



Harrogate District Biodiversity Action Group

Newsletter no.29 – December 2018

Results of the HDBAG Annual General Meeting
Saturday 24th March 2018.

Your committee is as follows:-

Vice Chair – Philip Woffinden

Secretary - Pamela Millen

Treasurer – Rob Tipler

Webmaster - Malcolm Jones

Membership - Bernadette Reid

Awards - Sandra Mason

Events - Pamela Millen

Valley Gardens - Penny Anderson

Newsletter - Pamela Millen

Schools/Community

Fundraising – Lynda Fussell

Media (Twitter) - Pamela Millen

Media (Facebook) – Lynda Fussell

Planting - Carolyn Rothwell (a new position to reflect the work CR is already doing for the group).

Planning - will be left vacant but individual members are to be encouraged to keep an eye on their local area.

Schools/Community - shared by Carolyn Rothwell, Bernadette Reid and Jennifer Hall who are all currently volunteering in those areas.

This leaves the office of Chair vacant. Rob Tipler and Malcolm Jones will be retiring as Treasurer and Webmaster respectively. If anyone is interested in any of these offices we would love to hear from you.

Musings of a wildlife gardener (a personal view)

Is gardening for wildlife good for my mental health?

We have recently had visitors who, unusually for us, are also interested in gardening. What to say of our exuberant and to a large extent, untamed patch? I was all ready to quote the gardening writer Alys Fowler, who said that she used to be concerned what other people thought of her garden but now she concentrates on what the insects think. This was a light bulb moment when I read it, as it sums up how we now approach our own patch. It wasn't always so, which means we do still have plants that may not be popular with our bees and other insects, even some that are supposed to charm but don't work here - think monarda, otherwise known as 'bee balm'. Our love of the life that comes into our garden has grown along with our planting over the last 14 years. Now we would no longer be content

with the simple pleasure of looking at the flowers - an empty exercise without the accompanying buzz of bees or background birdsong and call. Even snails can bring us a gruesome joy, as we listen out for the local song thrush smashing them against a stone!

However there is a definite downside to this. Becoming involved in the lives of the creatures that share our patch can be very stressful, and is likely to become more so as extreme weather events increase. At the beginning of spring we were able to get a grandstand view of a mistle thrush nest in the crook of a tree opposite a bedroom window. We watched the amazing devotion of the adult who sheltered 4 youngsters with outspread wings to take the brunt of a week of cold stormy weather. It was a humbling experience to watch the bird being relentlessly buffeted by wind and rain, but persevering until the young fledged.

More recently we have had swallow drama, watching helplessly as 2 tiny fledglings huddled together on our driveway in the worst wind and rain for weeks, while parents tried to get them up and flying before predators found them. It must have been really difficult to find sufficient food in those conditions, but they managed it and earned our deep respect.

We read that having access to green space is good for our mental health. In most ways I would agree. Certainly I feel my greatest sense of wellbeing when I am lost in my gardening. But like most things in life, I think it is a little more complicated than this. Just as love of family brings with it worry about how life is treating them and what their future holds, the same can be said of love for wildlife. Just as I feel a duty of care to my children, I feel a duty of care to the natural world. Being involved with our neighbours on this planet is increasingly a double-edged sword.

Our country's wildlife has declined dramatically over the last 30 years. Many individuals and organisations are doing sterling work to raise

awareness and reverse the trends, but the wider threats persist. Loss of habitat and extreme weather events continue to take their toll and are likely to escalate. I fear that our political leaders do not appreciate what we are about to lose and are unwilling to make the profound and positive changes to halt the decline. It is easy to say that they want to tackle loss of biodiversity, **but how do you square this with the proposal of permitted development for fracking**, for example? This is a prospect which fills me with anxiety for the future of our natural world unable to cope with the pressures of industrialisation and pollution - and if *it* can't cope, what price our human future?

So when I am out picking apples or just watching the butterflies in the sunshine, I find it is not with unalloyed joy. Rather I share the feelings of Mark Cocker who writes in his latest book ('Our place: can we save Britain's wildlife before it is too late?') of the 'persistent low-level heartache, a background melancholia, for which there is little remedy short of emigration....'

The problem is, where to...?! And, oh boy, would I miss those chattering tree sparrows if I did go! So I'll just have to stay and redouble my efforts to make good habitat for them for as long as I can.



I am attaching the photo of the caterpillar I found on a young birch which had us mystified, but which Charlie Fletcher very kindly identified for

us. To us it was a very striking and large larva for something we would probably never spot in its adult form. Apparently they are widespread but not common. I particularly like the blue stripe down its back and blue and black dots on the side.
Janice Scott

Comments and contributions welcome

Please contact Pamela Millen:-

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Working with Schools

A sub group of our committee work with schools who are interested in providing wildlife friendly areas in their school grounds that can be used for science and botanical studies and also provide sensory and quiet areas for students to spend time in.

Harrogate High School is developing an area in its new grounds in such a way. Carolyn Rothwell advises on layout, content and how too, Bernadette Reid with her Lions hat on can help with funding, Andrew Willocks in his education outreach role at RHS Harlow Carr provides plants and information about them.

Oatlands Junior School are about to revamp an area that had fallen into misuse but will be ideal for school classes and a home for wildlife. There is an added bonus of the area being close to allotments and will form a green corridor for birds and mammals.

The Montessori school at Beckwithshaw now has a magnificent bug hotel in the wildlife garden area, built under the watchful eye of Jennifer Hall. In the summer they were presented with a Gold Wildlife Friendly Garden Award in recognition of way their whole site and attitude encourages young children to be aware of nature around them.



Montessorie school receiving their Wildlife Friendly Garden Award

If you know of a school interested in establishing wildlife friendly areas in their grounds please let them know we are here to help.

Moth morning.

Once again many thanks to Sandra Mason for hosting the July event in her Sawley garden and to Charlie Fletcher and Jill Warwick for setting up and recording. Once again a beautiful collection of moths.



Large Emerald

Spreading the word

We have been out and about during the summer to different events where we take our information boards and leaflets to spread the

word about the need for everyone to be wildlife friendly in their own environments.

In June at High Batts open day we concentrated on help for hedgehogs and swifts.

At Studfold in August we had a bug hunt for the many families who enjoyed a beautiful day as fairies and elves on an adventure trail.

Also in August was the Allotment Show in Valley Gardens. It is always a pleasure to be part of their day and talk to the many people that attend. It is also a chance to sell the 'Wildlife on Allotments' booklet that has information for gardeners as well as allotment holders such as lists of companion planting and the advantages of green manure.

From the Allotment Show came an invitation to take part in the Ripon Walled Garden Apple Day in October. Snug and dry in a poly tunnel and situated alongside the Ripon Hedgehog Rescue team we had a great day. We ran the bug hunt which kept the younger members of the families amused.

Valley Gardens

In our patch of Valley Gardens we attacked the himalayan balsam with help from scouts and guides. Thanks also to Sam Walker, Harrogate Borough Council's Countryside Ranger, who mowed balsam and cleared pathways in early summer and who returned again in autumn to mow our wildflower planted area near the entrance from Ebor Rise. The raking and collecting the mowings was followed by planting some more plugs which will hopefully increase the meadow effect there.

In December we were delighted that finally we had installed our information board at the corner of the path from Ebor Rise and the main path to Pine Woods. It explains what we are doing in our area to make it a wildlife haven and gives website details where further information can be found about plants and animals. In this digital age we wanted to make it easy for people to follow up on thoughts and queries the board may encourage.

Many thanks to Malcolm Jones for all the hard work to produce the artwork and to Signs Express for producing and installing the final product.



Kate Leggett, Countryside Activities Officer at Open Country, said: "Throughout the development of our allotment we have always taken into account ways in which we can increase biodiversity alongside growing fruit and vegetables. We have had our plot for over eight years, but in the last year or so we have added some extra wildlife-friendly features, such as bug hotels, bird boxes and a hedgehog home. We always try to emphasise to our disabled members the importance of gardening with wildlife in mind and how it can actually help us; for example attracting frogs and toads to keep the slugs at bay and providing nest boxes for birds who will feed their young with caterpillars that they pick off our cabbages!"

Membership

Membership runs from January to December 2019 and we hope you will continue to support the group. Fees have stayed the same at £10 single or £15 for a family.

Please send your subscription:-

1. By mail to HDBAG, c/- 102 Leeds Road, Harrogate, HG2 8HB
2. Electronic Transfer to HDBAG, HSBC Account no, 12225778 Branch code 40-23-12 with your surname and initial as the reference
3. By PayPal – go to our website at <http://biodiversityaction.org>

Wildlife Friendly Garden Award

Also in December HDBAG was pleased to present Open Country with our Wildlife Friendly Garden Award for their work on their allotment in Knaresborough.

Our award scheme recognises the good work of individuals, groups and schools to help local wildlife by creating havens for bird and insect populations to flourish. Open Country's allotment is maintained throughout the year by the charity's disabled members, supported by its staff and volunteers. This work is just one of many ways in which Open Country helps people with a disability to enjoy countryside and get closer to nature.



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year