

Harrogate District Biodiversity Action Group

Newsletter no.12 - May 2013

What have we been doing?

Boroughbridge Allotment Society requested a speaker for their AGM on 10th April and Lynda Fussell, our Chair, responded with one of her great presentations which was very well received. 13 copies of the booklet 'Wildlife on Allotments' were purchased at the special price for allotment holders of £1 each.

Starbeck in Bloom's Spring Event on 20th April was good fun. We had stall and as well as giving out our information leaflets had a tombola that was well received. Thank you to our new secretary Lucy Hind for running that. We ran our Bug Hunt for children and gave out a couple of book prizes. We had a peek in the bug hotel and had fun helping out with the bug identification.

Work is going ahead in our section of Valley Gardens with the construction of log piles on 28th April and 11th May.

What Next?

Wildlife friendly plants, gardening books, summer walk guides and much more on our stand on the colonnade at the Valley Gardens Gardening Event this Sunday 19th May from 11am-3pm. Please come and say hello.

A 'Newt and Bat Night' will be conducted at Aspin Ponds, Knaresborough on Thursday 23rd May from 7.30pm-10pm. This is a chance to learn more about these elusive creatures and help in a survey of the area. A torch, stout shoes, protective clothing and insect repellent are advisable. Please contact Sue Kitching on susan.kitching@mail.com if you would like to attend this event.

Moth Morning at Azerley Grove, Harrogate on Saturday 1st June from 9am. The moth traps will have been set out during the evening of 31st May. If you want to see what has been flying that night contact HDBAG on biodiversityaction@gmail.com for details.

Ripon Bandstand is celebrating its 110th anniversary with a horticultural event in the Spa Gardens on Sunday 2nd June. HDBAG will be there with things for children and adults to do so please come and visit our stand and join in the fun.

Comments and contributions welcomed.
Please contact Pamela Millen:-

✉ biodiversityaction@gmail.com

☎ 01423 523233

Help! Don those gardening gloves and join in the Himalayan balsam bash in our section of Valley Gardens on Saturday 15th June from 10 -12. We will meet at the Ebor Rise entrance near the bowling greens.

22nd June HDBAG will be joining forces with the Pinewoods Conservation Group for some litter picking. Meet at the Water Tower at 10am to collect tabards and bin bags but do bring your own wellies and gloves.

Gardening with Hedgehogs



A cold, late spring will not have helped hedgehogs as they came to the end of their hibernation period in March. They will need all the help we can give them to fatten up, breed, rear young and prepare for next winter.

Here are a few pointers from 'Gardening with Hedgehogs' published by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society.

- Keep all netting a foot above the ground so they can get underneath and not get caught up.
- Provide a shallow dish of water and ensure there are shallow escape routes out of ponds.
- Keep drain holes covered – helps prevent leaves and hedgehogs causing blockages!
- Leave a hole in the bottom of fences or walls so hedgehogs can come and go. They travel a few kilometers each night and would like to include all wildlife friendly gardens on their route.
- As well as using environmentally safe wood preservatives do put up barriers until it is completely dry as hedgehogs often lick new smells and substances.
- STRIMMERS MUTILATE so take care when cutting long grass.
- Try alternatives to slug pellets or else pick up dead slugs and snails as soon as possible. Nematodes are now widely available and our very own Joe Maiden (Cliff Bank Nursery, Huby) sells wonderful slug pellets made from sheep wool.

Visit www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk for more information. They have a very nice [leaflet](#) too.

Valley Gardens

Sub committees rarely receive the recognition they deserve for the work they quietly put into projects so this is a thank you to Penny, Philip and Rob who are our 'Valley Gardens' subcommittee.

HDBAG was given permission by Harrogate Borough Council to improve the diversity of planting in the area between Ebor Rise and the War Memorial in an effort to improve the habitat for more species of wildlife.

The first job was to find out what we already had and the group surveyed and mapped out the area. They were then able to decide what should be changed. Seeds were sown off site to produce a supply of plugs for planting in late summer. On site, areas of Himalayan Balsam were removed and the ground broken up to receive the young plants.

This spring it is wonderful to see cowslips in bloom, the foxgloves ready to shoot up their flower spires and clumps of red campion and ox-eye daisy starting to show developing flower buds.



The team has been hard at work building log piles to give shelter to a variety of insects. The warm, wet weather is, of course, encouraging the Balsam to grow so, to stop it over whelming our freshly planted areas, we would be glad of your help on Saturday 15th June to pull out a few. Just come along between 10am-12pm and remember to bring gardening gloves to protect your hands from the sap. We will also be there on Saturday 7th July and Sunday 4th August.

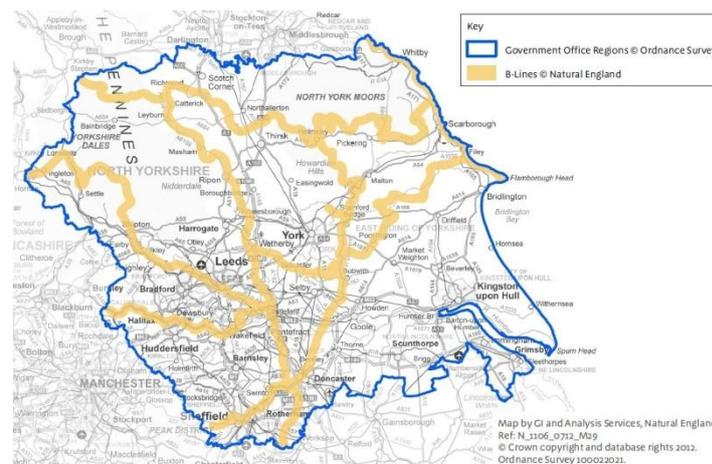
If you have any wildflower seeds you want to nurture and bring along later in the year when we have some planting sessions we will be pleased to hear from you.

This is not a quick makeover but thanks to the dedication of the Valley Gardens team our area is on the way to becoming a haven for wildlife.



B-Lines

Paul Evans, project officer for Buglife's 'Yorkshire B-Lines' initiative gave a fascinating and exciting account of the bee corridor trial in Yorkshire at our AGM in February.



In the same way that we now have motorways to link the whole of the country so Buglife has drawn up a series of proposed corridors that will act as insect highways. Isolated conservation areas provide havens for groups of species but without the ability to move and meet, their gene pools become very concentrated.

Drawing lines on a map is easy but working with landowners along these lines, to advise and encourage them to have edges of fields, banks of rivers etc that are conducive to wildlife is the hard part. In this work he is being supported by the Co-operative's 'Plan B campaign'.

Yorkshire was chosen as the area for the pilot project. Paul related and illustrated the work he has been doing in the past year. In Harrogate District the B-Line runs from Masham, through Ripon, between Boroughbridge and Knaresborough and out through Spofforth; in other words along the magnesian limestone ridge that was laid down when glaciers moved in our area.

The Harrogate Biodiversity Plan for magnesian limestone grassland highlights the plight of the [Dingy Skipper](#) butterfly that is specific to this habitat.



Looking at the network of lines you can see how each individual's cooperation is vital to ensure there are no gaps stopping movement. Even if we are not directly on a line what we do in our own piece of land is important as it is part of a chain or small lane that will eventually link up with the main road.

If you have any land in Yorkshire and want to get involved please contact Paul. There is a wealth of information on their website at www.buglife.org.uk.

For the Magnesian limestone grassland BAP go to the Harrogate Borough Council [website](#) at www.harrogate.gov.uk.

Musings of a wildlife gardener (a personal view)

It's an ill wind...

This year our ill wind really started mid-March, the day after I had pruned the buddleia and the lavender and decided that spring had begun. It brought with it snow, then more snow, and eventually 6ft drifts piled high in the lanes around us.

The flexing of the gardening muscles had all been in vain. The newly trimmed curry plant was split and flattened by the weight of snow. The bitter north-easterlies burned away the blossom on the viburnum tinus. This is usually a magnet for the first bees of the year, but where were they? There wasn't a sign of insect life in the garden - no early flying bumblebees, not a butterfly to be seen. What a change from March 2012!

We had no choice but to hunker indoors, making freezing forays only to keep the bird feeders topped up. The compensation was the variety of birds which found our garden and our food, giving us, in the words of the song, "an enormous sense of wellbeing" to feel that we had helped them in difficult times. Reed bunting put in a regular appearance, followed by growing numbers of siskin and redpoll.



female reed bunting

We were amazed to see brambling at that time of the year. Robins and blackbirds called a territorial truce and a pair of mistle thrushes became increasingly bold - sitting on the window sill when we opened the curtains each morning, waiting for the porridge scrapings to appear their way.

But the siskins and redpoll remain; in their best spring plumage they make a colourful addition to our garden's palette.



lesser redpoll

Now we are actually getting some glimpses of more spring like weather, and normal hostilities have resumed. There are territorial scraps and some of the visitors which sought refuge with us have gone on.

It's as if the seasons are trying to catch up with themselves and it makes for a fascinating jumble of simultaneous flowering in the garden and the wild. Slowly, slowly there is more of an insect presence around and about, and our swallows, which have been making odd forays to check out their nesting site, seem to have finally decided there is enough food around to stay. Yet, with the weather forecast for the next couple of days I'm wondering what fresh challenges they will face.

We set out to create a garden for wildlife at a time when it is under so much pressure. Judging by our recorded increase in residents and visitors over the last few years, we feel we have succeeded. But I don't know whether we bargained for how much we would get caught up in the drama of that life. It's a constantly changing scene, full of activity, with, for us, never a dull moment.

Janice Scott

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The **British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)** would appreciate knowing what birds you see in your garden, both the regular visitors and the unusual driven in by different weather patterns. More data means a more accurate picture of what is happening across the country. So if you need a reason to keep a check on what is happening in your garden sign up on www.bto.org.

From my own experience I can say they can also help you with identifying birds you are not too sure about. **PM.**