

BOWER ASHTON

Ponds

We counted eight ponds, varying in size from a dustbin lid to a gold-standard pond around five feet long, with gradations of depth and marginal plants. We spoke with one pond-keeper for whom duckweed was a bit of a problem.

Boundary walls & fences

When we walked the boundary, it was quite clear that almost the whole perimeter of the site already has wildlife-friendly growth, such as hedges, trees, ivy or brambles. All of this is undoubtedly providing nesting shelter, flowers for pollinators and food for birds.

We were interested to see how many 'substantial' trees were on the site or at the boundary. Clearly, the tenancy rules forbid large trees on plots, and there were none. However, on or near the boundaries there was a good deal of tree cover. Planted within the railway cutting and overhanging the plots are several mature trees, including sycamore and also one very large fir, which straddles the boundary. Along the A369 Clanage Road boundary, just inside or outside of the wall, the trees are mostly ash, elder and sycamore, with one or two oaks. These seemed to be kept to a managed size, presumably treated as part of the verge maintenance. The boundary fences including alongside the "Festival Way" to White City hold quite dense mixture of brambles, ivy, some sections of 'mixed English hedge' and typical self-seeded trees such as ash, elder & sycamore, all providing shelter wildlife cover, ideal not only for nesting, feeding and the safety of birds en route, but for pollinators too. Its maintenance on the plotward-side is managed, of course, in tiny lengths by each individual tenant. There was no obvious problem with this when we 'walked the bounds'. Nobody had grubbed-out the green cover. However, tenants should be made aware about best practice in managing their responsibilities for these vertical green spaces at the end of their plots. The Association strives to make sure it is alert to the intentions of the property owners that bound the site, including [presumably] Network Rail¹ and Bristol City Council, particularly around tree-felling and herbicides. The creatures that use wildlife corridors do not, as we know, understand who owns them!!

The perimeter of the site is approximately 420 m whilst the area is estimated to be 1 hectare (2½ acres)

Total number of various sized plots: 57

¹ Network Rail state '*Not all potentially hazardous trees are on our land, so we work closely with our lineside neighbours to make sure that trees next to the railway aren't a danger, whether they're on our land or not. If we need to prune neighbours' trees that overhang fences or boundaries, we'll always seek permission first.*'



Bird boxes and 'insect hotels'

These are easy & cheap to make and install. We saw a couple of insect hotels [arrangements of decaying or hollow wood], and a bird box, but by their nature we may have missed some.

The unexpected find

We were pleased to see two beehives, on different plots. Both were using mesh screens to channel the bees' line of flight, as recommended by the Association.

What did people say to us?

We spoke to several plot-holders, all of whom were very encouraging of the nature of our visit and the idea that the Association might be promoting a wildlife-friendly approach. Two people said they 'keep meaning to get round to creating a pond'. We heard of concerns about the use of herbicides. Whilst no one wishes a drift of weed seeds neither do we want the drift effects of blanket-application of weedkiller.

What is the potential for further improvement of the site's 'wildlife-friendliness'?

Small scale improvements add up, and the small additions that could help with wildlife are often ones that can be taken by individual tenants. These include:

1. Ponds, even modest in size
2. Nesting boxes
3. Bird boxes
4. Insect hotels, whether they be bought, constructed or just a square foot or so of intentionally untidy roof tiles & small logs etc

As to the Association's role, one of the easiest but most influential actions could be to *actively* encourage the above, through, for example: Site Rep conversations with new tenants; further useful tips on the website and in the newsletter; and one or two site volunteers being available for practical tips, or 'viewings' of their ponds.

What next?

We'll be doing similar surveys of all of the Association's sites before the Autumn. If you've got any further ideas for improving our 'wildlife-friendliness, or examples of things you've already done, please do let us know via your Site Rep., email or 'phone.

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