

GARDENS FOR WILDLIFE

Issue 28 Summer 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 website www.townclose.org.uk

In May it is easy to see the link between gardens and wildlife. The birds are building nests, butterflies are emerging, the bees are busy and maybe there is a toad in the veg patch!

Did you notice hundreds of ladybirds in the garden recently? Remember that insects are gardeners' friends as well as foes. They can seem a nuisance when they gather on window frames (sunbathing) but they are very good pest-catchers. You should have seen most of them on your plants feeding on the aphids.

I have been out searching for my little slimy friends, the slugs and snails and it seems that the cold winter has either delayed their appearance or cut down their numbers, as there don't appear to be many around at the moment! I have laid down some early beer traps to catch any that may be surfacing and have had some success. As the weather continues to warm up there will no doubt be an explosion of hungry predators, so what can I do then? It is recommended you try traditional barrier deterrents such as crushed shells or rock granules, or you can apply copper tapes and paints to pots and containers. Also mats impregnated with copper salts can be quite effective when placed under pots or around the base of growing plants. If your garden is really infested the newest recommendation is a biological control watering a pathogenic nematode into the soil. Most importantly nematodes pose no danger to other wildlife or pets.

May all your seeds grow into plants without too many holes in them!! *Julie*



Blackbird asks for help!

Last year my husband was working on one side of our garden when a blackbird alighted near him and began chirping loudly and then flew back to the other side of the garden and he carried on working. But it returned and just stood by him chirping loudly and hopping away.

He finally caught on and said "Oh you want me to follow you do you"? The blackbird flew back to a bush and stood by it looking up at my husband, and there he saw a young blackbird with its feet trapped in the bush. He untangled it and set it down next to the parent who checked it over, chirped again, and they flew off together! He said there was no mistaking its intent to attract his attention to help it.

Ann

EVENTS ... see over

WALKS

(Online newsletter – location links below open a Google Streetview picture of the meeting place. Zoom-out by clicking the minus sign to see an aerial-view/map of the location)

Saturday 22 May 2010 at 2.30pm

GARDEN WALKABOUT – We will visit 3 or 4 gardens in our area (and probably end up with a cup of tea). A good opportunity to see what others can manage to grow! Meet outside No 3 Daniels Road at 2.30pm. (At the Ipswich Road traffic lights turn right down Daniels Road and No 3 is only about 50 yards.) If the weather is uncertain, ring Jenny on 613047 to check whether it is going ahead.

Saturday 19 June 2010 at 2.0pm

WALK at Wheatfen for Swallowtail Butterflies

Guided Walk with the Warden David Nobbs

(Entry £1 per head as donation to The Ted Ellis Trust.)

Stout footwear as it may be muddy.

Meet at 2.0pm in [car park at Wheatfen](#) Nature Reserve, Surlingham NR14 7AL.

Directions:

- 0.1 From Hall Road at the Homebase roundabout take the 1st exit*
- 0.8 At traffic lights turn right onto the A146 (signposted Beccles, Lowestoft)*
- 4.0 (opposite Highways Nursery) Turn left onto Bramerton Lane*
- 4.4 Turn left onto Mill Lane*
- 5.0 Turn right onto Kirby Road*
- 5.3 Bear left in front of white gates*
- 5.4 Bear right onto Surlingham Lane*
- 5.9 Continue Forward onto Bramerton Road*
- 6.7 Bear right onto Walnut Hill*
- 7.1 Bear left onto School Lane*
- 7.5 Turn right onto The Covey – marked Ted Ellis Trust and continue to*
- 8.1 miles – Car park is on the left.*

Saturday 10 July 2010 at 2.30pm

WALK at Marston Marsh led by Peter Kitchener

Meet at 2.30 pm at [the sign](#) “Eaton Vale Activity Centre” at the top of Church Lane in Eaton Village. There is parking in Church Lane, particularly outside the cemetery half way up the hill on the left. At this time of year we should see Banded Demoiselles and some interesting birds and flowers by the river.

Saturday 7 August 2010 at 2.30pm

WALK round the Kenninghall Community Woodland Project

Meet at 2.30pm outside the [Church/Red Lion Pub](#) in the centre of the village of Kenninghall. Many of us were treated to a fascinating talk on the setting up and planting of this community woodland at our evening meeting in April, so we have seen the photographs and now we will be guided round by Lucy Whittle and Norman Groves.

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

HERE TODAY . . . GONE TOMORROW

When I moved to Cecil Road 34 years ago I can recall that house sparrows were regular visitors to the bird table and feeders in the garden. Then all of a sudden they became a rarity. My last records were of one sparrow in 2008 and in 2009 and so far one in 2010. These figures are consistent with the National figures recorded by the [British Trust for Ornithology](#) (BTO) nationwide which indicate a significant decline of 30% between 1994 and 2009.

There is no one reason for the decline but these include loss of habitat, loss of suitable food, cats and other predators. There are still sparrows in our area but these tend to be restricted to those gardens that have hedges and lots of cover for the birds.

It is very important to keep daily records of birds in your garden no matter how common they are. When we first moved to Cecil Road starlings were regular visitors to our garden but now I only see them flying over or on roof tops. The BTO calculate that we have lost three quarters of our starlings. These surveys help us spot these problems and it is the first step in putting them right.

But it is not all doom and gloom, you win some and you lose some. Little egrets are now becoming regular visitors to our wetlands, travelling north from their traditional breeding sites further south. A recent visitor to my own garden is the goldfinch which I now see on a regular basis. These have been attracted to the garden by the introduction of Nyjer seeds (politically correct spelling) to our feeders. Who knows what we will be seeing next.

Mick



Hedgehogs.

I wonder whether anyone in our area still has hedgehogs in their garden? We used to have them regularly in ours, and once a mother brought up a little family here, but I have not heard or seen one for ages, and have you noticed how few hedgehogs you see squashed on the road these days? It was sad to see them squashed, but at least it meant they were around.

I listened to a programme which was suggesting that, when agricultural practices became too much for them, they found sanctuary in gardens, but now so much garden-space is giving way to gravel, decking, brickweave etc., and concrete-based fences are making their travel difficult, this garden sanctuary is also disappearing. Perhaps we can remember to leave holes in the fence for them, leave as much growing-garden as possible, and not use chemicals, especially slug-pellets which are lethal. I have found that yogurt-pots with a yeast mixture in the bottom are effective slug-traps, and, of course, hedgehogs themselves are marvellous slug-eaters!

Juliet



At this time last year I wrote a piece for *Gardens for Wildlife* and there is some interest in comparing the situation this year after a very different and prolonged winter.

Because of the latter I put out food for the birds (seeds, peanuts and suet cake) at an early stage and have been rewarded with a very full attendance of my 'usuals', blue and great tits, the ever-active coaltit, with more than usual visits from long-tailed tits, and also chaffinch, dunnoek, and of course the robbin (sometimes two), male and female blackbirds, and the ever-present wood pigeons. I have even seen my reticent but always-resident wren (latin name appropriately *trogodytes troglodytes* !) and I believe that once I saw my resident goldcrest flitting about.



I have had more than usual visits from collared doves, magpies (one pair must atypically be nesting not far away as they have been picking up twigs) and I have had my usual sighting of jays and crows. My most unusual visitor was the tree-creeper, seen proceeding upwards on the bole of my apple tree. I have not seen, but have heard, the characteristic laughing call of the green woodpecker.

On the side of flowers, Nature proved to be very adept at 'marking time' until the end of the prolonged cold spell, with the result that the Glory of the Snow, primroses, dog violets, daffodils, tulips and forget-me-nots have all followed quickly on the heels of

their predecessors to give an exceptionally colourful show. Because of the prolonged cold spell, this year the snowdrops and aconites remained in flower for very long periods.

Today (April 11th) the delightful snowy mespil, and simultaneously the pear and copper Norway maple trees, are just beginning to show the colours from their opening buds. They were preceded several days by the leaves, not yet flowers, of the apple trees.

On the side of insects the bumble bees have now been much in evidence for a fortnight, and I have had peacock and comma butterflies around now for a week

I have an attractive but, as usual troublesome, young squirrel which gets at the nuts for the birds and then buries them in holes in my lawn - but that's life! Several of us in the Close saw a fox, and also its track during the snowy spell. He is clearly a regular visitor during the night and lives in the next garden over the brick wall.

Norman

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A Strange Fight.

I was walking near Horsey when I spotted what I thought at first was a weasel with a bird in a field by the path. Closer inspection revealed that the weasel was, in fact, fighting with an animal of a roughly similar size to itself, with thick rich-brown fur. The four of us trained our binoculars on the place and watched the encounter for about five minutes.

The darker creature was certainly getting the worst of the fight and was underneath most of the time, and, though sometimes it looked as if the whole thing was a play-

fight, we fully expected to find a dead body when the weasel eventually ran off. We found a way across the ditch and headed for the spot, but there was nothing there, and obviously the other animal had run off too.

There was some dispute among us as to what we had witnessed. We had never seen the black end of the weasel's tail, so it could, just possibly have been a stoat. It seemed most likely the opponent was a rat, but the coat looked too thick for a rat. Also, my five-year-old grandson was completely sure both animals had white fronts. After looking up in our mammals book, we concluded in the end we had seen a fight between a weasel and a water-vole.

Juliet



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It was very cold in mid March and I had just arrived home and parked under my neighbour's overhanging tree when I was aware of a great flurry of feathers. I looked up and saw a dunnock furiously flapping its wings and then noticed another dunnock further along the branch. I deduced it was a male bird doing his courtship ritual. The female would tantalisingly fly off to another branch whereupon the male followed and did the whole thing over again. This was **very** vigorous wing flapping and it occurred to me that he would have been expending a lot of energy trying to impress her at a time when he would have needed a lot of energy just to survive in the cold. I watched for at least 10 minutes but this lady was playing very

hard to get! Eventually she flew off into the neighbour's garden and I have no idea if the poor fella was ever successful.

Vivien



Carbon Reduction Course.

We all know one cold winter does not mean global-warming has disappeared. Many of us want to do our part in combating it, but may feel unsure or dispirited. I have been attending a brilliant once a week six-week course called "Carbon Conversations", based on a workbook by Rosemary Randall, and I hope to train to facilitate the course, with someone else, in our area in the autumn. If you might be interested phone Juliet on 623816. More details in the September issue.

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A FIRST YEAR AT BRIAN AVENUE

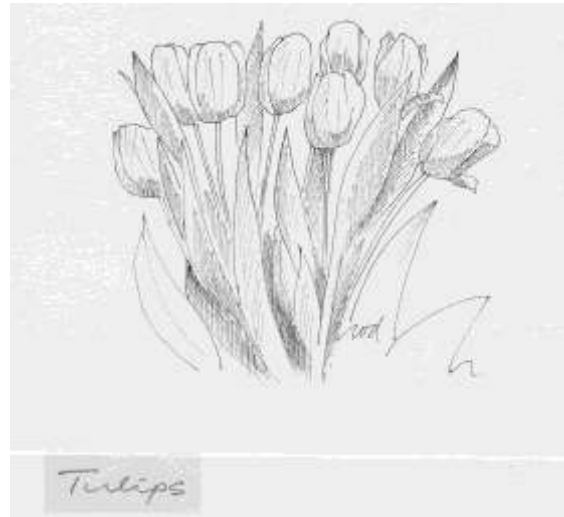
Approaching May 2010 and it's almost exactly a year since we first looked at our house here. Of the garden, all I recall on that initial viewing is noticing that it was well populated with 'stuff', much of which needed a bit of a trim, and had a small tree in the middle of the lawn.

Almost three months later and we're moving in. Immediately there's a flock of Long-Tailed Tits with the odd Coal Tit thrown in moving East to West through the garden and making good use of the tree, which I now know is a flowering cherry. About a week later they moved back West to East.... We were pleased to note Goldfinches and a Thrush as well as a few Blackbirds. There were also plenty of

butterflies of a variety of species. What was most amazing was that all these were here so close to the city, and that the almost total lack of traffic noise really allowed their song to be appreciated. The garden didn't get too much attention whilst we sorted out the house a bit, but we did notice Blue Tits and Great Tits as well as Sparrows and a few Starlings even before we unpacked any of the feeders. Once found the feeders went out on the tree with nuts and seed and seemed to ensure the birds kept visiting.

In the house I was getting worried about noises coming from the roof of the study. Luckily we soon confirmed that a family of sparrows was living there, entering under a slightly misplaced tile. As Lorraine had Swifts in her previous house it felt good to know we still had some birds living with us.

Once we found time to hit the garden some tough work was called for to deal with the ivy and brambles, but not before harvesting the blackberries. This led to my first startling encounter with a Toad, which seemed less shocked than I was as it hopped away under the neighbour's shed. This and a first pass at some very overgrown buddleia was about as far as we got before the winter arrived along with a Robin and the squirrel (of whom more later). Fat blocks out on the tree feeders brought in flocks of up to 20 Starlings, otherwise the weather didn't seem to affect the mix of birds much. About now we also received a green newsletter through the door entitled 'Gardens for Wildlife', and thought it a really nice idea ...



Prior to the snow, and after having a feast on the bird's peanuts, I thought the squirrel was also digging out and eating the newly planted crocus bulbs. I hadn't really considered next door's hazel tree. Nothing much happened for ages with the snow and cold weather, except that late one night whilst checking the snow I noticed an animal in the garden – too big for a cat, too small for a dog, big bushy tail – ah, of course, an urban fox. It ambled off through the piece of fence that falls down.

Eventually spring arrived and with it some serious pruning and removal of weeds and ill-looking plants. Also a new shed and another toad encounter (again me being the most startled), and I finally spotted a Greenfinch and Chaffinches here. The squirrel returned and dug up the nuts it had buried, leaving our lawn littered with holes and hazelnut shells. A third toad encounter, in the front garden this time, and I spotted it before being startled and managed to encourage it well away from the pruning shears.

We're now identifying a few new plants to fill the gaps we've created. The RSPB website 'Homes for Wildlife' (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/hfw>) reckons the local bugs and suchlike would benefit from a woodpile, so that's making good use of the largest bits of buddleia trunk and branches. We've noticed a Wren in the as yet unidentified bush by the Lilac and

there are a couple of nests in the middle of the pyracantha. The Tits (mainly Blue and Great now), Sparrows, Starlings and Blackbirds keep coming, as do the big fat Pigeons, and we're finally starting to discover and identify just what is in the garden. We want to cultivate hardy plants giving a good mix of colour and cover whilst also attracting and serving birds, bees, butterflies and other wildlife. We certainly had a good base to start from; our challenge is to tame and manage it without losing its appeal.

I'm also learning what I'm sure everyone else already knows, that gardens are a long term project, and need some patience in between the action. On that basis, it will be some time before an update on how successful we might be at meeting the challenge!

Roy & Lorraine

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DREAMY DAYS

How lovely it is to sit in the garden, in the sunshine, and to just look and listen. The sun makes everything so beautiful after grey days. It backlights a tulip and shows up layers of overlapping scarlet petals. Here is my friend the 'hover bee' - he whizzes about humming, alights on the purple honesty flowers and probes them with his long black tongue. I long to stroke his ginger brown 'fur'. His arrival means summer is not far away. There are lots of proper bees about - big bumble bees wondering where to make a nest, and honey bees buzzing in the japonica flowers. They like drinking my bird water.

The great tits are calling, a blackbird is singing, and a crow is cawing some way off. The local robin is now singing nearby. I think the blackbird might be nesting in the privet - I saw the female and then the male hop into a dense part high up near the

fence. A holly blue butterfly has just fluttered into view but does not stop so I can't get a good look at him. I have seen a peacock and lesser tortoiseshell too.

There are lots of big ladybirds about - they must have survived the hard winter, but the only harlequin I have seen was a dead one, indoors. Maybe the winter was too cold for them.

Under the wygelia bush there is a slender brown spider dangling from his cast-off skin, twirling in the breeze, with his legs all hanging down - I hope he isn't stuck - best not to interfere. His spinnarets must be the last bit of him to be set free from his old skin. There are a lot of different spiders about - the little black wolf spiders in the grass, and tiny brown ones on a single thread. I like the jumping spiders who seem to prefer the concrete path or the window sills - they are grey and white and fearless of humans.

I have just remembered it's Brown Bin day on Tuesday - I'd better get trimming those bushes. *Kate*



Want to know more about encouraging wildlife into your garden? The RHS and The Wildlife Trusts have produced wildaboutgardens.org.uk

SPARROW TERRACE/NESTBOXES

We are very grateful to Robin who has made 5 sparrow terraces for us. We subsidise the cost and sell them for £5 each and the first 5 have been sold. We have also just had a kind donation of a sparrow terrace (ie 3 nesting spaces in one box) and a bird box from Roy & Lorraine.

If you are interested in buying one then contact us – as below. There will be a full article about this in the next newsletter.



PLANT SALE

We plan to hold our usual Plant Sale on Saturday 9 October, 10 until 1 at [The Ring Trafford Road](#). You might like to be thinking of growing on a seedling or cutting for this!

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.