

Sandringham Flower Show 2008

Passion for the Wild: A Naturalist's Garden

Entitled *Passion for the Wild: A Naturalist's Garden*, the informal country style of this courtyard garden demonstrates that even a small space, when carefully designed, can be both full of flowers and a paradise for wildlife. A simple path crosses the pond and gives access to all areas of the garden, and even a committed naturalist would need to look no further for ideas and inspiration than the birds, butterflies, moths and pond creatures that abound there.

Shady Corner: encourages the more primitive 'lower' plants – ferns, mosses and lichens

Mini Bog: a fascinating habitat in miniature

Young Silver Birch:

a replacement for the dead veteran, and a song post for birds

Perennial Tussocky Grasses:

shelter for invertebrates and small mammals

Nectar Bar: wild and cultivated flowers attract bees and butterflies

Pond Dipping: everyone's favourite hobby

Marsh: hideaway for amphibians and full of native plants to encourage insects

Pond: a superb habitat, water is essential for all life

Summerhouse and Outdoor Study: displaying treasured plants and other specimens

Moth Manger: night-scented plants to attract moths

Silver Birch: an old and broken trunk provides a natural insect hotel

Hot Spot: for sunbathing

Beach: birds and mammals can drink and bathe, and amphibians easily come and go

Wednesday 30 July

Adding to my fern herbarium earlier this evening, I was admiring the fronds of a particularly fine specimen of Lady Fern when I heard a commotion by the pond. Rushing for my net, I disturbed a cloud of Red Admiral and Tortoiseshell butterflies that had been feeding close by, and was just in time to witness an extraordinary event.

Two Blackbirds were perched on the large flints beside the pond, shouting their alarm call, over on the marsh a Hummingbird Hawkmoth was flitting around its favourite flowers and over the surface of the pond an early bat, probably a Pipistrelle, was caught in the jaws of a tiny Weasel. This was the first time I had recorded Weasel in the garden and I reached for my camera, dropping my net as I did so. The clatter disturbed the weasel which dropped the bat, who in turn flew up and ate the Hummingbird Hawkmoth, taking it from behind, so that its head, thorax and wings fluttered down slowly to land on the surface of the pond.

I returned to my studies, wondering what it was that had attracted the Weasel in the first place.

Wildlife Wonders

A garden such as this could attract as many as 44 species of bird, 10 species of mammal, 3 species of amphibian, 18 species of butterfly, 400 species of moth, 6 species of bumblebee, 12 species of dragonfly, as well as numerous other bees, flies, wasps, bugs, grasshoppers, slugs and snails, soil mini-beasts and a host of microscopic creatures....



The courtyard garden is peat free – the bogs and fens that are destroyed to provide horticultural peat are crammed with wonderful plants and animals. The compost and mulch used in the garden is from the Genie™ range, developed in association with the John Innes Foundation and kindly donated by Vital Earth.

