

GARDENS FOR WILDLIFE

Issue 30 Spring 2011

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.

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

Welcome everyone to our 11th year. The year terminated with a very cold winter which we are still experiencing and this has caused no end of problems for a great deal of our local wildlife. As I have also moved out into the countryside within the last few weeks, I have been talking to local people about the effects of the long cold period upon local species. One of the most severely affected creatures appears to be the Barn Owl, one of which lives at the bottom of my new garden! It really is a beautiful creature, but it struggled to find food during the long period of deep snow cover that we experienced during December when it was unable to see prey beneath the snow. I was treated to a wonderful sight on my way to school one morning, when a Barn Owl decided to fly across the road in front of me and then continued to accompany me alongside for several yards, flying just above the height of my car. Luckily, there was very little traffic about!

Another thing I am treated to in the country, is the increased numbers and varieties of birdlife I have on the feeders. It only takes a week for the tits of all varieties to completely devour a large feeder full and when a whole flock of long tailed tits appear just in front of the kitchen window, I am transfixed for several minutes! We also have colourful pheasants who visit the front garden regularly picking up stray seed left by the tits and I enjoy seeing the graceful herons standing so still and upright in the garden, masters of all they survey.

Sadly, this will be the last introductory article I shall be writing for the newsletter as I have moved out of the area and am resigning from my role as chairperson. I will continue to support the group in anyway I can and also attend meetings and events whenever possible. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in the group for all their support and friendship over the last few years, especially Dilys, Juliet and other committee members who have done all the hard work!

I have offered to lead a country walk out here in the Broads in June and hope that I will see many of you then.

Julie



We have a TALK and a WALK (see over). Why not come along and meet some more of your neighbours.

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 29th March 2011 at 7.30pm in Room A17

Talk: “HONEY BEES AND BEEKEEPING”

By: Graham Ford

Graham has been keeping bees for 25 years and is currently Treasurer of the Norfolk Beekeepers' Association.

We all know how important bees are, and perhaps we can learn more about how to help them.

There will be some honey for sale.



Saturday 7th May 2011 at 2.30pm

Walk at Earlham Cemetery for wildflowers and trees

Juliet will lead this walk and Margaret and Norman will help to identify the early wildflowers and trees.

Take the main entrance to the Cemetery (and the Crematorium) from Earlham Road, drive to the top of the sloping drive and meet at the sign “Burial Chapel and Cyclists” at 2.30pm. There is parking on the left and right of the main drive.

More walks in the summer months will be published in the next issue.

(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.)

Your Committee

Julie Chairperson

Dilys Secretary & Newsletter editor

Brian Treasurer

Juliet Endless good ideas

Jenny Walks

Kate Plant Sale, distribution & illustrations

There are a lot of people in our community who have helped in various ways – by submitting articles, giving expert advice, drawing illustrations, bringing plants to the plant sale, giving lifts, etc. In particular there is a huge team of newsletter deliverers – many of whom have been quietly doing it for the whole of our 10 years and we thank you.

Julie and Dilys will be standing down at the next AGM in September 2011 so we hope there are a couple of people willing to take over the roles of **Chairperson and Secretary**. There is plenty of help and advice available from the committee. Maybe a couple of people would like to share one of the roles. (Ring 454683 for information.)

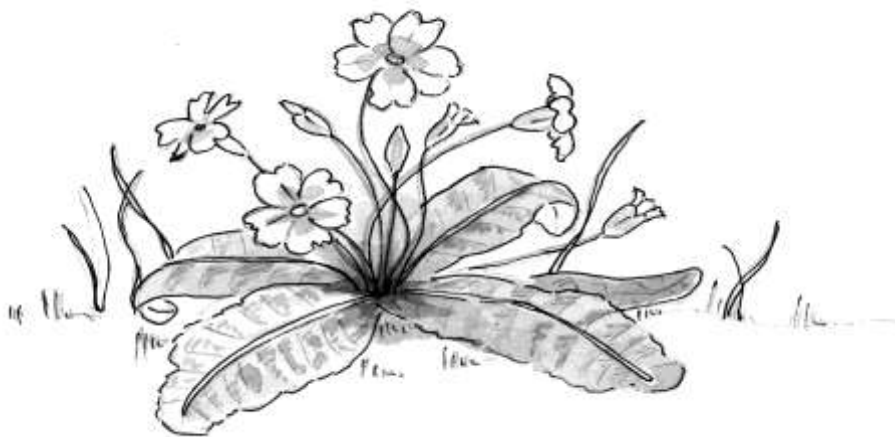
Jean Kentfield

Many of you will know that Jean Kentfield died in December. Jean was a founder member of the Gardens for Wildlife Group and it was largely due to her negotiating skills that the Group obtained a grant from a local community charity, a grant that was a vital element in setting up the Group. Jean was our treasurer, part of the newsletter editorial team and an early instigator and keen supporter of the annual plant sale. At meetings and outings Jean was always among the first to welcome and encourage new members and visitors.

Her own garden was an example of the Gardens for Wildlife ethos, full of plants and flowers attractive to all kinds of wildlife where things were allowed to spring up where they would and go their own way. Jean also worked her allotment to strictly organic principles and was always generous with the resulting produce. Her warmth and enthusiasm made Jean a valuable member of Gardens for Wildlife and she will be much missed.

Keith Farwell

We were very sad to hear of the untimely death of Keith Farwell. He and Rebecca were among the founder members of Gardens for Wildlife, and our first AGM was held at their house. However, we will chiefly remember Keith for his spearheading of the campaign which saw the abandonment of the unsuitable David Lloyd development proposed for the Hewett School Grounds. He founded RAID, galvanised us all into action to oppose this scheme, and with his lawyer's knowledge, and the huge energy he was prepared to put in, defeated the machinations of this large business consortium. He will be sadly missed in the area.



A Murmuration of Starlings

On the way back from the city along Brazen Gate at around 4pm in late winter when dusk was starting to fall, I saw about 50 starlings wheeling around in the sky in close formation, describing a very big circle overhead, tipping and turning as one. As they changed direction their wings all appeared to change shape from narrow to broad and back, and the effect was a lovely shimmering. One seemed to be leading. They went round and round for about 15 minutes, then started homing in on a big Leylandii tree near the pedestrian crossing. A few peeled off and tilted down into it, but the rest kept on circling. A few latecomers joined them. After a few more turns some more dropped down and then suddenly they all plummeted into the tree. As I walked past I could hear them chattering and squeaking – a real Chattering – which is the other name for starlings. There are places where you can see thousands doing this, but I felt honoured that we have our own small ‘murmuration’ locally. *Kate*

Notes from Brian Avenue

What a very cold spell we have had this past couple of months! At least it resulted in a variety of birds. I had a small flock of red wings (they are a little smaller than a song thrush) which have come across the North Sea to winter in Britain. They were feeding amongst the blackbirds and collared doves. I also saw seven magpies feeding together with little bouts of fighting over the food on the hangars. I wonder if they are one large family group as they did stay together for most of the time. There was also quite a large flock of jackdaws feeding on the grass verges of Brian Avenue from time to time.

Another bonus of the winter months (although not local) was a visit to Holkham and Wells to see some 40,000 pink footed geese arriving from Greenland and Iceland. They were very vocal, calling to each other continuously while flying in a dramatic formation. They were followed by a small less vocal group of brent geese from Greenland. While at the coast we also saw snipe, curlews and other waders. It is hard to believe it is warmer here than their summer home – it certainly didn't feel very warm to me!

I have been worried about the absence of smaller birds in my garden this winter, but

as I write it is getting warmer and a few are returning.

I had a walk around Hainford on 14th January and there were a good number of dunnocks, finches and sparrows. We also saw a number of lapwings feeding in the surrounding fields. There had apparently been sightings of waxwings earlier in the day, but they do not stay long after stripping the trees of their berries.

Now the snowdrops and aconites have appeared in my garden, perhaps a little later than usual, and I can look forward to a colourful spring. *Jenny*



GARDENERS' QUESTION TIME

Would you like some answers to your gardening queries?

On the evening of **Friday 8th April 2011** a Gardeners' Question Time will be held at Highways Nurseries organised by the Rotary Club of Norwich St Edmund for charity. The Panel includes **Adrian Bloom** from Bressingham Gardens, **Jim Wilson** (Radio Norfolk) and **Martyn Davey** (Head of Horticulture and Design, Easton College).

Doors will open at 6pm and the CQT starts at 7pm. You can browse in the store from 6pm or afterwards to make purchases (10% off items bought on the night).

Tickets: £8 Send cheques payable to 'Rotary Club of Norwich St Edmund' to Sue Lockhart, 8 Hall Farm Place, Bawburgh, Norwich NR9 3LW Tel: 01603 742825

Highways Nursery is at Framingham Pigot (on the A146 Norwich to Lowestoft Road only 5 minutes from the southern bypass).

Jonathan Ross Apples

We have a Jonathan Ross apple tree in our garden that was probably planted when the house was built, making it about seventy years old. It continues to fruit abundantly, and some of you will have tasted the apples that regularly make their way to the Plant Sale. We use all we can, but the tree is now so tall that the top is unpickable. This year, the crown of the tree remained a beautiful sight with red and yellow apples through the autumn, and when the snow came, it came into its own as a wonderful bird larder. For a while we would regularly see up to seven blackbirds feeding all together as well as a scattering of starlings and, occasionally, a thrush. It was surprising that there seemed to be no squabbling, though usually the blackbirds quarrel over the food on the bird-table, and the thrush is chased away whenever a blackbird sets eyes on it. Of course with all this activity the apples didn't last long and the birds had to try their luck elsewhere. *Juliet*



Dead Frogs!

In the middle of January a gentleman living in Trafford Road reported on a large number of dead frogs in his garden. He has a decent size pond that is 2 feet deep, and sitting in his conservatory one day he observed a dead frog. He went out to investigate and found 6 more dead frogs. A few days later he found 4 more dead frogs in the garden and 2 more floating in the pond. A few days later he hauled out duckweed from the pond and found around 10 more dead frogs. He estimates he found between 40 and 50 dead frogs in the garden and pond during January.

Has anyone else suffered such losses in their garden? We did ask a local expert and he reported the cause was unlikely to be a virus, but probably the severe cold weather conditions.



To the Camomile Lawn Lady –

In October a lady bought some camomile lawn plants from our Plant Sale. There are more plants available if still required. Ring 454683

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. 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.



Thrush

January 13th was the day when I first heard a thrush calling this year. It started on the same date as the thrush in 2007, for which I wrote the enclosed poem (my apologies for repeating it to those who remember it) though I have to say that, at present, this year's thrush is not the master-musician that that year's was. Luckily that thrush returned to sing after I wrote the poem, but in the years since, though I have occasionally seen and hear thrushes, they have not sung so consistently and beautifully as that one did ... or is it just that I have been sleeping better?

Juliet



To a thrush, singing

You started early this year,
but you were a master-musician, a star,
and from the first interspersed your repeats
with new intervals and trills,
trying out, as the year progressed,
daring rhythms, complex chirps,
soaring riffs and quavers.

You sang for so long, too!
I would doze and wake,
and still you were singing!
no human could have kept it up!

But today there is silence.

I pray it's caused by frost.
I pray you aren't lost to a cat, or car,
or carelessness on our part.
I long for your, urgent, raucous song.

Come back, frail bird!
May you clamour and call all spring!
May you conjure happy mating, hardy
babies,
and, in years after I have gone,
may city dwellers still be able to say:
"I heard a thrush this morning
singing with all its being!"