

DOMESTIC GARDENS

LOCAL ACTION PLAN FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH

Reviewed: February 2009

1 CURRENT STATUS

1.1 Context

Cambridgeshire is largely a rural county but it does contain a substantial urban area in the form of the two cities, towns and villages. Green spaces in urban areas form essential links with the countryside. They provide a sanctuary for wildlife and are often fragments of habitats that are under pressure in rural areas. Indeed, gardens are providing a last refuge for many species which are declining in the wider countryside, such as the song thrush, great crested newt, pipistrelle bat, the common frog and hedgehog.

Wildlife in urban areas provides people with a local connection with nature that might otherwise be unavailable. Contact with wildlife helps to increase an individual's quality of life as well as providing an opportunity to learn about biodiversity. Nationally, domestic gardens number around 15 million, covering perhaps 3% of the country.

The Cambridge City Nature Conservation Strategy 1991 found that 25% of the City's land is private gardens. If even a small part of this large area could be made more welcoming to wildlife, it would make a big difference.

Many gardens are managed in a way that is relatively unsympathetic to wildlife. Research by the University of Sheffield (Biodiversity in Urban Gardens, Sheffield – BUGS 1, 1991-1994) found that nearly 40% of gardens had a dead wood pile and 31% a pond. Few contain 'wild' areas and some may consist of mono-species close-mown lawns, with heavy chemical usage (for the area) and a lack of wildlife features such as ponds and hedgerows (favouring fencing). There is also an alarming trend to concrete over front gardens for car parking and deck over back gardens, leaving little room for wildlife and adding to flooding problems. A recent survey by the Royal Horticultural Society found that, in the East Midlands, more than 25% of front gardens were three quarters or more paved.

Gardens vary a great deal in terms of age, size and structure. Depending on their management and links with other gardens and wildlife sites, gardens can serve as important wildlife corridors. Adopting good practice such as home composting and non-chemical forms of pest control, along with the provision of nesting, breeding and feeding areas for birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and, above all, invertebrates, will help foster gardens as very valuable sites for wildlife.

Gardens offer great potential to be enhanced for wildlife; garden ponds are extremely important for aquatic invertebrates and amphibians such as frogs and newts, lawns can support wildflowers, and hedges and trees provide nesting and feeding areas for birds and small mammals, and important feeding and resting sites for many kinds of invertebrate. A balance can and should be struck between the aesthetics required of most gardens and the needs of wildlife. These need not involve great compromise, irrespective of the size of the garden.

Given the potential resource in terms of area for nature, attention should be directed at encouraging particular practices beneficial to wildlife.

This plan covers domestic gardens only. Other gardens such as school grounds are covered in the Managed Greenspaces Habitat Action Plan.

1.2 Biological Status

In 2001 a Garden Watch Survey was carried out in Cambridge. It covered an area of 141 acres of gardens and reported 26, 645 individual sightings – mostly of garden birds such as robins and blackbirds. Over 30 mammal species were reported in the survey. People reported a declining trend for house sparrows and song thrushes. A similar Cambridge wide survey was repeated in 2007.

Countywide, there is little known of the biological status of gardens, but key BAP fauna in Cambridgeshire which use gardens and their associated features include bats, house mouse, spotted flycatcher, song thrush, bullfinch, kestrel, swallow and great crested newt. They are also known to support small mammals such as hedgehog.

To a large degree, gardens have become refuges for many farmland species that have lost habitat through intensification of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough farming processes.

Gardens also form, and have potential to form, important wildlife corridors; strips of connectivity between urban habitats and, urban and rural habitats allowing species to move from space to space.

The BUGS research (see above) showed that gardens provide as much as 35-50% of all city greenspace. The project looked at the huge potential of this resource. Work on urban gardens and urban greenspace more generally is continuing at Sheffield University, with a new project looking at some of the aspects of garden biodiversity highlighted in the BUGS project, in a selection of cities elsewhere in the UK.

2 CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING BIODIVERSITY IN GARDENS IN CAMBIRGESHIRE

- Change of use from garden to car parking area or formal decked area
- Use of chemicals such as fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides
- The development process incorporates little planning for wildlife with regard to newly created gardens
- Lack of understanding by garden owners of gardening for wildlife
- Sites are managed by private individuals therefore there is no formal control over management
- Loss of gardens (especially large and mature gardens) to in-filling development

3 CURRENT ACTION

3.1 Legal Status

Some elements of gardens may be protected under Tree Preservation Orders, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Conservation Areas.

3.2 Strategic

Let our Gardens Live, a manifesto for gardens, people and nature, was launched in July 2007 and is available at www.naturalengland.org.uk/campaigns/breathingplaces/manifesto.htm

Peterborough was awarded one of 15 city Springwatch Festivals as part of the BBC's Breathing Places campaign in 2007 which launched a Year of Action for wildlife in the city. Details available at www.peterborough.gov.uk

Peterborough is currently working to increase status from Environment City to Environment Capital. Details www.pect.net

3.3 Example Projects

The Cambridge Sustainable City Biodiversity Group secured a demonstration wildflower area in the City centre. This helps to raise the profile of wildflowers in the garden.

St Neots Town Centre Initiative is working with a Social Housing provider to appoint a Biodiversity Champion. This individual will work with developers to create information / advice packs for new residents on how to make best use of small gardens in high density housing.

Conservators of the River Cam are seeking funding and partnership to redesign and stock the Lock gardens to meet biodiversity targets and improve visual amenity etc. Also working towards a Boats in Bloom competition in 2009 with Cambridge City Council and Cam Boaters.

Friends of Parnwell are working to create a flowerbed and rockery community garden for Parnwell in Bloom, and to work on surrounding area with school children in growing and planting.

Friends of Sudbury Meadow are working towards an information leaflet in conjunction with the Tourist Information Centre, plus information boards for three demonstration wildlife gardens and a community orchard.

Chatteris Town in Bloom is revamping a garden with a view to creating a more wildlife-rich area. The garden will be open to the public with information on garden biodiversity.

Ely Society's Friends of Jubilee Gardens are creating a wildflower meadow in Cresswells Pocket Park and a new winter garden in Jubilee Gardens.

Fenland District Council has a number of local projects designed to engage local people including:

Fenland's Great Nature Challenge

Engaging local groups in gathering wildlife data

Working with schools to promote Wildlife Teams

Facilitating community groups with wildlife information

Peterborough Eco Arts has a Green Backyards Project on two allotment sites, demonstrating sustainability and are looking to create a demonstration wildlife garden on site. The 3 year lease may be prohibitive.

The Wildlife Trust has developed a demonstration wildlife garden at its offices in Cambourne. Contact The Trust for more information www.wildlifebcnp.org

Anglia In Bloom has a number of wildlife garden entries each year www.angliainbloom.co.uk

The National Garden Scheme hosts some gardens managed with wildlife in mind which have open days to the public. Contact for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is George Stevenson, 1a The Village, Peterborough PE2 7DN, tel 01733 391506

3.4 Other guidance

A number of both national and local leaflets have been produced by organisations such as The Wildlife Trust and Natural England giving guidelines on wildlife gardening.

The Wildlife Trusts and the Royal Horticultural Society have a Wild About Gardens website www.wildaboutgardens.org

The Wildlife Trusts have produced a leaflet promoting alternative composts to peat www.wildlifetrusts.org

The Wildlife Trusts produced a Guide to Wildlife Friendly Gardening and 10 Top Tips for Wildlife Gardening. www.wildlifetrusts.org

The Biodiversity Partnership has produced leaflets on how the public can help to conserve song thrushes, great crested newts, pipistrelle bats and water voles.

The Wildlife Trust (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Peterborough) has produced a series of information sheets on species and how people can look after and encourage them in to the garden. Information sheets available include Snakes, Frogs and Toads, Newts, Hedgehogs and Lizards. www.wildlifebcnp.org

Cambridge City Council, The Wildlife Trust and World Conservation Monitoring Centre produced a poster and booklet called "Wildlife on your Doorstep". These posters and booklets went to all schools, libraries and parish councils in Cambridgeshire.

Information and advice on the conservation and planting of local native species is available from national organisations such as Flora Locale, Flora and Fauna International and Plantlife.

The Wildlife Trusts' Cambridge City Greenways Project and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Amphibian and Reptile Group have collated records of herptiles in Cambridge city during 2007. Report and follow up advice was sent to all participants.

Natural England produced booklets on Wildlife Friendly Gardening, Amphibians and Reptiles in Your Garden, Garden Ponds, Wildflower Meadows in Your Garden etc (15 titles in all). Details available from www.naturalengland.org.uk

The Wildlife Trust (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Peterborough) works with local communities and garden groups to promote wildlife-friendly gardening. Staff and volunteers attend public events and give talks. www.wildlifebcnp.org

Natural England carried out a wildlife gardening survey in July 2007. Results are available at www.naturalengland.org.uk

3.5 Measurable wildlife garden features

To determine the relative wildlife value of a private garden, for the purpose of this document, the following five features have been selected as indicators:

- Wildlife Pond
- Bird box/feeding station
- Shrubs/hedge
- Native flowers as nectar sources
- Compost heap

4 OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

4.1 Objectives

- Assess and monitor existing urban habitats
- Maintain the extent of our urban habitat resource
- Create new urban habitats
- Manage and enhance our urban habitat resource
- Raise awareness and increase accessibility and involvement

4.2 Targets

1. Establish baseline data of gardens to understand quality of the resource
2. Have a system in place for regular assessment of gardens
3. Safeguard garden features that are important habitats for wildlife
4. Additional 10% of existing gardens managed positively for wildlife
5. 10% of gardens in each new development have wildlife features
6. Widely positive wildlife friendly gardening practice in place for gardens with existing wildlife interest, with new features created where possible
7. Inform and educate public of the importance of gardens for wildlife, and for people, and the opportunities for combating climate change.
8. Adapt appropriate communications materials for each target group
9. Strengthen support for the 'Let our Gardens Live' manifesto and this BAP

5 ACTIONS Domestic Gardens - Objectives, Targets and Actions

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Responsible	Timescale
Assess and monitor existing urban habitats	1. Establish baseline data of gardens to understand quality of the resource	1.1) Collate all existing survey data of Cambridge gardens, including RSPB, BTO and Cambs/Peterborough Bird Club surveys	CPBRC	2009
		1.2) Carry out surveys of geographical areas where little to no data exists	CPBRC	2010
	2. Have a system in place for regular assessment of gardens	2.1) Develop a self-run wildlife survey methodology for garden owners .	CPBRC and BAP partners (Cambs City Council garden survey)	Every 5 years
		2.2) Investigate the feasibility of one agency leading on a wildlife gardening competition, possibly through 'In Bloom' or Breathing Places	WT	2009/10
Maintain the extent of our Urban habitat resource	3.Safeguard garden features that are important habitats for wildlife	3.1) Encourage the protection of gardens with features valuable for wildlife by using Tree Protection Orders etc	LA's	Ongoing
		3.2) Raise awareness of the issue of infill developments and the impact on gardens	LA's/WT	
		3.3) Provide list of suggested contractors / recognised practitioners	Anyone placed to do this?	Ongoing
Create new urban habitats	4. Additional 10% of existing gardens managed positively for wildlife	4.1) Distribute wildlife gardening information pack for homeowners	WT and CPBRC/ BAP Partners	2010
	5. 10% of gardens in each new development have wildlife features (as determined by the 'other guidance' leaflets and websites..)	4.2) Distribute wildlife gardening information pack / checklist for developers	BAP Partners	2010
Manage and enhance our urban habitat resource	6. Widely positive wildlife friendly gardening practice in place for gardens with existing wildlife interest, with new features created where possible	6.1) Target areas with wildlife gardening information packs	LAs, CPBRC, WT and BAP partners?	3 target areas per year

Raise awareness and increase access and involvement	7. Inform and educate public of the importance of gardens for wildlife, and for people, and the opportunities for combating climate change.	7.1) Work with new developments to build show homes with demonstration wildlife gardens	LAs	Ongoing
		7.2) Hold annual Wildlife Garden open days	LAs?	Annually
		7.3) Develop high quality demonstration public wildlife gardens in amenity parks (overlaps with Managed Greenspace HAP)	LAs/WT	2012
		7.4) Promote popularity of wildlife gardening through local media, literature and websites	BAP Partners	Ongoing
		7.5) Work with Garden centres and gardening societies to promote best practice wildlife gardening. Flag up invasive species.	BAP Partners, Plantlife	Ongoing
		7.6) Inform of impacts of paving over gardens through the local media	BAP Partners	Annually
		7.7) Offer training workshops	WT	Ongoing
		7.8) promote 'Let our Gardens Live' manifesto and BBC's 'Do One Thing'	All	Ongoing
Raise awareness and increase access and involvement	8. Adapt appropriate communications materials for each target group.	8.1) Communications officers to develop	?	2009 and ongoing
		8.2) be clear of audiences and pitch resources right	BAP partners	Ongoing
	9. Strengthen support for the 'Let our Gardens Live' manifesto and this BAP	9.1) Promote to all partners, gardening societies, garden centres etc	BAP partners	2008 and ongoing

Abbreviations:

BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
CPBRC	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biological Records Centre
LA	Local Authorities
WT	Wildlife Trust

6 LINKS TO OTHER PLANS

Urban Umbrella
Managed Greenspaces
Ponds
Burial Grounds
Urban forest
Song thrush
Pipistrelle bat
Great crested newt

7 REFERENCES

The Wildlife Trusts Wild About Gardens Project www.wildaboutgardens.org
Biodiversity in Urban Gardens (BUGS) University Sheffield www.bugs.group.shef.ac.uk
Cambridge Garden Watch Survey 2001 and 2007, Final Reports
RHS Gardening Matters www.rhsorg.uk
Recommended books
How to Make a Wildlife Garden – Chris Baines
Wildlife Gardening for Everyone – The Wildlife Trusts and Royal Horticultural Society

8 POSSIBLE LIST OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS TO BE CONSULTED

Anglian Water Services Ltd
Bat Conservation Officer
Biodiversity Partnership Coordinator
Buglife
Butterfly Conservation
Cambridge City Council
Cambridge Sustainable City
Cambridgeshire County Council
East Cambridgeshire District Council
Environment Agency
Fenland District Council
Froglife
Garden owners – Garden Clubs
Huntingdonshire District Council
Garden Centres
Peterborough City Council
Peterborough Environment City Trust
Peterborough Horticultural Society
Plantlife
Natural England, Bedfordshire Cambridgeshire Team
RSPB East Anglia
South Cambridgeshire District Council
The Wildlife Trust
Organisations consulted at review workshops May 2008
Ely Society – Friends of Jubilee Gardens
Chatteris Town In Bloom
Parnwell In Bloom
Friends of Parnwell
Friends of Sudbury Meadow
Conservators of the River Cam
St Neots Town Centre Initiative
Fenland District Council