

Harrogate District Biodiversity Action Group

Newsletter No.4 May 2011

What have we been doing ?

Fun in February

HDBAG hosted a biodiversity workshop as part of a Climate Change Exchange Conference for North Yorkshire school children held in Thirsk.

We helped them plant their own pea plants and make pine cone based fat balls to feed the birds, as well as talking about caring for wildlife.



Our First AGM

On Thursday 3rd March the Group held its first ever AGM at the new Harrogate Library. As well as the annual report being discussed, two guest speakers gave presentations. Matt Millington, Biodiversity Officer for North Yorkshire County Council, gave us a county-wide view of biodiversity issues and Neil Jameson, committee member of HDBAG, spoke about our new Wildlife Friendly Garden Scheme, which we intend to make our focus in 2011.

Several new officers were elected, most noticeable Lynda Fussell as the new Chairperson, with Nigel Hepstinstall standing down.

Wildlife Friendly Garden Award Scheme launched

The Award Scheme, endorsed by Harrogate Borough Council, RHS Garden Harlow Carr and Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, aims to encourage households, schools, organisations and businesses to create and maintain a space for wildlife in their garden or on their land.

"We depend on the local biodiversity or wildlife for our economy, our food and our lifestyle as well as for leisure and enjoyment. However our immediate environment is under threat and at a wider national / international level. Hopefully this award scheme will inspire more local residents and organizations to help

halt this trend and bring people closer to nature by encouraging wildlife back into their gardens."

There has been considerable interest in the scheme with applications coming in from individuals, schools and businesses. In future newsletters we will be featuring some of these applicants.

To find out more about the Award Scheme, and to get an application form, go to:

www.biodiversityaction.org.uk or email biodiversityaction@gmail.com.

Harrogate Spring Flower Show

In April we participated in the wildlife friendly area of the Harrogate Spring Flower Show along with other groups such as the RSPB and BTO. As well as encouraging people to join the Wildlife Friendly Garden Award Scheme we had quizzes for children and practical examples of how wildlife friendly can also be good looking.

Insect Hotels

Jenni Hall has completed another of her spectacular insect hotels. This latest is at Rossett Primary School. The young students worked with great enthusiasm and prefer to call it a mansion.

What are we planning for the next few months?

Bug Hunt

First steps in a project to establish a wildlife friendly area in Valley Gardens are finding out what plants and insects are already there. 11th June is the proposed day to have a bug hunt in Valley Gardens. Details when confirmed will be forwarded to you.

18th June 2011

HDBAG will be at two events on this day. We will be with Friends of Valley Gardens, in the gardens, to support their '40s event.

Rossett Nature Reserve is having its annual open day and we will also be there to support them.

Monthly events

We are planning on having an event or meeting each month for members and supporters to attend.

Monday July 11th there will be an evening walk around the Killinghall Moor area starting at the Community Park car park.

An evening bat walk through Nidd Gorge is proposed for later in the year.

Details of all events will be emailed to you as they are finalised.

We look forward to meeting you and sharing the nature that is on our doorsteps.

Harrogate Grammar School Home Grown Garden

Harrogate Grammar School has a 20m x 7m area of grass that is enclosed between the art block, the old Sixth Form building and corridor, and the new Sixth Form building. The area is shady most of the year, but in summer it's a lovely sunny, but cool spot. It seemed a shame that it was largely unused, and so the idea of a Home Grown Garden was hatched.



The school is keen to promote sustainable activities and to educate staff and students on how to reduce their carbon footprint. There is a Student Sustainability Officer, and this has resulted in six new 2mx2m beds in an enclosed area for use as allotments by students and staff. Luckily the Head Teacher, Business Manager and Site Manager, and many staff are all very supportive, and come to check on progress and participate.

The school has planted many trees over the past few years and as well as the vast grassed and sports areas there are four internal garden areas. One is the new Home Grown Garden.

The idea of the Home Grown Garden was to turn a patch of grass into something more beneficial to wildlife, whilst being attractive to look at as the whole school at some point passes by. In the February 2011 half-term the school's grounds contractors, Skeltons, stripped off the turf, and laid a winding woodchip path through the rectangle space, leaving three beds for planting.

On two sides a row of 20 dogwood saplings (*Cornus Alba Sibirica*) from Johnsons of Whixley were planted; on another side a

Meadowmania and made up of mainly Hawthorn, plus Field Maple, Blackthorn, Dog rose, Dog wood, Crab Apple, Common Buckthorn, Sweet Briar, Spindle Bush, Hornbeam, Guelder Rose, Honeysuckle and Hazel was planted. Then on the fourth side an edible edge from WigglyWigglers of 25 saplings of Blackthorn (for Sloe Gin), Crab Apple (for jelly), Cherry Plum (for jam), Dog Rose (for Rosehip syrup), Elderberry (for cordial), Hazel (for Nuts), Wild Pear (for jams) was planted. Some small Forsythia, Amelanchier and Philadelphus shrubs were added. The dry spell since planting has been a cause for concern, but the saplings were mulched with wood chip, and the soil is usually very damp.

Plants donated by friends and staff have been planted up within a rough plan of grouping by scented, edible, or perennial. Because the site is enclosed on all four sides by two-storey buildings it is shady, but open to the sky, and sunny in summer. Two fruit trees in pots have been added, and over the Easter 2011 school holidays five Horticap students and an instructor spent a day on the site rotavating the soil and making it lovely for an annual flower meadow to be sown. A small pond was installed and artistically surrounded by large, but beautiful logs taken from the huge Horticap log piles. It is hoped that soon the wildlife will move in, but meanwhile students and staff can use the area to sit in as there are some tables.



Carolyn Rothwell, May 2011,
www.HomeGrownGardens.co.uk

Musings of a wildlife gardener (a personal view)

In praise of cranesbills

I'm a sucker for a hardy geranium. If I were to be asked which plant I couldn't be without in my garden, this is what I would choose. Let's get it clear at the start: I don't mean the half-hardy wimps that have to go inside for our British winters, properly known as pelargoniums. No, I mean the sturdy chaps that can cope with layers of frost and snow, also known as cranesbills because of the shape of their seed heads. They just need a little TLC when first planted and they will come back year after year.

Geranium flowers can give you colour from spring through to the first frosts. But as this newsletter goes out we are heading up to the peak of geranium performance in early to mid-summer.

Geraniums can range in colour from dark purple or magenta to the purest white. Many flowers have the most delightful veining, worth a close up look. We have planted geranium renardii in a raised bed so we can admire her delicately patterned flowers without too much stooping. Some, such as Rozanne, love sun; others, such as geranium phaeum, will prefer shade. They can be alpines adorning a gravel path (geranium sanguineum) or growing almost to waist height (geranium psilostemon) in the herbaceous border. Leaves too can vary in size, shape and texture, making it possible to weave complementary shapes around in the border if you fancy being creative with your gardening.

But why rave about cranesbills to a biodiversity action group? Because nearly all the examples I have come across have tremendous insect appeal. Geraniums are versatile plants popular with plant breeders; new varieties come out almost every year, but even the newcomers seem to retain their magnetism for insects, such as bees and hoverflies.

I've been gardening with geraniums for quite a few years now, so I have their complicated

names at my fingertips. But I appreciate that there is a bewildering and ever increasing array of them in the nursery. Where does the novice who wants to add one to their 'nectar bar' begin? You could start with the natives often seen growing in the fields and hedgerows of the Dales and which would certainly look good in anyone's garden: meadow cranesbill and wood cranesbill. But can I choose one to recommend of the cultivated varieties seen in nurseries?

I've always said I wouldn't be without geranium macrorrhizum 'Album'. It has pale shell pink flowers in spring, providing a feast for early bees. The seed heads which follow the flowers are a delightful coral red, while the aromatic leaves provide good ground cover and, if planted in a sunny spot, colour up a delightful red in the autumn, some of them being retained to give winter interest.

However in recent years a rival has come along to steal my affections: geranium 'Rozanne', a relatively recent introduction that is found in most garden centres/nurseries. Rozanne has large blue and white saucers of flowers for weeks in mid-summer. Her foliage comes from nowhere in the spring until by July she's scrambling through her neighbours to show off her bee-magnet blooms.

So can I choose one to recommend? Probably not, it's nigh on impossible for me to restrict it to two! Can I suggest asking around among fellow Handbaggers, or getting in touch via our website? There's sure to be someone who can spare you a bit of cranesbill to get you started and hopefully begin your own love affair with this plant species.



Janice Scott