

Putting the Bee in Bracknell – Project update

Wildlife around your home

Have you noticed some of the changes around where you live? Working with the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH), Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) and Bracknell Forest Council, our grounds staff at Southern Housing Group have been making changes around the estate to encourage wildlife and increase biodiversity around your homes.

The estate already has some fantastic green spaces with plenty of wildlife and many of the changes are simply to encourage that wildlife by tweaking the current management – for example, not mowing certain areas so often so that some of the native wildflowers and grasses important for a wide range of pollinators and other wildlife can flourish. So if you see areas left uncut that are usually mown check them out for wildflowers and the great variety of insects visiting them.



Unmown areas around Jubilee Court ©Marc Botham

We are also adding plants to these areas to increase the range of wildflowers available which in turn will result in an even greater variety of insects, birds and mammals. We do this using small 'plug' plants of native species of plant sourced locally to fit in with the surrounding Bracknell wild habitats. Currently the main areas where this is taking place are around Jubilee Court. Look out for more of



Large white butterfly on knapweed ©Marc Botham

species such as Bird's-foot Trefoil, Common Knapweed, Oxeye Daisy and Wild Carrot in the summer and Cowslips in the spring. There are many other species as well. Not all will be as successful at establishing, especially after such an incredibly warm and dry start to the season in April and May which has had a huge impact on the growth of these plug plants. However, those established will hopefully flourish in the future and create a diverse habitat with lots of flowers to attract even more wildlife.

In addition to plugs we are also starting to establish some entirely new meadow areas. Such areas require more intense management in the early stages including completely clearing what is already there and more regular mowing in the first couple of years to allow different species to get a foothold. Sometimes these processes can look rather drastic but they are necessary to get towards the final goal of creating a beautiful, diverse and flower rich meadow habitat. You may have noticed a fantastic burst of colour as you pass Orchard Court on Mount Lane. Here we removed the struggling grass habitat in this area and re-seeded with a mix of wildflower and grass seeds known from the Bracknell area and including a range of annual species typical of old arable fields across the country. You may have noticed in particular the vibrant displays of Corn Marigolds, Corn Chamomile, Cornflowers and Corn Cockle in this area which looked absolutely stunning and have been attracting good numbers of butterflies, bees and hoverflies. These annual species only last a short time and require continued disturbance for their seeds to germinate each year. Their colourful flowers are great resources for pollinating insects and they provide a great display for part of the year. However, as the area succeeds these species will become less and less common and the perennial species will start to establish and this area will change throughout the year and from year to year as different species get a foothold. As the annual species start to be replaced look out for species such as Lady's Bedstraw, Salad Burnet, Red and White Campions, Yarrow, and Meadow Buttercup as well as those already mentioned above around Jubilee Court.



Wildflower meadow early in season and late on when the flower heads have gone to seed ©Marc Botham

Not all of the plants have such showy flowers, but many are selected as they are important food plants for invertebrates, including the caterpillars of butterflies and moths as well as grasshoppers and crickets, beetles and bugs to name a few. Grasses are an important component of such habitats as they provide food and shelter and shape the structure of the habitat. Some grasses can become dominant and so we have also spread seed of Yellow Rattle, a plant which takes some of its nutrients from the grasses which in turn keeps their growth in check allowing other plant species a chance to establish and grow.

There are a whole range of other wildlife improvements ongoing and you can get more details on these, and those mentioned above, by contacting John Vince. Some of those you may have already noticed include:



New hedge planting ©Marc Botham



Infilling gaps in hedges with native hedgerow species such as Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Hazel – hedgerows are incredibly important habitats for a wide range of wildlife. Birds use them for nesting sites and many of the hedgerow plants provide fruits and nuts as well as attracting invertebrates all of which birds and mammals feed on.

Holes in stumps – this may look weird, but many invertebrates including a wide range of solitary bee and wasp species, use holes in dead wood. These holes will be used by these important insects. Like the wood piles and bug hotel, we need to also provide suitable nesting sites for all the invertebrates as well as the flowers and plants on which they feed

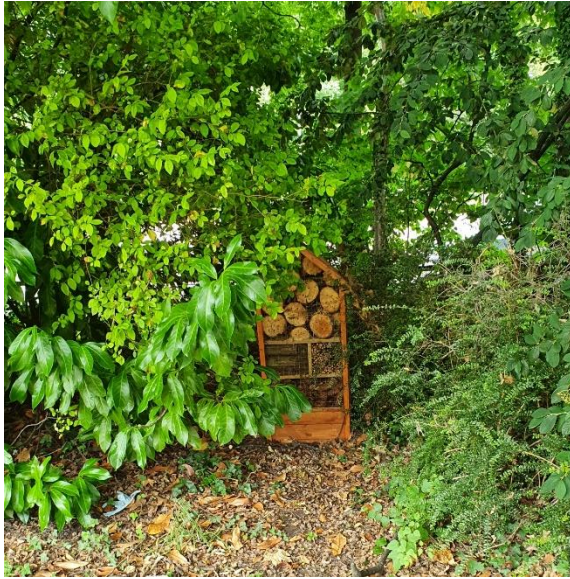


Holes drilled in stumps ©Marc Botham

Dead wood piles – these are important for a wide range of wood feeding invertebrates and as shelter for lots of different wildlife. This includes the nationally scarce Stag Beetle which can be found in suitable habitats around Bracknell. This impressive beetle requires dead wood in which its larvae spend several years feeding.



Log pile ©Marc Botham



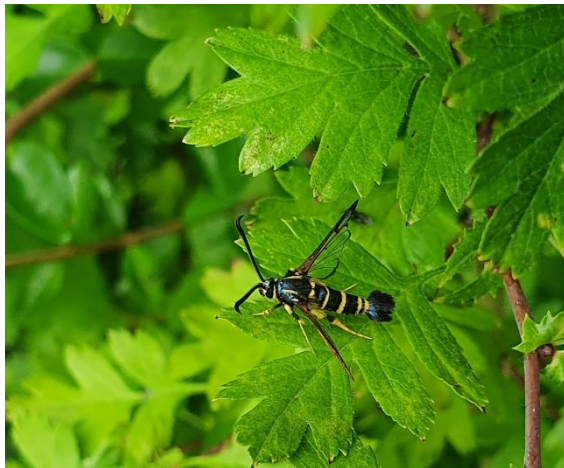
Bug hotel ©Marc Botham

Bird and bat nesting boxes on trees and buildings around the estate



Bird nest box ©Marc Botham

And here are some of the beautiful insects we saw when we surveyed the site on 4th August



Nationally scarce Yellow-legged Clearwing moth
©Marc Botham



Common carder bee
©Marc Botham



A hoverfly - *Myathropa florea*
©Marc Botham

Of particular interest to ecologists are these fantastic Yellow-legged Clearwing moths. They are day active moths which mimic wasps to offer them protection from predators. They are classed as nationally scarce insects so are great to see thriving on the estate. They are likely to be feeding on the oak trees around the site, although they will use other tree species too. We would love to hear what wildlife you find on site. If you have a smart phone or computer, you can enter your records of plant and animal species directly to iNaturalist <https://www.inaturalist.org/>, an online platform that identifies species through a community of biological recorders.