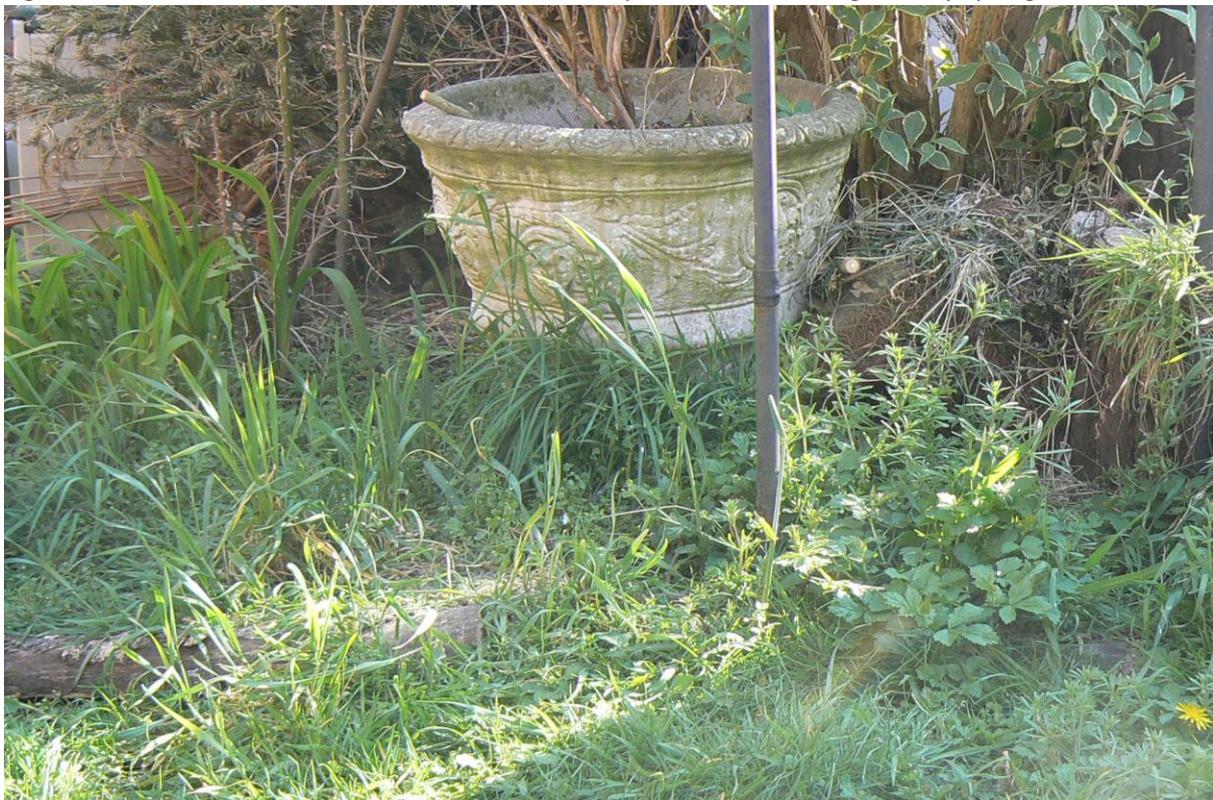


## Confined to the garden – Week 14

After three months, the government have decided it is time to get the economy going again. Every day there seem to be more announcements and rumours of adjustments to lockdown rules and lifting of restrictions. Next weekend pubs, restaurants, cinemas, hairdressers and a whole host of other businesses will be allowed to reopen. The difference between 1m and 2m seems to be the main topic of conversation this week. Face masks are now a common sight and mandatory on public transport. Several other countries in Europe are lifting their lockdowns, only to find they have to re-impose restrictions where fresh outbreaks of Covid-19 occur. We cannot take anything for granted. It seems likely that July will see drastic changes, but by now we should be used to not knowing what will change when. I am now able to carry out more of my normal work and, apparently, you are no longer stuck at home with nothing to do. This means that one of the drastic changes in July will be this blog switching from weekly to monthly updates.

This week, I've completed another project for pollinators. Inspired by a walk in the woods in the early spring, I wanted to bring some of the early spring woodland flowers into my garden. This will extend my flowering season, making pollen and nectar available to early emerging pollinators like bee flies.

I have a shady patch under a shrub at the end of the garden which was previously untended. Most of what is growing here is self-seeded, either blown in on the wind or fallen from the bird feeders. This will provide a suitable home for my shade-tolerant woodland flowers. The patch is in direct line of sight from the kitchen window, so it will cheer me up to see it blooming in early spring.



'Wild' area at the end of the garden

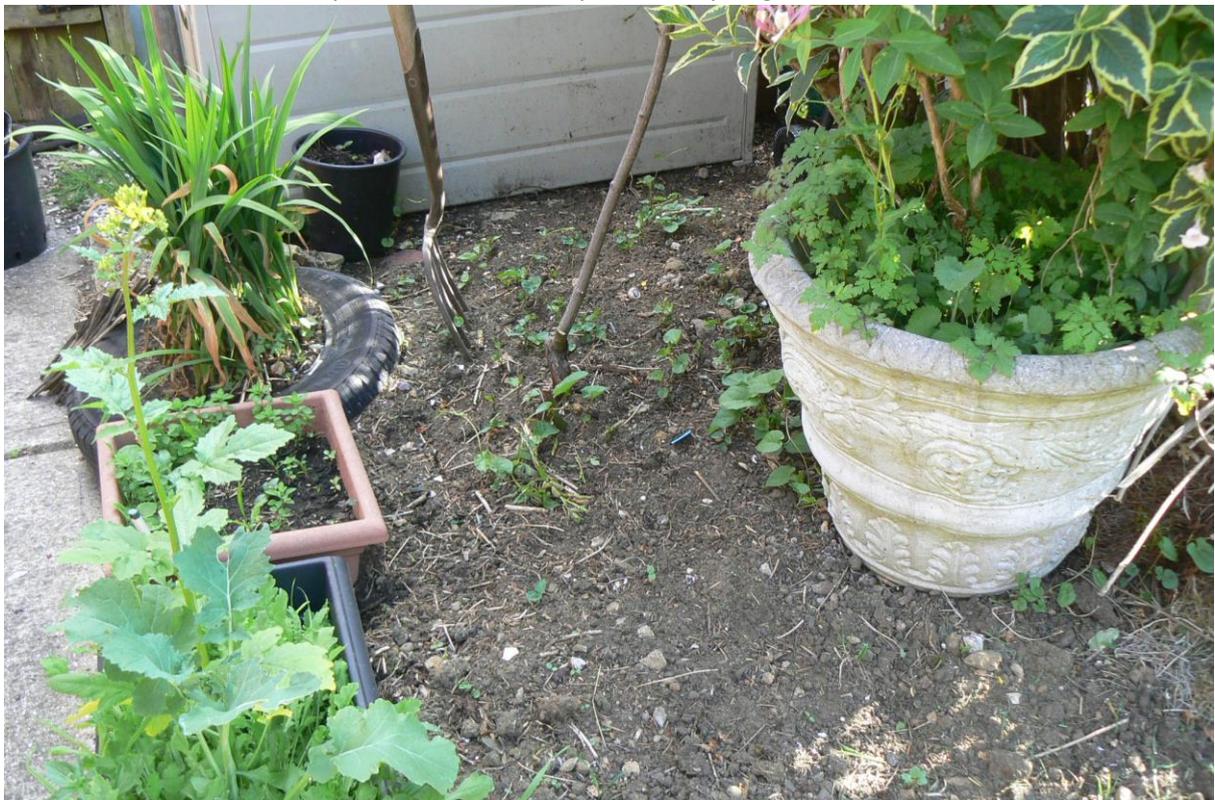
I cleared the area a few weeks ago, then left it alone while I waited for my plants to be delivered. I have been watching the Hedgehog house carefully for several weeks and have seen no signs of

occupation, so I was happy to work round it without worrying about disturbing anyone.



First clearance

By the time the new plants arrived, arrived there was Bindweed sprouting there again so I dug it over for a second time and pulled out the root system. I hope I got it all.



Bindweed regrowth



Bindweed free

With the soil prepared, I added a layer of compost to simulate the rich humus of a woodland floor, where these plants would naturally occur. I am planting Primrose, Bluebell, Wood Anemone, Lesser Celandine, Foxgloves, Dog Violets and Ground Ivy. I marked out the positions of some of the plants first. I want them to be visible from my kitchen window, so I put the Primroses at the front (they're my favourites), the Bluebells behind them and the tall Foxgloves at the back. The Celandines are around the bottom of the large pot. The rest I mixed together in the middle of the area.



Ready to plant

Some of the plants look a little past their best but that is to be expected. Most of these species have finished flowering for this year, their foliage will die back and they will retreat underground until next spring. Once the canopy is in leaf there is little light available and many woodland species use geophytes or underground storage organs to protect their energy and water reserves until the following spring. These are known as bulbs, rhizomes, tubers and corms. Bluebells are traditionally planted as dry bulbs at the end of summer, but I found using plug plants so easy in my flowering lawn that I decided to use them again here. They are much less mature and each plug contains a tiny little developing bulb. The Wood Anemone (in the separate pot) cannot be grown as a plug plant because it grows from rhizomes.

To learn about different types of geophytes, click the link:

<https://www.dummies.com/home-garden/gardening/flower-gardening/gardening-what-are-bulbs-corms-tubers-and-rhizomes/>

Then I got stuck in and planted my plugs.



Finished planting

I had some bark chip left over from my stag beetle project last week, so I made use of that. It will help to retain moisture and suppress weeds. I didn't cover the whole area though. The most visible part at the front received a scattering of wildflower seed (woodland mix). I hope this will provide flowers later in the year, when the Primroses and Bluebells have finished blooming. I will sow more of this woodland seed mix here in the Autumn.

I like to leave some 'wild' areas for the Hedgehogs so although I have cleared this one, I have substituted a similar patch at one side of the garden which is less visible from the kitchen window

and will now be left to do its own thing. There is a lot of Rosebay Willowherb and some Bramble growing there at the moment.



Replacement wild area

I had another Slow Worm sighting this week, possibly the same one as before. I think it is a female as it has a dark stripe down its back. I've been told that males are usually uniform in colour and often more on the grey/silver side, sometimes with blue spots. The females on the other hand are usually more brown/copper, with darker flanks and a dark stripe down the middle of the back. I have now placed a piece of paving slab in front of the compost heap. I'm hoping this will provide a basking place for the Slow Worm and a photo opportunity for me, so I can share it with you.



Basking slab for Slow Worms

More about Slow Worms:

<https://www.froglife.org/info-advice/amphibians-and-reptiles/slow-worm/>

I've had some close encounters with the resident mice this week. They are much bolder than their country cousins and often come out before dark, while I am sitting in the garden. They eat seed from under the bird feeders. They also steal food from the Hedgehog feeding station and cache it in the hibernaculum under the rockery. I think they are using one of the Hedgehog houses too.



Wood Mice

Can you tell a mouse from a vole? For a guide to small mammals, click the link:

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/01/types-of-uk-mice/>

Hedgehogs have been a bit thin on the ground for the last couple of weeks, I'm starting to wonder if they've had a better offer. Perhaps one of my neighbours has started a new feeding station and is providing tastier treats than me?

I haven't had any more news about the surviving 'rescued' Hedgehog, who was very thin. I hope she continues to put on weight and can eventually be released back into my garden.

As I have little interesting Hedgehog footage from this week, I'd like to share some old clips with you. You'll have to forgive the quality, I've learned a lot about editing since 2018. The first is a compilation of itchy Hedgehogs. They're always scratching themselves and I find it very endearing.



To see the video, click here:

<https://youtu.be/ZuFDxt5hH6c>

The second video is also a compilation from 2018. This one is of some curious behaviour. Lots of people are recording this 'chin-wiping' on their back garden hogcams and there is much discussion

about what is actually happening. Some have suggested scent marking, cleaning food from their chins or just scratching an itch. Whatever they're doing, it looks pretty comical to me.



To see the video, click here:

<https://youtu.be/4zzOym9jklc>

I am still getting frequent visits from the Fox cubs. They are growing fast and its getting harder to tell them from the adults now. Only their slightly oversized paws and their boundless enthusiasm and curiosity give them away. There is a bit more squeezing and wriggling required to get into the Hedgehog feeding station now, I just hope none of them end up in a 'Winnie the Pooh' situation, where they've eaten so much while inside that they can't squeeze back out again!



Squeezing in



Squeezing out

On Friday morning this week, I was able to distinguish one more individual from the crowd. One of the young foxes has unfortunately suffered an injury to its right eye. I haven't yet been able to tell whether this is a male or a female. I will be looking out for this individual. I'm not too concerned about the eye at the moment, lots of urban foxes do just fine with one eye, but it does look like it's causing some discomfort. If it looks like the eye is getting worse, I may seek advice and assistance from one of the excellent wildlife rescue charities in my area. For now, it seems to be doing ok. It failed to find its way into the Hedgehog feeding station but found dish of leftover hog food from the previous night, which it seemed to appreciate.



1Eye the Fox



To see a video of 1Eye's visit, click here:  
[https://youtu.be/qGs09u9Vs\\_E](https://youtu.be/qGs09u9Vs_E)

I took lockdown as an opportunity to focus on my garden and spend more time and money on it than I would usually be able to spare. I normally aim to make at least one improvement for wildlife each year. In the last 14 weeks I've achieved all of the following:

- Introduced over 20 new species of flowering plants for pollinators.
- Put up 6 new bee hotels.
- 'Rescued' 2 Hedgehogs (although only one survives).
- Added new habitat features for beetles.
- Created a bird bath.
- Provided a basking place for Slow Worms.
- Added 3 brand new species to my list of visitors, including Tawny Owl!

Along the way, I've shared the highs and lows in the lives of recognisable characters and learnt a lot about the wildlife in my garden. I hope you have enjoyed following my progress and maybe learnt something new too. I will be back at the end of July with an update on all the news from my garden. In the meantime, You can see videos of all the night-time visitors, including 3Paws, 1Eye and the other cubs, at my YouTube channel:

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