

GARDENS FOR WILDLIFE

Issue 26 Autumn 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

Welcome everyone to our 8th year, which ended yet again with a lovely sunny afternoon AGM, kindly hosted by Dilys and Charles. Thank you to all who attended and for the delicious cakes which we enjoyed after the meeting!

This summer has been rather a mixed bag, with mild damp days followed by very hot and dry weather. I know which I prefer as my garden was quite dead on my return from 10 days in Northumbria! One of the highlights of this trip was a visit to Howick Hall gardens; a real gardener's garden with a wonderful bog garden, herbaceous borders, wildflower meadows and 65 acres of marvellous woodland or arboretum. Also, as it was once the home of the 2nd Earl Grey and his wife Lady Grey, the tea rooms are quite exquisite!

This year I also added another bird feeder to my garden and filled it with Niger seed, which has attracted a multitude of gold finches. They are such a delight to watch and together with the greenfinches, chaffinches and tits of all varieties, we have truly been well entertained this year! I even saw a tree creeper climbing up the apple tree!

The lovely addition of a small pond may also have contributed to an increase in our visiting bird population and I am delighted to have a resident frog too, who is happily sharing it with my son's goldfish!!

Julie



Come to the PLANT SALE Saturday 10th OCTOBER 2009 10am to 1pm

Our annual bring-and-buy plant sale is at The Ring in Trafford Road. We would welcome plants, apples or any other garden produce, jams, etc. Plants for sale can be taken direct to the stall or left beforehand with Julie at 35 Brian Avenue or Jean at 102 Cecil Road.

Could you deliver a few Newsletters?

We are now short of 3 people to deliver the newsletters (particularly in the Cecil Road area).

Our newsletter comes out just three times per year, and we don't ask anyone to do more than say half an hour. If you can help please ring 454683.

EVENTS .. EVENTS ..

The TALKS in the Winter series will be held in Room A17 of the Hewett School. The entrance is Gate 1 in Cecil Road opposite Trafford Road. Inside the entrance of the building turn right down the corridor and Room A17 is on the left. (There is plenty of parking close to the entrance.)
Everyone welcome.

TALK: “THE ROUND NORFOLK ROW” by ROBERT CONWAY, Optometrist in Norwich Tuesday 3rd November 2009 at 7.30pm in Room A17

Robert lives in our area, and last year he undertook a 250 mile eight-day row round Norfolk to raise money for Vision Aid Overseas. It involved the full length of the rivers Waveney and Little Ouse and the reaches of the Great Ouse, and the coastline from King’s Lynn to Lowestoft. In particular he was enthralled by the wildlife he encountered on the trip. We are very pleased he is to tell us all about his trip with pictures, and we were thrilled to hear he raised a total sum of £3,500.

(Further talks will be listed in the next issue.)

* * * * *

Two of our WALKS were particularly enjoyable this summer. Hoveton Hall gardens were looking glorious in May and seven goldfinches were circling the car park as we arrived. It was a very hot day in July when a group of us joined a volunteer warden who guided us round Whitlingham Broad. The warden gave us a comprehensive history of the making of the broad and the great range of wildlife that had been seen, and was pleased when Margaret was able to identify the spectacular dragonflies near the bird hide. How lucky we are to have the Whitlingham country park and nature reserve so close to us.

* * * * *

New Treasurer needed

Jean has acted as our Treasurer for the whole of our 8 years, and now feels she must retire. Thank you Jean for the tremendous support you have given to the group. We need a new Treasurer. It is not an onerous job and Jean would talk you through it. If you can help please ring 454683.

* * * * *

In July 2009 it was pleasing to hear that **Harford Manor School** had won the Eco-Schools Green Flag award which they had been working hard towards since January 2008.



Vegetables in the Front Garden.

There is a move afoot to cut food-miles and costs and grow delicious organic vegetables in our gardens. On my newsletter delivery round I spotted the crowded front garden pictured above. The owner is Susan Guymer, and with the help of a friend, she grows an enormous variety of vegetables in a space which measures approximately 16x14 feet.

Susan grows potatoes, onions, runner-beans, peas, spinach, parsnips, leeks, lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, sprouts, courgettes, cucumbers, tomatoes, strawberries, raspberries, rhubarb and black-currants, as well as a selection of herbs including two types of parsley, chives, oregano and two types of mint. The garden also has some lovely sweet-peas.

She started the project fairly recently, and decided to put in a lot of different things to see what was successful. So far most things have grown well, though she was only able to produce a small number of potatoes and lost her cauliflowers to slugs.

Because of the limited space, the greens are in raised well-manured beds where they can be grown close together, the strawberries are in a large pot with separate holes for each plant, the herbs are in pots, and the courgettes and cucumbers are in grow-bags. Susan was also trying out beetroot in a long plastic container.

The peas, which Susan planted out as seedlings and guarded by covering them with plastic drinks-bottles, have been particularly successful.

Susan uses no pesticides, but she sets up “slug-pubs” by putting lager into pots which the slugs climb into and drown. She also nets her greens to prevent them being eaten by caterpillars.

As well as using them for her own family Susan also supplies her daughter with vegetables, and this little garden is feeding about seven people! So, let’s all get digging –the autumn is just the time to get started!

Sustainable Living Initiative
Grow-Our-Own Scheme
Bluebell South Allotments, Norwich

The Grow-Our-Own (GO²) helps people to grow fruit and vegetables on the allotments or at home. We provide hands-on practical help and advice on what, when and how to grow - along with the supply of tools, seeds, plants and other inputs.

If you are interested in:

- Growing fruit and vegetables organically
- Having an allotment strip
- Growing fruit and vegetables at home, and
- Getting practical gardening experience,

please give us a call on 01603 455868, or visit our website: www.grow-our-own.co.uk.

SIX YEARS OF PROGRESS IN OUR GARDEN

It is now nearly six years since we moved into the area. The garden is established although never finished and we plod on with renovating the house. Each year has brought new excitement as we learn more about gardening and wildlife. All sorts of wildlife has populated the hand-dug garden pond; the only things we have added are the water and native British plants. This year we have had a large number of magnificent dragonfly larvae emerging from the deep to transform into beautiful dragonflies of all colours, we also have a pair of Mallard ducks that visit regularly every spring. A future project is a fox proof duck house - if only I was an MP! Newts and frogs have heavily populated the pond along with water soldier plants that have increased 50 fold. Does anyone want some water soldiers?

For his birthday my husband received a nest box with a camera which we fitted onto the summerhouse. I was spending a lot of time in there as I was using it as a quiet place to go where I could leave out all my books while

studying the final course of my degree. It was a great treat to find that a couple of blue tits had decided to use the box. Over the coming weeks they entertained me with their comings and goings. My husband was inclined to mention on occasions that I was supposed to be studying. There were eight eggs which all hatched. I was dismayed to witness one of the parents taking one chick and unceremoniously removing it from the nest. This particular chick was one of the stronger ones so I was surprised that this one was removed - perhaps it was too greedy. I felt quite privileged to watch their behaviour even if it was brutal at times. I did not see them leaving the nest but they are now very noisy visitors to the bird feeders.

One other aspect of the passage of time has been the gradual increase in bird visitors. When we moved here I was quite envious of my neighbour who had a lot of birds in her garden. Gradually we have managed to entice a nice variety of birds into our garden and we can now enjoy seeing the bird feeders supporting several different species at one time, although there is quite a cost involved in providing constant bird food!

Moving into a house with a large garden has meant that we have been able to keep hens. This has been a delight as they have such lovely personalities and are good company when working in the garden. I feel I am fluent in chicken as they convey their feelings with different sounds. They do make a funny purring sound when they are going to sleep and I am left in no doubt when they are displeased if I accidentally step on their feet. Although they are good for clearing the garden of pests, I do reprimand them when they catch frogs which I dislike them eating as they are good for the garden. The hens are very fast and see movement very quickly. I disturbed a mouse's nest and was very surprised when the baby mice were quickly caught and eaten by the chickens. Some of the hens were rescued from a battery farm. I will never buy another battery farm egg after seeing the awful state these poor hens were in when I got them. However with a bit of care they have recovered into magnificent healthy chickens.



Having diverse wildlife in the garden occasionally has its downside; recently some rats decided to take up residence in the compost heaps and they brought with them disease. Rats were getting into the chicken run and as a result the chickens became ill, one died, but I managed to treat the others who have since recovered. I did resort to rat poison because I am very protective of my hens, with my children believing they are lower than the hens in our family pecking order.

The foxes are another danger to the chickens as they have become regular visitors to the garden. One strolled past the summerhouse in the middle of the day when I was engaged in my studying. So far they have not taken any of the hens but I think this is only by luck. Although we did see a fox make off with a rat, this made us feel a bit better about them. Recently we rescued some more hens, we kept them in a separate run as initially establishing the pecking order can be quite vicious. Sadly these disappeared one night while we were on holiday, the run was secure and there was no evidence of remains from escaped chickens despatched by foxes. Our only other thought was humans.

Although the garden is hard physical work that does not get easier as we get older, it is also an immense source of pleasure. We also feel we are doing our bit in providing green spaces for our native plants and wildlife to thrive, even if some of it is a bit wilder than we would like.



CATERPILLAR CATASTROPHE

I was sitting in my garden reading when I saw a peacock butterfly. He sat on the buddlea for a while, then fluttered over to me and nearly settled on my hat, but thought better of it. Then I heard the tut tut pwirrp of a long-tailed tit and five appeared in the silver birch with one or two blue tits and a great tit all feeding and flitting about.

One of the long-tailed tits came very close to me in the apple tree with several more nearby. Suddenly one appeared with an enormous brown caterpillar (about one and a half inches long). It battered it on top of the fence, against branches, evaded another snatch and grab attempt, and pecked it all the way along and didn't drop it.

The other birds gradually dispersed and he was left battling with the caterpillar. I could hear a robbin scolding. I went to get my camera and returned a few minutes later – no sign of the bird at all. Did I hear the neighbour say 'it was a blut tit'? Had

the cat got it while it was engrossed in the caterpillar?

I hoped not. At least I had not been there to witness it (coward). Sitting down again I saw a tiny green caterpillar dangling from the apple tree. That was more the size the long-tailed tit should have gone for!

Kate

Mystery arrival of native wild flower

When four plants with gladiolus-type leaves arrived in my garden in late May I thought the squirrels had been at work again bringing in the neighbours' bulbs. In early June two of them came into flower – they were clearly gladioli but with quite small blossoms, not the large fancy open flowers which cultivated gladioli boast. The colour was a deep, intense magenta – some people might call it a rich purple. Later in June I received an email from a friend with a country garden in Wales sending me a photograph of an identical flower which she'd discovered for the first time this year in her garden. She said it was wild native gladiolus. I checked – so were mine and my wildflower book says that it is "rare" in Britain. Has anyone in the area had a similar surprise windfall? And can anyone explain why a native plant suddenly turns up in Norwich and Wales at the same time?

Barbara



Progress in Josephine Close

Since my article in issue 24 there has been even more digging, cutting, weeding and burning of the ever growing pile that resides in our garden – but we are definitely making progress. The front has been transformed and soon we shall have four new raised beds for our vegetables. They say practice makes perfect so as our lettuces shrivelled in the heat in our greenhouse we are now planning to shade parts of it and start again! My New Zealand flax plant has gone wild. It has 20 stalks on it and the bees can't seem to get enough of the pollen. I love watching them go about their business – it is quite therapeutic. The last newsletter noted the abundance of long-tailed tits and I see or hear a small flock at least every

other day as they love the fat balls I put out. When the sun has shined I have had woodland brown butterflies, the odd damselfly and plenty of hoverflies. They seem to love the firethorn flowers. I am waiting patiently for my scented mixed seeds to flower. At the moment it is love in a mist that is thriving. On warmer nights we have the window open and can hear the songthrush and the ever lovely notes of the blackbirds. We have seen a hedgehog this year, but only once. Next time I write I hope to have eaten some of our own home grown vegetables – you never know!

Lisa



Mahesh from the Bluebell South Allotments brought a delicious carrot cake to the AGM, and several asked for the recipe:-

Carrot Cake Recipe

- 110g finely grated carrot
- 110g raisins
- 300ml honey
- 75g chopped dates
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp grated nutmeg
- half tsp ground cloves
- 110g butter or margarine
- 225ml water
- 225g plain wholewheat flour
- pinch of salt
- 2 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 110g chopped walnuts

Mix the carrot, raisins, honey,, dates, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, butter and water together in a pan over a gentle heat, then boil for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to cool for about 30 minutes until lukewarm.

Stir flour and salt together in large mixing bowl then mix in the bicarbonate of soda. Add the walnuts, then make a well in the middle and pour in the carrot mixture. Mix thoroughly. Pour into a well-buttered and lightly floured deep cake tin 9 inches square or 10 inches round..

Bake in pre-heated oven at 350 degF/180 degC/gas mark 4 for 55-65 minutes. The cake is ready when a skewer inserted in centre comes out clean. Leave cake to cool in the tin for 10 minutes before turning on to cake rack. Can be eaten warm topped with cream or sliced when cold.



THANK YOU TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS

We are delighted to have some new contributors in this issue. We are an informal group and we rely on your participation. Do write a short article or even just a snippet, and get in touch: Ring chairperson Julie on 627681 or 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.