

West Wickham Allotment Society Biodiversity Audit - April 2019.

In addition to applauding the benefits to mental and physical health our community provides West Wickham Allotment Society should be proud of the considerable attention we already pay to recycling, conservation and biodiversity.

It is soul destroying to see crops eaten by pests so, of course, it is understandable that members may resort to chemicals to save time and ensure a harvest. However, these chemicals have led to the decimation of pollinators and we all know that without pollinators, our crops will not survive. What is more, these chemicals and fertilisers are entering our food chain so, apart from the damage inflicted upon nature, we will suffer in the long term as a result of using them.

The aim of this audit is to review what is currently being done by members and to identify manageable actions which we can all undertake in order to protect our environment, support the growing number of people who are concerned about the future of the planet and set an example to the wider community about what can be done. Small actions help. Local action helps.

Measures supporting biodiversity and the environment to date:

Efforts in the shop include:

- Provision of jute bags – why not put the name of allotment on them? (idea from Julia E10)
- Coir pots
- Sale of bird food and bird feeders
- Provision of organic products provided wherever possible such as organic seaweed
- Provision of Chicken manure
- Organisation of manure deliveries
- A concentration on minimum waste
- Emphasis on the reuse of household objects
- Encouragement to reuse plastic pots and root trainers
- Promotion of durable 'Tendamesh'
- Promotion of the reuse of cardboard
- Promotion of recycled and second - hand tools – proceeds to St. Christopher's Hospice

- Investigations in to buying paper mulch / corn starch mulch
- The shop is not run to make a profit – just a surplus. Those in charge are open to ideas about alternative products.
- The shop is open to gardeners in the wider community

In General:

- The Newsletter provides useful information about how to care for wildlife. For example, slow worms.
- Propagation of fruit trees
- Plan for an orchard
- Bees are kept on plots A17 / F17
- RSPB members: Sandy Wood; Pat Tabraham, Helen Korro make us aware of the work of the RSPB
- Bird boxes
- Eco toilets
- Use of waste from toilets as fertiliser
- Pond with bog area and pollinator friendly shrubs and flowers; encouragement of amphibians
- Long grass area with fruit trees and daffodils by main entrance
- Hedgerows left as wild margins on the road side
- Pond on one plot with running water feature – full of tadpoles
- Considerable use of natural composting
- Nettles left in and around compost heaps and bins
- Use of Green manure
- Use of alternatives to chemicals. For example, beer traps
- Careful direction of traffic and discreet parking areas
- Viv's idea to introduce hedgehogs once the slug pellet ban comes in to force
- Huzzah for M15A – which contains a labelled conservation area

What we need more of / what we could do:

- Leave more long grass areas with wildflowers – establish wildflower meadows / verges especially under hedges; clover and trefoil lawns which bees love. Think carefully about when to mow in order to encourage wild flower growth.
- Plant mixed hedgerows – not just beech
- Have the courage to leave parts of sites for nettles and other beneficial wild plants such as poppies, clover and dandelions, cow parsley etc
- Promote natural alternatives to chemical pest deterrents: beer traps, citrus fruit skins, Vaseline bands, companion planting, containers of water etc
- Initiate discussions about natural predation – encouragement of ladybirds, spiders and birds
- Sell newspaper mulching kits for making pots; employ active advertisement strategies
- Promote the use of natural mulches, even small amounts to reduce use of plastic. STRULCH – straw mulch? Used on the Eden Project and RHS
- Avoid using carpets to suppress weeds (despite what the RSPB site says!) as they can leak chemicals in to the soil
- Provide cooler shady areas with log piles
- Build more small ponds on individual allotments. Containers only need to be 45-60cm deep. Remember to include a slope or some stones to ensure Hedgehogs could get out if they fell in! Surround them with wildflowers surrounding them (RSPB recommends Emorsgate EM8 for wetlands)
- Buy and Plant pollinator friendly shrubs for the site – buddleia to encourage bees, butterflies and hover flies
- Be brave enough to place slightly less emphasis on tidiness on all parts of our allotments – leave margins of wild flowers
- Provide Hedgehog houses and tunnels to allow movement
- Introduce bug houses, bird boxes and bat boxes
- Provide Bee piles and hollow stems (2-6mm diameter) drilled holes in fence posts and logs for wild bees which are responsible for 75% of our pollinating needs (source: RSPB website)
- Leave some woody debris and wood piles for insects, beetles and amphibians and hopefully, later on, for hedgehogs!
- Bury some stones and / or debris under the soil as hibernacula for frogs and toads which need cavities and voids as shelter
- Encourage wider use of green manure and comfrey both of which in addition to making great fertiliser, attract pollinating insects.

- Plant climbers on any fences – honeysuckle. Plant wildflowers beside them (RSPB recommends Emorsgate EM1). Ensure fences have some small gaps or specifically designed tunnels to allow hedgehogs through.
- Include some managed scrubby areas with thorn, bramble and long grass – labelled as wildlife sanctuaries
- Plant more fruit trees and bushes on the margins specifically for birds and insects
- Persuade bordering neighbours to leave wilder areas bordering on the allotments
- Use fewer chemicals - be brave enough to stop selling them in the shop to set an example. <https://www.earthday.org/pesticide-pledge/>
- Invite environmental experts and speakers in to help and encourage us; Workshops. Posters – constant reminders
- Observe and record what we see on a regular basis
- Erect a ‘Spotters board’
- Submit sightings to Bromley Biodiversity – encourage partnership with said organisation plus other allotments
- Apply for a grant to act as a study for biodiversity (Sheffield allotments secured £9,300 from the Lottery Fund. 2017)
- Apply for a Green Flag Award – Be proud of being one of the best Green spaces. Contact those who achieved it. (Roeshott, Hants)
- Present awards to allotment holders for efforts to include biodiversity. Before and After pictures. Diaries / notes detailing process.
- Join up with other allotment societies and nature organisations for encouragement and joint events