

THE LONGHIRST WILDLIFE PROJECT

Introduction

We are creating the Longhirst Wildlife Trust as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and have already submitted a bid for a Natural Heritage Grant to get things moving. A small Steering Group of volunteers has been formed and will be meeting regularly to take the Project forward.

The Longhirst Wildlife Project

An important part of the project is to involve as many of the residents of Longhirst, young and old, in what we hope will be a community wide effort to enhance the wildlife and environment within the Parish. We know that there are plenty of activities already taking place from gardening for wildlife to bird feeding to management of Paddock (Millennium) Wood and other areas, but there's plenty of room for more!

To this end, the members of the steering group have agreed that we will send out four newsletters a year, on a seasonal basis. That way we can give you all information and help with what to look out for and what to do or plan when.

Here are a few short paragraphs about things we could be doing now as winter approaches or planning for early next year.

Habitat Log Pile Factsheet

Woodruff Wood

A topical issue to start us off! We're sure many of you will have suffered damage to trees and shrubs in your gardens during the recent storms and will have a quantity of fallen wood. What to do with it all? The owners of Woodruff Wood have produced this factsheet encouraging us to build log piles in quiet corners of our gardens. Perhaps this might be one answer to the problem.

Why have a log pile?

- A log pile is a great way of making your garden wildlife friendly. It will support mosses, fungi, invertebrates, amphibians, birds and small mammals.
- As Britain was once covered in woodland, many of our native species use wood as a natural habitat. Today, only 13% remains as woodland so a log pile provides these species with an alternative haven.
- As long as you are careful not to cause too much disturbance, a log pile is a hands-on way for children (and that includes the big kids amongst us) to learn all about mini-beasts and natural history.

- Once in place, a log pile requires no maintenance. Leave it to gradually rot down and the wildlife will benefit enormously.

How to build a log pile

- A log pile is a stack of logs arranged either vertically or horizontally. Each one is unique – you get to design your own using available materials and in your preferred location
- Ensure the logs are responsibly sourced – don't remove them from the wild (they are providing a valuable habitat where they are). You may already have some in your garden or perhaps family and friends have some available following tree work in their gardens?
- If possible, use different species of native hardwood logs – this will encourage the widest range of wildlife.
- Choose a semi-shady spot – most log pile inhabitants prefer damp conditions out of full sunlight.
- Do not use treated wood or timber as it contains chemicals which may harm wildlife.
- To build a horizontal log pile:
 - Stack logs of top of each other (with logs running in the same direction)
 - Dig the bottom row of logs 5cm into the ground
 - A pyramid shape often looks more appealing
 - If necessary, drive some stakes into the ground to prevent the logs from rolling away
- To build a vertical log pile:
 - Dig a hole and place different length logs upright within it
 - A pyramid shape with the tallest logs stood in the middle is a good design
 - Bury the lower part of the logs ensuring they are secure

REMEMBER: GAPS BETWEEN THE LOGS ARE IMPORTANT AS THEY PROVIDE SHELTER FOR MANY ANIMALS

Caring for your Log Pile

- Very little maintenance is required – you may choose to water the log pile if there is a prolonged dry period.
- Fallen leaves, brash and plants can all be placed around the log pile to provide further habitats for wildlife.
- Planting may also enhance the appearance. Choose species such as ferns, primroses, snowdrops and bluebells which suit shaded conditions.
- Otherwise, do nothing and leave your log pile to rot down naturally – deadwood is good wood!



Now that the weather is turning cold, wet, dark and windy, this is the time that hedgehogs start looking for places to hibernate. Most hedgehogs have their first litter of young in June or July. This gives the young hogs plenty of time to fatten up for hibernation in October or November. Some hogs, however, have a second litter in September or even October. These hoglets are autumn juveniles and have only a short time before the weather gets cold and food becomes scarce. Hedgehogs need to weigh at least 500gms to survive winter hibernation.

Hedgehogs are nocturnal so those out in the day are displaying odd behaviour. Even though they appear lively and are rushing around, these hedgehogs probably need rescuing in autumn/winter. If out in the day, whether rushing about or curled up asleep they need rescuing or they are likely to die. Hedgehogs do NOT hibernate in the open. They make a nest of leaves etc and are completely hidden. Hedgehogs under 450gms (1lb) that appear to be hibernating (cold and in a tight ball) are suffering from hypothermia and must be rescued if they are to stand any chance of survival. As a general rule, from October, those under 450gms (1lb) should be rescued.

When gardening and clearing at this time of year be aware that your pile of unsightly leaves may be replicating the natural habitat of a hedgehog and some forceful raking can cause at best disturbance and at worst injury. Hibernation can take place quite late in the year and even be delayed into January. You might think it is cold but a hedgehog can still be wandering around when you are warmly tucked up.

At any time of year please put out fresh water. In winter it causes its own problems as it freezes but anything you can do will help. Also feeding at any time of year is a bonus and just might be enough to keep the hog alive but also increase its territory into your garden. Remember NO MILK, JUST WATER. I find chicken based cat food in jelly and cat dried food works well. Consider allowing part of your garden to grow wild with logs and leaves and cut a 5-6" hole in your secure fence to allow them in.

It is wonderful in summer to venture out around 11 pm and listen for them as they shuffle around and fight for courtship.

If you have any specific questions then feel free to contact me on 07850 066633.

Poisoning Pigeons in the Park

Mo Dewar

It's not a subject you'd expect to find in a newsletter about wildlife. If you're over a certain age, you'll recognise the title of Tom Lehrer's classic comic song. It's funny because the idea of deliberately harming wildlife is so outrageous. But that's exactly what we may be doing in our gardens.

Until 2005, trichomonosis was a disease largely confined to wood pigeons. Since then, it has killed 35% of the UK's greenfinches. Where did it jump species? Almost certainly at our garden feeding stations. Avian pox virus and avian salmonella are causing similar problems. Sick wildlife can't be treated, so disease prevention is vital.



If Longhirst is typical, one household in two puts out food and water for birds. Feeding stations that are not kept clean may harm the birds that visit them. Here are some tips for minimising the risk of infection:

- Avoid build-up of stale food; don't put out too much at a time.
- Regularly empty your feeders, wash them with dilute bleach, rinse them in clean water and let them dry before re-filling.
- Regularly brush your bird table, wash and rinse it as for feeders.
- Check the ground underneath and wash/brush away any spilled food and droppings. Regularly changing the feeder position will help to avoid a build-up on the ground.
- Empty and renew the water supply daily (it doesn't take that long!).

For useful information, or to report sick or dead wildlife in your garden, go to www.gardenwildlifehealth.org

Red Squirrel Conservation

Pauline Gilbertson

Our native red squirrel is one of Britain's best loved mammals but its numbers are sadly declining at an alarming rate. In the nineteenth century there were around 3.5 million reds but that number has plummeted to approximately 140,000 today (compared with 2.5 - 3 million grey squirrels).



The introduction of North American grey squirrels to the South of England in the 1890s had a devastating impact on our reds, which are now absent from all but a few isolated sites in the South. Greys out-compete reds for food; they can eat unripe nuts, which reds cannot digest, creating a shortage of food for the reds. Many greys carry the Squirrelpox Virus, which does not harm them but which causes the reds to die an extremely painful death within two weeks of infection.

Here in Northumberland - even on the outskirts of Longhirst itself - we are fortunate to still have small populations of red squirrels, and the Longhirst Wildlife Project would love to help them survive and thrive.



To report sightings of red and grey squirrels in our area, please email: sightings@madredsquirrels.com

Beekeeping

Peter Lovering

Many villagers will already be aware of the essential benefits that bees and other pollinators bring to the planet. The wildlife project will provide the opportunity for community beekeeping. There are two experienced and active beekeepers in the Village who are prepared to promote Honey Bees and beekeeping, and to assist in the establishment and running of a community apiary, if there is sufficient interest.



Coming up in the next issue: Habitat creation in gardens; beekeeping in spring; spring birds to look out for; more on hedgehogs and more!