

Maria Himsworth's Chillenden Blog

November 2021

A Pollinating Buzz in my Rural Garden - A monthly look at how my rural garden is enjoyed by pollinating insects



At This time of year our wildlife gardening thoughts are often on next year as we pack away our tools and let the garden go to sleep for winter. The only noticeable activity is the wind blowing the leaves across the lawn into the flowers beds and the birds searching for bugs amongst the litter. My windowsill bird table provides me with plenty of wildlife action without even stepping outdoors. Of course, birds that visit the garden are also attracted to a healthy environment that is chemical free with piles of leaves, dense hedges, seed heads and long grassy areas where they can hunt for insects. I have a huge population of Sparrows and Blackbirds that when not squabbling at the bird table are doing just that.

What was buzzing in November?

Early November was still mild and there were plenty of Buff-tails (*Bombus terrestris*) buzzing around in the garden both workers and queens and hoverflies still appeared to be active. As the month moved on the light levels seemed to deteriorate rapidly and so did the bees and by the end of the month the only pollinators around seemed to be the odd Honeybee.

In my garden in rural East Kent some autumn flowering species were still in bloom for most of November but as they disappear there does seem to be a gap before I start to see the true winter flowering species start to blossom such as Mahonia, Hellebores, primroses and all of the early flowering bulbs, although my Winter flowering Jasmine has just started to bloom in the last few days of November. Autumn flowers that managed to hang on for the whole month were *Salvia amistad*, *Salvia greggi* (such a great long lasting pollinator plant that comes in so many colours), *Scabiosa ochroleuca*, *Lobelia vedrariensis* and *Salvia Corrugata*. Some of these are a little tender and go from flowering to being mulched or even wrapped up for winter. Another shrub that



puts on a good show for pollinators in November is my Violet Hebe which has plentiful flowers for hungry pollinators.



Geranium rozanne, Salvia greggi, Hardy Fuchsia, Winter flowering Hebe, Winter flowering Violet, Scabiosa ochroleuca, Salvia corrugata, Lobelia vedrariensis

It is the time of year to plant trees and last year I added an *Arbutus unedo* (Strawberry Tree) and I was so pleased and surprised when it was dripping with flowers well into November, I am sure it is going to be a useful late flowering addition to the garden. The last week in November is also the Tree Councils 'National Tree Week' where they support many activities nationwide and you can find lots of tree planting tips here

<https://treecouncil.org.uk/take-action/seasonal-campaigns/national-tree-week/>

Trees are an incredible food source for so many pollinators especially in the early spring when many species can offer a profusion of blossom for them to forage on. Trees are also an important food source for the larvae of Butterflies and Moths.

It is also a good time of year to plant a new hedge. Using a hedge instead of a fence in a garden will provide you with screening and privacy without blocking the highway for wildlife. At the same time as providing you with privacy it is invaluable for pollinators and not just for any flowers they might produce. Hedges provide protection and overwintering places for many insects and for caterpillars it is often their source of food. A mixed hedge will obviously attract the most diversity of wildlife and species such as Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Hazel, Privet and Spindle can offer so many benefits. In my garden I have a Beech hedge which is mature and dense providing protection and nesting for so many birds around the whole of the garden. I take advantage of its cover by allowing native nettles, ivy, Clematis and Bryony ramble through it which is great for pollinators and not being particularly attractive can also be well hidden in a hedge. I also fill the gaps under the hedge with log piles and leaves which is a good place for over wintering insects and provides a home for hibernating hedgehogs and mice too.

I do sort out my herb pots in November and this year I needed to replace a large pot of Garden Mint which had mysteriously disappeared. When emptying the pot, I noticed a healthy population of caterpillars that I initially thought were Weevil grubs or Cut worms. After much investigation they turned out to be the caterpillar of the Ghost Swift Moth (*Hepialus humuli*) A rather stunning moth that is quite common in June and July. The female unlike most moths lays her eggs whilst in flight, scattering them randomly. Caterpillars will then appear from July. The caterpillar larvae can take two years to





Ghost Swift Moth Caterpillars (Hepialus humuli)

mature. They spend this time in the soil munching away at perennial plant roots with a preference for Common nettles and Docks they will however also eat perennial flowering plants such as Michaelmas Daisy. So I decided to take them on a long walk to deposit them in a road verge full of lovely Common Nettle!

Toads naturally prey on insects and finding Toads in your garden is a good indication of a healthy environment. Not using pesticides and herbicides and building healthy soil is often rewarded by a greater diversity of wildlife that in turn will help to keep your unwanted pests at bay. So as you can imagine I was delighted to come across a young Toad in the garden this month. Hopefully I have a good amount of damp hiding places to keep it happy and maybe it will breed here, who knows!



Common Toad (Bufo Bufo)

If you live in Kent don't forget to keep up to date with Kent's Plan Bee at https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/127531/october-2021-kents-plan-bee-newsletter.pdf and take a look at our Wild About Garden Adviser run workshops at Kent Wildlife Trust <https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/events?tags=259> there are some great online courses to about nature friendly gardening. And if you are doing your Christmas shopping and fancy something bee related then there is no better place to visit than the Bumblebee Conservation Trust Online Shop, sorted!

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