

Confined to the garden: September

Autumn has arrived. Flowers and leaves are starting to die off, evenings are getting chillier and the wildlife is preparing for winter. That pervasive sense of uncertainty that arrived with Covid is still here, but we're learning to live with it.

In my garden, the last few blooms are just holding on. I am looking forward to enjoying a longer flowering season next year thanks to all my hard work during lockdown.



Sedum



Fuchsia, Sedum and Lavender

The bee hotels are quiet now. Some tubes are protecting the next generation until they emerge in spring, others are empty and waiting for the first bees of 2021 to claim them. All are draped with the webs of the spiders which are so ubiquitous at this time of year. There are Orb Weavers spinning beautiful webs which catch the sparkling morning dew as efficiently as they catch flies. There are Labyrinth Spiders hiding out in the bee hotels, still hoping for an unsuspecting bee to buzz past so they can leap out and drag it into their tunnel, and there are False Widows lurking in the shed.

I'm not going to include any pictures of spiders here but if you like them and want to know more, you might enjoy this article from the Metro in 2016:

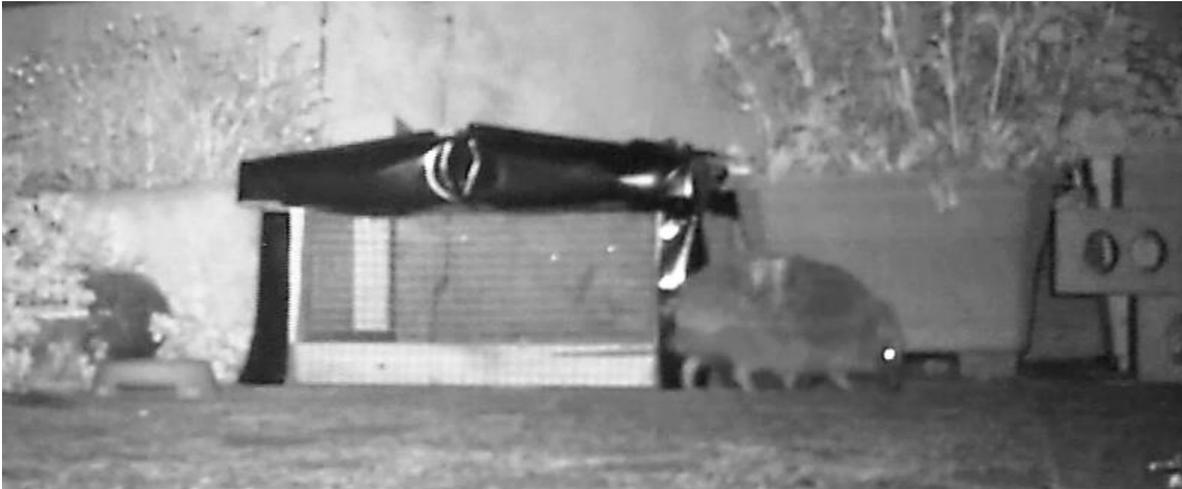
<https://metro.co.uk/2016/09/06/uk-spider-identification-17-common-british-spiders-you-might-find-this-autumn-6110982/>

The other invertebrate I've noticed a lot this month is another one that not everybody enjoys. There are some gigantic slugs around this autumn! More than once this month I've glanced out of the kitchen window and thought there was a banana sliding across the lawn. I don't know why they seem to be so big this year, but it's not that unusual for the Large Red Slug to reach a length of 30cm, that's a foot of slug! I'm not the biggest fan of these slimy beasts but every species has its place in an ecosystem. One thing I do like about the Large Red Slug in particular (and other slugs in the Arion family), is its peculiar habit of rocking from side to side when threatened. This behaviour is well documented but as far as I'm aware nobody has yet come up with an explanation of how it might benefit the slug.

If you'd like to know more about British slugs, click the link below:

<https://www.jic.ac.uk/research-impact/technology-research-platforms/entomology-and-insectary/slugwatch/>

I only have the one Hedgehog visiting me at the moment, but he comes most nights, usually more than once each night. I can tell it's the same one because he's acquired some markings. I often see these kind of marks appear suddenly then fade very slowly.



Hedgehog with pale marks

So what are these marks? There are lots of very concerned people on the internet who believe these Hedgehogs are being deliberately marked with for identification purposes, but there are also a few who believe these marks are just mud with a high clay content which makes it fluoresce under infra-red light. Hedgehogs do roll in mud sometimes and have even been rescued from sticky situations in clay. I'm reserving judgement at this point.

Early this month, I enjoyed seeing this unmarked Hedgehog having a good scratch on the way out of the feeding station. Seeing them scratch so intently they fall over never gets old for me, funny every time!



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

<https://youtu.be/Ug1gBJpQQG8>

Unlike the Hedgehogs, the visiting Foxes have been frequent and varied this month. At least two of the cubs are still around, maybe all of them, I can no longer tell 2Eyes (formerly known as 1Eye) from

the others since her eye injury healed. 3Paws the vixen has been around a bit and I've even had a few visits from a mature 'dog' fox that could be the cubs' father.

There's plenty of interaction going on as the cubs mature into adults. In the video below the dog fox is just about tolerating the presence of one of them. He's definitely asserting his dominance but does allow the juvenile to eat from the dish in the end.



To watch a video of this dominant behaviour, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/xo9Snqo4ReY>

Sometimes dominance is displayed more subtly. The video below features a technique I like to call 'the bumshove', usually employed to prevent access to food.



To see a video of this, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/605kBl8Uitw>

In the video below, two of this year's youngsters jostle for dominance over an egg. Whenever I leave eggs out for the foxes, I always break them so that they can't carry them away and cache them. That way I get to see them eating and they don't dig up my neighbours' gardens to bury their prize.



To see the video, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/yrRRSfGAeU>

3Paws entered into a quick game of hide and seek with one of her youngsters, who outfoxed her by slipping round the back while she wasn't looking.



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

<https://youtu.be/iMO6Z0KnzHw>

3Paws received a very enthusiastic greeting from what I think was one of this year's youngsters, with much tail wagging and rolling on the floor.



To see a video of this greeting, click the link:

https://youtu.be/xZE_RnQHc38

The youngsters have been practising their pouncing skills, especially around the pond. There is a clump of Ivy there which mice like to hide in, but I don't think that's what they're targeting. The ground there is damp and easy to dig because the edge of the pond liner is underneath. I think they are foraging for earthworms and beetles. Some mornings I find small holes have been dug here, in an effort to reach tasty morsels living beneath the surface.



To see videos of this pouncing practice, click the links:

<https://youtu.be/DPTKbhs9GCc>

<https://youtu.be/s6mVk1oxlWc>

My final Fox video this month features some pouncing practise and some noisy squabbling.



To see a video of this encounter, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/TNtgwy0ARaA>

While the Foxes and Hedgehogs go about their business, there is an almost constant background of Wood Mouse activity. I have no idea whether this always the same mouse or several different mice, but there is a food cache somewhere being well stocked for winter. They are working hard running backwards and forwards between the Hedgehog feeding station and the cache with stolen nuggets.

This mouse was caught out inside the feeding station when a Fox arrived. Luckily for the mouse, it was able to hide and avoid being eaten.



To see the video of this, click the link:

<https://youtu.be/XhJ-1v5cQto>

This mouse was presented with a more spiky and indifferent dining companion when it arrived to find the feeding station already occupied by a Hedgehog. It was a bit unsure at first but eventually plucked up the courage to steal a morsel.



To see the video, click the link:

https://youtu.be/yqqYpK_hsCE

Although there is still plenty going on now, I expect the level of activity in the garden will begin to dwindle soon. Most of the animals will be less active over winter, although my cameras will still keep an eye out for hungry visitors. Come back again at the end of October to see what been happening.

More videos available on my YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCg7gSnXpjeo85XqoY35hTwg>