

# **GARDENS FOR WILDLIFE**

**Issue 27 Spring 2010**

**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](http://www.townclose.org.uk)*

Welcome everyone! Hope you are all keeping warm and doing your bit to help ease the struggle that birds and small creatures have during this extreme weather.

A few weeks ago I attended a very interesting talk by the organic gardener Bob Flowerdew. He has grown just about every kind of fruit and vegetable possible from bananas to pineapples! He is such an adventurous, positive gardener and nothing is seemingly too difficult for him as long as the conditions are right. Being totally organic also, his garden has achieved a perfect balance between the natural world and the plants he has grown. He has no need for fertilizers or soil improvers, as his own quite unique compost gives the soil all the goodness it requires!

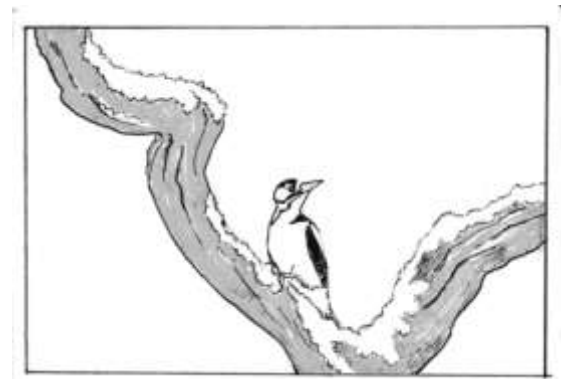
He enthused about the virtues of growing fruit assuring us that it was eminently suited to both busy or lazy gardeners, pruning being light work compared to digging! He also got us to admit that we much preferred eating a bowl full of peaches, pears, raspberries and strawberries than a plate full of salad! "So if you want strawberries, don't plant turnips!"

Bob talked about how birds are the 'natural heirs' to the fruits and much of the gardener's time is taken up thinking of ways to prevent them and other pests nibbling away at their harvest. However they can also be our allies in the battle against the smaller pests, and it is of course through birds that a lot of the plants

seeds are distributed. Also, the permanent nature of most common fruiting plants means their cultivation is much less demanding on peat and heat than vegetable gardening or growing bedding plants. Their permanence also makes it easier to build up an effective ecosystem around them.

Fruiting plants also have an abundance of flowers, which are in themselves very beneficial for a variety of insects. One of the greatest benefits of growing fruit, he said, was that if we don't protect or use all our produce, the wildlife will really enjoy it, which is more than can be said for sad rows of forgotten or abandoned vegetables!

*Julie*



***We have a couple of good TALKS shortly (see over). Why not come along and meet some more of your neighbours. Everyone welcome.***

## 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.

### **Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2010 at 7.30 pm in Room A17**

#### **Talk: “Norwich Fringe Countryside Management Project”**

**By: Matthew Davies, Project Officer**

This Project was established in 1990 and responds to issues which affect the area’s wildlife, landscape and recreational value, the project area extending to a four mile radius from the centre of Norwich to the fringe. Matt will tell us how they work with local people and communities to manage the countryside on their doorstep. He will also talk about the Project’s special four-legged mowing machines (!) and how they help to improve the marshes and grassland areas for wildflowers and orchids.

### **Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2010 at 7.30pm in Room A17**

#### **Talk: “Setting up a Community Wood at Kenninghall”**

**By: Norman Groves and Lucy Whittle from the Kenninghall Community Woodland Project**

In 2002 an opportunity arose to purchase 10 acres of arable land adjoining Kenninghall Wood, and this would provide a total of 15 acres of community woodland. A village meeting unanimously agreed to attempt the purchase, and within 4 months the money was raised. In January 2003 most of the village turned out to plant some 6,000 trees, many of which had been raised in local gardens from seedlings. Our speakers will tell us how this has become a much used local amenity.

(We plan to organise an outing to this Wood in the summer. Ed.)

*We are planning WALKS in the summer months and expect to organise a Garden Walkabout and visits to Upton Fen, the Kenninghall Woodland Project and Wheatfen for swallowtail butterflies.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The PLANT SALE held in October was very successful raising some £130. This sum will be used to pay for the room hire for our talks and a small donation to the speakers. You might like to plan to grow on one or two plants for the next sale in October!

## Goshawk or Sparrowhawk?

A few years ago we had the window sill lowered and the 1970s mock Georgian panes replaced by a single sheet of glass in our kitchen-diner, so that we could sit either side of the table and look out over the garden.

On December 16<sup>th</sup> last year a flurry of wings caught our attention and we looked out to see a large bird of prey scattering feathers across the grass. For the next forty-five minutes we watched transfixed, having grabbed the bird book, as the large bird plucked and ate its prey which turned out to be a collared dove. Unfortunately it was getting dark so I was unable to get a good photo. The bird was the size of a female pheasant with big fluffy, white speckled plus fours. Having consulted Peter Kitchener, we concluded that it was either a female sparrowhawk or a male goshawk. It was quite an amazing experience.

When we moved here 24 years ago, we had house-sparrows and starlings as regular visitors; now there are none, though I know there are house sparrows further up Cecil Road. We only see a thrush very occasionally and the wren seems to have disappeared. Regular visitors to our garden and bird table are blackbirds, greenfinches, chaffinches, recently goldfinches, blue tits, great tits, coal tits, of course the robin, and one of my favourites, the dunnock. In the last few days a flock of long-tailed tits arrived at the birdtable along with what appeared to be a blackcap.

Ros

\*\*\*\*\*

## A WINTER VISITOR

It was about 10.30pm on 21 December and there was about 4 inches of snow on the ground, but it was starting to thaw. I had just come indoors after making a snowman

in my garden (as you do) and I wanted to see what he looked like from my French windows.

As I peered through the blind a big bird appeared from under the bushes visible against the bright snow. It was about the size of a partridge, but slimmer, with a long straight beak. It moved quite jerkily, probing the snow with its beak as it scurried about. Then it bobbed up and down on the spot. It looked dark against the snow but I couldn't see any detail of its plumage. Its tummy was about level with the top of the snow.

I went to get my glasses for a closer look, and it had gone to the end of the garden and must have caught sight of me as it flew away quite low over the garage. I thought it must either be a snipe or a woodcock, neither of which would I have expected to see in my garden. I looked it up in my bird book and think it was a woodcock. They are largely nocturnal, and probe the ground with their beaks for earthworms and insect larvae, and are bigger than snipe with shorter legs. How amazing that one visited my garden!

Kate



Just 2 days after Kate told me about this, the natural history snippet on the BBC1 "One Show" mentioned that snipe and woodcock were coming into the towns during the snow to look for food. Ed.

### Notes from Brian Avenue

Well hasn't it been another hard winter for our wildlife? I had hoped for one milder than last year, but the frozen ground and snow have brought some of their own highlights. My neighbour heard two Tawny owls calling one evening, and we still have regular visits from a local fox. I have had a greater variety of birds than past years – although I do feed the birds all year round so perhaps they know where to go for 5 star treatment!

We have had our usual sparrows and starlings but not in the flock sizes of past years. Also visiting were great and blue tits, with many goldfinches also (up to seven at a time). At one point a friend had 26 feeding from her two feeders – we gave up counting the ones perching on nearby branches awaiting their turn. This is in a road not too far from our area in the city.

We have had regular visits from magpies, chaffinches, greenfinches, as well as a jay, great spotted woodpecker and jackdaw. A first for my garden this winter, I saw a redwing feeding with seven blackbirds and a thrush. Redwings winter in Western Europe – from the UK through to Turkey and the Middle East – coming here from

Iceland, Scandinavia and Russia. They are slightly smaller than a song thrush and can be easily identified by a white eye stripe and red flank and under-wing. It is amazing the long flights these smallish birds take as they battle against the elements. Sadly many countries still consider trapping and killing them in the name of sport.

At this time of year when blackbirds are beginning to pair up they are not too tolerant of other males feeding nearby, but this year I have counted up to seven male and female blackbirds feeding on the lawn without their usual squabbles. However as I write this the snow is now melting and the fights are starting. With February on the way, eggs will be laid until early March with them hatching in the cold. I hope spring is on the way and temperatures will rise giving the chicks a chance of survival.

So now we can look forward to new life beginning in our neighbourhood. Best wishes to everybody for 2010.

*Jenny*



## LAKENHAM WAY

A new Friends of Lakenham Way Group has drawn up a Management Plan for the wellbeing and maintenance of the Way. Working parties for litter collection and cutting back the vegetation have been organised recently (with Citycare removing the rubbish). Anyone interested in helping should contact Councillor Stephen Little (Green) at [s.little@cllr.norwich.gov.uk](mailto:s.little@cllr.norwich.gov.uk)

\* \* \* \* \*

A year on and I STILL have four robins feeding from my bird table. They are even able to share the table occasionally. I wonder if they are the same ones as last year.

*Diane*

\* \* \* \* \*

Juliet saw this last year -



## **Broken Silence**

Out of her front door, all wrapped up,  
She moves through cold air  
Onto the thick carpet of snow.  
The crunching of her footsteps  
The only sound in the street.  
Noisy crunchy steps followed by muffled ones.

A car drives slowly past.  
Now she listens to the swishing of its tyres  
on the slushy road.  
The purring of its engine comes a little closer before fading away.  
The stillness returns.

She feels the cool air upon her face.  
Her cheeks tingling now.  
A second car is moving towards her.  
The humming of its engine growing louder,  
Soon to vanish down the road.  
All is quiet again, but not for long.

From the frozen white gardens  
Invisible birds start to sing,  
Their chirping and twittering  
Spiralling in mid air.  
Small tremulous notes  
Accompany her morning walk.  
The delight of birdsong on a wintry day.

*Laure*

\* \* \* \* \*

## **SPARROW NEST BOXES**

**We are thinking of trying to get more sparrow nest boxes put up in the vicinity. We would like to put them where there are already little colonies of sparrows which is usually where there are unfelted roofs. So if you have an unlined roof, or if you are thinking of having it felted, do get in touch (contact details below).**

## **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](mailto: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.