



Gardens for Wildlife Newsletter

Issue 32 Autumn 2011

gardensforwildlifenorwich@gmail.com

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 everyone to talks and outings.

The newsletters can be found on our community website www.townclose.org.uk

We want to hear from you!

We hope you enjoy reading the newsletter. Is there anything else you would like to read about? Perhaps you might like to share some of your own wildlife or garden knowledge with us. We welcome contributions from anyone living in our distribution area.

Please contact us at the following email address, or use the tear-off strip at the end of the newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you!

[**gardensforwildlifenorwich@gmail.com**](mailto:gardensforwildlifenorwich@gmail.com)

Plant and local produce sale on Saturday 8 October 2011

Gardens for Wildlife will be holding their annual plant sale on Saturday 8 October, in front of the Lion's Den on Trafford Road, from 10 until 1. Please think of us when dividing plants, or thinning out your flower beds! All plant donations gratefully received; also any excess fruit or vegetables from your gardens you wish to share. Please drop off any items to Rosemary at 5 Sigismund Road by the evening of Friday 7 October, or bring along on the day. Proceeds will go to support the activities of the Gardens for Wildlife Group.

Wildlife wonderland



Digging out a pond always presents a challenge with where to put all the dug out soil. My solution was to

barrow it round to my small lawn in the front garden and cover the lawn, completely! I have never liked mowing much. Also I had a hunch that this poor sandy base-soil would be make a great start for wildflowers.

I selected a wildflower mix from a seed company that uses locally sourced, native wildflowers. I chose a mix of corncockle (has a purple flower, pretty rare in the wild, but the plants are poisonous for grazing animals), cornflower, corn marigold, poppy amongst other things including some non-aggressive grasses. I waited until the weather forecast rain in the early autumn and I planted the seed, scattering it one way then they other and trod it in. It looked like a big mistake for a while, and there was only a sparse cover of young plants. I did not think they would make it through the winter with the snow cover. But they did and in May to July they provided a FANTASTIC display. With a cover of blues, whites, yellow and red I would recommend a wildflower patch to everyone who wants to have a go. It was so easy (apart from digging the pond). I can't wait for next year. There are lots of ways to create a wildflower area, if you are interested in finding out more some along to our evening talk...

Andrea

Sparrowhawk vs. blackbird in Cecil Road

In July as I was cycling down Cecil Road I saw a sparrowhawk dive into a street tree, lift a baby pigeon off its nest and fly off with it. I turned around and saw the hawk drop the pigeon in the middle of the road. The pigeon was a bit stunned but still alive, when a car came along and drove over it. The baby bird emerged, staggered onto the pavement and huddled next to a wall. I didn't stay around to see

the outcome, but I don't think it could have been too good. It was too heavy for its parents to put back into the nest, but it wasn't fledged enough to fly. Sad, but I reflected that I suppose there are enough wood pigeons about.

This incident reminded me of a time a couple of years back when a sparrowhawk with deadly speed and accuracy swooped and lifted a female blackbird off our garage roof, landed in my neighbour's garden and tried to rip the bird apart. The blackbird was thoroughly incensed and flapped and shrieked. The sparrowhawk appeared rather taken aback but had another go. The blackbird retaliated with more outrage and a lot of swearing. The hawk looked a bit more thoughtful, but attacked again. The blackbird reacted with yet more fury and flapping of its wings. After which the hawk gave up in despair and flew off. The blackbird shook herself and flew into a bush muttering furiously but seeming none the worse.

It made me realise a sparrowhawk doesn't know it is a sparrowhawk and can have aspirations to be a blackbirdhawk or even a pigeonhawk.



The assertiveness of the blackbird reminded me of an amusing sight one sunny afternoon of my cat being chased down the garden by a blackbird. She was bounding along with her ears back, looking about desperately for a safe haven while he kept dive bombing her. This male blackbird was a very aggressive bird and would often advance towards the

cat whenever she sat in the garden, hopping this way and that, flapping his wings and squawking at her in outraged tones while she sat and watched him apprehensively. He has done his work well as she has caught no baby blackbirds this year. I put a bell on her collar to alert any prey and it is unusual for her to catch a bird, though she does catch mice of which there are a surprising number.

I have also enjoyed more peaceful times in my garden this summer admiring the different butterflies, wondering if there were enough bees, glad to see the bats again, and marvelling at the variety of insect life in one small suburban space.

Lois

Protecting your house sparrows

Research recently published by the British Trust for Ornithology has highlighted the importance of residential areas with gardens. The population of house sparrows has been in decline across much of Europe for the past 30 years, and the house sparrow is now red-listed as a species of high conservation concern.

The popularity of ornamental plants such as leylandii, the removal of trees, and the conversion of front gardens for parking is detrimental to house sparrows. The loss of woody shrubs and trees leaves too few insects in summer for the birds to feed their chicks. Gardeners are encouraged to use fewer pesticides and to plant shrubs such as cotoneaster, berberis, honeysuckle, wild rose, hawthorn or fruit trees to encourage house sparrows. Alternatively, nesting opportunities could be provided in the form of nest boxes with a 32 mm diameter entrance hole.

Sue

Picture of a house sparrow by Olly, aged 8



Carbon Conversations course



Following the successful Carbon Conversations course last year, we are hoping to run another one starting this autumn. The course consists of 6 fortnightly sessions and will be held locally at times to suit the most people we can.

Carbon Conversations is an inspiring, practical 6-session course on low-carbon living. It was recently featured in the Guardian as one of the 20 best climate change solutions.

- . based on the psychology of change
- . emotionally engaging
- . technically rigorous
- . up to date, attractive handbook, games and materials

The course engages people both emotionally and practically, helping them overcome the barriers often

associated with making large carbon reductions.

Members explore the basic climate change problem, their responses to it, their ideas for a low-carbon future and the four key areas of the footprint – home energy, travel, food and other consumption.

The cost of the course is £20. For more information tel: 01603 623816 or email loishill@live.co.uk



THE COMMON SWIFT.

The swifts are back

What a delight for my early May eyes.
Those curving, gliding, screeching
outlines.

Almost constantly on the wing.

The local skyline again refreshed and
awakened

With grace, speed and dance.

Perhaps here first fledged,
Before a flight of thousand eons.

Being less than a year moved into this area the swifts are a new experience. I feel they are well 'at home' here, so

are probably known to most of you reading this newsletter. Perhaps you will also know about the National Swift Inventory (maintained by the RSPB).

Apparently there seem to have been dramatic reductions in swift numbers, so the inventory welcomes reports of low-flying screaming groups, or nesting swifts. You do not need to be a member to submit information to the inventory, which can be found via <http://www.rspb.org.uk/thingstodo/surveys/swifts/>

Sally

Your birds need you!

We have space in our front and back gardens for a variety of bird feeders to keep them fed all year round. There are hanging, ground or table options.

We have acrobatic blue tits, greenfinches, siskins, chaffinches, sparrows, coal tits and squabbling starlings enjoying the mixed seed and peanuts, spectacular goldfinches on the nyger seed whilst the more sedate blackbirds, robins, collared doves, noisy jays and magpies and occasional thrush eat at the seed, meal worms and fruit on the ground feeder.

The water provided is also essential for the birds as well as fun. We enjoy



watching the bathing antics, especially our little gang of sparrows, who queue up awaiting their turn!

Elaine

Seasonal top tips

- Autumn/winter bug hunting - have a look for ladybirds and other insects overwintering in seed heads or perennial plants
- If you are cutting down shrubs why not pile up twigs and prunings to make a wildlife habitat pile
- It's time to remove leaves from the pond or cover it with a net. Any excess water plants that you clear out of the pond this autumn will make great compost
- Now is the time to scatter wildflower seed, if you want to know more about creating wildflower areas please come along to our talk in February
- Think about attracting early bees into you garden by planting pulmonaria and other early flowering plants
- Don't forget to feed the birds! (see the bird cake recipe on this page)

Have you seen the giant spider?

The wildlife of Lakenham Way was on parade at this year's Lord Mayor's Procession, courtesy of the Hewett cluster schools of Bignold, Cavell, Harford Manor, Hewett, Lakenham and Tuckswood. With the help of a Big Lottery 'Awards for all' grant the children have been exploring the wildlife on their doorstep whilst uniting the schools with a common purpose to produce a sculpture trail. The sculptures depict the urban fox, squirrels, deer, owls, butterflies, caterpillars, moths, snakes and dragonflies all to be found in around the cluster schools' areas including two special schools Parkside and Eaton Hall who have joined them in the project. Working with three local

artists Maggie Campbell, Ben Loughrill and Gerard Marsom using willow, chain saw woodcarving and clay they have used art as the vehicle to link the children to the nature on their doorstep. They have also been discovering the local nature sites of Whitlingham Country Park and Norwich Fringe Project sites of Danby Park and Coopers Wood with activities such as photography, filmmaking, fishing and bushcraft in the holidays. The schools are now working on their wildlife stories and would welcome any local wildlife stories, gardening or wildlife tips.

The Big Lottery Wildlife Sculpture Trail will be launched at the Hewett School in November. If you would like more information and would like to offer some feedback, please contact Ingrid Fairman, Extended Schools Cluster Coordinator at cluster@hewett.norfolk.sch.uk



LOTTERY FUNDED

The Hewett Cluster schools' giant spider as displayed at the Lord Mayor's Procession



Creative Kids for Nature

This simple recipe will provide your garden birds with a tasty treat during the coming winter months.



Things you need for your bird pudding:

- Left over bread
- Bird seed mix
- Currants/dried fruit
- Chopped apple
- Meal worms
- Large mixing bowl
- Hands or spoon for mixing

Put the bread into the bowl, followed by a cup full of water to soften. Add the rest of your ingredients as you wish, and mix together well. It works best if you allow the mixture to sit and soak for 15 minutes or so.

Choose the most bird active area of your garden to put your pudding either on a low feeder tray, or straight on the ground. Always provide a bowl of water for your garden birds too!

Sarah

Marston Marsh – a place for all seasons

Marston Marsh is a 26.5 hectare Local Nature Reserve situated along the banks of the River Yare between Ipswich Road and Church Lane, Eaton. The site is owned by Norwich City Council, and it is managed by the council in partnership with the Norwich Urban Fringe Countryside Management Project and local volunteers.

Marston Marsh is one of the most important wildlife areas for wildlife in Norwich. The site mainly consists of

wet grassland and fen, a now scarce habitat consisting of reeds, sedges and a variety of other wetland plants including the yellow flag iris, meadow-sweet, marsh marigold, ragged-robin, water mint, southern marsh orchid and a host of others. Other habitats present include smaller areas of dry grassland, along with scrub, wet woodland and the river itself. The network of drainage dykes that divides the site provides a valuable habitat in its own right for plants such as frogbit, arrowhead and water soldier.

Animal life is equally varied. A wide range of invertebrate life is present, with around 20 butterfly species having been recorded as well as most of Norfolk's dragon and damselflies and a host of moths. The drainage ditches are an especially rich habitat for a variety of aquatic insects and molluscs.

On early mornings, otters can occasionally be glimpsed fishing in the river, and both water vole and water shrew have been recorded. Frogs, toads and smooth newt are all present, and these animals form the main diet of the grass snake, of which some very large specimens well over a metre in length are occasionally glimpsed.

The site's bird list is especially impressive, with a wide variety of wetland birds either breeding or feeding at the site. Kingfisher, grey heron, little egret and lapwing can be regularly seen, whilst summer brings swallows, house martins and swifts that hawk for flying insects over the site. A host of different warblers, including chiff-chaff, willow, reed and grasshopper warbler can be seen flitting around the reeds or scrub areas in spring and summer, and the explosive call of the Cetti's warbler bursts from cover all year round. In winter, when much of the site has flooded, you might flush a small group of snipe or glimpse the cryptically coloured woodcock.

Many people imagine that an area like Marston Marsh 'looks after itself', but nothing could be further from the truth, and in fact a wide range of management is undertaken to maintain the various habitats in good condition and to keep the site safe and accessible for visitor. There is a long tradition of summer grazing at Marston Marsh, and every summer cattle belonging to a local farmer can be seen on the site. The grazing helps create a patchwork of different vegetation types that encourages a wider range of wildlife, and helps prevent the fen and grassland habitats from being taken over by scrub.

The site's dyke network is managed by digging out the dykes on a rotational basis, which not only retains them as a wildlife habitat but also provides some control over seasonal water levels. This is especially important, as the site suffered from extremes of drought in summer 2006, and dramatic flooding in summers 2007 and 2008! The recently completed dyke network restoration scheme should help reduce the damaging effects of unpredictable weather in the future.



As with many urban and urban fringe nature conservation sites, providing for public access whilst safeguarding the site's wildlife value can be a challenge. Marston Marsh is popular with visitors, most of whom are local residents. One particular problem has been that the main path around the site is muddy and can be almost impassable for much of the year. Not only did this deny many visitors, including those in

wheelchairs or with other disabilities the opportunity to enjoy the site, it also resulted in increasing damage being caused to the vegetation on either side as the path gradually widened.

The Eaton Vale Residents' Association was able to obtain a grant from the Big Lottery Fund, and working in partnership with the city council and the Norwich Fringe Project 1 km of the main route around part of the site was upgraded with a hard surface path during summer 2011. The path has been constructed of sympathetic natural materials, rather than tarmac or concrete, and it is hoped that it will enable more people to enjoy the site but at the same time help prevent habitat damage from trampling and other disturbance. As part of the project, an outdoor log seating area for educational activities and some fish fry refuge ponds have also been provided.

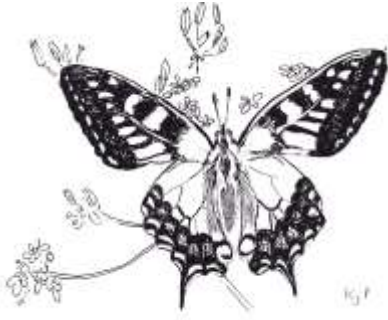
With something of interest to see at any time of the year, Marston Marsh is well worth a visit.

*Paul Holley (Natural Areas Officer,
Norwich City Council)*

Report from the summer walks

On 11 June about 20 of us made our way in the sunshine to Julie's country garden near Neatishead. We were amazed by the variety of lush plants and vegetables, and then she took us on a delightful walk down to Alderfen Broad. We saw some interesting plants and birds, and then some of us saw 3 swallowtail butterflies.

Apparently the swallowtails came out early this year and Julie did not see any more after that day. Thank you Julie - it was a lovely occasion.



We did not have a Garden Walkabout this summer because AGE UK had planned a Golden Gardens event in June to raise awareness and funds that included gardens in our area. The beautiful weather encouraged hundreds of visitors and some £14,000 was raised for the charity.

On 16 July we had planned to walk round High Ash Country Park near Caistor St Edmund, but it poured with rain. We hope to offer this again next summer.

Dilys

Report from the Annual General Meeting

It was a very encouraging AGM on 10th September, followed by tea and delicious cakes in Margaret's wildlife friendly garden in the sunshine.

The walks and talks during the year had been well supported – in particular the talk on Honey Bees and Beekeeping attracted our biggest audience yet.

As previously announced, several longstanding committee members were standing down. Chairperson Julie had moved out of the area, Jenny had completed a long stint on the committee and Dilys had prepared newsletters for 5 years. Following the request for help, several offers were forthcoming and we are delighted to report that Gardens for Wildlife is in safe hands. A (younger) team of Sue/Ann/Andrea will manage

the newsletter and Rosemary will join the committee. To retain some continuity, Juliet and Dilys will share the chairperson's role. In due course the new team hope to offer more for children and community events.

Forthcoming talks

FarmShare developments at the Hewett School - Josiah Meldrum (FarmShare)

On Wednesday 9 November 2011
Hewett School, Room A17 at 7.30pm

Josiah will update us on the latest developments with the proposed community allotment on the Hewett's land.

Attracting bees to your garden
- Nick Owens (Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society)

On Wednesday 7 December 2011,
Hewett School, Room A17 at 7.30pm

Nick will talk about the bumblebees and solitary bees that are likely to be found in Norwich. He will also talk about suitable flowers and nesting sites - illustrated with his own photographs.

Creating successful wildlife areas in your garden - Richard Brown (Emorsgate Seeds)

On Wednesday 22 February 2012,
Hewett School, Room A17 at 7.30pm

Inspired by Andrea's article earlier on the newsletter, or wondered how to turn your garden into a wildlife paradise - come along and find out!

Sad news

We are sorry to report the death of Cynthia Ward, who was a keen supporter of Gardens for Wildlife.

Wild about Norfolk 2011

This event will be held at Easton College on 15 October. For further details, go to www.wildaboutnorfolk.co.uk

Many thanks to:

- Marsh Group Ltd, who kindly print the newsletter for us.
- Our wonderful team of distributors, who deliver the newsletter around the local area. We always welcome more distributors!
- Our talented authors and illustrators – please do contact us if you would like to contribute to the next newsletter.
- If you think you can help us in any way, please send an email to gardensforwildlifenorwich@gmail.com, or fill in the slip below.

Feedback slip

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