

# Harrogate District Biodiversity Action Group

## Newsletter no.16 - May 2014

### What have we been doing?

**March** was a busy month with the main event being our AGM. Not much change as regards committee members which were elected as follows:-

Chair: Lynda Fussell

Vice Chair: Philip Woffinden

Secretary: Pamela Millen

Treasurer: Rob Tipler

Newsletter: Pamela Millen

Webmaster: Malcolm Jones

Media Relations: Courtney Conroy

Membership and Events: Pamela Millen

Schools and Community: Jennifer Hall

We were pleased to have two very interesting speakers for the evening.

**Mark Goddard** – research assistant on the Urban Pollinators Project, Faculty of Biological Sciences, University of Leeds – outlined the aims and some of the results so far of the project..

Cities cover large areas of land and are an important habitat for pollinators. Questions to be researched:-

1. How do urban areas compare to farm land and nature reserves?
2. Are there any hotspots that are good in cities?
3. How can we improve cities for pollinators?

It was predicted that the results to question 1 would be nature reserve – farmland – cities but research in all areas proved this to be incorrect and that cities were important for the wellbeing of pollinators.

Other findings included:- Two thirds of pollinating insects were flies. Bees did better in cities. Allotments and gardens were important hotspots. Dandelions were the most popular flower.

Public support will be needed for urban flower meadows to be effective. Poorer areas where less immaculate gardens were present were best for pollinators. Mark referred to the University of Sussex trial list of plants best for wildlife as an authoritative list. Marjoram appears to be a good plant for all pollinators.

Visit [www.urbanpollinators.org](http://www.urbanpollinators.org) for more information.

**Sam Walker** – Countryside Ranger, Parks Department, Harrogate Borough Council.

Sam gave a brief career history highlighting work with volunteers and horticulture. The designated areas of responsibility for the 3 day a week job are the Cycle Way, Grange Quarry, Rossett Nature Reserve, Quarry Moor and Gallows Hill. The job description of encouraging everyone to be more wildlife friendly in the Harrogate district mirrors the aims of HDBAG.

Being in post for only 3 months he knew there was still much to learn by following the cycle of seasons for a year before making detailed future plans. However, already on the 'to do' list are:-

1. Recording of wildlife (there is much anecdotal evidence but little in the way of statistics).
2. Making a network of sites in the style of 'B-Lines'.
3. Encouraging public participation (there is too much work for 1 person employed 3 days plus there are physical and mental benefits to those who volunteer).

Also in March members of HDBAG helped plant trees at Grange Quarry with Sam Walker and lay paths at Rossett Local Nature Reserve.



During the half term break in **May** we hosted a 'wildlife friendly garden' event in Harrogate Library. We made mini bug hotels and planted marjoram plugs in custom made pots with the many children who attended and then took home their handiwork to enhance their own gardens.

Comments and contributions welcomed.

Please contact Pamela Millen:-

✉ [biodiversityaction@gmail.com](mailto:biodiversityaction@gmail.com)

☎ 01423 523233

## Wildlife Friendly Courtyard at Harrogate District Hospital

HDBAG applied for a £500 grant from the RHS and Karcher Community Fund to use on one of the many courtyard spaces at Harrogate District Hospital (HDH). In April we heard we had been successful. The garden must be completed by mid-2015.

Ray Skelton, the Horticultural Contractors, will remove most of the old existing shrubs, which are mainly very prickly Berberis and Laurel, but they will leave the collection of mature Holly, and Hydrangea. The plot of soil is approximately 12m x 3m wide and is surrounded by concrete paving and 2-storey walls so it is very shady. It's a mezzanine so there is a blue barrier stopping anyone falling to the 'Blue' Courtyard below. Due to this hazard the courtyard is kept locked, so no one can go in to disturb the wildlife but they can watch!

HDBAG will design, plant and maintain a garden that is wildlife friendly and a pleasure to look at for the patients, staff and visitors to HDH. The courtyard is on the 1st floor, between Abbey Wing (General) and Strayside Wing with the Woodlands Children's Ward. (To get to it, enter HDH at the main entrance, walk the full length of the main corridor, turn right at the bottom and climb the stairs on the right, or take the lift, to the first floor. As you come out you face the courtyard). Volunteers will have access and as weekends are quiet it will be easier to work then.

As this is a hospital extra care has to be taken at all stages of building the garden. A pond is not allowed due to concerns of Legionnaire's disease with open water, and there is no tap for watering plants. HDBAG members are invited to donate plants and seedlings, the smaller the better, as they are easier to carry, and will not require so much TLC when planted. We should aim to encourage bees, butterflies and bugs, but not birds as the hospital has had a pest problem with pigeons and magpies.

The courtyard is by the children's ward and it would be nice to add small animal sculptures and ideas to appeal to children, who will see through the garden at a different eye level to adults.

If you would like to help with the gardening or donate plants and sculptures please contact HDBAG member Carolyn Rothwell;  
on 07900 567904  
or email [info@HomeGrownGardens.co.uk](mailto:info@HomeGrownGardens.co.uk)



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## Jacob Smith Park – a local wildlife rich park

Jacob Smith Park was opened to the public in January 2008 following the bequest of 30 acres of private walled parkland for public use by Miss Winifred Jacob Smith, the last surviving member of a prominent local farming family. The parkland is intended as a natural space for "people to enjoy the freedom and beauty that public parks bring."

This land was originally part of the land of Scriven Hall, the seat of the Slingsby family. In 1965-66 the Scriven Estate was split up and Dorothy and Winifred Jacob Smith purchased the 30 acres, primarily for grazing their prize-winning herd of Ayrshire cattle.

Current research being undertaken by the Claro Community Archaeological Group indicates that there were buildings within the area of the Park - in mediaeval times known as Guiseley Hill and the Guiseley Hill plantation. There are also indications that a part of the landscape adjacent to the Park was used in connection with smelting, whilst there are preliminary findings that indicate that there may have been iron age houses on part of the site near to the now culverted stream.

An excellent, detailed and insightful Botanical Report was completed in December 2011 by Bernadette Lobo, of Lobo Ecology. It is hoped this report will form the backbone of the ongoing conservation and ecological development strategy for the Park. For details of the park go to their website at [www.jacobsmithpark.org.uk](http://www.jacobsmithpark.org.uk) and for the full report follow the link below the pdf icon on the 'About the Park' page.



## Musings of a wildlife gardener (a personal view)

### Can we learn to love our weeds?

Well, after quite a bit of persevering, I finally got a response from NYCC Highways to my biodiversity-themed protestations about the vandalism done in December to the ivy and hedgerows near my home. I received a very helpful email from the Boroughbridge area office in which it was reported that "this issue has been raised with our contractors as unsatisfactory and they have been issued with a notice of further action should this level of service occur again in the future". I was also assured that the area will be closely monitored "following future cutting back to avoid a repeat of this". So I am fingers crossed that my little bit of tapping the keyboard has done the trick.

I was rather more disturbed to read what followed in this and a subsequent email:

"our contractors carry out cuts of hedging and various vegetation across the District and this is the first instance of any poor workmanship."

"On average the Area Office receive approximately 400 emails/calls/letters each month regarding various Highway issues and so far this year yours is the only complaint of this nature received."

This made me very sad. I know I am not the only one to be upset at what was done here, but was I the only one to do the necessary keyboard tapping? If you also witness examples of bad practice, I do hope you will join in the fight for the sake of our nesting birds and pollinating insects.

Along the way in my protestations I have come across several people who are obviously very upset and frustrated at the damage done to our verges at this time of the year. Some heated correspondence seems to have resulted. I have to say that the claims that cutting must be done on the grounds of road safety leave me befuddled, as does the regime of cutting in mid May and August. Over the last 2 weeks we have witnessed extreme cutting of verges bordering wide, straight stretches of road, where visibility could not be claimed to be an issue. Victim to the blades have been bluebells and cowslips in full flower.

In August we will no doubt see hardheads (always flagged as an important flower for pollinators) sacrificed. I fail to understand it, particularly when I travel outside North Yorkshire and find many wild flowers more able to co-exist - I am told the Burley by-pass is a riot of buttercup and ox-eye daisy at the moment.

Are there other issues at stake here, such as ideas on what constitutes tidiness and control? I have even mused on where the concept of the weed fits in.

What is a weed? According to my dictionary a weed is "a wild plant growing where it is not wanted and in competition with cultivated plants". The Online Etymology Dictionary describes a weed as a "plant not valued for use or beauty," coming from the Old English *weod*, *uweod* meaning "grass, herb, weed". So the Old English word which possibly was used for all native plants whether they be medicinal, culinary or just a nuisance, seems to have mutated into our modern pejorative "weed" - a bad thing which must be eliminated. Does this somehow subconsciously affect us so that we see our verges as full of weeds which must be controlled? Is this why we prefer to plant them up with garden daffodils on steroids for early spring? A gentleman in my area has carefully sprayed all the local wild flowers and grasses on his verge, leaving only a certain pink hardy geranium found in many people's gardens - very pretty it is too, but it does behave like (dare I say it?) a weed!

Perhaps it is time to look at this whole issue afresh? There was a time when we could take all these native flowers for granted. They were abundant. No wonder we were enticed by the introduced, exotic forms of flowering plant. But this is no longer the case. Now it seems as if the cultivated forms are abundant (viz the garden daffodil mentioned above) and it is many of the native or wild flowers which are exotic in their rarity. This seems to be acknowledged as more and more of them creep into our gardens - globeflower, devil's bit scabious, etc. In the past week I have read gardening articles advocating greater stitchwort and meadow buttercup as garden-worthy plants. There are fewer homes for them in the wild, so one way to ensure their survival is to bring them into the mini nature reserves that are our gardens.

## Musings of a wildlife gardener (a personal view)

### Can we learn to love our weeds? Cont..

Is it time for us to consider more positive discrimination, time for us to re-introduce some of these natives to our verges and learn to delight in them again? Can we cease the use of the daffodil and instead plant up the approaches to our villages and towns with wild flowers such as primroses or cowslips? What a lovely harbinger of spring these would be and how much more welcome to the first bees of the year. Follow them on with native bluebells, stitchwort and campion and perhaps we might get people to see that a verge can be a thing of beauty, not just something to be scalped or littered. Yes I know I am an idealist, especially in these cash-strapped times, but I feel as if it is a proposition worth putting out there, an ideal to work towards - what this particular "Handbagger" would like to see happen in her lifetime!

**Janice Scott**

### A new bee in town

The Tree Bumblebee (*Bombus hypnorum*) was first seen in the UK in 2001 in the South of England. It is a native to Europe and had found its way over the Channel. It has gradually spread northwards and I know I saw quite a few last year in my garden.

Tree bumblebees will nest in trees as their name suggests but they have found bird boxes the right height and size for their needs. This year I have a colony in my Blue Tit box high on the garage wall. They do not take kindly to vibration so I am making sure I close the door gently whilst they are in residence for the next few months. They certainly are 'busy' bees and would react quickly to any disturbance.

They also move quickly from plant to plant and the cotoneaster is alive with them at the moment. This is the best photo I managed to take as they never stay still.



This one fits the official description of tawny to reddish brown head (thorax), grey to black abdomen and white tail.

An interesting article about them can be found by searching on the term 'tree bumblebee' and following the link to [www.bumblebeeconservation.org](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org). The article was published in the journal Bee Craft, May 2013.

**Pamela Millen**

### Valley Gardens

The wildflower plugs we planted last year in Valley Gardens have thrived in the area where we thinned out the Himalayan balsam. We aim to do the same again this year to increase the diversity of plants in the small section near the Ebor Rise entrance and that near the war memorial.

Thank you to the 11th Harrogate St Paul's guides who pulled some balsam a few weeks ago and to the 7th Harrogate Brimham Cub pack who will be helping us in June.

We would be pleased for your help to thin out the balsam on Sunday **July 13th from 10 – 12 noon** and/or planting up replacements in **August**. Remember to bring gardening gloves and wear clothing to protect you from brushes with nettles.

### Not yet renewed your membership for 2014?

Membership fees have stayed the same at £10 single or £15 for a family. Please send your subscription:-

By mail to HDBAG

c/- 30 Lindrick Way, Harrogate, HG3 2SU

Electronic Transfer to HDBAG,  
HSBC Account no, 12225778  
Branch code 40-23-12

with your surname and initial as the reference

By PayPal – follow the links on our website at  
[www.biodiversityaction.org.uk](http://www.biodiversityaction.org.uk)

We can then send you a renewal pack containing a free entry to RHS Harlow Carr and some seeds plus you will continue to receive this newsletter ☺ ☺ ☺

### Diary Dates

The annual Moth Morning is later this year being Saturday the **16th August** at Sawley near Ripon.

We hope to have warmer weather and therefore more moths. For details email HDBAG at [biodiversityaction@gmail.com](mailto:biodiversityaction@gmail.com).

Members free. Non-members £2.

We will be at the Allotment Show in Valley Gardens the following day – Sunday **17th August**. Hope to see you there.