Headlines

- **Next Forum Conference dates for your diaries:**
  - WLGF Summer Conference – Meadows Special (Magdalen College, Oxford), with site visit. Thursday 22nd June. (We will email when bookings open).
  - Wednesday 18th October: WLGF Member’s Day (London Wetland Centre)

- **The Best Garden Plants for Wildlife pilot survey results are in**...and they make for fascinating reading, with ‘best of’ lists compiled for butterflies, bumblebees, Honeybee, solitary bees and hoverflies. *We're now rolling the survey out - if you like watching pollinators visit your garden plants, we need you!*

- **Want to help the Forum?** The Forum is run entirely by volunteers, and we have a number of positions we'd like to fill to help grow the Forum's work. Find out more [here](#).

- **Have you joined us on Facebook and Twitter yet?** Our Facebook group, administered by Jan Miller and Helen Bostock, has over 1100 members and our Twitter feed, @WLGForum, run by Andy Salisbury and Marc Carlton [here](#) now has over 600 members.
Forum News

Forum volunteer vacancies
The Wildlife Gardening Forum is run entirely by volunteers. We'd like to grow the work we do and the influence that we have, and are looking currently for volunteers for three roles. They are:

- **Horticulture Lead/Trustee.** We are looking for someone connected with the industry who can come up with simple ideas for how we can better work together, and is able to help deliver that plan. This role could be combined with that of Trustee.

- **Best Garden Plants Survey Data Manager.** The Forum's Best Garden Plants pilot survey generated a lot of data, submitted in Excel spreadsheets. We will be rolling the survey out to more participants, and will need the new data collated and managed so that it can be analysed easily, and we need help in developing the best way to do that.

- **Membership & Publicity Officer.** The task of this role is to devise and deliver a simple plan for increasing the Forum's profile and growing our various memberships. The role could be combined with that of a Trustee or be standalone.

For full Role Descriptions and details of how to apply, please email news@wlgf.org.

Best Garden Plants for Wildlife pilot survey: the results
One of the most common questions in wildlife gardening is, “What should I plant in my garden to benefit wildlife? To try and provide more reliable answers to this question across a very wide range of garden plants, 29 volunteers took part in the Wildlife Gardening Forum's pilot survey.

The methodology was simple: participants gave scores between 0 and 3 for different garden plants according to how good they find them to be for various groups of pollinating insects. Critically, they only scored plants for which they had extensive first-hand experience, removing the risk of perpetuating 'assumed knowledge'.

By then collating and averaging those scores, the Forum has been able to compile initial lists of some of the very best plants that gardeners can grow if they want to see butterflies, bumblebees, Honeybees, solitary bees and hoverflies in their gardens.

Despite being only a small scale pilot so far, the experience of the 29 participants has allowed a rapid and countrywide amalgamation of thousands of hours of real experience, covering many more plant species than is possible in a controlled experiment.

The top three flowers, thus far, for each of the insect groups studied, are as follows (with the average score in brackets, where 3.00 is 'excellent' and 0.00 is 'of no use'):

**Butterflies**
1. Butterfly Bush *Buddleja davidii* 2.71
2. Yellow Butterfly Bush *Buddleja x weyeriana* 2.63
3. Verbena *Verbena bonariensis* 2.58

*Verbena bonariensis with Comma*
### Bumblebees
1. Greater Knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa* 3.00
2. Round-headed Leek *Allium sphaerocephalon* 2.89
3. Scorpionweed *Phacelia tanacetifolia* 2.86

### Honeybee
1. Heather *Calluna vulgaris* 2.80
2. Borage *Borago officinalis* 2.75
3. Round-headed Leek *Allium sphaerocephalon* 2.71

### Solitary bees
1. Lungwort *Pulmonaria spp.* 2.73
2. Lamb's-ear *Stachys byzantina* 2.67
3. Comfrey *Symphytum spp.* 2.67

### Hoverflies
1. Fennel *Foeniculum vulgare* 2.85
2. Ivy *Hedera helix* 2.77
3. Goldenrod *Solidago spp. & cvs* 2.71

We are delighted with the success of the pilot. From the results, you can be pretty sure that if you grow some of the top-scoring plants you will be rewarded with visits from the relevant groups of insects. *(Note that Buddleja davidii and Canadian Goldenrod are invasive non-native species).*

However, the more participants who add their experiences, the more robust the results will be, so we are rolling out the survey in 2017 and hoping many of you will be interested in taking part.

**GET INVOLVED:** If you have an interest in which insects visit the flowers in your garden or in gardens you visit, we'd love to hear from you.

Please email survey@wlgf.org if you'd like to take part in 2017 or want to find out more.

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**The Forum and LINK**

*Wildlife and Countryside Link* (often referred to as just LINK), of which the Wildlife Gardening Forum is a member, is a coalition of 46 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife and the countryside. It works on issues identified by the membership where added value can be achieved by working in partnership and makes regular representations to government. Combined, the member organisations have a membership of over 8 million.

So far in 2017 the Wildlife Gardening Forum is pleased to have backed:
- Environment Links UK and Greener UK submission to the Lords EU Select Committee Inquiry – Brexit: devolution
- A joint letter with Greener UK to the Prime Minister, to stress our shared views regarding the need for the environment to be included in the White Paper.
- The Lords briefing Neighbourhood Planning Bill.
Events and Calendar

2017

- 21-31 March: Invasive Non-native Species Week
- 1 April: Guildford Goes Live (see below)
- 7 May: International Dawn Chorus Day
- 22 June: Wildlife Gardening Forum meadows conference
- 1 July: National Meadows Day
- 15 July-7 August: Big Butterfly Count
- 12-14 October: National Moth Night
- 18 October: Wildlife Gardening Forum Members Day

National Gardens Scheme wildlife-friendly gardens to visit:

- Sun 30 Apr: The Cottage, Chandlers Ford, Hants
- Sun 14 May: Stillingfleet Lodge, Yorks
- Fri 26 May & Fri 30 Jun: Shandy Hall Gardens, Yorks
- Sun 28 May: The Old Vicarage, Burley, Rutland
- Sun 4 Jun: Pensychnant, Conwy
- Sat 17 Jun: Broom Cottage, Appleby-in-Westmorland

Featured event: A day of wildlife gardening comes to Guildford

On Saturday 1 April, Surrey Wildlife Trust will celebrate wildlife gardening in Guildford town centre at their ‘Guildford Goes Wild’ event. There will be a range of free wild activities including meeting garden wildlife, planting sunflowers, making bird feeders and hunting for minibeasts. That morning there is also a selection of wildlife gardening talks by local experts on butterflies, hedgehogs, bats and pond life.

Would you like your event to be featured here? Email news@wlgf.org

Feature article

Wildlife gardening on the edge?

Leonora Keogh gives us a taste of what it is like to garden for wildlife in one of the most northerly and exposed parts of the British Isles.

Can you have a garden right next to the sea on Orkney's outer north isles? Yes you can, if you work with your soil and your climate. Nothing new there then!

My garden is quite small for Orkney, and it's a bit irregular in size. At its longest its probably around 130ft and the width is maybe 60ft, with my little cottage set towards one side.

The soil here varies from sandy to acid. I was fairly lucky with mine as it is basically sandy but with clay about 2ft (60cms) down, so with plenty of humus and lots of
worms I can keep it in good heart. I operate 'no dig' and I leave most of the fallen autumn leaves on the soil. I collect seaweed thrown up on the beaches for further winter mulching.

The growing season is short, with the top summer temperature being about 16 degrees Centigrade. The soil isn't really warm enough for seed planting until May, so you do need at least a greenhouse to get everything going and for rearing the more delicate veggies. On the other hand lots of flower annuals self-seed, which is fun as you never know which lovely plant is going to appear where!

The winters are probably milder these days with little frost or pitching snow, but there is a great deal of strong wind, which can blow for days, and a great deal of rain, which turns the garden into a sea of mud.

To combat the wind one must use windbreaks. Mine are a mixture of dry-stone walls, windbreak netting, and tall hardy shrubs such as fuchsia (probably *magellanica*), *Rosa rugosa*, shrubby willows, and *Escallonia*. It is best to arrange one's garden in rooms and create shelter for each room. This stops the wind from whirling around inside the garden.

I don’t do anything about drainage as my garden is on a slope and drains itself. I give the garden a good compost mulch in spring. I also scatter pelleted organic fertiliser, 'Growchar', and spray an organic liquid containing *Bacillus subtilis*.

My home-made compost components are garden and kitchen waste, horse or chicken manure, seaweed, and soil. I do use an organic powder activator to speed up the composting process, which takes several months. I also buy in peat free commercial bags of the stuff.

I prune in spring, ideally before the end of March, but I do have a couple of weeks' leeway as spring is officially two weeks later up here. However things do seem to be changing; I had Primroses in January this year.

My wildlife garden is slanted specifically for the feeding of bumblebees. The Honeybees are very short on the ground in Orkney, but we have four species of bumble: *Bombus hortorum, lucorum, pascuorum*, and the rare *distingendus*. We also have, according to my observation, the cuckoo bumble *bohemicus*.

Editor: If you’d like to share an account of your wildlife-friendly garden, we'd love to hear from you. Please email news@wlgf.org.
Feature article
A healthy mix of kids, veg and wildlife
By Jan Miller

As a volunteer for Butterfly Conservation and the North Wales Wildlife Trust, I have designed and planted many school wildlife gardens over ten years or more. But some school heads are not very keen on the idea of a wildlife garden as they cannot see right away how that would advance their National Curriculum and league table goals.

However, growing vegetables is very much in the news just now, and many teachers are more interested in that than in wildlife. It is a perfect way of bringing in an appreciation and study of wildlife and the natural environment, and now is the time to start off school gardens!

Here are some of my plans for looking at wildlife while growing vegetables that I used in a local school.

Primary School Vegetable Garden project
AIMS
1. National Curriculum Science Key stages 1 to 6. Topics covered include: plant growth, minibeasts, climate, life cycle of the butterfly, healthy eating.
2. Healthy eating. Why we need vegetables; vitamins, minerals, fibre, protein; the five food groups. Preparing and cooking vegetables.
3. Link to biodiversity and the natural world: minibeasts, life cycle of earthworms, what soil is made of, food chains, disease, contamination, pollination, life cycles of butterflies and bees.

LESSON PLANS
First lesson, early March

1. Read the old folk story ‘Stone Soup’ (left, as illustrated by Jess Stockham) with the class. Ask children for suggestions for vegetables we could grow to make our own ‘Stone Soup’; talk about our climate and which we could grow to crop before the end of the summer term. (In the UK, I found the best options were: first early potatoes, onions, garlic, peas, broad beans, carrots, radish, lettuce, spinach, herbs and strawberries.)

2. Show some vegetables bought at the supermarket: eg onions, garlic, potatoes, carrots, frozen peas, green beans, broccoli, bunch of chard/spinach and Brussels sprouts – ask what these are good for (vitamins, fibre, starch, minerals, etc). Ask how is it we can buy lots of fruit and veg in the shop when it is too cold to be growing them here now?

3. We can eat different parts of these plants – which of these are mainly grown for leaves, roots, flowers, fruits or seeds? Show the seeds for these different plants and talk about structure of seeds and how they grow. The requirements for germination: temperature, water, growing medium and light.
4. **Practical task:** different classes/groups of children sow different vegetable seeds. (You can collect packets of old seed from your own store or friends – what is important is if each child has seeds to handle and to plant.)

You can sow seeds direct outside in March in most parts of the UK. As we dig, we look at the creatures we find in the soil. We talk about the importance of organic matter and creatures that break it down in the soil for use by our vegetable plants. We also look at the life cycle of the 'cabbage white' butterfly, and talk about why we need animals and fungi in the soil to release nutrients from the organic matter. Mobile phone apps can be used to identify all kinds of wildlife.

My website contains further one hour lessons and lots of songs to sing with primary children of all ages! I used a song for each vegetable, or groups of vegetables, and got the kids singing along – this greatly added to their enjoyment of the lessons! This activity does not just have to be restricted to school lessons, however – easy to do with your own child or a club.

For further ideas about incorporating wildlife into education, Eco-schools is a great scheme for your school to achieve a Green Flag that will enhance its reputation, Environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy is the Eco-Schools National Operator for England, and more than 17,000 schools are registered and 1,200 schools currently hold the Eco-Schools Green Flag. The programme provides a framework for learning and action around nine topics, which include biodiversity.

Meanwhile, in Wales, Bee Friendly is a brand new initiative aimed at communities and community organisations, schools, public bodies, town and community councils, businesses, universities and colleges, places of worship and many other organisations, all around Wales. And funded by The Heritage Lottery, Polli-Nation is a UK wide initiative supporting pupils from 260 schools to turn their school grounds and other local walk-to spaces into pollinator friendly habitats, with a range of activities and educational links on pollination on their website.

©Text and images, Jan Miller 2017. Jan is a Trustee of the WLGF and author of ‘Gardening for Butterflies, bees and other beneficial insects.’ This is an excerpt from a longer article on her blog on her website, where you can also find more information and plants for wildlife www.7wells.co.uk.
Wildlife Gardening Research

Open nests near bird feeders may be more prone to predation
Researchers from the University of Reading found that artificial open-cup nests (akin to Blackbirds' nests) provisioned with quail eggs during the breeding season were five times more likely to be raided by predators if there were filled bird feeders within 10m of the nest. Only 10% of the nests near filled feeders survived, compared with just under 50% of those near empty feeders.

This, the study concluded, is because predators are also attracted to the food, and then explore nearby vegetation, where nests are located. However, the survey conclusions emphasised that feeding birds should still be encouraged, as long as people are mindful of the potential consequences.

The survey did not investigate any impact on hole nesting species, nor if there is less predation if nesting habitat quality is improved. It is also possible that real birds are better at concealing real nests.

Bumblebees exposed to agrochemicals in agricultural and urban landscapes
In a paper by British, French and Spanish scientists, they report on an investigation into the presence and levels of five neonicotinoid insecticides, 13 fungicides and a pesticide synergist in wild bees in farmland and urban habitats. In total, 61% of the 150 individual bees tested had detectable levels of at least one of the compounds. Of the bees where pesticides were detected, the majority (71%) had more than one compound, with a maximum of seven pesticides detected in one specimen.

Concentrations and detection frequencies were higher in bees collected from farmland compared to urban sites. The results also showed that pesticides can be detected in bee tissues later in the season beyond the crop flowering period. These findings may help to direct future research and pesticide regulation strategies to promote the conservation of wild bee populations.

Urban butterflies struggling even more than their rural counterparts
Analysis of data from the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme has shown negative population trends for all of the 28 widespread and common species that were studied, with 25 of those showing greater declines in urban areas than in rural areas.

The differences between urban and rural areas are thought to be linked to a number of environmental pressures, including: increased pollution; influences on habitat availability, eg habitat loss and fragmentation due to development; reductions in garden size; and loss of brownfield land.

The analysis also showed that urban butterflies tend to emerge earlier than those in rural areas. Given the high proportion of people now living in urban environments, the study recommends the establishment of an urban indicator species, monitored annually, to measure the health of urban areas, for its wildlife and its people.

For advice on gardening for butterflies, check out Butterfly Conservation or the RHS.
Cities: reassessing their value and potential for pollinators

Typically, the urban environment has been regarded as something of an ecological desert, where nature conservationists can best engage people rather than deliver meaningful conservation. However, research on urban insect pollinators is changing our understanding of the biological value and ecological importance of cities.

New analysis of research from around the world has shown that the abundance and diversity of native bee species in urban landscapes are evidence of the biological value and ecological importance of cities. Because insect pollinators don’t have overly complicated ecological needs compared with, for example, larger mammals, meaningful high-impact nature conservation is achievable. The project concludes that, in a rapidly urbanising world, transforming how environmentalists view urban environments can improve citizen engagement and contribute to the development of more sustainable urbanisation.

DNA analysis reveals Honeybee flower preferences

A study at the National Botanic Garden of Wales has provided fascinating insight into which flowers are visited by the Honeybees in three hives located in the grounds. By doing DNA analysis of the pollen that the bees collected, it revealed that although 437 genera of plants were in flower in the garden during April and May, only 11% of these were used. All three hives used the same core set of native or near-native plants, typically found in hedgerows and woodlands. These, included trees such as oaks. The major plants were supplemented with a range of horticultural species.

The study provokes some questions. For example, the Botanic Garden is in a very rural location, so results from urban locations may provide an useful comparison. It would also be interesting to explore whether the results are similar for other (wild) bees, what happens during the rest of the year, and whether the amount of the resource available to the bees is a factor, as the native hedgerows might offer a much bigger pollen resource than the flowers in the garden.

More nature around you brings better mental health

Increasing levels of anxiety and mood disorders in society, such as depression, have been attributed in part to the increasing disconnect between people and the natural world resulting from more urbanised, sedentary lifestyles. Researchers from the University of Exeter, the British Trust for Ornithology and the University of Queensland therefore looked to see if there is a link between three established self-reported measures of mental health (for depression, anxiety, and stress) and levels of neighbourhood nature (vegetation cover, and the abundance and richness of birds). They also looked to see if there is a threshold of vegetation cover that influences the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress.

The results showed that vegetation cover and afternoon bird abundances were positively associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Also, the prevalence of mental-health issues is significantly lower if there is a certain level of neighbourhood vegetation cover (depression if there is more than 20% cover, anxiety more than 30% cover, and stress more than 20% cover). The findings demonstrate quantifiable associations of mental health with nature nearby.
**Feeding garden birds is good for you!**

A study by the University of Exeter and report in *PlosOne* has found that people who feed birds regularly feel more relaxed and connected to nature when they watched garden birds, and perceived that bird feeding is beneficial for bird welfare.

The authors conclude that "As urban expansion continues both to threaten species conservation and to change peoples’ relationship with the natural world, feeding birds may provide an important tool for engaging people with nature to the benefit of both people and conservation".

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**3,200 tons of insects migrate over southern England each year**

Using radar for larger insects and high nets for smaller ones, researchers from the University of Exeter and Rothamsted Research have *concluded* that 3.5 trillion insects migrate over southern England each year. That equates to seven times the biomass of migratory songbirds which leave the UK for Africa each autumn.

For two of the most eagerly awaited migratory insects - the Painted Lady butterfly and Hummingbird Hawkmoth, gardeners can help monitor their arrival and presence through Butterfly Conservation's *Migrant Watch* project.

*Marmalade Hoverfly - one of the 3.5 trillion insect visitors.*

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**LED street lighting: what effect will it have on wildlife?**

There is a revolution underway in how we light our world through the use of LEDs. Whereas they made up 9% of the global lighting market in 2011, they are forecasted to account for over two thirds by 2020. The energy efficiency of LEDs makes them a key part of combating greenhouse gas emissions, and as a result many councils are undertaking major initiatives to replace existing street lights with LEDs.

However, there are concerns that the wavelengths of light typically emitted by LEDs may affect wildlife, upsetting daily rhythms and blurring the lines between nocturnal and diurnal activity. A study by Exeter University, reported in *Global Change Biology*, found that predatory spiders and beetles, typically diurnal, were drawn to grassy areas lit by LED lighting at night, but the effect was markedly reduced when the lights were dimmed by 50% and when the lights were switched off from midnight to 4am.

Although the study didn’t compare LEDs with other kinds of lights, the research shows that local authorities might be able to manage LED lighting in a way that reduces its environmental impacts, although a reduction in night-time lighting is an even more important goal.

However, in contrast, a German *study* reported in The Journal of Applied Ecology undertook a large-scale field experiment, recording bat activity at street lights to see if urban bats were affected by changing municipal mercury vapour (MV) street lamps to LEDs. Some bat species are known to be less light tolerant than others (in other words, they tend to shun lit environments). The results suggested that LEDs may be less repelling for light-averse *Myotis* spp. than MV lights. It is possible that the global spread of LED street lamps might lead to a more natural level of competition between light-tolerant and light-averse bats.
How good are garden centre plants for pollinators?
A study at Sussex University has sought to determine the proportions of flowering ornamentals being sold in garden centres that are attractive to flower-visiting insects. Surveys were undertaken at six garden centres in Sussex, counting the insects visiting patches of up to 74 flowering plant varieties on display. The consistent baseline was pots of Marjoram *Origanum vulgare* plants.

The results showed yet again the high variability of attractiveness of ornamental plants for pollinators. It also showed, that most varieties were relatively unattractive, with only a few being highly attractive. Interestingly, those plants that were recommended for pollinators by some kind of symbol in general were more attractive than those without a pollinator symbol, but there were poor varieties that had a recommendation and good varieties that did not.

The results suggest that there might be considerable scope for making parks and gardens considerably more insect-friendly through judicious variety choices.

British Ash trees more resistant to Ash Dieback
Rapid sequencing of the genome of a number of Ash trees has shown that British trees may be more resistant to Ash Dieback disease than, for example, those trees in Denmark where 90% are already affected. The research, by Queen Mary University in London and reported in *Nature*, opens the way for potential (if slow) mitigation work to breed resistant Ash trees to replace those being lost.

Wildlife Gardening Policy

Mass sterilisation of grey squirrels on its way?
Most of the daily newspapers reported a story that originated in *The Times* which claimed that The Prince of Wales is backing a project led by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA, a government agency) to create a population crash in Grey Squirrels by feeding them chocolate spread laced with contraceptive.

The reports say that numbers could be reduced by more than 90 per cent from 3.5 million to fewer than 300,000. However, the APHA website does not corroborate the report. We await with interest.
Ireland's councils given support to help pollinators

Ireland's Biodiversity Data Centre has produced new guidance called 'Councils: actions to help pollinators', suggesting a range of 30 pollinator-friendly actions for local councils to do. Although it is aimed at councils in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, many of these actions could also be undertaken by councils elsewhere.

There are instructions for each action, suggestions for where it might be applied, and a pollinator-friendly planting code.

This comes on the back of a wonderful range of downloadable resources, including Junior Pollinator Plans, as part of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

Conwy breaks new ground in Wales for pollinators

In February 2017, Conwy County Council received an Award from Iolo Williams (in red, below) as the first Bee-Friendly Council in Wales, thanks to their great efforts over the years as part of the Welsh Government Pollinator Taskforce. To gain Bee Friendly status, the Council had to demonstrate how it met the four goals of being Bee Friendly: providing pollinator-friendly food sources, places for pollinators to live, being committed to avoiding chemicals that harm pollinators, and involving the community in the initiatives.

The Council also has over 40 biodiversity areas, plus roadside verges and 21 nature reserves which are managed to encourage pollinators. It has taken action like replacing seasonal bedding plants with herbaceous, perennial plant schemes which provide a food source for pollinators. And the Council works with communities holding events like those to build bee habitats and with schools with initiatives like hosting visits to the Great Orme to learn about habitats.

See here for more information about the Welsh Action Plan for Pollinators, to which the Wildlife Gardening Forum contributed, with Forum Trustee Jan Miller also contributing training and plants.

France bans pesticides in public parks

The French government has banned the use of pesticides in all public parks, public gardens and forests. Exemptions include cemeteries and sports fields. In 2019, the law will extend to private gardens. The cities of Lyon and Strasbourg had previously paved the way, having kept all their public parks and gardens pesticide-free since 2008.

Read Matt Hickman's full piece in Mother Nature Network here.
Wildlife Gardening Resources

New Soil Biology group formed
There is growing interest and exploration of the true complexity, and functional importance, of the below-ground ecological interactions driven by soil biology. To help bring that those in the field closer together, the Association of Applied Biologists has approved the establishment of a Soil Biology Special Interest Group.

The group will be launched with a one-day conference at Rothamsted Research, Harpenden on 20 April 2017 with the broad title "Advances in Soil Biology". You can register here.

The Living Jigsaw: The Secret Life in your Garden by Val Bourne
Anyone who is familiar with Val's writing, either through her previous books or through her many articles in everything from The Daily Telegraph and Garden Answers, will know that she brings two things beautifully together: bags of gardening know-how with the most engaging turns of phrase. So it is perhaps no surprise that in this beautiful book, with many photographs by that master photographer, Marianne Majerus, that we feel both in the presence of an expert combined with tales of tantric ladybird sex!

What we get in this book is something very personal, for most of the chapters are about the creation and maintenance of her garden in the Cotswolds, and how she tries to create a natural balance (and succeeds, by the look of it). We get to see the garden in every season, she describes many of her intimate encounters with wildlife, and we get to see the way in which she chooses and tends all sorts of wildlife-friendly flowers.

All in all, this is 252 pages of joyous story-telling and practical advice rolled into one, which for many readers will find so much more inspiring than dry facts. It is in essence a love-letter to the topic.

The Living Jigsaw: The Secret Life in your Garden by Val Bourne (Kew Publishing) RRP £25
Wildlife on your Doorstep by Mark Ward

Wildlife on your Doorstep is the new book by the RSPB's, Editor-in-Chief of Nature's Home magazine. It takes you on a season-by-season trip through the wildlife that is likely to be found near where you live, showing you that you don't need to go far to connect with nature, in fact much of the time no further than just outside your door!

Mark is a lifelong naturalist, as much an insect, mammal and amphibian (and everything else!) man as a bird man, so we get the benefit of his experience through 'How to' and 'Quick tip' mini sections, dotted throughout the book, such as 'How to see Common Liza'ards', 'How to watch Badgers' or 'Quick tip: Check fenceposts'.

We also get to dip into Mark's own wildlife diaries; it is like being able to go on a personal guided walk with an expert, year-round, including several glimpses into Mark's own wildlife friendly garden.

Well illustrated, including many of Mark's own photographs, it is a delightful reminder that you don't need to go to far flung places to have amazing encounters with wildlife.

Wildlife on your Doorstep, Mark Ward (New Holland), 176pp. RRP £14.99

Garden Wildlife

NHM Wildlife Garden continues to amaze

The latest results from the long-term ecological study of the Wildlife Garden at London's Natural History Museum have been reported in The London Naturalist (No.95, 2016), the journal of the London Natural History Society.

An astonishing 3,100 species (and counting) have now been recorded in this little oasis in the middle of London. As examples of the species richness of some groups, 94 species of lichen have been recorded, 44 aphid species, 356 beetle species and 90 spiders.

Tree Bumblebee, a new arrival in the garden in 2006.
Records that seem unthinkable include self-sown Broad-leaved Helleborine, a Bog Bush-cricket, and two species of moth new to the UK.

The aims of the Natural History Museum’s Wildlife Garden were to illustrate successful habitat creation and wildlife conservation, to provide an educational resource for schools and Museum visitors, and provide research opportunities for Museum scientists and other naturalists and students.

As the then Secretary of State for the Environment, John Gummer, said: “The garden is a symbol of what can be done to help and protect our wildlife, even in the centre of London.”

Now, more than 20 years on, it is clear that the overall biodiversity of the local area has been increased, the site was upgraded to a Site of Nature Conservation Importance, Borough grade II, in 2010, and the garden has won numerous awards.

This long-term study is now due to be interrupted by the planned major changes to the NHM grounds, including the replacement of much of the Wildlife Garden with new garden features. From a scientific and wildlife point of view, this remains deeply regrettable.

Above: View of museum from top pond
Right: The heathland in full bloom

Photos © The Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London
Wildlife Gardening and Citizen Science

Hedgehogs become increasingly rare garden sight
A new survey of over 2,600 readers of BBC Gardeners World magazine found that 51% did not see a Hedgehog in 2016, up from 48% in 2015. Just 12% saw a Hedgehog regularly.

It is just the latest survey to highlight the decline in Hedgehog numbers, thought to have fallen by a third since 2000, and with an overall population now estimated at less than one million.

Wildlife Gardening Community Projects

Pollinator Paths pilot project starts in Wandsworth
Do you have knowledge of London pollinators, biodiversity and wildlife gardening in general? Or do you have experience of growing plants in small urban spaces such as balconies and window boxes?

The London Sustainability Exchange has been lucky enough to be supported by Players of the People's Postcode Lottery to start a new project in Wandsworth designing and planting stepping stones for flying pollinators. During the initial phase of the project we invited people to attend a design workshop to help create the “kits” – plants and how-to guides – that will be distributed to participating households during the Wandsworth Fringe in May.

Please sign up here to join our knowledge network and contribute your thoughts/ideas to the design – even if you cannot attend the initial workshops, please sign up to keep up-to-date with future events.

And finally...

We loved this idea from landscape designer Christy Russell on the Wildlife Gardening Forum Facebook page for how to recycle some unused stones into a great wildlife feature. As Christy says, "Cairns like this are great for insects, you can fill the middle with building rubble or less aesthetically pleasing stones, to then use your nicer materials for the outside."

The newsletter is sent to all the members of the WLGF; you are welcome to forward it to friends or colleagues. Do encourage them to join the Forum (it’s free!) by visiting www.wlgf.org and filling in the simple form.

The Wildlife Gardening Forum is a consortium of the UK’s leading wildlife, conservation, gardening and horticultural organisations, from both the private and the public sectors. Formed in 2005, our core aim is to help gardeners and decision-makers understand just how important our gardens are for wildlife.

Newsletter compiled by Adrian Thomas & Marc Carlton. All photos by Adrian unless stated.