

## How can we make our allotment sites as wildlife-friendly as possible?

### A brief survey of the White City site



This is the third site we have surveyed during the summer of 2021, and our findings and suggestions are similar to those of the other sites. However, it is important to note that each site has its own unique bio-diversity, and each one is part of a different wildlife corridor.

With the assistance of site rep. John Lansdall we walked the boundary, looked at plots and talked with those on site. Our intention was to look for the things that would encourage fauna, be they birds, invertebrates or reptiles.

#### **Ponds**

Ponds, by offering a different habitat, are one of the easiest ways of increasing the diversity of wildlife. We counted at **eighteen ponds** varying in size from a dustbin lid to at least two gold-standard ponds with gradations of depth and marginal plants. One is a 'community pond' in the community orchard, and another is stocked with fish. We heard that in the recent past there was a newt migration scheme as part of the metrobus groundworks, so we hope that the numbers have been sustained.

#### **Trees, shrubs and climbers alongside the boundary walls & fences**

As with the other HwDAA sites in Bower Ashton, White City sits within a wider area of green spaces, including Ashton meadows and the cricket field [except on the east boundary, where there is a demolished railway yard awaiting housing development – plenty of buddleia at the moment, but not so likely in the future.]

Not surprisingly, there were no 'substantial' trees on the site itself. However, on or near the west and northern boundaries [bottom and left in the aerial photo above] there is a good deal of tree cover. Running up to the west boundary of the site is a dense thicket of mature self-seeded trees, including ash, sycamore, elder, buddleia and wild/crab apples. This land [not part of the site, and not owned by Bristol City Council] runs down steeply to the Portishead Line railway cutting.

Along the eastern boundary [the top side in the aerial photo above] of this very 'pointy' triangular site is Festival Way. The hauling way runs directly alongside about half of this fenced boundary, with the remainder of the eastern boundary being formed by the 'sides' or ends of individual plots. Similarly, along the north side of the site [facing the Cumberland Basin flyover] all of the plots have green cover alongside the fence.

In theory there is potential for some planting along the bare fence where it runs between the hauling way & Festival Way, but it is a narrow section and in practice there would be difficulties in maintaining clear access on either side, thus this is not a wise option.

In conclusion, more than half of the entire site boundary has wildlife-friendly growth on both sides of the boundary fences, with this green shelter including trees, hedges, shrubs, ivy and brambles. All of this – whether within the site or just outside of it - is undoubtedly providing nesting shelter, flowers for pollinators and food for birds.

### **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 twelve bird boxes, but, being tucked away, we may have missed some.

### **The unexpected finds**

We saw two sets of beehives, on different parts of the site, and also a hen-run in use.

One of the plots is being actively managed as a 'permaculture' plot, and is part of a research study by the plot-holder. We hope the results can be shared with tenants in a future newsletter.

By the main entrance to the site is a community orchard of over twenty fruit trees, and tenants are entitled to a share of the annual crop. It also contains a seating area and a well-planned pond. Pruning and maintenance is largely done by the enthusiastic plot-holder who got the plan off the ground. The orchard is on a narrow plot that, in living memory, had previously been a plot holding horses, and then later, goats.

One plot holder has recently built a suite of compost bins with a sedum roof, clearly making use of every square foot of the plot!

Tucked away, amongst uncut grass where they won't be disturbed, are six 'slow-worm mats'. These have been made by a tenant from 50x50cm squares of roofing felt, to provide the ideal location for slow worms. Since they were put down two years ago, they've all been occupied and young slow worms are in evidence.

### **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 HwDAA might be promoting a wildlife-friendly approach.

We heard that foxes, rabbits and possibly a deer had been spotted on the site, although not hedgehogs. This was not a scientific survey, and it may be that other plot-holders have seen other mammals; perhaps a tenant might like to use a trail-camera to investigate hedgehog presence further.

One plot-holder told us how on the day of our visit they had spotted hornet mimic hoverflies, and thought it would be useful if less-experienced tenants were able to identify – and thus not discourage – such beneficial insects.

### **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. As with our earlier site surveys, these actions by tenants could include:

1. Ponds, even modest in size
2. Nesting boxes
3. 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 with tenants, one of the easiest but most influential actions could be to *actively* encourage the above, through, for example:

1. Publicising with tenants that the wildlife-friendly measures listed above are encouraged, not forbidden.
2. Site Rep conversations with new tenants, as well as written advice
3. A well-researched & easy to use page on the website
4. Regular reports and 'what I have done/wildlife seen' stories in the newsletter
5. One or two volunteers on each site being available for practical tips, or 'viewings' of their pond
6. Advising tenants about best practice in managing the vertical green spaces at the end of their plot
7. An information board on each site about wildlife to look out for e.g. 'butterflies this month', with a place to log sightings

Many of the above could first be trialled at one or two sites, to see how they work.

As we know, the creatures that use wildlife corridors do not understand who owns them. Just after this survey was made, a stretch of wildlife-friendly hedgerow on the outer side of the site's boundary was razed to the ground. This was a telling reminder that the HwDAA may want to make sure it is alert to the intentions of the property owners that bound the site, whether this around unnecessary 'tidying up', tree-felling or the use of herbicides. If and when the railway yard site is developed, it will be important to put forward the HwDAA's views about construction management regarding wildlife.

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***Footnote about site area and perimeter***

*The data – which has been rounded off - are calculated from Google Earth. The perimeter includes the gates and has been measured by following the boundary fence. The area is automatically calculated from this; thus the area quoted is for the whole site [including the two car parks and hauling way], not just the sum of the plots. These measurements are indicative, and not verified by other means.*

*Perimeter = 793 m [2,600 ft]*

*Site area = 1.29 hectares [3.19 acres]*