

Wildlife Gardening Forum

Autumn Forum Meeting 22nd November 2007

Summaries of the morning presentations

These précis were made by the meeting organisers, so please do not quote directly from these notes without consulting the web links or presenters.

1. **Biodiversity in Urban Gardens: latest results** Dr Alison Loram, BUGS Project

The original BUGS project examined biodiversity in gardens in Sheffield, generating ten refereed papers and providing unique statistical information on garden biodiversity. The BUGS2 project extended the study to five additional cities: Belfast, Cardiff, Leicester, Oxford and Edinburgh.

Across the 5 cities gardens made up 22-27% of urban areas and 35-47% of urban green space. There was no systematic relation between garden area and distance to the city margin, but detached houses had larger gardens than semis, which in turn were larger than in terraced properties. In fact most urban gardens are small, so that in aggregate these small gardens contribute disproportionately to total garden area. (These results are published in Loram, A., Tratalos, J., Warren, P.H. & Gaston, K.J. 2007. **Urban domestic gardens (X): the extent & structure of the resource in five cities.** *Landscape Ecology* 22, 601-615.)

Garden features were studied in 50 houses in each city, picked to maximise variation in location, housing type, house age and garden size. The overwhelming influence is garden area, larger gardens supporting more of the land use types recorded, and in greater extents. Larger gardens are more likely to contain tall trees & mature shrubs, areas of un-mown grass & uncultivated land, vegetable patches, ponds, & composting sites. This means that as housing density increases, an equal area of small gardens may contain less of some resources than an equal area of large gardens. (This work is due to be published as Loram, A., Warren, P.H. & Gaston, K.J. **Urban domestic gardens (XIV): the characteristics of gardens in five cities.** in *Environmental Management*)

Floristic species richness proved similar in all five cities, with over 150spp in some gardens. Species composition was also similar between cities; on average 30% of species were native and 70% alien. 40% of the species were classed as 'wildlife friendly'- good for pollinating insects and birds. While total species richness increases with garden size, species richness per m² *decreases* with increasing garden size, probably due to proportionally larger lawns and shrub areas. Very importantly, garden floristic diversity in all cities was *greater* than in traditional wildlife habitats, as shown on cumulative sample diversity curves, with gardens in all cities exceeding urban brownfield sites. Gardens even exceeded limestone grassland diversity after 100 quadrat samples, showing no sign of saturating. (This work is being published as Loram, A., Thompson, K., Warren, P.H. & Gaston, K.J. (2008) **Urban domestic**

gardens (XII): the richness and composition of the flora in five cities. *Journal of Vegetation Science* (in press.)

Garden management effects were assessed with questionnaires. Preliminary results suggest floristic richness & land use richness were more strongly correlated with garden area than with garden management. Some garden characteristics were correlated with garden management, and some garden characteristics and management activities are correlated with deliberate wildlife gardening activities. (This work is still in progress and when completed will be published as Loram, A., Warren, P.H. & Gaston, K.J. **Urban domestic gardens (XV): the effect of human intervention on garden composition.**)

For more information see www.bugs.group.shef.ac.uk , or contact Alison on alison@loram8.freeserve.co.uk .

2. **Garden for Life Project in Scotland**

Catriona Morrison, Scottish Natural Heritage

Garden for Life grew out of the successful SNH Plant for Wildlife project and was launched in 2001. As a forum it links 22 organisations, and its aims are:

- To increase enjoyment and understanding of biodiversity
- To support action by gardeners for the benefit of Scotland's biodiversity
- To promote the benefits of gardening for health and well-being.

The forum has produced five free leaflets distributed at promotions, schools and community events. It is linked with the BBC's Beechgrove Garden, and the Community Gardens projects across Scotland.

SNH commissioned Research.Report 244 "Growing Nature- The Role Of Horticulture In Supporting Biodiversity." The report investigates current practices and approaches to promoting biodiversity through horticulture. Its most significant finding was the belief among stakeholders that promoting greater participation is the best way to increase biodiversity through gardening. See :

www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/Report%20No244.pdf

The Garden for Life Forum will create a separate Manifesto that may acknowledge the aims indicated in the Wildlife Gardening Manifesto launched in July but would include issues that are more relevant to gardens in Scotland.

For more information go to www.snh.org.uk/about/initiatives/g4l/

3. **Campaign to Protect Rural England Update**

Kate Gordon, CPRE

CPRE have been painted as unsympathetic in the 'building on brownfields' debate, but this is not the case. CPRE considers urban green space to be important and shares concerns about garden development, but want to retain the greenfield/brownfield distinction. CPRE is concerned with the extent of opportunistic development destroying gardens, and the lack of monitoring of the scale of the problem. 25% of new houses are built on existing residential land, and existing gardens tend to be converted to car parks as large houses are converted to flats.

Efficient use of urban space is obviously important, and high density living is not the fundamental problem. Effective design in relation to previous use can be successful, while building at high density, makes local services such as shops and public transport more sustainable. Other complicating factors are the ageing population, with large gardens becoming hard for older people to manage, encouraging downsizing and consequent infill to raise money for long retirements. CPRE sees Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3): Housing as a good basis for protecting gardens and biodiversity. CPRE want Local Authorities to have strong policies and guidance about backland development, and want the government to back this up.

See www.cpre.org.uk/home

4. **Garden Centre Accreditation Scheme**

John Hayward, Devon Wildlife Trust and Derrick Dyer, Eggesford Garden Centre

Devon WLT recognises the importance of gardens for conservation, estimating 25,0000 people in Devon manage 14,000 hectares of gardens with perhaps 2,000 species in each garden. The Garden Centre Accreditation scheme is designed to help both gardeners and the retail trade provide locations all over Devon where people can get the advice and products they need for wildlife gardening . The scheme was launched for Garden Centre owners in 2005 at Rosemoor RHS garden.

Devon WLT provides staff training for each approved Garden Centre, and offers marketing advice and help with interpretation and signs showing which wildlife particular plants are good for. Centres can also host the Devon WLT roadshow with its travelling wildlife garden Participant Garden Centres need to demonstrate a commitment to becoming more sustainable, especially reducing energy and water use, and receive a certificate to show achievement at bronze level. Higher level requirements are being researched. So far there are seven approved Garden Centres; with twelve planned by 2009. Devon WLT plans to expand this unique approach around the country by encouraging other Wildlife Trusts to try it.

Contact jhayward@devonwildlifetrust.org for more information.

Eggesford Garden Centre is a small independent garden centre in deeply rural mid Devon and joined the accreditation scheme in December 2006. It has appreciated the very good staff training given, and the practical support given for information, marketing and through events. It has been a great opportunity for marketing and promotion, increasing their ability to help customers make informed choices about plants, products and garden design. Eggesford Garden Centre has developed:

- Plant labelling
- Advice Leaflets
- Different selection criteria for products to sell (e.g. only FSC timber)
- Product promotions / shelf strips
- Wildlife Notice board
- Wildlife Gardening pages on their website
- Advertising / PR / Editorial / Events
- A Wildlife Pond and other habitats
- A more environmentally aware approach within the business

From an industry perspective:

- Overall public awareness of wildlife gardening is too low – improved national campaign is needed
- There are differences in approach between urban and rural garden centres
- A champion within the business is vital to success
- Culture change is a real challenge – for both employees and customers
- Ongoing training / events provided by the Trust are essential

For more information see www.eggesfordgardens.com

5. **Buglife's Big Bumblebee Hunt** Diana Cheng, Buglife

This project was set up in 2007 to encourage large numbers of people, from keen naturalists to children, to participate in a July to August public survey, recording bumblebees in their local neighbourhood. The project also ran events, Bumblebee walks and identification workshops. It used an online survey form linked to simple gardening tips for bumblebees. These tips include:

- Having a continuous succession of nectar-rich flowers from spring to autumn
- Planting a variety of 'bowl', 'bell', 'lipped' and 'tubular'-shaped flowers for different tongue lengths.
- Providing suitable nesting sites in uncultivated and wild spots in quiet areas of the garden.
- Avoiding using pesticides

There were 2500 visits to the website during the Big Bumblebee Hunt, with 175 people taking part in recording bumblebees; 500 attending bumblebee events. 65% of people participating looked for bumblebees in their own gardens. The results of the Big Bumblebee Hunt are on the website:

www.buglife.org.uk/conservation/currentprojects/bigbumblebeehunt

Buglife are now planning a National Bumblebee Survey, and a National Ladybird Survey in 2009.

6. **Froglife's experience involving young people in wildlife gardening** Sam Goodlet, Grass Roots Green Shoots Project, Froglife

Froglife is a charity concerned with native Amphibians and Reptiles. It manages Hampton Nature Reserve for Great Crested Newts, and runs local and national conservation projects such as "Toads on Roads" and the London Standing Water HAP. This project works with young people in Peterborough aged 10-17, who have been sentenced to hours of community service reparation for a crime. It provides environmental and educational activities, giving a positive, rehabilitative approach.

Special educational sessions are provided for 'hard to reach' 10-13 year olds, emphasising choice of species, research, and creativity around the chosen animal.

Students learn how animals fit together in habitats, giving an understanding of biodiversity and an enjoyment of scientific words. The aspirations of the participant young people are addressed through building skills for life and learning with purpose through new experiences and physical, practical, and fun activities. The project is regenerating the local area and school grounds where a helping hand is needed. Using young people's ideas helps develop ownership while delivering improvements for wildlife and for people. See www.froglife.org

7. **Discovering and celebrating wildlife in National Trust gardens**
Matthew Oates, National Trust

The National Trust owns some 130 gardens and most support valuable wildlife habitats with rare species. Many gardens include semi-natural features such as wildflower meadows, chalk grassland and ancient woodland, albeit in modified states. Garden walls, hedges, ponds and bog gardens provide important artificial habitats, often in landscapes denuded of such features.

Many Trust gardens are of considerable importance for wildlife within their landscape or county settings, especially for birds such as Spotted Flycatcher, Nuthatch and woodpeckers, bats, aquatic faunas, reptiles and amphibians, grassland fungi and invertebrates. The invertebrates are under-recorded, though four species new to Britain have been discovered in Trust gardens since 2003. The wildlife of a few Trust gardens has been well surveyed, notably The Weir, near Hereford, and Cragside in Northumbria.

The challenges for the Trust are to discover the significant wildlife that occurs in its gardens, and how to accommodate wildlife without compromising the fundamental principles of heritage garden design or management. Potentially dangerous species such as adder, hornet and social wasps occur in some well visited gardens. Climate change presents a further set of challenges, both for the gardens and for their wildlife.

The Trust has set up a Wildlife in Gardens project that aims to discover and celebrate, partly as a learning resource, the wildlife of its heritage gardens. A system enabling visiting naturalists to record garden wildlife has been established, with records reported via a dedicated email address: gardenswildsurvey@nationaltrust.org.uk. Records of scarce species are particularly sought, along with the notification of important habitat features such as a grassy bank with a colony of rare bees.

Details of the wildlife of 50 Trust gardens can be found on the Trust website: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wildlifeingardens

8. **How we engage the community**
Anna Williams Snowdonia Wildlife Gardening Partnership

The Snowdonia Wildlife Gardening Partnership started in 2002 and involves 13 regional partners. It covers Gwynedd, Conwy and Anglesey and is based with the

North Wales Wildlife Trust in Bangor, with funding to March 2009. The Partnership's aims are to

- To enhance the biodiversity of gardens and public spaces
- To raise awareness of wildlife friendly gardening
- To implement the Habitat Action Plan for gardens in Gwynedd, Conwy and Anglesey
- To involve the community working with schools, community groups and businesses
- To encourage a healthy lifestyle
- To encourage recycling, composting and organic gardening

Working with community gardens, the project has advised 16 groups, given talks to 50, and has 18 groups involved in the competition below. 50 schools have been given advice, and 10 schools helped with practical projects. Start-up kits have gone to 60 schools, and teacher training workshops have been run.

Good publicity has been achieved, with an Information Pack and leaflets, regular press coverage; monthly gardening columns in 3 local papers, radio and TV and two websites, www.gardenforwildlife.co.uk and www.garddiobywydgyyllt.co.uk. There have been many public events with Open Days at Partners' Gardens, activities at Biodiversity Fairs, local festivals and local agricultural shows, and an annual Plant Fair at Tŷ Hyll

The partnership has had success with the Best Wildlife Garden in North West Wales Competition. This annual event has four entry categories which are Private Gardens (large and small), School Gardens, Community Gardens and Business Gardens, attracting 40-50 category entrants each year. See : www.gwynedd.gov.uk/upload/public/attachments/903/shorter_article_winning_gardens_2007.doc

9. **Update on the RSPB's Homes for Wildlife campaign** Richard Blashford RSPB

Homes for Wildlife aims to reverse the decline of bird species with significant populations in urban and suburban areas. It is based on the successful *Homes fit for Birds* 2006 trial, in which 22,855 people took part, and 4,518 people completed a survey. The current project focuses on House Sparrow, Starling, Blackbird and Song Thrush.

The five year project wants people to sign up for advice, undertake some management, complete a survey online, and feed back results. It aims to provide wildlife gardening advice for all, with information provided on ponds, lawns, planting, hedges, homes for birds, homes for insects, feeding, dead wood, products and more. By 2011, the aim is for 90,000 surveys and 400,000 registrations.

Communicating the message will come through articles in *Birds* magazine, registration address carrier, flyers at events, linkage with Big Garden Bird Watch and Springwatch, inserts in mailings, CDs, promotion through media, advertising,

podcasting and Enews. Already a substantial number of linked information leaflets have been produced. The project website is <http://www.rspb.org.uk/hfw/index.asp>

10. **Woking Garden Surveys**

Gill Stribley and Hilary Griffiths Woking Local Agenda 21

The Woking LA21 Gardening for Life Project aims to:

- Reduce water use in the garden
- Cut down on use of pesticides and inorganic fertilisers
- Use alternatives to peat
- Compost kitchen and garden waste
- Attract wildlife and create habitats

The project promotes environmentally friendly gardening with the distribution of Gardening for Life and other information leaflets, a newsletter, Public meetings and events such as 'Green Gardener's Question Time' and a public wildlife flowerbed in Woking Centre. The project has run several successful surveys.

The Garden Profile Survey in March 1999 received 515 replies, covering garden structures size and features, use of chemicals and peat, common wildlife species seen, and respondent age and gardening interest level.

The 12 Species Wildlife Survey ran from 1999 to 2006, seeking data on sightings of house sparrow, blackbird, song thrush, great spotted woodpecker, pipit, hedgehog, comma butterfly, peacock butterfly, stag beetle, grass snake, slow worm and great crested newt.

The All Bird Species Survey ran from 2002 to 2006, with 1154 returned forms analysed for 21 selected months. Results over the years were very consistent and correlated well with local BTO survey results, and showed consistent seasonal variation. The survey is a sound baseline for monitoring future changes.

Environmentally friendly (EF) practices were surveyed between 1999 and 2005 with 115 responses: 50 from bird surveyors, 65 from non-surveyors. There was a significant improvement to most EF practices between 1999 & 2005, especially by the bird surveyors. There was a general improvement in water management, and decline in use of chemicals and peat-based products. Use of kerb-side green waste collection rose dramatically, while garden composting and bonfire use declined.

The first Annual Garden Wildlife Watch was held in April 2007 through forms distributed to all households in *Woking Magazine*. With 374 replies analyzed, the average number of bird species per garden was 13.4, while on average 17 bird species were seen since May 2006. A parallel question revealed many broad groups (eg dragonflies) were recorded within the previous year. Nearly 50% of gardens recorded stag beetles and nearly 40% had toads.

It was concluded that surveys have an important role in engaging the general public and increasing their appreciation of wildlife and understanding of the importance of biodiversity. The surveys provided some quantitative evidence to support the concept

that greater involvement can result in change of attitudes and behaviour with respect to environmental issues. This is relevant to Local Authority policies in meeting present and future challenges for sustainable living.

<http://www.woking.gov.uk/environment/la21/gardening>