

Sedlescombe and District Garden Society

Newsletter No. 63 – June (3) 2020

To continue our series on birds Look out for.....**Scruffy Tits**



Dense shrubs and hedges in the garden are very important to many birds at this time of year. They provide nesting and feeding opportunities plus, shelter/safety for many species.

Also at this time of year, some of our early breeding birds are going into moult and can look remarkably scruffy for about six weeks. Feathers age and wear out and virtually all our adult garden birds replace their feathers once per year. This process is called moult and usually takes place once breeding for the year is finished. For Tits who only nest once, that process is happening right now. For birds like Robins and

Blackbirds who may have several broods, this will normally happen later in the summer. Worn out feathers are not as efficient for flying or for keeping warm, and for most of our garden birds, a new set of strong, warm, feathers ready for winter is required. Most young born this year will only replace some of their body feathers, however some species will replace all of their feathers, just like the adults.



During adult moult, the feathers drop out one at a time as a new feather pushes the old out and grows into the space. In the wing this progresses in a sequence, starting near the middle and eventually reaching both ends. Often several feathers will be re-growing at once and you may notice a very jagged wing with feathers missing when the bird flies. The same process happens in the tail, and less noticeably in the body feathers which are also being changed during this time.

Although birds are able to continue flying during this period - (look up at the Jackdaws at the moment as they fly around and you will often see gaps in wings and tails) many of our small garden birds are very vulnerable during the moult. They can't fly as well as usual to escape predators or look for food and if it goes cold or wet, then keeping warm can be a problem. The process of moult demands lots of energy and having somewhere safe to hide and shelter, preferably near a food source, natural or artificial, becomes vitally important.

The wildlife friendly gardener can help at this time by growing a wide range of dense shrubs, flowering plants attracting insects and having areas of ground cover present. Natural food in the form of caterpillars, aphids etc will be taken, if present, so avoiding insecticides will benefit the birds and save you work!

Christine George

Below is a precis of a newspaper article. More serious than we usually produce but nevertheless interesting

A rising international force of rebel botanists armed with chalk has taken up street graffiti to highlight the names and importance of the diverse but downtrodden flora growing in the cracks of paths and walls in towns and cities across Europe. The idea of naming wild plants wherever they go – which began in France – has gone viral, with people chalking and sharing their images on social media. More than 127,000 people have liked a photo of chalked-up tree names in a London suburb.

France banned pesticide use in parks, streets and other public spaces in 2017 and in gardens from 2019, leading to a surge in awareness of urban wild flowers in the country. French botanist and campaigner Sophie Leguil, who lives in London, set up the More Than Weeds campaign to change perceptions of urban plants in the UK. She has won permission to chalk up Hackney's highways and make chalk trails to highlight the forgotten flora at our feet and is asking other councils to allow the same. "I've been wanting to do it on a larger scale, with permission, and I hope to get more authorities interested in creating trails. We talk a lot about plant blindness – what if putting names on plants could make people look at them in a different way? I despair at how sanitised London has become. Plants can be managed differently, with benefits – cost-saving, biodiversity, education."

In the UK it is illegal to chalk anything – hopscotch, art or botanical names – on paths or highways without permission, even if it educates, celebrates and fosters interest and knowledge in nature. A UK Plantlife spokesman says the charity could not condone breaking the law, but added: "The incredible response to graffiti plant names is astonishing and I think it's part of something profound. In a recent YouGov poll, just 6% of 16- to 24-year-olds were able to correctly name a picture of a wild violet. The same poll showed nearly 70% of respondents would like to be able to identify more wild flowers. One survey of pavements in Sheffield found 183 different plants, another in Cambridge found 186 species on walls. All these little micro niches build up to a wonderfully complex tapestry. Every flower counts and will be targeted by pollinators – a patch of nettles can be swamped with caterpillars. And

bird's-foot-trefoil, a not uncommon urban verge plant, is a food plant for more than 160 different invertebrates. If we change our perceptions and see the dandelion flower for what it is – an absolute lifeline to our bees in early spring – we might learn to love them more.” With less spraying and weeding, we might expect to see up to 400 plant species on walls and paths, he suggests. That is 10% of our wild flora richness.

A study by pollinator researchers revealed that many wild urban “weeds” rank very highly for the quantity of nectar and pollen each flower provides, often much higher than a variety of garden plants. The top trumps among the plants they measured included dandelions and their lookalikes – rough hawkbit, cat’s-ear and sow-thistles – plus ragwort, viper’s bugloss, mallows, self-heal, scentless mayweed, love-in-a-mist, wild mignonette, rosebay willowherb, thistles, creeping buttercup and poppies. Andrew Whitehouse, of conservation trust Buglife, said path and wall plants are also important as winter food sources when there is less blossom available for insects such as bumblebees. “Below the concrete, the roots create tiny microhabitats that support woodlice, worms, harvestmen, spiders, baby slugs and snails, which in turn become the food for birds and hedgehogs,” he added.

Cllr Jon Burke, of Hackney Council, which has gone pesticide-free in some areas and halved its use overall to increase wild flowers and boost insect biodiversity following public concern, said: “It is absurd that this chalking of plant names is criminal. It is something we welcome as an important and inspiring teaching tool for adults and children. How else will a kid ever know these names? The vocabulary of the natural world helps us access it, love it and desire to protect it.”

Just to warn you, chalking plant names in the UK is illegal without permission or “lawful excuse” and a rebel botanist could be fined up to £2,500 for painting or inscribing any picture, letter, sign, or other mark on a path, highway surface, tree or other structure.



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Our rainbow colour this issue is Indigo. A tricky colour. Blue, indigo and Violet tend to merge but I’ve done my best

This photo was sent in by Chris Stovold. He photographed this elegant creature from his flat window in Sedlescombe



A reader sent this pretty picture of a weed growing profusely in her greenhouse because she was unable to find its name. A knowledgeable friend recognised it as common centaury. A wildflower, but will cost you £1.50 to buy a plant! It was used as a herb in days past for gastric and liver diseases. Feel free to send in your questions and we will try to answer them.



What to do in June (2)



Towards the end of the month of June there are still things to do. Actually, there are always things to do in your garden.

1. Towards the end of the month start lifting bulbs.
2. Plant de Caen anemones for winter flowering. Plant out Arum lillies or stand existing plants in their pots outdoors for a summer rest.
3. Water plants and pools – finish planting aquatics this month for a display in their first season, keep water oxygenated in heatwaves and sultry weather by adding fresh water. Deal with aphids immediately, especially midges that eat lily leaves, but take care not to affect any fish. Remove algae. Remove blanket algae with a rake and leave it to dry at the side of the pond to allow creatures to get back into the water, then compost. Control surface plants to allow light to penetrate lower down.
4. Summer prune gooseberries, red and white currants (shorten this year's new growth to five leaves) and outdoor vines.
5. Feed established lawns and from now to October regulate the height of mower blades according to the weather. During drought mow less often, raise the blades and don't collect the clippings as these will help retain moisture. Also try to leave an area uncut to provide wildflower pollen and nectar for bees and butterflies and cover and forage for small invertebrates.
6. Put house plants outside, if possible, to benefit from light, warm rain. During dry weather stand pot grown plants in trays or saucers to catch run-off, thereby saving water and potentially reducing the amount of nutrients lost by leaching.
7. Take cuttings of pinks. Remove side shoots with 4 or 5 pairs of leaves, pull off the lowest pair and cut stem cleanly just below the joint where the leaves were removed. Insert up to 10 cuttings, to the level of the next leaves, in a 3.5 inch pot of well draining soil. You should see renewed growth after three weeks, after 2 more weeks you should be able to pot on or plant out the new plants.
8. African violets and begonia rex can be propagated by leaf cuttings and shrubs and early perennials that have flowered can be pruned from the end of June – the rule of thumb is if it flowers before the end June, prune in summer, if it flowers after June, prune in the spring.
9. Deadhead roses, cutting back to the first leaf below the flower or doing it by hand, (with gloves) using the natural breaking point below the flower to detach from the stem.
10. Keep an eye out for adult vine weevils in pots and containers, especially after dark, and pick them off to avoid them laying eggs that hatch into root feasting grubs.
11. Tomatoes. When plants have set seven trusses of flowers, indoors or 4 outdoors, remove the growing point of the main stem, leaving two leaves above the topmost truss.

No recipe this month as Strawberry time is coming up and the best thing to do with them is to just eat them as they are or maybe with cream, sugar, ice cream, yoghurt, crème fraiche, whatever is your choice. Messing about with them, with the exception of Eton Mess, doesn't really do anything to improve them. Mind you, if you have a glut, strawberry jam, if you are clever enough to get it to set, is a very good way of preserving them for the winter and is delicious on scones by the fire when it is cold and wet.