

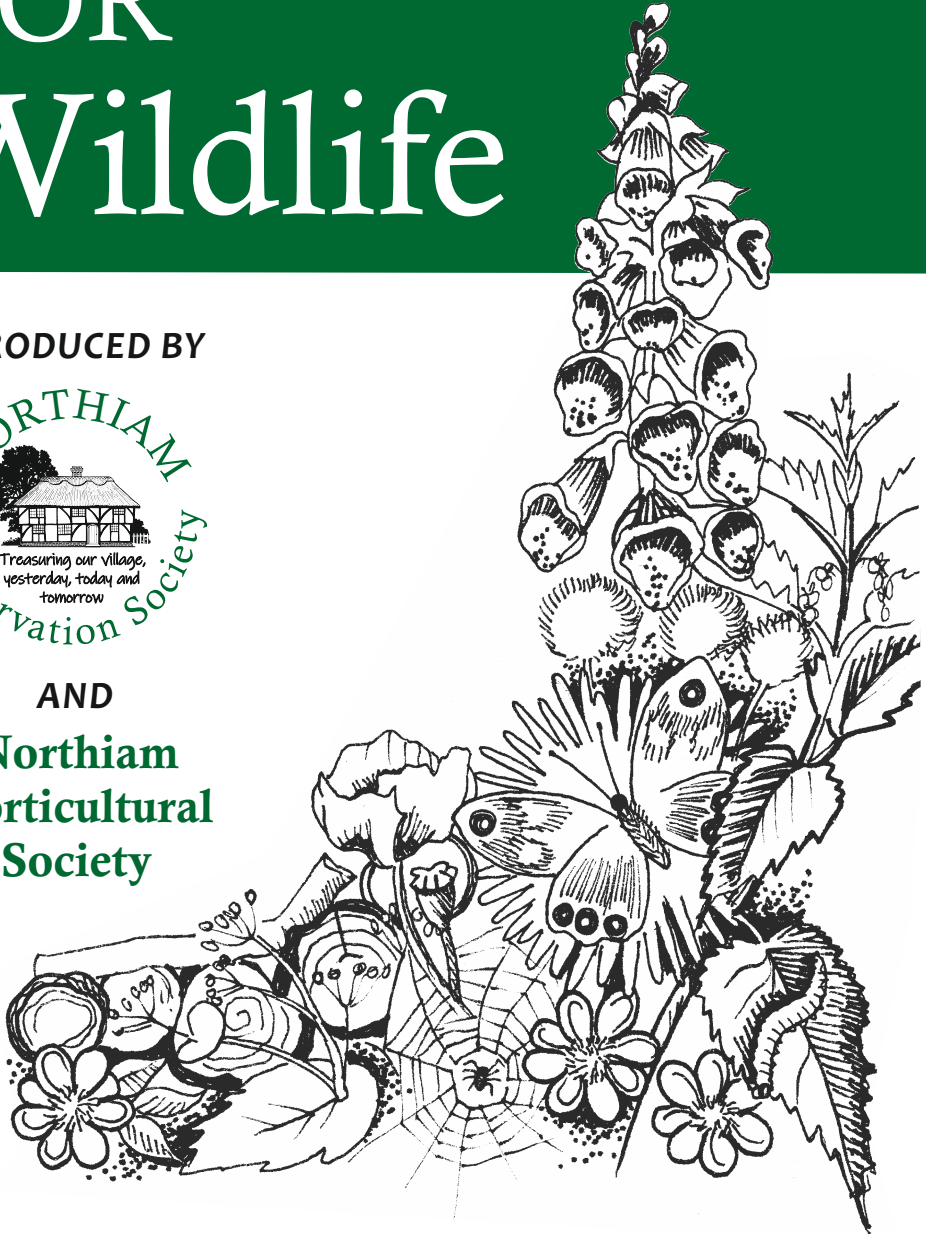
Gardening FOR Wildlife

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AND

**Northiam
Horticultural
Society**



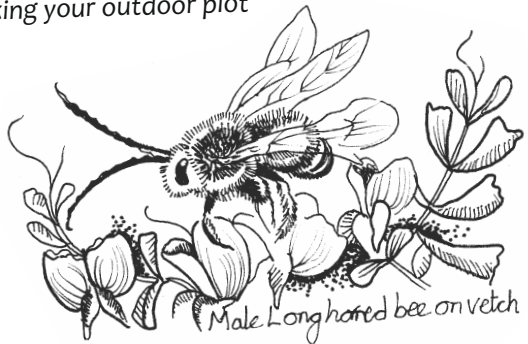
Dear Neighbour

The iconic garden at Great Dixter is well known for the way in which it merges the natural and the cultivated. Its wildflower meadows dripping with orchids, scattered ponds, old walls and changing flower borders provide a rich environment for all manner of animals and plants. In 2020 we published an extensive biodiversity study of the garden which has been regarded by some as the most important horticultural research completed in the last 10 years. It proves the importance of having a wide range of habitats, such as long grass next to short grass, woodland edges, ponds, and trees, and most of all the cultivated flower garden where the highest level of biodiversity is found.

Great Dixter is considered a 'Garden Nature reserve' by our lead ecologist. But the findings from Great Dixter directly relate to other gardens, large and small, and prove what an important resource these spaces are for conserving some of our most threatened wildlife. All our gardens, hedges and verges within the village can play their part, because every garden matters. Acting together, we can do something about the alarming rate of decline of biodiversity, so please get involved. Not everyone needs to do the same, some gardens will be tidier than others, some will have water, others will be dry, some will have log piles, others will hang insect hotels – every bit will help. I hope you will enjoy implementing some of the ideas in this leaflet, making your outdoor plot a haven for protecting and encouraging Northiam's wildlife.

Fergus Garrett

CEO Great Dixter



Illustrations by Dean Charlton

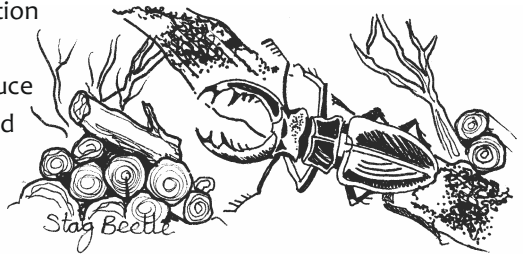
GARDENING FOR WILDLIFE

This leaflet comes to you from Northiam Conservation Society and Northiam Horticultural Society and gives ideas on some small changes you could make to the way you manage your garden that will encourage birds, mammals and insects to visit and live there.

This will help to look after Northiam's local wildlife, keep our valuable green spaces thriving and control garden pests by encouraging natural predators. From large gardens to window boxes, every home can be made more wildlife friendly.

Bees, bugs, flies & creepy crawlies

Needed by many crops to develop, key pollinators include bees, wasps, hoverflies and other flies, butterflies and moths and some beetles. Insects are so important as they are at the bottom of the food chain. If pollinators continue to decline it will have serious implications for our food production and our ornamental gardens. So where possible, avoid using insecticides, introduce plenty of flowers, wild and cultivated, and create different insect habitats.



Flowers and wildflowers

Many insects, especially bees, feed on pollen, so choose plants that provide pollen and nectar for as long as possible, from spring (e.g. crocus and mahonia) through to autumn (michaelmas daisy, sedum). Native ivy is one of the best wildlife plants of all, benefitting birds, mammals, butterflies, bees, hoverflies and other useful insects. Single flowers are better than doubles as pollen and nectar are more accessible.

Buddleia and verbena are particular favourites of butterflies, and plants with an open structured flower such as cotoneaster, lavender and fruit blossom are good for attracting bees. Moths will come to red valerian, honeysuckle and night-flowering stock. Wildflowers are very much in fashion now but a colourful display of whatever you like will encourage more diversity in your garden. The RHS website www.rhs.org.uk has a list of flowers for pollinators.

Hello birds!

Nesting boxes will encourage birds to breed in your garden; the RSPB website www.rspb.org.uk has information to help you choose the kind of boxes to put up. Site bird boxes out of strong sun and sheltered from the elements (and cats!), ideally before spring – ready for the breeding season.

Bird feeders will attract birds to your garden, either hanging from a branch or attached to a window so you can see the birds close up. Fat balls and seed mixes are ideal for attracting a range of bird species. A bird bath provides a water source for drinking and washing as well as making a pretty feature in your garden. Make sure your bird bath doesn't freeze over in winter and keep the feeding going year round.

Welcome mammals in

Make sure your fences and walls have gaps for small animals to pass through (13 x 13cm is ideal). Check for animals before you strim or have a bonfire and leave some areas undisturbed if you can.

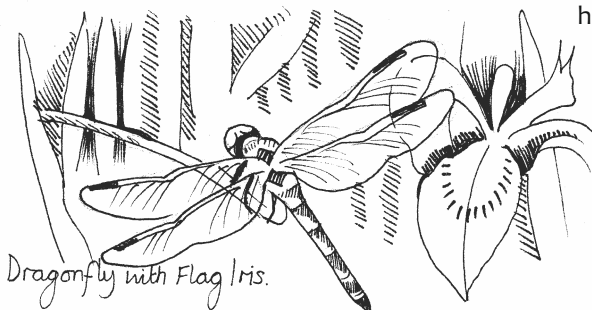
You can buy special feed for hedgehogs from garden suppliers. Make sure you leave out water as well. Steer clear of bread and milk which cause digestive problems for animals.



Water

Ponds are a magnet for wildlife, attracting frogs, newts, dragonflies and other insects, as well as giving water for birds and mammals. If you haven't got much space, you could use an old sink, or a bucket sunk in the ground will work. It's not a good idea to

have fish in a wildlife pond – they will eat anything that moves, and make sure ponds have at least one sloping side to allow creatures an easy way out. Ponds are a magnet for kids too, so always make sure a pond is safely fenced if you have children around.



Dragonfly with Flag Iris.

Hedges

Hedges provide nesting areas for birds and small animals, and corridors for small animals to travel under cover from predators.

Suitable hedge plants include buckthorn, cherry plum, elder, hawthorn, hazel and privet and then you can weave in climbers such as clematis, dog rose and honeysuckle, providing further foliage and flowers to boost the insect population and draw in birds. You can also grow white dead nettle, violets, wood anemones and celandine at the base of the hedge to attract nectar-loving insects. How neat you keep your hedge is a matter of taste, but avoid cutting it in the nesting season, usually March to August.

Trees & shrubs

A range of deciduous trees, shrubs and climbers will provide cover, nesting sites and food for birds in the form of flowers, fruit and seeds. Where possible, plant native trees as these support a broader range of insects, and go for species with fruit or flowers like crab apple, cherry, rowan, elder, blackthorn and hawthorn, or silver birch, yew, and alder. Willow trees are especially good if you have an area of damp soil. Planting a few trees or shrubs near each other will create more of a woodland habitat, drawing a wider range of wildlife.

A little bit of wilderness

Can you be a bit untidy? How about leaving an area of lawn to go wild to mimic a meadow – enticing shrews, voles and other mammals that feed on grass or insects? Wildflower meadows are especially valuable. You could join in with 'No Mow May', and a variety of different lengths of grass across the garden provides habitats for different insects. A small patch of nettles offers nectar for insects.

In your veg patch, tolerate a few nibbled leaves – caterpillars are the next generation of butterflies and valuable food for young birds.

A pile of dead wood, leaves and twigs in a shady spot will encourage beetles and grubs, which in turn will attract larger foragers such as stag and bark beetles, and many species of fungi. Piles of stones also make a good habitat, particularly for hibernating lizards, slow worms, grass snakes, frogs and toads. Big natural logs or larger stones are best, ideally partly buried as a rustic feature or you can tuck them

Avoid chemicals

Synthetic pesticides and garden chemicals are toxic to more than the pests they target, and they are also extremely energy intensive to produce, so avoid them if you can. Nature has its way: birds eat slugs, snails, grubs, wireworms, and caterpillars; hedgehogs eat slugs and snails, beetles and insects; frogs and toads eat slugs, snails and various insects, and ladybirds and lacewings eat aphids such as blackfly and whitefly. So the best form of pest control is to use nature's own checks and balances, and a garden that's diverse in wildlife will do that for you.

out of sight. Leave at least a few perennial plants uncut over winter as their hollow stems can shelter hibernating insects.

Make compost

Composting your garden waste helps all your garden plants and wildlife, as it speeds up the natural recycling of nutrients. Compost makes for healthy soil, which is good for everything living in it and growing on it and it's an excellent mulch to improve your beds and borders. It's free, easy to produce and compost heaps also shelter many small creatures (and some larger ones, like slug-loving slowworms and grass snakes), which enjoy the heat released by decomposition. Open-sided bins or heaps will allow them in.

**Thank you for doing your bit to make Northiam
a wildlife-friendly place!**

