



Wildlife Plot Update

The Spring issue of The Grapevine featured the first article about our Wildlife plot. The year has rolled on and it feels like it's time for another update. The plot is on the edge of the site next to Gordon Road not far from the entrance gate. You can recognise it by the two lovely apples trees and a hazel. The hazel catkins are a sight to look out for in spring. The plot is very lightly managed. We try to keep it planted with only native species but some plants have other ideas and seed themselves freely.

In spring the ransomes (wild garlic) bluebells and cowslips dominated, buttercups shone through in May and bees enjoyed the comfrey. As the season moved on foxgloves, which were added to the plot this year, sent up their purple spires. By June the Eupatorium cannabinum were at full height and providing nectar for the gatekeeper butterflies.



Changing seasons



The aim is to let nature take its course, but some management is needed. Wild brambles are allowed to grow but a careful eye is kept on them to prevent top rooting. We also need to control the tufted vetch which, although it adds nitrates to the soil, is invasive and can dominate. Autumn approaches and it will soon be time to mow the plot. We will reduce some planting and introduce some new native species.

The Pond

At the beginning of the year the old bath that had served as a pond was drained by Eric Hess and refilled as we started out on a project to populate the pond with frogs. Once full again a bucketful of spawn was added. We waited for the magic to happen. Our first observation was that the liner had a leak and the pond needed regular topping up. Between the three of us we managed to keep a reasonable level of water and tadpoles did arrive.

The first tadpole was spotted in April and by dipping a jam jar into the water every so often we were able to track their progress. By early June the signs of rear legs developing could be clearly seen. In June the first froglet was spotted.



Through the Barnet Allotment Federation we received a call out for allotments to report on the amphibian and reptile presence on sites and so, eager to show off our new frog population and with all the anecdotal reports of slow worms on the site, we invited an expert to come and review our allotment. We took Sam all round the site for two hours, looking at ponds, composts heaps and woodpiles. We carefully lifted corners of black plastic and peered underneath planks of wood. We found a female stag beetle but not one single slow worm. We called it a day but Sam stayed on and her diligence paid off. Here is her report.

Frogs and slow worms at Gordon Road allotment

Sam Ho, London Amphibian and Wildlife Rep

I was kindly invited to Gordon Road allotment, run by Finchley Horticultural Society, to review the wildlife garden with two new small ponds, and also scout around for amphibians and reptiles over the wider allotment. There's anecdotal evidence of slow worms and frogs, but no formal knowledge of where they reside and whether they're adults or juveniles. I was more than happy to hunt!

Findings: Wildlife garden new pond had ~8 nearly Ready To Go froglets, and a few large tadpoles that will hopefully develop this year, if not – they may over winter and finish morphing next spring, that's if the frost doesn't beat them to it. Recommended bulking up the ladder of stones leading out.

After scouting the land, looking at cover and likely migration links – found two adult slow worms! (a male and female) in a compost bin (half filled with loose grass cuttings), amongst an undisturbed plot. There was another sighting on the day (under logs) – meaning at least 3 exist on site to date.

I supplied some helpful leaflets on pond creation, and there was keenness to create a communal sightings map and place extra refugia around the site to hopefully draw out the slow worms for easier detection in future.

We were delighted to hear that Sam found some slow worms. So many plot holders having reported seeing them that we felt sure we would come across them somewhere. Slow worms love sunny south facing sites and to encourage them you can use an old compost bag on a corner of your plot, weight it down on the corners and keep your fingers crossed.

Sam suggested that we plot the sightings we are hoping that we can get a map and some pins put up in the Green Room. We would like to record sightings of stag beetles too. If you see stag beetles please report them to www.gigl.co.uk Greenspace Information for London. They are putting together a data base of all sightings.

Stag beetles

Our first sighting of a stag beetle was in a bucket near a log pile, the perfect home for stag beetles. The beetle was having trouble climbing out of the bucket so we tilted it on its side and let it make its escape. A few days later one was seen on the woodchip pile, so keep looking, you may be lucky.



Slow worms



Slow worms are a protected species and we are delighted that the allotment environment provides the perfect habitat for them. Sam is planning to visit again in August or September when she will be on the look out for juveniles. You can find out more about slow worms by looking at the information sheet in the Wildlife folder in the Green Room at Gordon Road.

Create your own pond on site

Some plot holders have their own pond on site. A pond doesn't have to be big to attract wildlife so if you are interested in setting one up have a look at the leaflet in the Wild Life folder which gives a step by step guide to creating a pond. More frogs might mean less slugs! There's an incentive

Butterflies



The Big Butterfly Count is taking place between 14 July to the 6 August. Go to website www.bigbutterflycount.org for details. At Gordon Road allotment there is a book in the green room for you to record your sightings.

There is a useful chart in the Wild Life folder and if you are a smart phone user you can download butterfly identification apps to help make the job easier. The wild plot was fluttering with Gatekeeper butterflies on the day Sam visited and many other species have been spotted already.



Come along and help develop the Wildlife plot

First a big thank you to everyone who has helped out with the Wild Life plot this year. To Eric for wading through the mud to clear the pond and get it ready for new spawn, and for a his regular mowing of the plot edges. To James for his amazing pruning of the two apple trees on the plot which were in need of a good reshape. To Roy for his sterling efforts with the old compost heap, now in great shape for the next steps. And to Felicity for her knowledge of plants and for sharing her plant stocks.

Now we need to set up a new pond that doesn't leak, turn the old pond into a bog garden and consider if we can have an open pond which would attract damsels and dragon flies. So if you are willing and able to do some clearing and digging in late September please get in touch with June. We would like to get the digging out and lining of a new pond done over one weekend but we will need to do some clearing of ground some time before then. Tea and biscuits guaranteed.

Please send us your photos and sightings



We hope you enjoyed reading this update. Its not a regular feature but we will send out information whenever there is something to report. If you have anything to share from

your plot please email June who will pass on the information for the next update. Photos are very welcome and also reports of bird sightings. Gordon Road allotment is bordered on one side by Dollis Brook and by woodlands on another side making it a great position for wild life. This wonderful wild life corridor is alive with creatures and it would be fantastic if we could build up a picture of who else shares our allotment site. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Follow us and keep up to date with all that goes on at FHS

The photos in this newsletter have appeared on our Facebook and twitter pages. It's a good way to keep in touch with Finchley Horticultural Society throughout the year. You can have conversations with other horticulturalists and on Facebook you can set up a private group to host your allotment and gardening questions. You don't have to post yourself but if you have a twitter or Facebook account please follow us and like our posts—assuming you do!

Our website www.finchleyhort.co.uk has a news and events page which lists all the latest information.