

Confined to the Garden – August

Another month has flown by and it feels like summer is coming to an end. After baking in a record-breaking heatwave, we are now being battered by some decidedly autumnal storms. Life post-lockdown seems to be settling into some kind of familiar rhythm but that nagging sense of uncertainty is still with us.

There are still several plants blooming in the garden, but seeds are becoming more plentiful than flowers as August gives way to September.



Water Mint



Rosebay Willowherb



Crocosmia

This small Sunflower appeared out of nowhere, I assume it germinated from bird seed spilt from the feeders.



Sunflower

The Foxgloves and other woodland plug plants I put in during lockdown are doing well. They haven't had a chance to flower but I'm looking forward to seeing them burst into life next spring. I'm still pulling up bindweed in this area, despite doing my best to remove every scrap before planting my plugs.



Foxgloves

My new bird bath is being used quite regularly now. I love seeing the House Sparrows and sometimes Starlings making use of it to clean their feathers and get a drink.



House Sparrow using bird bath

My cameras are still watching over the garden at night and recording all the nocturnal comings and goings. Some nights are busier than others, but the Hedgehogs are still only visiting one at a time. This seems very quiet compared to early spring when I was seeing five or six at a time and it's much harder to tell how many unique individuals there are.



A Hedgehog arrives

I've been really enjoying watching Foxes in the garden this year. I used to put occasional kitchen scraps out for them but this year I've developed the habit of putting any leftovers from the Hedgehog feeding station out for the Foxes the next night. It's not a lot of food, but it has kept the young foxes coming back each night to see if there will be anything available.



Feeding Foxes and Hedgehogs

I am aware that feeding Foxes can be controversial, but as you can probably guess, I'm of the opinion that if it is done sensibly it can benefit both humans and Foxes, without any harm being done. However, many others remain unconvinced. An informal case study by the National Fox Welfare society attempted to shed light on the following questions: *"By providing food for foxes each night will this make them reliant on a food source, will this food source encourage more foxes to breed, decrease the foxes normal territory size, create more reports on fox attacks against people, will they stop hunting for themselves and could this lead to an increase in rodents as we take away their instinct to hunt. If we stop feeding them after they have become reliant will they simply just starve? By feeding foxes are we encouraging rats and mice? Is this food so kindly supplied by the householder causing foxes more harm than good?"* I am pleased to report that the answer to all these questions would appear to be 'no'.

If you'd like to read the case study for yourself, click the link below:

<http://www.nfws.org.uk/should-we-feed-foxes-in-our-garden.html>

1Eye appears to be fully recovered, it is now very hard to tell her apart from the other young Foxes. I think I should start calling her 2Eyes (if I can recognise her at all!). There is still a slight difference between her eyes, but it's not always noticeable. She's on the right in the picture below.



To see a video of 1Eye and a sibling, click the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCT-cuLi3cw>

Although the Foxes and Hedgehogs usually share the garden peacefully, some of the cubs are curious about their spiky neighbours. The cub in the pictures below had a good sniff of this Hedgehog as it entered the garden, and couldn't resist performing repeat inspections as the hog was going about its business.



To see a video of this encounter, click the link
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Co7_tv4ISOU

Later that night, the same hog got sniffed all over again when 3Paws arrived with a particularly playful cub in tow. First, she checked it out for herself, then her cub had a look. The Hedgehog just puffed out his spikes and waited patiently for them to leave. The cub then found a new toy, a piece of dried-up Blanket Weed discarded on the grass by another fox.



To see 3Paws and the playful cub, click the link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrckK6PUNGE>

If you were watching the first video carefully, you may have noticed the Fox pulling Blanket Weed out of the pond. This is something I first noticed last month and have seen several times since. At least one of the young foxes drags the weed out of the water and carries it away before dropping it elsewhere in the garden. I still don't really know why, but they do seem to chew on it before

discarding it. I can only assume they are eating invertebrates living in the weed. I've not seen this behaviour before and so far, I've not found any Fox experts with an explanation.



Fox chewing Blanket Weed

I probably won't be seeing so much of the cubs for much longer, as they are nearly ready to disperse and find their own territories. For now, I'm making the most of being able to watch them interact with each other. They don't always get along peacefully, these two had a bit of a disagreement over the dish, when one of them refused to share.



To see a short video of this squabble, click the link:

https://youtu.be/Ft_Tm4pW794

I'll keep watching throughout September to see what else my nocturnal neighbours get up to. Come back at the end of the month for another update on all my garden goings-on.