

WILDLIFE GARDENING FORUM

Conference 20th April 2006

Summary of the Conference

Introduction: The Forum

This was established in 2005 following a meeting of interested parties organised by English Nature. Its purpose is 'To inspire people to manage gardens for their own enjoyment in ways which also benefit wildlife'. Fifty-eight organisations are now members of the Forum. The group communicates predominantly by email, but it is anticipated that there will be an opportunity once a year for the whole forum to meet and that smaller groups may well meet more often to pursue particular action points.

The objectives of the Forum are:

- ✓ To cultivate a responsible attitude to the natural environment on the part of gardeners and the garden industry
- ✓ To gather evidence supporting the benefits, to people and biodiversity, of gardening with wildlife in mind
- ✓ By relaying this evidence, to assist people to make well-informed choices about their gardening activities
- ✓ To help link people and nature, through their gardens, thereby encouraging a wider and deeper appreciation of biodiversity and sustainability

The activities of the Forum are co-ordinated by a Steering Group meeting several times year. Its terms of reference are to provide opportunities for information exchange, facilitate mutual assistance, avoid duplication of effort and help develop partnerships among members. See Appendix I for membership.

The Meeting

This was held at the Royal Horticultural Halls Lecture Theatre, Westminster, and introduced by Sharon Gunn, Head of People and Nature Unit, English Nature. The day was arranged in two parts: a series of presentations in the morning, followed by discussion groups on related topics in the afternoon. The summary that follows is arranged by topic.

Wildlife gardening and health

Presentation: Nature and Green Exercise for Health and Wellbeing Dr Rachel Hine,
Centre for Environment and Society, University of Essex

Background research indicates a decline in healthy living, for example we now eat 34 percent fewer vegetables than 50 years ago, and use 500 kcals/day less energy – the equivalent of a marathon a week.

The presentation focused on the way that exposure to nature enhances the effect of other health-improving activities. For example:

- Looking at a photograph of an attractive scene made exercise more effective at reducing blood pressure, improving self-esteem and mood.
- A range of ten different outdoor activities from mountain biking to just strolling in the woods all improved self-esteem, mood and general mental health.
- The research team are now looking at the effects of garden design on workers and patients at a day care centre.

Points arising from Q&A

Views of water are known to have a therapeutic effect. The University of Essex are involved in a study of this with British Waterways.

Mood was measured using standard questionnaires that are widely accepted by health professionals.

The Department of Health is interested in the study but has not provided any funding.

Views do not have to be rural to have a positive effect, just 'pleasant' eg incorporating trees and water.

Afternoon discussion group on Wildlife gardening and health

The many health benefits of wildlife gardening include motivation for taking exercise in the fresh air, growing food to contribute to '5 a day', stress-reducing peace and quiet, enjoying the movement and magic of life, being able to work alone or with others, and relating to nature. Also, your garden is where what you do makes a difference to the wider (local/global) environment which can give a feeling of worthwhile activity and achievement which can lead to improved psychological health individually and for society.

Suggestions for future action

For children:

- ❖ Teaching kids where food comes from – for health, being part of food web – in school grounds/local allotment
- ❖ Child-adopted local events and localities so kids can get out and about and experience the magic
- ❖ Integrating gardening into the natural curriculum

For young offenders:

- ❖ Involve young offenders in practical projects – initial indifference can be overcome by innate interest in nature. For example the creative achievement of making birdboxes is one way in.
- ❖ What relevant school resources are available? Do we need more, or just promote what exists?
- ❖ Promote the idea of "Spot 5 species a day"

For the older generation

- ❖ This is a health priority group for whom gardening is a major, healthy activity
- ❖ Could be involved teaching gardening and nature

For everyone, including busy grown-ups:

- ❖ Research into value for *preventing* health problem – 'healthy lifestyles'. What is the difference in current health of people working actively outdoors vs. others?
- ❖ Could use forum members' memberships as public health sample eg Essex University/Bugs/Springwatch to see how wildlife gardening benefits them
- ❖ Making healthy gardening a way people choose to spend their precious time, making it 'quality time'. Make it part of the 'Slow' movement: slow food; slow health/well-being. Stress the multiple benefits/paybacks, it's good value
- ❖ Promote healthy, natural gyms with green roofs and natural swimming pools

- ❖ Alternative health marketing , ‘sell’ people on real natural health, ‘Magic’ of nature as selling hook for buying health etc.
- ❖ ‘Flash research’ into what effect greenery/water have as natural air conditioning in a heatwave

Resources

Green Gym network

Wildlife gardening and the commercial sector

Presentation: **Buglife, Notcutts and the Scarlet Malachite Beetle** Kathy Wormald,
Development Manager, Buglife

Gardens are a valuable refuge for invertebrates, for example there are more bumblebees in gardens and urban spaces than there are in the countryside. Buglife and Notcutts both have gardeners as a major target audience and have worked as partners on a campaign called ‘Get the gardening bug with Notcutts’. This has included

- Buglife stands at Notcutts garden centres
- Notcutts sponsoring Buglife’s Scarlet Malachite Beetle Survey by paying for and distributing information leaflets (the beetle is a BAP species)
- Most Notcutts garden centres have bug gardens, where they can give advice on gardening to attract bugs, and promote bug-friendly products. They are also sponsoring a leaflet on gardening to attract bugs
- An article for National Insect Week June 19-25 June 2006 in Notcutts magazine
- A competition for a photograph/artwork of a bug with £2000 worth of prizes
- Bugwalks

Points arising from Q&A

Notcutts benefit as many of their customers want to encourage wildlife. Also, this kind of partnership has a positive effect on staff, and encourages them to take more interest in their environment

Buglife only promote planting native plants in gardens

Afternoon Discussion group

Notcutts have got involved with wildlife partly because the MD and others have a personal interest but also because of the vast increase in sales of wildlife products, up 74 percent in the last year.

Not all wildlife gardening products work. Ladybird boxes and wild flower seed, for example, can give disappointing results, but people tend to blame themselves when things don’t work. There may be a conflict between what’s good for wildlife and what people want to do – people want the best of both worlds.

Peoples Trust for Endangered Species has also worked with some companies.

Commerce wants to find more creative ways of working with NGOs not just providing funds. Need greater mutual understanding and tolerance.

Suggestions for future action

- ❖ Should NGO’s endorse effective wildlife gardening products?
- ❖ Garden centres could provide advice and problem solving as leaflets or on websites
- ❖ NGO’s need to acknowledge people have their own motives for gardening and be positive about what people can do – total revolution not necessary

- ❖ Think carefully about messages, keep them simple.
- ❖ What about an action plan/manifesto/statement of common aims for wildlife gardening?
- ❖ Establish a better dialogue between NGOs and commercial (manufacturing and retail) sector leading to more effective products, more information and better advice
- ❖ Make people more aware of the value of gardens for wildlife eg with case studies and statistics such as 75 per cent of frog population now found in built up areas and most of them live in gardens
- ❖ Use media more effectively, catch publicity opportunities to promote wildlife gardening eg in drought, stress the natural resilience of wildlife gardens

Wildlife Gardening and Research

Presentation 1. **Biodiversity in Urban GardenS (BUGS2)** Alison Loram, Biodiversity and Macroecology Group, University of Sheffield

The main objective of BUGS2, which began in May 2004 is to test the extent to which the major conclusions from BUGS1 in Sheffield could be applied to other cities by studying gardens in Belfast, Cardiff, Leicester, Edinburgh and Oxford. Features studied were:

- Proportion of area in cities occupied by gardens
- Size of gardens relative to type of house
- Floristic diversity of domestic gardens (50 studied per city), both native and exotic
- Major features in gardens

The survey work is complete, but the results are still being analysed. Conclusions so far are on the website www.bugs.group.shef.ac.uk

Points arising from Q&A

A 'large' garden is one in excess of 800 sqm, 'small' is below 200 sqm, the smallest garden surveyed was 11 sqm.

Olga Barbossa at University of Sheffield is carrying out similar surveys into urban wildspace. It is not yet known whether garden biodiversity is improving.

There were no green roofs included in the survey, but one roof garden consisting of planted pots.

Presentation 2. **Wild About Gardens, a Wildlife Trusts/RHS partnership** Morag Shuaib, Wildlife Trusts

This partnership promotes wildlife gardening throughout the UK. The project aims to promote gardens as space for wildlife and was launched in April 2005. A number of surveys have been carried out, one covering the attitude of people to animals in their garden, which found that the hedgehog is the favourite animal. Website www.rhs.org.uk gives full details.

Afternoon Discussion group

Any garden provides a habitat for some wildlife. Beyond that it can be difficult to know what constitutes 'wildlife gardening', to know which activities are most likely to make a difference, there is still so much we do not know. The basics are food, water and shelter, but there are lots of ways to achieve this, eg non-native plants can be just as good for bumblebees – is this

horticulture? Sometimes doing nothing is the best course. Wildlife gardening is more about attitude than doing lots of things or buying lots of products.

Celebrities can be important in gaining public acceptance eg Geoff Hamilton was very influential. Still resistance from squeamish or very tidy minded.

Suggestions for future action

- ❖ Encourage community action where gardens too small individually to have, say, large trees
- ❖ More useful to talk about principles for wildlife gardening, not be prescriptive
- ❖ Encourage observation before action
- ❖ Publicise things not to do, eg removing seed heads, as well as things to do

Resources

www.bugs.group.shef.ac.uk

www.rhs.org.uk (for Wild About Gardens)

Nettles Not Required by Ken Thompson, published by ?

The RHS are conducting a literature search to compile a list of plants and their associated animals.

Wildlife gardening and the built environment

Presentation: **Green Roofs in Towns and Cities** Dusty Gedge, Living Roofs

There is a huge amount of scope for building green roofs which is largely ignored in the UK, though they are far more common in parts of Europe, particularly in Basle, Switzerland. However, most of the Olympic buildings in London will have green roofs. But green roofs don't have to be big – there are 500,000 electricity sub-stations in London that could have green roofs, which would keep them cool too. The new Komodo dragon house at London Zoo has seven different substrates on the roof to attract different invertebrates.

Green roofs can help with storm water amelioration, noise reduction, air quality, biodiversity and insulation of buildings. They may be intensive forming roof gardens, or extensive with a shallow substrate and low-growing vegetation.

Points arising from Q&A

Basle has given two thirds of the costs of adding green roofs to new buildings since 1999, and in 2001 it became a requirement for all new builds to have green roofs which must be designed to encourage rare invertebrates.

The total size of roofs in London suitable for greening is 28 times the size of Richmond Park. The best type of planting is dry habitat as this is what the country is losing most.

Afternoon Discussion group

Benefits of wildlife gardening in this context are: giving access to nature; improving the environment eg trees adding shade and improving air quality, open ground contributing to flood prevention; economic benefits, as green spaces improve house prices and attract business; improvements to health and social cohesion eg green routes to encourage walking. Drawbacks were seen as: need to dedicate time, space and money to make it work; aesthetic perceptions may not be favourable; health and safety concerns eg slippery leaves, Weil's disease; unwanted wildlife – rats, pigeons, insect pests.

Threats to successful progress include wildlife fatigue from too much information and commercial interests such as peat producers and pesticide manufacturers

Suggestions for future action

- ❖ Use planning guidance to protect and enhance existing wildlife habitats and create new ones eg Local Development Framework
- ❖ Sell the social, economic and environmental benefits ie what's good for wildlife is good for people too
- ❖ Set up demonstration gardens eg at show homes, in garden centres
- ❖ Have bird box squads that not only make bird boxes but put them up – like fire brigades do with smoke alarms
- ❖ Consider starter products and simple information eg for new home owners