

GARDENS FOR WILDLIFE

Issue 25 Summer 2009

Supported by Marsh Ltd

Gardens for Wildlife is a local initiative (which operates in the area between Newmarket Road and Lakenham Way and between the inner and outer ring roads). We distribute newsletters free to all houses in this area and we welcome everybody to talks and outings.

Reminder: You can now access this newsletter on the community web site www.townclose.org.uk

I hope you were able to enjoy some beautiful gardens this Easter. The weather has been unseasonably warm and has brought on some of the spring flowers and flowering trees quite quickly. But I really do hope that by the time you read this, we will have had some urgently needed rain. My water butts are very nearly empty already!

Although many of our front gardens have areas of planting with shrubs, small trees and hedges, there seems to be a growing trend to move away from this and pave over or tarmac our front gardens, thus depriving birds and other creatures of an invaluable source of food and shelter. The main reasons for this change are often a desire for low maintenance gardening and to increase parking availability. However, this may soon be a less popular method, not only because of its dull appearance and apparent negative effects on saleability, but also because of the government's new planning laws.

The new planning laws which came into effect last year, have been designed to reduce flood risk. Two thirds of the homes flooded in summer 2007 were affected by surface water run-off rather than river water and more than £3 billion worth of damage was caused. Hard surfaces such as tarmac prevent heavy rain from sinking into the ground. This can quickly lead to drains overflowing and can cause local flooding.

Permeable surfaces allow rainwater to soak into the ground slowly, therefore reducing

flood risk. These include porous asphalt, gravel, concrete block paving with gaps, wheel track only paving or 'soak-away' systems. To encourage people to use these surfaces when altering front gardens, permeable driveways or parking areas under five square metres do not require planning permission. But impermeable surfaces such as asphalt measuring more than five square metres will need permission. The new rules only apply to front gardens.

The soil in most of Norwich is of a type which allows water to soak into the ground easily. In these areas permeable surfaces are more appropriate. Norwich City Council is not likely to grant planning permission for impermeable surfaces in these areas. However in areas where the soil does not allow rain water to soak easily into the ground, permission for impermeable paving would more likely be granted.

So let's hope that in the future front gardens will look more attractive and be a much more attractive place for wildlife too!

Julie

(For detailed information on the new planning rules and a drainage map, see the Norwich City Council web site www.norwich.gov.uk - Planning - paving front gardens.)



OUTINGS

Sunday 31 May 2009 at 2.30pm

WALK at Hoveton Hall Gardens to see the rhododendrons and azaleas. Meet at entrance at 2.30pm. Usual entrance fee is £5.

Directions: From Wroxham Bridge continue straight on on the Stalham Road for a little over a mile. There is a brown tourist flower sign pointing left, so turn left and after another mile the entrance is on the right.

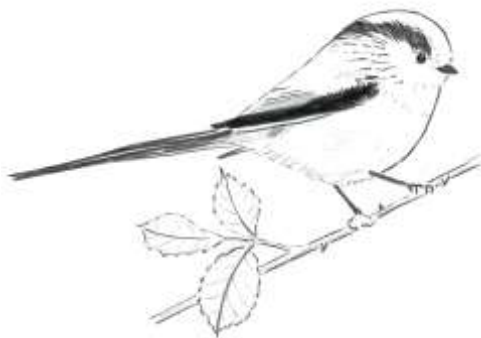
Saturday 4 July 2009 at 2.0pm

Nature Walk around Whitlingham Broad led by a Volunteer Guide. Meet at the Visitor Centre (the restored barn).
Usual car parking charge applies.

(Please be aware that we are an informal group and we do not hold public liability insurance. Visitors attend outings at their own risk.)

Perhaps you have attended 'Wild About Norfolk' at Notcutts in the last 3 years. This year this event has moved out to Acle High School and will be on Saturday 3 October 2009 from 10am to 4pm.

'Wild About the Wensum' will be taking place as usual at Pensthorpe Nature Reserve near Fakenham on Saturday 16 May 2009 from 10am to 5pm. Ed.



'Birds in our gardens – or not'

Have you been seeing more long-tailed tits in your garden recently? This charming little bird made newspaper headlines recently by making it into the national 'top ten' of most sighted birds in this year's Big Garden Birdwatch. 552,000 people took part during the weekend of 24/25 January. I remember looking out into the garden during that weekend and seeing only three fat wood pigeons on the lawn – not my favourite bird, especially when it, along with six friends, gorges on the new shoots of my small trees. There has been an 825% increase in wood pigeons since the first Birdwatch thirty years ago.

The long-tailed tit is this year's success story with almost twice as many recorded as last year. Our recent run of mild winters has probably contributed to this: small birds are very susceptible to cold weather.

Another reason for the increase in sightings, according to the British Trust for Ornithology based in Thetford, is because the long-tailed tit has adapted to eating seeds and peanuts from bird feeders. They have also responded to climate change by laying eggs earlier in the season to avoid damaging effects of early Summer rain. Let us hope that the recent very cold snap during early February has not reduced numbers. They can hold their parties in my garden any time.

Here are the ‘top ten’ results comparing Norfolk with the national average (the tables also show the average number of birds per garden):

National average			Norfolk		
1	house sparrow	3.70	1	blackbird	3.80
2	starling	3.21	2	house sparrow	3.12
3	blackbird	2.84	3	starling	2.89
4	blue tit	2.45	4	wood pigeon	2.64
5	chaffinch	2.01	5	collared dove	2.37
6	wood pigeon	1.85	6	chaffinch	2.26
7	collared dove	1.44	7	blue tit	2.17
8	great tit	1.40	8	long-tailed tit	2.16
9	robin	1.36	9	greenfinch	1.60
10	long-tailed tit	1.34	10	goldfinch	1.58

As highlighted in the last Newsletter, numbers of sparrows have fallen greatly from an average per garden of 10 sparrows in 1979 to under 4 this year. Starlings have dropped even more: from 15 sightings down to just over 3. Even so, house sparrows and starlings are still the second and third most frequent visitors to our Norfolk gardens according to the survey results.

But where are they? I have a reasonably sized garden near trees with lawn, natural hedges, pond and wildlife areas and during the last eight years I have seen not one sparrow and not one starling.

Shall I blame the neighbour’s cat?
Cherington (March 2009)

OUR SURVEY ON SPARROWS

Our last newsletter included a survey form for recording the number of sparrows seen in your garden. We had 15 replies and 7 reported no sparrows seen in the last year. These negative replies came from the large gardens with big trees (surprising perhaps).

Eight medium sized gardens (mostly in Cecil Road) reported seeing between 2 and 12 sparrows. Most gardens were providing food for them, but they preferred pyracantha berries and insects if available.

Only 2 responses reported seeing a sparrow’s nest in the roof. One was a nest in an unlined roof, and at the other the sparrows had made space under the tiles.

If you put up boxes for sparrows, we are told that putting a bit of dead grass or straw so it sticks out of the hole will encourage the sparrows in.



Hewett Sustainable Grounds Development Pilot Project

On Saturday morning 2 May some 15 of us met up with Paul and Elaine of Landscaping for Biodiversity (LfB) in the grounds of the Hewett School. The sun was shining and the temperature warm. This meeting had been organised for Paul and Elaine to update us on the Hewett Sustainable Grounds Development Pilot Project, and to walk us around the large amount of green space that is the Hewett grounds.

In March 09 the Project presented an Interim Report to The Broads Authority. A great deal of research/consultation has been carried out with the school, the children and the wider community. Currently LfB are at the design stage for 2 projects: an external classroom (the amphitheatre) and a large cultivation area.

The amphitheatre would provide an outside area to learn, socialise (away from ball sports) and provide an outside venue for the school's prolific drama group with opportunities for hired use by community organisations such as choirs, orchestras etc. It is hoped to site it on the plateau of land in between the swimming pool and the lovely old hedge facing south towards Ipswich Road. Students on the Construction and the Built Environment National Diploma would be assisting with the construction.

The cultivation area would be sited close to the Harford Manor Special School as Harford are keen to develop a relationship with the Hewett. Students from both schools have met up to discuss accessibility issues that need to be considered in the design for some of the wheelchair users. The area would be a 'whole school' responsibility and would welcome and encourage parent and local community involvement. Mahesh Pant from the Bluebell Allotments is keen for his Sustainable Living Initiative organisation to be involved offering skills and experience to the project.

LfB are currently continuing their partnerships with a range of community organisations and the school staff and students, the County Council and businesses. They are looking for partners who would be willing to match fund, and identifying and providing support for approaching funding bodies.

Those of us who were introduced to this project felt very, very positive about the proposals.

If you would like to find out more or feel that you have something that you can contribute to this project, contact Landscaping for Biodiversity

pwoodmin@toucansurf.com tel: 07832 383074 or 07796 553838

(The project is supported by the Broads Authority Sustainable Development Fund with a grant provided by Defra)

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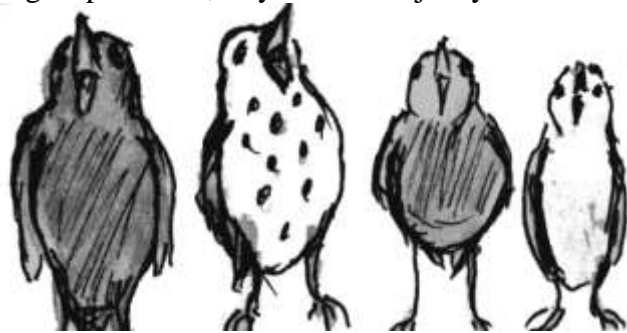
Juliet and Dilys attended a Natural Neighbours Conference organised by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers on 9 March 09. There were some 80 representatives of community conservation groups in Norfolk. Five particular projects described their work and there were workshops on 'How to survey wildlife on your patch' and 'Pond problems'. It was a day for networking and being inspired by the enthusiasm and achievements of volunteer conservation groups.

(We plan to approach one of the woodland groups with a view to visiting their project next year.)

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Difficulties with identifying Birdsong.

It isn't difficult to identify a robin's song in winter, as robins are the only birds that sing then - I believe that both male and females sing to mark a territory. In my garden they used to be joined in January by a thrush, but sadly this year there is no thrush singing. Again, it isn't difficult to identify a thrush as it usually begins by announcing itself in a loud voice over and over, and then repeats all its phrases "in case you thought he never could recapture/ his first, fine careless rapture". They are wonderful singers, but a fragile and declining species, and the best thing we can do for them is not put out slug-pellets. (Yogurt-pots with beer in the bottom are proving excellent slug-traps for me, or you can use just yeast and water).



This year dunnocks started singing in February - a sharp sprinkle of sound, which at that time wasn't hard to identify, and shortly after I found myself standing beside a couple of strangers listening to a blackbird whistling away on the roof of the Bell Hotel.

But then the problems started. Blackbirds were building nests in my garden, but every time I thought "that must be the blackbird singing", I looked up and saw the indefatigable robin. In early morning it was worse. I woke up to birdsong (how lucky not traffic!), and then wondered "blackbird or robin?" The dunnock was joined by a wren. Out in the country, and occasionally in my garden, wrens sing very loudly a distinctive short song with a chirr towards the end. But this wren misses out the chirr - that is, if it is the wren and not the

dunnock. Tits, which sing quite separated and distinct notes, and not many of them, should be easy, but actually they vary them in all sorts of ways. Greenfinches have a long note which is fairly plain, but they also have lots of other softer sounds, and gold-finches, which I thought had a little, glassy song suddenly seem to give a grating burr - if it is them of course. In fact, as I lie in bed, every burst of song, except for the starling's rattle and the chaffinch's 'descending notes and coda' set up a problem for me, and these two are not the most exciting of singers. Or, perhaps I shouldn't say this - recently I was delighted by a long burst of sparrow-twitter in a station restaurant abroad.

As I get older I love listening to birds more and more, but I despair of ever being able to identify even my garden songsters. It is wonderful to go on walks with experts and be told, but it is hard to remember, especially as the songs vary so much and each year you have all autumn and winter to forget - except the robin's, of course!

Juliet



SPRING IN SPAIN

"I enjoyed my stay in Norwich but how lovely to get back to my Mediterranean garden. The swallows arrived around 8 April and very noisily too. Once contacts were established with fellow swallows individuals began swooping and skimming over dew-soaked ground early morning picking off insects, daring to swerve so close to me I can see their beautiful petrol blue head and wings.

I spotted the pair of ravens tumbling together acrobatically through the air, kruk krukking as they went. I've been aware of them for at least 5 years now.

There are familiar northern european birds, robins, blackbirds, starlings, mistlethrushes and many sparrows around the house pairing off and renewing nests under the tiles on the south side of the roof. Then there are the not so familiar birds to northern climes, black redstarts, egrets, vultures and my favourite the hoopoe.

The almond blossom in February gave way to cherry blossom in March and now the air is flooded with the heady sweet scent of orange blossom even though many trees still carry a full crop of fruit! The loquats are filling out, still green but will soon turn a wonderful warm apricot. Geraniums are springing to life and the powerful reds of the succulents still shooting out. The mimosa scent struggles to make an impression now and the once bright yellow pom-poms are past their best. But I am excited to see small green pea size cherries forming from the fading blossom, my first crop after 3 years.

Next week I'm looking forward to visiting an Iris Garden half an hour's drive from my house inland. For 6 weeks it is open for the public to view a magnificent collection of bearded irises. Can't wait!"

Jardinera

Reminder of some recommended web sites

British Dragonfly Society

www.dragonflysoc.org.uk

The society is involved with study and conservation of dragonflies and their natural habitats especially in the UK. The site contains details of 'Dig a Pond for Wildlife'

British Trust for Ornithology

www.bto.org

The BTO is the major ornithological society in the UK promoting bird conservation through volunteer-based surveys such as the garden watch survey

British Wildflower Plants

www.wildflowers.co.uk

Excellent web site from enthusiasts based at North Burlingham, Norfolk

Butterfly Conservation

www.butterfly-conservation.org

An organisation conserving butterflies, moths and their habitats

The Henry Doubleday Research Association

www.gardenorganic.org

HRDA is now also known as Garden Organic and is the national charity for organic growing

The Invertebrate Conservation Trust

www.buglife.org.uk

Informative site with useful links

Royal Horticultural Society

www.rhs.org.uk

An excellent site with lots of useful links

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

www.rspb.org

Another excellent information site with a section devoted to gardens

Thrive

www.thrive.org.uk

Thrive is a national charity founded in 1978 that makes use of gardening to change the lives of people with physical or mental disabilities

Wild About Gardens

www.wildaboutgardens.org

A joint project by the RHS and the Wildlife Trusts that aims to bring the worlds of gardening and nature conservation closer together

(Our thanks to Peter for this)

Gardening for Disabled People

The Grow-Our-Own (GO2) Allotments Scheme is looking for disabled people who are interested in growing their own vegetables. GO2 has allotments that have specially designed raised beds for wheelchair users. A plot measuring 1.3 x 1.3 metres costs £5 per year (October 2008 - September 2009) which includes the cost of seed, plant, muck and tools. We provide gardening tools especially designed for disabled people.

The Grow-Our-Own (GO²) scheme at Bluebell South Allotments started in the autumn of 2004. The main aim of the scheme is to help those who are interested but have little or no experience in growing fruit and vegetables. We offer practical help and advice on what to grow, when to grow it and provide tools, seeds, compost, and so on.

We have an Information Centre, picnic area and a composting toilet for the use of our members. Car parking spaces are limited and are reserved for disabled people and for parents with young children. We have ensured that the new facilities are wheelchair accessible.

If you are interested in finding out more email or call: E-mail: sustainable@talktalk.net
Tel: 01603 455868

CALLING ALL CONTRIBUTORS AND ILLUSTRATORS

We are an informal group and we rely on your input and participation. If you can write a short article or even just a snippet, do please support us and get in touch. Ring chairperson Julie on 627681 or contact the Newsletter editor Dilys at 454683.

Email: dilys.jones2@btinternet.com

If you would like to be on our membership list (free) in order to receive notification of our AGM ring Giti on 662146.

