to offer an opportunity to contribute positively to the wider conservation agenda of seeking to combat the alienation from nature that the urbanised and increasingly technology-focused lifestyle experienced by the majority of the population has encouraged.

If you would like to discuss this work with Cathy please email Steve in the first instance at wlqf@stephenmhead.com and he will forward the email

Top doctor backs 'garden gym' idea

Author: Mark Kinver, Environment Reporter, BBC News

See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-26871970> for full story

A growing body of research has identified a correlation between access to green spaces and wellbeing.

One of the UK's top doctors says an accumulating body of evidence supports a link between urban green space and benefits to human wellbeing. Royal College of Physicians president Sir Richard Thompson said plants helped reduce stress, anger and depression. He added the fourth biggest cause of death in the UK was a lack of activity, making it important to provide green spaces in which people could exercise. He made the comments at a green cities conference in central London. Although a growing number of scientific studies have produced



evidence supporting the idea that urban green spaces are good for human wellbeing, the issue still remains on the margins of healthcare strategies.

Looking at a diverse array of flowering plants can help reduce stress, studies suggest. But Sir Richard observed: "When we look into the science of the beneficial effects of plants and gardening, there is quite a decent set of papers to read." gardens improved the mood within hospitals, reducing stress levels among patients, families and staff."What was very important was that the gardens had to have biodiversity - a variation of plants," he told delegates.

Among heart patients, the gardens were also shown to reduce post-operative anxiety, resulting in a reduction of medication. But, he added: "Evidence showed that concrete gardens had no effect at all, so you had to have green gardens."

Sir Richard, a patron of Thrive - a charity that champions the benefits of gardening among people with disabilities or mental ill health - went on to explain how scientific studies had documented the health benefits of gardening. "It improves your mood, increases flexibility, improves your balance and reduces the number of falls, which is a great problem for older people living at home by themselves."

He added that just getting outdoors had health benefits. "We now know - from a recent study - that sunlight reduces blood pressure and a small reduction of blood pressure in the population produces a significant reduction of cardiovascular disease.

He concluded that urban green spaces could help ease the strain on health budgets. "At a population scale, it can offer huge savings to the NHS by reducing the burden of preventable diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease. "Some people say there is a gym outside your window, and it is much cheaper than a gym subscription."

How town planning can make us thin and healthy: Architects show that more green space and less housing density has a clear effect on public health

Author: Charlie Cooper, Health Reporter. The Independent

See: <http://ind.pn/1icWpXJ> for full story

It isn't hard to find an architect who will tell you that vast swathes of the British urban landscape are ugly, grey and unappealing – nor would you struggle to find people who agreed with them. But could it be that the look and the layout of our cities is actually bad for our health?

A new report from the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) sets out to prove just that. Comparing rates of physical activity, childhood obesity and diabetes in England's nine most populous cities, RIBA have found a clear correlation between the amount of green space, density of housing in urban areas, and the overall health of the local population.

They have also pinpointed the cities with the best and worst records on these key public health measures. Birmingham has the fewest physically active adults, while Liverpool has both the largest number of obese children and the highest rates of diabetes. On the other end of the spectrum, the citizens of Leeds can boast the highest levels of activity while Bristol has the best outcomes for obesity and diabetes. All four cities have plenty of parks – but it is the quality as well as the quantity of green space that counts, if people are to be encouraged to walk around their city, go for a run, or let their children play outdoors, RIBA said.

Their report, “City Health Check”, found that the local authority (LA) areas which had the least physically active adults in the country – which included Birmingham’s Sandwell district, Brent in London and Gateshead in Newcastle – had on average twice the housing density of the most active areas and also 20 per cent less green space. The pattern repeats itself even within an individual city. 69 per cent of land in Birmingham’s leafy suburb of Solihull is green space, and sure enough, the area has the lowest levels of childhood obesity of any LA in the study – 14.1 per cent. In Sandwell meanwhile, only a third of land is green space, and a quarter of children are obese.



Nearly 26% of children in Sandwell are obese (Alamy)

A significant factor behind the gulf in health outcomes identified by RIBA is explained by the different levels of social deprivation across the country and across cities. Greener, leafier areas with a lower density of housing and well-maintained parks and pathways come with a house price premium. Richer people who can afford to live there can also afford to buy better food, pay for gym memberships and generally fit within a national pattern of health inequality – the richer the area you live in, the more likely you are to be healthy.

Nevertheless, it’s clear that physical inactivity – a key cause of obesity and the catalogue of associated health risks – is a national problem. RIBA reports that 75 per cent of people living in the nine cities surveyed do not meet the Government recommended 150 minutes of physical activity every week. However, three quarters of people surveyed by RIBA said they could, in the right circumstances, be encouraged to do more walking each week.

Citing estimates suggest that the risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes could be cut by 50 per cent if people were to meet physical activity targets, RIBA believes that the key to that encouragement – and an estimated £1bn saving for the health service – is better town planning.

“With responsibility for public healthcare devolved now from central Government to local authorities, it’s vital that planners and developers take the lead in ensuring healthier cities,” said. RIBA’s president, Stephen Hodder. “At a time of austerity and

increased concern with physical and mental wellbeing, it's shocking to discover that just by making public health a priority when planning cities, we can save the country upwards of £1bn annually through reduced obesity-related healthcare costs."

But it isn't simply the amount of green space a city has, according to his report, it's the way it uses it. Architects and urban designers could play a key role in "mitigating the impact of a lack of green space and creating environments to support walking," the report states. Their practical recommendations include the creation of attractive, safe walking routes between green spaces, to encourage people to travel around the city by foot. Parks and recreations grounds themselves can be made more attractive as places to walk, run and play through simple measures such as improving walkways, letting in light by lowering any high walls or heavy vegetation and installing more bins and benches.

The Local Food Programme: A Social Return on Investment Approach

Author: Sam Coleman, PR & Communications Assistant, Local Food

In March 2013, the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) from the University of Gloucestershire were commissioned to undertake an assessment of the Local Food programme using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework, an established methodology recognised by the Cabinet Office that has been developed from social accounting and cost-benefit analysis.

In SROI, monetary values are used to represent outcomes, which enables a ratio of benefits-to-investment to be calculated and the amount of social, economic and environmental value created for every £1 invested in the programme.

During the Local Food Celebratory Event in November 2013 at the Lowry, Manchester, Professor Paul Courtney from the University of Gloucestershire presented the initial results from the SROI report to 130 delegates, including dignitaries from the sector, Local Food funded projects and other interested parties.

The findings suggest that **every £1 invested in Local Food returns £7 to society** in the form of social and economic outcomes including health and well being, training and skills.



The full report is available from: <http://www.ccri.ac.uk/sroilocalfood/> and join in the discussion on Twitter using the hash tag #LocalFoodSROI

Soil report shows we should all grow more of our own - New research confirms that soil in allotments and back gardens is richer - and more productive - than on farms

Author: Ken Thompson, The Telegraph

See <http://bit.ly/1iziltk> for full story

Soil is one of the great failures of modern intensive agriculture. Healthy soils, beneath natural grasslands and – especially – woodlands, contain lots of organic matter. This organic matter holds onto nutrients and gives the soil structural stability, allowing it to resist damage by, for example, heavy rain, thus preventing erosion. There's also plenty of life in a healthy soil, lots of burrowing earthworms, and so lots of pore space too. A healthy soil is basically a giant sponge, which fills up with water after rain, gradually releasing that water to plants in dry weather.

When land is cleared for agriculture, and especially for arable crops, all that goes out of the window. The organic matter in arable soils is lost to the atmosphere as CO₂, and the soil loses its structure and strength, leading to compaction and erosion. Arable soils also lose their ability to hold onto water, nutrients and pollutants, leaking nutrients into groundwater and lakes and rivers, causing eutrophication, and if the water is for human use, the need for expensive water treatment.



(Alamy)

Although this is all depressingly well-known, the conventional view is that all this soil degradation is the price we have to pay for the high yields of arable crops on which we all depend. But, says new research just published in the Journal of Applied Ecology, gardening proves the conventional view to be completely wrong. The researchers looked at the properties of soils on allotments in Leicester, along with those from other urban sites, and compared them with soils beneath arable

fields and pasture in the countryside around Leicester.

The arable soils showed all the usual symptoms: compacted, lifeless and low in organic matter. Allotment soils, by contrast, were more open, more fertile, and higher in organic matter, in fact they weren't all that different from soils beneath woodland. The reason isn't hard to find: composting of allotment waste is virtually universal among allotment holders, most also import household green waste as well, and use of manure and other kinds of commercial compost is widespread. In short, soils on allotments are healthy because allotment holders go to a lot of trouble to keep them that way.

Nor are these healthy soils any barrier to high yields. During the Second World War 'Dig for Victory' campaign, allotments and gardens provided around 10% of food consumed in the UK, despite covering less than 1% of the area of arable cultivation. Recent research also shows that gardens and allotments produce yields of fruit and vegetables 4-11 times greater than conventional agricultural crops. In fact, soil organic matter is now so low beneath many agricultural soils that it makes it increasingly hard to maintain high crop yields.

These results are not unique to allotments; soils in private gardens were pretty good too. In fact garden soils beneath trees and shrubs were the best of all, presumably because they are undisturbed and also benefit from the organic matter added by fallen leaves. Nevertheless, allotments are unique in the way they manage to combine a productive 'agricultural' function (i.e. growing food) with healthy soils.

The policy lessons are clear, but I'll spell them out anyway. Encouraging people to grow their own food simultaneously targets food security, improves the well-known (physical and psychological) health benefits of gardening, and helps to reduce climate change, flooding, pollution and erosion. You seriously want to save the planet? Give us the tools, and the land, and we – gardeners – will do it for you.

Modelling relationships between lichen bioindicators, air quality and climate on a national scale: Results from the UK OPAL air survey

Author: Lindsay Seed, Pat Wolseley, Laura Gosling, Linda Davies, Sally A. Power

Environmental Pollution, 182, November 2013, p437-447

Abstract: Air pollution has many negative effects on the natural environment, from changes in plant growth patterns to loss of ecosystem function. This study uses citizen science to investigate national-scale patterns in the distribution and abundance of selected lichen species on tree trunks and branches, and to relate these to air pollution and climate. Volunteers collected data for nine lichen indicators on 19,334 deciduous trees. Submitted data provided information on species-level patterns, and were used to derive composite lichen indices. Multiple linear regression and ANCOVA were used to model the relationships between lichen

response variables on *Quercus* spp. and pollution, climate and location. The study demonstrated significant relationships between patterns in indicator lichens and levels of N- and S-containing pollutants on trunks and twigs. The derived lichen indices show great potential as a tool to provide information on local, site-specific levels of air quality.

Wildlife Gardening Forum Supports Nature Check Report 2013

Author: Andrew Salisbury, WLGf Link Representative

In November 2013 the Wildlife Gardening forum signed up to the Nature Check 2013 report produced by Wildlife and Countryside LINK*. The report analyses the Government's delivery against its environmental commitments and has been produced every year since 2011, it was launched at the Houses of Parliament on 19th November. The report can be downloaded from <http://www.wcl.org.uk/nature-check.asp>

The Nature Check report gives the government a traffic light rating on a range of environmental commitments from its stance on whaling and trade in endangered species, to water use, commitments to biodiversity and marine conservation zones. Overall of the 25 areas assessed, the report found that there had been only moderate progress (amber rating) or no progress (red rating) in a majority of its commitments, only four achieving good progress (green rating). Green rated areas include progress made in plant health following the outbreak of ash dieback, the governments' strong stance on whaling and work on endangered species such as the big cats as well progress made on improving the common fisheries policy. Twelve commitments were given amber ratings as only moderate progress has been made around commitments in agriculture and water industries, the national wildlife crime unit and illegal logging. Nine commitments were rated red, particularly highlighted was that unless Leadership and resources were forthcoming commitments to implement *Biodiversity 2020* were unlikely to be met. Another area of concern was the establishment of marine conservation zones.

The report was launched at a Parliamentary reception hosted by Zac Goldsmith MP, this was attended by representatives of the 42 members of Wildlife and Countryside LINK, including Andrew Salisbury of WLGf, the press and politicians. Presentations were given by Elaine King of LINK and Lord de Mauley, Minister for Resource Management the Local Environment and Environmental Science. There was a lot of media interest with coverage throughout the day on BBC news and radio, national and local newspapers and lots of activity on social media such as FaceBook and twitter.

*Wildlife and Countryside LINK has the purpose of bringing together voluntary organisations to protect and enhance wildlife, landscape and the marine

environment. There are currently 42 members, primarily wildlife and conservation NGOs, which collectively employ more 11,000 staff, and have the support of over 8 million people in the UK. These organisations are united by their common interest in the conservation and enjoyment of the natural and historic environment. Wildlife and Countryside LINK is not a representative body and it issues statements only with the express support of its members. The Wildlife Gardening Forum joined as an associate member in Summer 2013.

More on link can be found at <http://www.wcl.org.uk/default.asp>

RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show puts Hedgehog Street on the Map

Royal Horticultural Society Press Release

See <http://bit.ly/1Ip6Jiy> for full story

The British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) and People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) are pleased to announce that their joint submission for a hedgehog-friendly garden has been selected as one of this year's summer gardens at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show. The charities' summer garden, called Hedgehog Street, aims to raise awareness of the plight of threatened hedgehogs and show how gardeners can help the species in their very own back yard.

Created by award-winning garden designer Tracy Foster, the garden will feature various elements that are beneficial to our native hedgehogs. Hedgehog populations in the UK have plummeted by over a third in the last ten years, and one of the factors contributing to this decline is tidy, fenced-in gardens.



RHS

Fay Vass, Chief Executive of BHPS explains: "The decline of hedgehogs can be attributed to a number of environmental factors, including neat and tidy gardens that

are isolated from one another by fences or walls, preventing hedgehogs from finding shelter, food and mates. The average range for a hedgehog in an urban area covers about 500 gardens, so we need people to help these iconic creatures by joining up their gardens.”

One of the simplest steps gardeners can take to help hedgehogs is to link gardens in their neighbourhood by teaming up with their neighbours to make a small hole in shared boundaries so that the creatures can roam freely. A hole that is 13cm² in size at ground level will be big enough for a hedgehog to pass through.

Jill Nelson, Chief Executive of PTES said: “The hedgehog is known as the ‘gardener’s friend’ and by creating a summer garden at RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show we hope to prove to professional and amateur gardeners-alike that it is easy and inexpensive to create a hedgehog-friendly space, no matter what type of garden you have, whether modern and contemporary or wild and rustic.”

For more information about Hedgehog Street and how to help hedgehogs in your garden and neighbourhood, visit: www.hedgehogstreet.org

Help support your local wildlife by taking part in the People’s Trust for Endangered Species ‘Living with Mammals’ survey

People’s Trust for Endangered Species

The People’s Trust for Endangered Species is asking members of the public to look out for mammals in the green spaces around their homes and places of work as part of their annual survey, *Living with Mammals*. Now in its 12th year, the 2014 survey begins on Monday 31 March and volunteers are asked to take part in at least eight of the thirteen weeks to the end of June.



Hedgehog. Commons Licence
(Flickr) : WillBurton2

The citizen science project not only acts as an important environmental inventory, but by recording the public’s observations of mammals and their tell-tale signs in the built environment, the results help provide a picture of how towns and cities can support our native wildlife. Volunteers are required to select a site and monitor the mammals they see there over the survey period, reporting their sightings online at the PTES website.

Gardens, allotments, cemeteries, recreational grassland, industrial and brown field sites, derelict spaces, railway embankments and roadside verges, as well as isolated pockets of heath and woodland are all typical survey sites and provide important refuges for our urban wildlife neighbours.

David Wembridge, Surveys Officer at PTES says, “By carefully identifying and

counting the mammals that live in and around built-up land, we can begin to understand and encourage the biodiversity on our doorstep.”

Last year’s survey revealed that hedgehog records continued a downward trend. Just over a third of volunteer sites recorded hedgehogs, with the figure being the second lowest since the survey started. Green spaces such as neighbourhood gardens are important habitats for hedgehogs but are often fragmented by garden fencing, creating impassable barriers for hedgehogs and making searches for food and mates much more difficult.

Mammals recorded in previous surveys include bats, deer, shrews, hedgehogs, voles, squirrels and otters and this year PTES is running a competition for people to submit their best mammal photos during the survey period. To take part in the 2014 *Living with Mammals* survey, register online at www.ptes.org

Helping our pollinators

Author: Hilary Dickson, Bourne Conservation Group

The future for bees, butterflies and hoverflies may sound bleak but everyone with a garden can do their own bit to help support these vital insects right now. Careful plant choice can make a huge difference to how well our gardens provide for pollinators but until recently there hasn’t been much scientific work carried out to investigate exactly which plants really are best.

Now, however, there are an increasing number of studies looking into which garden plants are most useful to pollinators and last month Martin Angel [Bourne Conservation Group] and I attended a meeting at RHS Garden Wisley where the findings of some of these projects were presented.

One project, run by the Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects (LASI) at the University of Sussex, looked at the variation among garden plants in attractiveness to bees and other flower-visiting insects. They chose 32 summer flowering ornamental varieties and found that some plants were 100 times more attractive than others to insects. **Marjoram** was, perhaps surprisingly, found to be the best all round plant attracting bees of many kinds as well as hoverflies and butterflies. **Hybrid lavenders** of any colour were especially good for



Marjoram. Commons Licence (Flickr): anemoneprojectors

Plants this study could recommend were:

- * *Dahlia* 'Bishop of Llandaff'
- * *Dahlia* 'Bishop of Oxford'
- * *Erysimum* 'Bowles Mauve', a perennial wallflower
- * *Origanum vulgare* 'Hirtum', marjoram
- * *Borago officinalis*, borage

Other good plants studied were:

- * *Agastache foeniculum* 'Blue Fortune'
- * *Echium vulgare*, viper's bugloss
- * *Nepeta x faassenii* 'Six Hills Giant', catmint
- * *Hyssopus*, hyssop
- * *Salvia*
- * *Lythrum salicaria*, purple loosestrife
- * *Stachys byzantina*, Lamb's ears (this attracted wool carder bees which used the plant for food and the hair on the leaves to build nests: the males defended the plant from other varieties of bee)

Borage. CCommons Licence (Flickr):
M. Doring)



Another LASI study investigated which insects visited *Buddleja*, a shrub frequently recommended for pollinators. Interestingly, it found *Buddleja* to be popular with only a small number of species of butterfly and it was rarely visited by bees and hoverflies.

LASI acknowledges the impossibility of quantifying the attractiveness of even a fraction of all the garden plants available. However it recommends one simple technique you can use: visit your local garden centre on a sunny day, sit among the plants for a while and just watch. It soon becomes apparent which the most popular varieties are.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4u2LeTPGo9w> A description of the LASI project on YouTube

<http://www.foxleas.com/> 'The Pollinator Garden', a useful website on helping pollinators

Editor's note:

Lisa has just pointed out that there is some advice on the web about making your garden more bat-friendly which includes a list of plants that are night scented and so attract more night flying insects at

www.bats.org.uk/pages/encouraging_bats.html

Put your best foot forward

Bumblebee Conservation Trust



We need help to monitor bumblebees so we're calling on you to make the most of the longer days by getting outside to count our favourite pollinators.

BeeWalk is our national recording scheme to collect more information about bumblebee populations. All you need to do is walk a fixed route of your choice once a month between now and October, and send us your findings.

If you have any problems with identification, you can take a photo of your mystery species and upload it to our BeeWatch site. Alternatively you can go to our BBCT forum where you will find a community of fellow bumblebee enthusiasts.

The information collected by BeeWalk volunteers is integral to monitoring how bumblebee populations change through time, and will allow us to detect early warning signs of population declines. All data collected will contribute to important long-term monitoring of bumblebee population changes in response to changes in land-use and climate change and, ultimately, to informing how we manage the countryside.

We hope you'll be able to join in – without the fundamental information provided by volunteers across the country, we're fighting blind in the struggle to reverse the plight of the bumblebee.

For more information, please email beewalk@bumblebeeconservation.org

Attracting bees to nest in your garden

Author "Anthony's blog at the BBCT website"

I've been trying for a few years to attract bees to nest in my garden. I get plenty of visitors, but no residents, so I've tried harder this year to make my garden more attractive for prospecting queen bees.

Queen bumblebees will look for nests in different places, often depending on the species. For example, the Tree bumblebee, *Bombus hypnorum*, almost always nests above ground in bird boxes and lofts. But most other bumblebees will nest in tussocks of grass, thick moss (like the Common carder bee, pictured left), or cavities under paving slabs, sheds and decking. They basically want a cavity that is large enough to accommodate a growing nest, which is well-drained and hidden from predators.

So to go about making my garden more attractive, I've had to do some messing-up. I live in a rented house, and my landlord has been nice enough to allow me to take over the gardening from the landscaping company he used to pay. When I first



moved in, the garden was very neat, and much too tidy for my liking. The hedges were all cut into squares or rectangles, and the whole garden could be seen in one glance, and there were no quiet, hidden places where bees could nest. So when I was pruning the shrubs last autumn, I decided to leave a lot of the cuttings in the corners of the gardens. These will have provided places for wildlife to live over winter, and should now make the place more inviting for queen bees. In the corners I also let the vegetation grow, and don't bother removing any of the weeds unless they are especially pernicious. Even if I don't get any nests, I'm still more than happy to watch the bumblebee visitors come to my garden.



If you do decide to make some nesting sites, there is information on our site at <http://bumblebeeconservation.org/about-bees/habitats/bumblebee-nests> here's the secret to attracting bees: put some mouse bedding in it. Bumblebees will naturally nest in abandoned rodent nests, and can 'smell' mice. Research has shown that artificial nest sites with mouse bedding inside are much more likely to be taken up by queen bees. You can use any mouse bedding, including that from wild mouse nests or pet mice.

Citizen science app hopes to create buzz for bee survey

Author: Mark Kinver, Environment Reporter, BBC News

See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-27764163> for full story

Organisers of the UK's first nation-wide bee count hope a new smartphone app will create a buzz among the nation's citizen scientists. They hope thousands of people will log their sightings in order to give scientists a vital insight into the health of bee populations.

There is growing concern about wild bee numbers, as many species have recorded a serious decline in recent years. Participants can also submit their data on the Great British Bee Count website.

The app - developed by charity Buglife, Friends of the Earth and retailer B&Q - allows users to report the species, number and location of bees they spot between now and the end of August. The submissions will provide data to the National Biodiversity Network, which collates data from a wide range of national, regional and local organisations in order to provide a comprehensive overview of UK wildlife.

"The data that people collect will do an important job to help scientists fill in the blanks about where bees are thriving and where they are in trouble," explained bumblebee conservation expert Prof Dave Goulson from the University of Sussex. Andy Atkins, executive director of Friends of the Earth, added: "The great thing is that you do not have to be an expert, everyone can get involved and be part of the

generation that helps save our bees."

According to the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, there are about 250 species of bee in the UK, and the survey hopes to build up a more detailed picture of the range and behaviour of certain species. For example, the establishment of the non-native tree bumblebee on these shores, since its arrival at the turn of the century. Researchers would be interested to know more about the species' spread northwards.



The Great British Bee Count app
Photograph: /Friends of the Earth

The RELEAF London i-Tree Eco Tree and Woodland Survey 2014

Author: Julie Tucker, Green Infrastructure Partnership and Protected Landscapes Team



This summer, the RELEAF London Partnership is looking for 200 volunteers to be involved in the world's largest urban forest survey. It will be a survey of London's trees and woodlands to establish the benefits they provide and put a value on them.

You will:

- Receive training in the use of the US Forest Service's i-tree methodology
- Be accredited as an i-Tree Eco London 2014 surveyor
- Help protect London's trees and woodlands for future generations
- Place a value on the benefits London's trees and woodlands deliver
- Get the chance to meet others

Please get in contact with Jim Smith at the Forestry Commission jim.c.smith@forestry.gsi.gov.uk if you have any further questions or would like to register as a volunteer.

The RELEAF London Partnership are: The Greater London Authority , The Tree Council, The London Tree Officers Association, Trees for Cities, Treeconomics, Forestry Commission England with support from Natural England.



Street tree maintenance day 19 Jan 2014

Author: Sophie Talbot, Kings Cross Community Projects

[See more at : www.kccp.org.uk/street-tree-maintenance-day-19-jan-2014/](http://www.kccp.org.uk/street-tree-maintenance-day-19-jan-2014/)

Back in November 2013 our trustee John Ashwell and voluntary Manager Sophie Talbot started planning a street tree maintenance day in which members of the community would be invited to work in pruning and sprucing up street trees in one section of King's Cross.

A few years ago John had fundraised to buy the vast majority of trees in the north east quarter of King's Cross. He worked with Islington Council's tree department to pick the best trees for each spot, identify and survey tree pits and to plant the trees. Since then John has continued working with Islington Council on maintenance and replacing vandalised or car and lorry damaged trees.

The tree team at Islington Council has recently won the Forestry Commission and Mayor of London's Award for Excellence in Tree and Woodland Work by a Public Body. John liaised closely with Islington again in arranging street tree maintenance day and we can't thank them enough for all the support they've given.

Invitations were sent out to the local community on this website and on the King's Cross community website kingscrossenvironment.com. The response was fantastic. Although not everybody was able to make it on the day, we did get nearly a dozen people willing to give up those very precious Sunday hours starting at 10am.

Simon Castle, a locally based housing association maintenance specialist whose area of expertise include health and safety and is a qualified first aider, advised Sophie on producing a 'Safety First' document and safety register. Simon also volunteered on the day.



It was a wonderful day, we were amazed at how much got done and what a lovely atmosphere there was – despite all the hefty lugging of tools and tree waste. Conversation was lively throughout with ideas for the next events flowing. As a result we hope to run a spring planting day. We'll be approaching Islington Council for permission to plant up those tree pits suitable for ground level plants to really give the area a spring boost of colour.

If you would like to participate in the next event – whether for the whole thing or part of it – please contact us. We'll also put news on kingscrossenvironment.com and, hopefully, the free local paper, the Islington Tribune.

In this short film we tell the story of what we did and where: <http://www.kccp.org.uk/street-tree-maintenance-day-19-jan-2014/>

RSPB Turkey Fat Warning

A very late Christmas message!—apologies for not putting this out sooner, however we think the problem still warrants highlighting.

The RSPB is warning that cooked turkey fat is extremely dangerous to birds and urging people not to put the leftover contents of their Christmas dinner roasting tins outside.

Many people wrongly believe that it is as beneficial to birds as other fats like lard and suet but cooked turkey fat is dangerous for birds for several reasons. It remains soft even when cooled, meaning it could smear onto birds' feathers and ruin their water-proofing and insulating qualities. Birds need clean, dry feathers to survive the cold and a layer of grease would make this virtually impossible.

The fat in roasting tins cannot be separated from other leftover elements like meat juices. This concoction can go rancid very quickly, especially if left in a warm kitchen for a while before being put outside, and form an ideal breeding ground for salmonella and other food poisoning bacteria. Birds are prone to bacterial infections at this time of year as their defenses are low and their energy levels depleted with the cold. Also, many people add other ingredients to a joint of meat before roasting, including rubbing it liberally with salt in order to crisp the skin. High levels of salt are toxic to garden birds.

'Please don't put the fat from your roasting tins outside for the birds - you could be killing them with kindness'

The cooking juices from all other meats as well as turkey are equally as unsuitable for feeding to garden birds. Richard James, RSPB Wildlife Adviser, said: 'Please don't put the fat from your roasting tins outside for the birds - you could be killing them with kindness.'



Blue Tit. CCommons Licence (Flickr): gynti_46

'People pour turkey (or other Christmas joint) fat onto bird tables or mix it with seeds because they think it will give birds energy and nutrients as things like fat balls do. But this is a completely different kind of fat and could have catastrophic effects. Only pure fats such as lard and suet should be used to make homemade fat balls.'

'However additional feeding at this time of year can be the difference between life and death, particularly for some of the smaller garden birds and although this Christmas dinner is completely unsuitable, there are a range of other alternatives for a festive treat for birds.'

'Christmas cake crumbs, mince pie pastry crumbs and biscuit crumbs are all suitable Christmas Day leftovers and mild grated cheese, cooked or uncooked rice, breakfast cereals, cooked potatoes and fruit will also provide vital energy. There are also lots of great bird food options available to buy, such as table mix, niger seed and sunflower hearts.'



**Thanks to all our contributors: please do
remember to send in all your articles, news,
events and rantings to:
wlgf@stephenmhead.com**