

Gardening for Wildlife: There Is No Planet B!

At the annual parish meeting on 12 April 2019, Owain Jones and Kate Rigby, both specialists in environmental humanities, introduced us to one of the interlinked environmental crises facing the Earth, the current mass extinction of wildlife. It is ongoing and devastating. While much agricultural land is now devoid of biodiversity, gardens are becoming increasingly significant for wildlife. Don't forget, we depend on wildlife such as insect pollinators for our food!

Dave Watson, specialist in ecology restoration, offered four tips to encourage wildlife in the garden:

- Be untidy in the garden – leave undisturbed areas of long grass and some woodpiles to attract insects and nesting areas for wildlife.
- Don't use the popular slug pellets which contain metaldehyde. This chemical will be banned for outdoor use next year because it poses 'an unacceptable risk to birds and mammals'. To have any chance of encouraging hedgehogs we need to use alternatives, such as wool pellets – or just decide to do without those hostas.
- Create a pond. Big or small it will attract insects such as dragonflies and amphibians such as frogs and newts. Birds benefit from ponds too – they need water to bathe and drink.
- Plant to create food sources for birds and insects throughout the year. For example, pulmonaria, willow, flowering currant attract bumble bees and orange tips early in spring. Ivy is a good source of nectar late in the year. And plant high – honeysuckle and clematis climbing over arches attract many insects.

Further ideas from villagers:

- Don't use Round up or other weed killers containing glyphosate. It's highly toxic, both to us humans and to insects, including important pollinating bees. This will mean digging up some weeds by hand, but dandelions, for example, provide for many different bee species, hoverflies, butterflies, moths, their larvae, beetles and goldfinches.
- There was concern that people stop using slug pellets and Round up in the churchyard as well as in gardens.
- Control light pollution by dimming/removing bright external lights. This will help nocturnal wildlife.
- Cut the grass less often and don't use weedkiller or fertiliser on it. If it is left to grow longer it will be more drought resistant and host wild flowers such as cranesbill, eyebright, primrose, cowslip, violet, clover and even wild orchids. Not only does this mean less work for the gardener, but you will see far more butterflies and bees.
- If you have room in your garden, create a dead hedge with all your hedge clippings and twiggy garden refuse. This could avoid the need for a bonfire or green waste bin and create a safe habitat for birds, hedgehogs and insects. (A native living hedge is good too!)

Recommended reading:

- The Wildlife Trusts' *Wildlife Gardening*
- Dave Goulson's *The Garden Jungle: Or Gardening to Save the Planet* (published later 2019). He is the author of two inspiring and readable books *A Sting in the Tail* and *A Buzz in the Meadow*
- The RSPB website has lots of info about how to attract birds, <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/creating-a-wildlife-friendly-garden/>

If you would like to share your tips on how to encourage wildlife in the garden, email Penny at pennyjrogers@outlook.com to pass them on to the PAGE group. Or put a post on the Priston Chat Facebook page – which, if you haven't used it, is an easy way to show great garden wildlife pictures and is becoming a forum about community events, traffic issues and, hopefully, lift sharing. Go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/200579497542746/>