

Confined to the garden – week 5

You're going to have to use your imagination this week. Are you ready?

Picture an ancient woodland. Tall trees, just coming into leaf, their topmost branches swaying, knocking and creaking in a soft breeze. Below, the gentle scent of English Bluebells mingles with woodsmoke from a far-off chimney. The haze of blue stretches as far as you can see through the trees, peppered with Yellow Archangel and Dog's Mercury, there are scattered clumps of strikingly white Wood Anemones and bright yellow Lesser Celandines shining like polished butter. A Bumblebee floats lazily from flower to flower, humming tunelessly to itself. There is a winding path through the flowers, worn by the habitual movements of a local Badger. Follow it. Tread lightly so as not to crack the dry twigs beneath your feet. As you follow the track towards the edge of the wood, the evening sunlight filters through and dapples everything with gold. A Blackbird lets off a sudden alarm call to announce your arrival. The path has led you straight to one of the many entrances of a Badger sett. A few flies buzz about the entrance, suggesting the sett is occupied. It's nearly dusk, they will be stirring soon. Not wanting to disturb Brock's evening routine, you turn to follow the path back into the middle of the wood. As you turn, a flash of purple grabs your eye amongst the blue. A group of Early Purple Orchids stand proudly above the nodding bells as if addressing an audience. You stand there for a while, admiring them while Woodpigeons coo softly above you. A Green Woodpecker calls out its 'yaffle', breaking your reverie. It's time to get home for dinner, but this spot is so peaceful. Just five minutes sitting on this log listening to this Song Thrush first....

This week I found inspiration on one of my local walks. Looking for somewhere peaceful, I stumbled upon a little fragment of beautiful ancient woodland I didn't know was there. It was glorious in the evening sunlight. Finding a Badger sett and some orchids there made it even more special. It's only a small patch of woodland, bordered by a road, a field and two bridleways, but it provided a little oasis of tranquillity which was incredibly restorative. I didn't have a camera with me, it could never have done it justice anyway. However, it looked a bit like this:



Beautiful ancient woodland (not my photo).

Looking around me and mentally ticking off all the ancient woodland indicator species I could see, I realised that a lot of my favourite flowers seem to be in that list and most of them are early to flower, before the canopy shades the woodland floor completely. I can't bring the whole woodland home with me, I don't have room for the trees, but I do want to bring some of these flowers into my garden. I have a shady patch which might suit them well. It's the first bit you see when you look out of the kitchen window so having some flowers appearing there in early spring would be really nice. These are the species I'd like to plant.



Snowdrop



Primrose



Lesser Celandine



Wood Anemone



Bluebell



Dog Violet

For more information on ancient woodland, click here:

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/habitats/ancient-woodland/>

As well as bringing some cheer to the garden at the end of winter, this would fit well with my goal for the garden this year, which is to improve my patch for pollinators. Eventually, I'd like to provide year-round flowers. These would be a good start as some of them can start to bloom as early as January or February, and some of them stay in flower until May. This would provide much needed nectar and pollen for early pollinators such as Bee Flies.



A Dark Edged Bee Fly feeding on a Primrose

For more information about Bee Flies, click here:

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/invertebrates/flies/dark-edged-bee-fly>

I have some money to spend on plants as not much is being spent on petrol while we're in lockdown. I've had a look online and plants are available for delivery. As usual though, I've had an idea at the wrong time of year to act on it. Probably something to do with not being the greatest gardener. After a quick browse, I discovered that bulbs for snowdrops, bluebells etc. can either be purchased 'in the green' Jan-April, or 'dry' from August onwards. Other plants I want such as Primroses are available now, but I don't want to put them in then have to try not to disturb them when I plant the

bulbs in August. I have made my plan and my shopping list, but that particular project will have to go on hold for a few months.

I'd got the bug though, so more plans started to develop.

I have a large planter in a sunny spot which is not being used. It was originally for potatoes, it has since grown onions and garlic, but is currently dormant. I'd like to grow something here that can be used in the kitchen but will still benefit pollinators. So, I've made a list of herbs that are good for bees and they've been added to my shopping list.

Click here for a list of herbs that bees like:

<https://www.buzzaboutbees.net/herb-planting-for-bees.html>

Last week, I planted some Buddleia seeds which may or may not germinate as I completely disregarded the advice and 'use by' date on the packet. If the seeds do ever germinate, I have decided on a suitable location for their pot, but there are no visible signs of life yet. These plans to improve my patch for pollinators are all very exciting, but I need a project I can get stuck into now.

While browsing for plants online I came across a supplier offering a selection of plug plants suitable for a flowering lawn. Plugs are cheap and easy to plant, so very appealing.



A plug plant

I've never really seen the point of perfect lawns, what's so great about short grass? Unless you intend to practise your bowling it all seems a bit unnecessary to me. Mine is already full of dandelions anyway. I might as well add a few more species. The plants in this selection are all low-growing and will tolerate mowing as a substitute for grazing animals. Cutting the tops off will encourage sideways growth and they should spread through the grass. Instead of a boring sea of green, my lawn will be full of colourful flowers and the pollinators will love it. I will order the plants at the end of this week and when they arrive, I'll let you know how I get on with planting them.

I'm full of good intentions this week, keep checking back here to see how many of these grand plans I manage to execute. Whether my vision of a pollinator paradise will match the reality remains to be seen.

OK, you can put your imagination away, that's enough dreaming, back to the here and now...

The bee hotels are really busy now. Females are going in and out, depositing pollen in the tubes to feed their offspring. A tube in one of the new hotels has been capped with mud already. This means the bee has laid several eggs in this tube, sealing each one into its own chamber with its own supply of food, where it will hatch into a larva, eat the food and pupate over winter. This is the final cap of mud on the final chamber in that tube.



New bee hotel in use

OK, what you really want to know about is the Hedgehogs, isn't it?

Courtship continues. There has been lots of huffing and snuffing as couples dance around the garden. Plenty of scuffles breaking out between rival males too.

I've been suffering some technical issues with the motion detection software I use to capture the action, so I'm trying out a different one. This means I don't have as much video as usual this week. Although I did capture a new record being set, four hogs inside the new feeding station at once.

Click here for a short video of this game of 'sardines':

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9Yn3pq\\_Qes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9Yn3pq_Qes)

3Paws has visited only once this week, very briefly. She must be busy elsewhere. I did manage to get a closer look at her last week and she's definitely feeding cubs. They will be above ground now. They rely solely on milk for the first month but by now they will be taking solid food as well. Weaning can last several weeks for Fox cubs, but by 12 weeks old they will be following their mother to learn

where to find food for themselves. Maybe as they venture further from their den, I might catch a glimpse of them on my cameras.



3Paws is definitely feeding cubs

For more information on Fox cub development, click here:  
<http://www.thefoxwebsite.net/ecology/ecologygrowingup>

To find out whether I've seen the cubs yet and whether I've carried out any of my grand plans for a pollinator paradise, check back here next week.