

Harrogate District Biodiversity Action Group

Newsletter no.13 - August 2013

What have we been doing?

June, July and August are great months for enjoying outdoors and the group has been busy.

The weather was still cold and wet for the moth morning on the 1st June but we did have 9 different species to report. There were 7 of the diamondback moth that had probably been blown in from Europe on the recent easterly winds. Many thanks go to Jill Warwick for her time and expertise.



A brimstone moth in the trap

The many shows and events during the summer are a great opportunity to set up our stand, meet people, spread the word about being wildlife friendly and sell some plants. We were at Ripon on 2nd June, Rossett Nature Reserve on the 15th June, Ripley on 11th August and the Allotment Show in Valley Gardens on the 18th August.

On July 6th we were delighted to be included in the fantastic Bioblitz at Brimham Rocks. This was an opportunity to find all manner of wildlife and have an expert tell you all about it. All the findings of the day were logged as an important survey of the area within a 24hour window.



Comments and contributions welcomed.
Please contact Pamela Millen:-

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It was hands on activity again on the 27th July at the Studfold Adventure Trail near How Stean Gorge. Work was completed on a large bug hotel and take away versions were also made.



Our Valley Gardens Project is progressing well. The Foxglove, Teasel and Red Campion planted last year in the area closest to the Ebor Rise entrance all flowered well and hopefully will self-seed this autumn. We have had regular balsam pulling sessions there to give them space to grow and will be doing some more planting in September.



Many thanks to the 7th Harrogate Brimham Cub Pack for their sterling work one evening June when they made a big difference. HDBAG has also worked with the Pinewoods Conservation Group to clear balsam and litter. If you didn't join in this year don't worry there will be plenty next spring and summer. It is easy to do, satisfying and you get to meet other members of the group.

It is at this time of year that you can see how widespread the balsam is. The vast areas of pink, whilst attractive, show how prolific this plant is. Sadly at the expense of the varied plant life which supports insects throughout the season.

What's Next?

The Harrogate Flower Show is 13, 14 and 15 September. The RHS Harlow Carr will have a stand which will include an area for making mini insect hotels with children. They are a great supporter of HDBAG and have offered the opportunity for us to raise our profile at the event by joining their team of volunteers working with the children. If you are free and would like to help then please contact us on biodiversityaction@gmail.com.

Also in September is the Nidderdale Agricultural Show at Pateley Bridge on the 23rd. They have offered us the same ringside site as last year, and in the hope it will not rain quite as much, we have accepted. It is a big show so we need volunteers to set up on the Sunday and mind the stand on the Monday. Please email if you can help.

In October we will be in Birk Cragg checking out the re-growth of the rhododendrons with a view to cutting back the new and attacking some more of the ever encroaching shrub. Allowing light to the undergrowth has encouraged original woodland floor growth and hopefully improved the habitat for the elusive chestnut click beetle.

Woodfield Millenium Green

We see and hear about the large conservation groups and the ambitious projects they are managing. However, as individuals we are the ones who can make a difference on our own doorstep. A plot of land on the corner of Albany Avenue in Bilton had become an unsightly dumping ground in the middle of a housing area. Taking advantage of funding to promote 'Breathing spaces' in urban areas, a group of people set about making this a place for the whole community and wildlife to enjoy. They have come a long way in a short time. They have fruit and vegetables for anyone to help plant and for anyone to help themselves to fresh produce. They grow produce organically and are improving the boundary as a wildlife haven. There are areas to just come and sit or bring the family out to play.

Work can be done at anytime but they aim to meet on site the first Saturday in the month from 10am -1pm. It is well worth a visit.



How to be wildlife friendly & not even know it

I have always had mint in my garden and grow several types, mainly for the fragrance as I am not too keen on mint sauce. Leaving it to go to seed has provided fluffy mauve flowers for the bees to enjoy. An unexpected bonus was this moth which likes catmint as well as regular mint.



Many of us have holly and ivy in the gardens. This is a great combination for the beautiful holly blue butterfly as it lays its spring clutch eggs beneath the holly buds and the summer clutch under the ivy buds. Just this week I watched a holly blue on the newly forming ivy buds. No more trimming ivy now as the butterflies are welcome and the unobtrusive flowers will provide some of the last pollen and nectar of the year as they open.

PM

Other Local Groups

The approach of autumn heralds the start of the indoor meeting and talks given by local groups. The two gentlemen starting the season for RSPB and HDNS are both entertaining and informative speakers not to be missed. You don't have to be a member of either group to take the opportunity to attend.

The **local RSPB** indoor evening meetings start 9th September at Christ Church, Harrogate at 7.30.

Leading the way is Colin Slator talking about the Farne Islands. £2 for members. Non members £3.

Harrogate District Naturalist's Society lectures start again on the 9th October at the St. Robert's Centre, Robert Street, Harrogate at 7.30.

John Mather will be delivering 'Round the Horn: cruising the southern oceans'. Non members £3.

2014

Planning ahead can be a chore, but for the HDBAG committee it is time to think about what to plan for next year's event calendar.

What sort of events would you like to take part in, where and when? Your input is important so please email on biodiversityaction@gmail.com

PM

Musings of a wildlife gardener (a personal view)

I was pleased to see that my HDBAG membership pack for this year included seeds for hardhead (*centaurea nigra*). We have already grown clumps of this for splashes of late summer colour and because we know bees love it. As I write ours is covered in peacock butterflies - a heart warming sight. If you haven't already done so, sow your seeds and give yourself a wild corner of food for bees and butterflies - and for your soul.

But today I would like to champion 3 northern specialists whose natural habitat is disappearing and who deserve some support from us wildlife gardeners.

The first is globeflower (*trollius europaeus*). You can find "improved" double-flowered or stronger coloured forms in the garden centre but to me you can't beat the simple beauty of our cowslip-yellow native. If you have a damp patch in the garden it will love it - and you will be doing your bit for biodiversity, as improved drainage is probably one of the reasons why it is so hard to find in the wild (although it gave us a jolly day out in June going in search of the patch near Rievaulx that features in Sarah Raven's book on wild flowers).



My second treasure is wood cranesbill (*geranium sylvaticum*). We have seen this growing in Swaledale hay meadows and on uncut verges in Cumbria, but in how many other places does this delightful plant survive? The modern mentality "if it grows cut it" doesn't suit this early summer flower, which could well fall a victim to the blades just as it is coming into bloom.

We have managed to acquire some plants grown from Yorkshire seed, courtesy of the fantastic wild flower section of Mires Beck Nursery. It flowers earlier than many other cranesbills, looks great with sweet rocket and the bees love it.

Last, but by no means least of my northern treasures, is melancholy thistle. Again we fell in love with this in Swaledale hay meadows and, with a lot of patience, have managed to grow our own plants from seed. It's taken about 3 years to get some through to flowering but it's been worth the wait. It may be a thistle but it is not prickly, rather a more elegant perennial with attractive felted white undersides to the leaves. Its July flowers are held colourfully and gracefully erect. Once again those precious pollinators love them.



So there we have it, my trio of good Yorkshire flowers, sadly underestimated in the way we have of not appreciating what is on our doorstep. I do hope others will recognise their charms and find a space for them in their patch.

Janice Scott

A note about membership packs. Not everyone received hardhead or knapweed seeds but they are easy to find in hedgerows and fields. All the seeds were sourced locally, many from a member's wildflower meadow in Staveley - for which, many thanks.

Don't forget to make the most of your 2013 membership and use the RHS Harlow Carr family pass before the end of the year.

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