

Moulsecoomb Allotments Nature Site 2015-16

The First Year



We aim to increase biodiversity by creating areas where different types of wild and native plants grow (habitats) so that as many species of 'creatures' can find food and breeding places as possible. Work started in February 2015 when a small group cleared a sizeable area of brambles.

We have created these habitats:

Chalk grassland: With many perennial wildflowers many specific to our local chalk downland to provide pollen and caterpillar food for a wide range of butterflies, especially the 'blues', and other pollinating insects.



Widely spaced trees: With 3 mature Hawthorn trees, plus 8 varieties of wild tree saplings planted by us Jan 2016 that in 6 or so years time, will provide flowers for pollinating insects, & berries for birds. The widely spaced tree canopy will allow a wide range of wildflowers and insects to thrive underneath.



Dead Hedge: This is where we put the bramble and other leafy or wood cuttings. Dead and decaying wood and leaves provides home to millions of soil microbes, beetles, insects, and worms. Many creatures will use this to hibernate in.

Pond and bog area: with a selection of native, wild, water and bog plants. We have close-planted shrubs on the North side which when grown will provide perches and safe cover for creatures accessing the pond. Ponds nurture a massive range of life, from water insects and amphibians to birds, hedgehogs, bats & foxes.

Wildlife Hedge: of 12 wild and native tree saplings, planted Jan 16. They will grow to different heights, providing flowers & berries. A dense hedge provides cover, food and hibernating places for many animals - harvest and field mice, hedgehogs; reptiles ; birds and insects. Hedges provide a safe 'corridor' between different types of habitat- from the pond to the brambles for instance.

Dense brambles: Large areas of brambles are a brilliant habitat for many creatures. 150 species of invertebrates (insects) use it for food, including sawflies, scale insects, beetles, many butterflies and moths. Brambles provide flowers for pollen and berries eaten by many creatures - and us! Whitethroat and Blackcap nest in bramble thickets &

eat the berries in autumn. Bees and other insects will hibernate or nest underground in safety, or inside the dead and hollow bramble stems.

Damson tree thicket: Grown up over the last 15 years or so little light reached the floor & ivy clambered up tree trunks and covers the ground. Dead wood is left as it attracts insects & fungi. It provides dense, safe, warm cover, hiding birds, bats and animals inside it. The ivy provides pollen-rich flowers, loved by many butterflies esp. Red admiral. Many insects will hibernate or hang as chrysalis from the folds of the ivy stems. Bats also may roost or hibernate in it.

Some comments from the Sunday work group:

'I think it's a really interesting contrast to allotment gardening; not about products. A very different way of using the land - and the two complement one another.'

Rachel

'I love working with fellow plot holders on something so beneficial, gaining knowledge of the indigenous wildlife and flora.'

Sally Mac'

"The nature site is a place of creativity and life where we enable wild flowers and a variety of native shrubs to grow, and make habitats for insects, animals and birds, by working together for a few hours every fortnight."

Sally G'

'It is tragic that in the last 50 years we have lost over half of this country's nature – birds, butterflies, wild flowers, etc – due mainly to intensive farming; with our Nature Site we can play a part, however tiny, in helping repair the damage.'

Dave

'I feel so lucky to be part of planting trees, and wildflowers, - creating a little bit of varied countryside in the city. And then seeing the result of our habitat creation- a small blue butterfly on the kidney vetch! Marvellous!'

Liz

'The nature site has brought together people who have formed a nice community atmosphere but also creates hopefully a lasting legacy in creating a wonderful area for our wildlife for future generations on our allotment site. I totally enjoy helping out and seeing the different range of wildlife.'

Richard

I have enjoyed helping to build the steps to make it safe for people to visit the nature site, and it has been good fun working with the group.

Jim

'What I love about the project is the camaraderie and energy between us when we meet as well as increasing my nature knowledge. I'm learning a lot from the volunteering about bio-diversity, types of plants etc. We're thinking more widely beyond our own little plots about how we can encourage bio-diversity to the site as a whole, which will benefit all allotment holders but also the community surrounding the site as we start to get increasing birdsong and butterflies (and frogs!) as a result of our little project.'

Heather