



Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership



Gardens and allotments Habitat Action Plan 2010-2014

Plan Lead Organisation	Middlesbrough Council
Plan Coordinator	Simon Blenkinsop
Action Group	Urban
Associated Plans	Parks and amenity areas, ponds, school grounds
Latest version	Published January 2010

Description

Gardens and allotments account for a significant proportion of urban greenspace, (around 15-25% towns). Private gardens cover an estimated 3 % (485,000) of the land area of England and Wales with an estimated 13,000 ha of allotment gardens. Gardens and allotments will never act as substitutes for many semi-natural habitats; however, they can offer a variety of habitats that support a wide range of invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians, birds and mammals. They can also provide habitats, such as ponds, that may be increasingly rare elsewhere.

The value of any individual garden or allotment for wildlife will depend on its size, age, location and management. Although individual sizes of gardens and allotments are usually small they can be considered on a landscape scale.

Gardens and allotments are intensively manipulated green spaces yet can still provide a refuge for species that are becoming less common in the wider countryside such as hedgehogs, common frog and song birds such as robins, song thrush and house sparrow. Gardens contain a range of habitats and typically include lawns, flower borders, pond, shrubs and trees. Gardens vary in size and character with larger and older gardens generally supporting a greater range of wildlife. Allotments can be a haven for wildlife, the cultivated and empty plots, nectar producing plants, compost heaps, and grass areas, sheds and stores, and the boundary hedges and banks all provide a variety of habitats, attracting birds, insects and small mammals.

Whilst the potential value of domestic gardens has been much discussed, data on the structure of the existing garden resource and quantitative data on their biodiversity is scarce. The Biodiversity in Urban Gardens in Sheffield (BUGS) started as a three year investigation, looking at the significance of urban gardens as habitats for 'natural' biodiversity, and the efficacy of some simple 'creative conservation' measures in enhancing that biodiversity in Sheffield. This project's research has expanded in 2004-7 to cover to develop a better understanding of the role that domestic gardens play in providing valuable green space across urban areas, and how the resource they provide interacts with current, and potential future, urban forms.

Since the 1980's there has been a growing interest in managing gardens as places for

wildlife. This has been popularized through TV programmes with wildlife organisations providing detailed information and advice on maximizing the potential of gardens to attract wildlife.

Gardens and allotments are important places for people of all ages and social background to be able to engage with the natural world on a daily basis and is often a starting point in developing an interest in wider countryside and environmental issues. Wildlife gardening is one area where people can make small practical impact on their environment. The creation of garden ponds, planting flower rich in nectar and providing food and shelter for birds are all ways that people can increase biodiversity of urban areas.

However gardening does have significant detrimental environmental impact. Many garden products can cause harm to wildlife habitats such as the use of peat from peat bogs and limestone from quarrying and the use of tropical hardwoods. The widespread use of garden chemicals and the high environmental inputs in the growth and containers of plants and transportation in large scale nurseries are also issues. The leading gardening organisations and wildlife charities are promoting a more sustainable approach to gardening. Another issue is that some plants grown in gardens, especially ponds, have become naturalized in the wider countryside. The charity Plantlife estimate that more than 60% of invasive plants damaging the environment originate from gardens.

Current factors causing loss and decline

Direct loss of garden/allotment area through:

- ◆ Loss of large back gardens to housing development.
- ◆ Loss of front gardens to concrete for off-road parking.
- ◆ Lack of provision of garden space in new developments.
- ◆ Change in land use of former allotment gardens.

Loss of wildlife in gardens through:

- ◆ Use of chemicals and slug pellets.
- ◆ Loss of hedges and replacement with fences or walls.
- ◆ Fewer open compost heaps and less dead wood left to rot.
- ◆ The desire for tidiness (e.g. lack of wild corners, the cutting of rank vegetation, removing seed heads after flowering and disturbing hedges and compost heaps during critical periods).
- ◆ Garden trends, e.g. the move to low maintenance gardens.
- ◆ The decline in growing vegetable and fruit crops, which provided wildlife with food, especially in autumn/early winter.
- ◆ Predation by domestic cats, particularly on birds.
- ◆ Wild neglected allotment sites are being brought back into use resulting in habitat being destroyed.

Detrimental effects of gardening on the wider environment

- ◆ Use of peat causing the destruction of our lowland raised bogs.
- ◆ Use of un-sustainable garden materials e.g. tropical hardwoods
- ◆ Naturalized garden plants damaging semi-natural habitats

Conservation Status

Garden habitats have no specific legal protection, although trees are protected in Conservation Areas and through Tree Preservation Orders.

The Allotments Acts of 1925 and 1950 oblige local councils to provide allotments.

The Habitat in the Tees Valley

The current area covered by gardens and allotments in the Tees Valley has not been quantified, but given the predominance by urban development it is likely to be greater than the national average. Due to density of housing in some inner town areas, especially terraces, the average garden size is likely to be small

Current Activity in the Tees Valley

There is a growing number of community and school gardening and allotments initiatives in the Tees valley by a range of organisations and community groups as the recognition of the importance of the value of these activities are in engaging a wider range of people in environmental activities is becoming well established. Nature's world has a well established gardens demonstrating wildlife friendly gardening and good environmental practices. Examples of successful community allotment projects that have incorporated biodiversity are Berwick Hills Community allotment in Middlesbrough and wildlife garden run by the Saltburn Allotment association at Hazel Grove Allotments in Saltburn.

Further Information

Here is a small selection of wildlife gardening publications of the many available

Amott, S. (2007) Wildlife on Allotments. Natural England (catalogue code NE20)
Baczacki, S. (2007) Collins Wildlife Gardener. Collins
Baines, C. (2000) How to Make a Wildlife Garden, Frances Lincoln Ltd
Holden, P & Abbot, G, (2008) The RSPB Handbook of Garden Wildlife. Christopher Helm Publishers Ltd.
Lavelle, C. & Lavelle, M (2007) How to Create a Wildlife Garden. Lorenz Books
Owen, J. (1991) The Ecology of a Garden: the first fifteen years. Cambridge University Press
Tait, M. (2006) Wildlife Gardening for Everyone. Think Publishing Limited

Websites

Wildlife Trust Wwildlife gardening web pages	www.wildaboutgardens.org
Space for Nature Garden biodiversity forum	www.wildlife-gardening.org.uk
RSPB Wildlife gardening advice pages	www.rspb.org.uk/advice/gardening
Biodiversity in Urban Gardens projects (BUGS)	www.bugs.group.shef.ac.uk
National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners	www.nagtrust.org
Allotments Regeneration Initiative	www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari

Vision Statement

To maximize the potential for wildlife of gardens and allotments in the Tees Valley and to provide opportunities for increased enjoyment and appreciation of wildlife through gardening.

Targets

Note for steering group

We have not set targets in this plan for several reasons

- ◆ *Much of this plan focuses on adding value or a biodiversity focus to other initiatives*
- ◆ *This is not a UK priority habitat so target data will not be collected by Natural England*
- ◆ *We can not set any meaningful quantitative targets relating to extent and quality of habitats*

Actions

Code	Action	Organisational lead	Action contact	Partners	End date
GA.A1	Produce and maintain a database of community wildlife gardening allotment initiatives in the Tees valley.	Middlesbrough Council	Simon Blenkinsop	Hartlepool Borough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council	2010 and ongoing
GA.A2	Incorporate biodiversity into local authority allotment strategies.	Middlesbrough Council	Simon Blenkinsop	Hartlepool Borough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council	2010
GA.A3	Promote wildlife allotment gardening to allotment tenants in Middlesbrough and expand wider if successful through best practice and demonstration plots. Use the Town Meal Middlesbrough as an awareness raising vehicle.	Middlesbrough Council	Simon Blenkinsop	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust	2010
GA.A4	Promote environmentally sustainable and wildlife gardening principles to allotment holders through, mailing and presentations to allotment associations.	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust	Susan Antrobus	Middlesbrough Council, Hartlepool Borough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council.	2010
GA.A5	Promote and support biodiversity in community gardening and allotment initiatives.	Middlesbrough Council	Simon Blenkinsop	Hartlepool Borough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council	Ongoing
GA.A6	Link national gardening initiatives e.g. Garden Bird Watch, nest box week, Spring Watch into existing annual countryside events programmes delivered by Local Authorities.	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust	Sue Antrobus	Middlesbrough Council, Hartlepool Borough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council	Ongoing
GA.A7	Deliver a garden pond road show of events to community groups through the Tees Valley Pondscape project.	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust	Rachel Jackson		2011
GA.A8	Provide information and advice on the problems alien aquatic plants through the Tees Valley Pondscape project.	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust	Rachel Jackson		2011
GA.A9	Promote the use of locally used beanpoles through national beanpole week by hosting wildlife gardening events where people can purchase beanpoles, wild plants and charcoal sourced in the Tees Valley.	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust	Sue Antrobus		2011 and ongoing
GA.A10	Incorporate wildlife friendly gardening and learning in schools throughout the Tees Valley the new Tees Valley Growing Food For the Future project	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust	Steve Ashton	Local schools	2011
GA.A11	Carry out a wildlife gardening awareness campaign each year through gardening allotment societies and local media E.g 2010 slow worm, 2011 hedgehogs	Tees Valley Biodiversity partnership	Sue Antrobus	Regional records centre, NERAG., mammal society	2010 and ongoing