

Blog entry

## WELCOME TO MY GARDEN

March 2020: We are being asked to stay at home in order to protect vulnerable people from Covid-19 and prevent the NHS from being overwhelmed. Of course, the British weather is adding insult to injury by showing us sunshine for the first time in months! Contact with nature could be severely limited this spring and summer.

I am lucky enough to have a garden where I can get my nature fix, so I'd like to share some of the action. Being unable to go any further afield this weekend, I had a bit of a tidy up. There may be humans wanting to spend time in the garden in the coming weeks/months, the wildlife will have to share. Over winter, they've had it all to themselves and it has been gloriously untidy for months!

I'm not the world's greatest gardener and my budget brings the words "shoe-string" to mind, but I'm keen to help out my local wildlife where I can (mostly by not tidying up). When I moved in, this garden was pretty useless to people and wildlife alike. I didn't have the resources for a big makeover so the changes have been gradual. Every year I try to add at least one feature which benefits wildlife. Over the years I have seen the number and variety of visiting and resident species grow steadily.

I started with a simple bird box. There are usually a couple of broods of House Sparrows fledged from this box each spring. There have been some prospectors already this year, but no-one has settled in yet.



Click here for instructions on how to make your own bird box:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-families/family-wild-challenge/activities/build-a-birdbox/>

I try to keep a range of foods on offer for the birds. The menu usually includes some mixed seed, fat balls and peanuts. Sometimes they'll get some mealworms or extra suet. I get mostly House Sparrows and Starlings on the feeders, but also Blackbird, Robin, Dunnock, Blue Tit and sometimes a Coal Tit. Of course, the ubiquitous Pigeons and Doves too. I have had brief visits from a Female Sparrowhawk.



Click here for advice on feeding garden birds:

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-feed-birds-your-garden>

Last year I renovated the tiny pond. It was a slimy green mud hole with no signs of life at all. I removed the rigid liner, re-profiled the banks and re-lined it with a flexible liner. I added some rocks and a couple of suitable plants. There is a hibernaculum built into the rockery behind the pond, which was meant for amphibians but seems to have been claimed by mice. This year the pond looks much more like a home for wildlife. I am starting to see a range of invertebrate life and it's even been visited by a frog!



Click here for instructions on how to build a pond:

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-pond>

This year I am trying to improve my patch for pollinators. This weekend I put up all the insect hotels I got for Christmas and re-hung some that had been blown down over winter. I intend to plant some pollinator friendly flowering plants soon.



Click here to find out how to build your own insect hotel:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/garden-activities/build-a-bug-hotel/>

But the best thing about my garden is ... Hedgehogs!

I love Hedgehogs. I am very lucky to have several visiting my garden regularly. They are fast disappearing from Britain and need all the help they can get so I am more than happy to provide a bit of food, water and shelter to help them out. In return, they provide me with endless entertainment. I use a wall-mounted CCTV camera and a motion-triggered trail camera to keep an eye on their antics.



There are two hedgehog 'homes', plus an open compost heap for 'self-builders'. The one on the right is new this year. I'm hoping to encourage nesting and eventually see some hoglets.



All food is served inside the feeding station to stop foxes and cats getting to it first. This took a long time to get right. There are some very determined cats and foxes around here! The hedgehogs enter through the hole between the plant pot and the bricks, they have to go around the back of the plant pot to reach the clear plastic feeding chamber, where I can watch them eating. The Hedgehogs get a combination of tinned cat food and dry hedgehog food, plus plenty of fresh water.



Click here for advice on how to look after Hedgehogs in your garden:

<https://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/a-brief-guide-to-looking-after-hedgehogs-in-your-garden>

Other regular visitors to my garden include: A vixen with three paws, plus assorted other foxes; a family of Slow Worms in the compost bin; some Woodmice stealing the hedgehog food and clearing up scraps left under the bird feeders; plus a variety of neighbourhood cats!

I will be following the lives of all these characters a little more closely than usual this year, so watch out for updates and pictures appearing here.

I'll also be posting about any garden habitat improvement projects I manage to complete.