



SUNNYSIDE ALLOTMENT SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

www.sunnysideallotments.org.uk
email: info@sunnysideallotments.org.uk

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When I invited contributions for this edition of the newsletter e.g. a grouse, suggestion, photo, item for sale/donation I was pleased to receive three of the four and not a single grouse. Thanks to Lewis and Jayne Eckett for their account of working on their 'difficult' plot which makes interesting and amusing reading.

I notice the rooks nests steadily increasing in number as I drive down New Road so Spring must be here. Continuing the theme of birds I was fascinated to read a report of research which shows that crows remember the faces of people they don't trust and can hold a grudge for years against people who have treated them badly. And it really is the face that they remember as the experiments involved people donning face masks (eg cave man or Dick Cheney masks) as well as distinctive clothing. (New Scientist 30 January 2010).

Chris Locke

Chairman's Wildlife Report

Enthusiastic tenants are being recruited to augment the small team already working to maximise habitat on both sites. This group is co-operating with the SRT and the new warden of Birtchnell's Copse. The two Sunnysides link in with one of the important wildlife corridors mentioned in the local plan.

The aims of the team will be to maintain, create and encourage a good wildlife habitat on the allotment land while maximising its use for cultivation. The habitat will be both for pleasure and to encourage pollinators and predators to help the gardeners to increase crops and cut insecticide use. It will also inform and encourage tenants to play their part.

The original jungle of unlettable land which had a wide range of species acted as a reservoir for the local area as well as a refuge for species not normally found in urban and suburban areas. It is particularly important because the town has open space below normal for a town of its size.

As the land has been brought back into allotment use the bird count has dropped and the richness of the habitat has been significantly reduced. The old policy of leaving odd corners and plots has to be modified as there is no longer enough space. To maximise the effective use of space the group will initially be looking at completion of partial habitats.

Contrary to popular belief many species are totally habitat specific. Butterflies need a source of nectar when the adults arrive or emerge in spring, a food plant to lay eggs on and shelter to survive the winter. The cabbage white butterfly will feed from most nectar sources and its caterpillars will gobble up any member of the brassica family. If cabbage were banned from the allotment they would eat brussels and broccoli without suffering any drop in numbers. In fact one strategy for keeping them off the brassicas is by planting nasturtiums which they are reputed to prefer. Others are horribly particular and cannot breed unless their needs are met. The brimstone's caterpillars for example only eat alder buckthorn, an uncommon and dreary plant. No alder buckthorn – no Brimstone however much nectar and shelter there may be.

We are collecting information about such habitat needs so that we can assess and take appropriate action as a holding operation. The first step we have taken is to plant alder buckthorn on a small area near the Grantham Mews gate. This was scoured by Fred when the rabbit fence was completed. This is being planted by the SAS over the winter as a wild life area as it is unsuitable for normal cultivation. With the planting of alder buckthorn the brimstone butterflies habitat is complete and we should in time get them back to normal numbers.

Some preferred habitats and food plants are not popular. Some of our most beautiful butterflies need nettles as a food plant. Not in shady corners where no one cares but on the best soil and the sunniest places. Others like rough grassland with the stalks left on from the previous summer which is anathema to the tidy minded.

After sounding out opinion at our AGM in November we shall be trying to make our wild areas look as if they are a bit more managed with labels explaining what is going on. This will educate and attract new people to increase the expertise of the group in some areas

It is likely that a group will be set up to enable funding to be sought. At the moment all money comes from the pockets of interested people and the SAS.

Freda Earl



Working Parties 2010

Working parties are held on Sundays during the winter months to do general site maintenance jobs which improve the allotments for the benefit of everyone. The more people who take part, even for an hour or so, the lighter the tasks and the more we can get done. It is a good way of meeting other allotment holders and lunch is provided. The next one will be at the beginning of November.

The January event was cancelled because of snow, but in February a select band concentrated on work in Birtchnell's Copse. This is a nature reserve owned by the Town Council on what used to be allotments, managed on their behalf by a volunteer warden. The recently appointed warden is an allotment holder, Andrew Calderwood. We planted a young oak tree donated by Jane Dickinson to replace one which had been destroyed, and we cleared an area of bramble designated for future hazel planting. More bird boxes were installed.

After lunch, we turned our attention to the area at the entrance to Sunnyside Old by Grantham Mews. For a long time this has looked messy. We had it cleared and levelled when a digger was working on site, and it is being planted to provide early and late flowers for butterflies and bees, and berries for birds. We have also planted a communal Bramley apple tree which will hopefully provide a good crop which we can all share in the future. In February we planted a hawthorn hedge. (We are looking for michaelmas daisies and other later flowering perennials if anyone has any to offer).

In March there were more of us and we were able to get a variety of jobs done. Two new noticeboards (made by Ted) were installed on Sunnyside New, and metal and plastic rubbish was cleared from the green roadway at the SE corner of the site. The wooden barrier outside the SSN gate was also repaired. The inside of the toilet on SSO was redecorated and we started to creosote the Tea Hut. We also continued to plant up the area by the Grantham Mews gate with cotoneaster horizontalis, foxgloves and pyracantha.

Angela Wheeldon

Allotments Information Pack

All tenants are entitled to an Information Pack. If you were not given one of these when you signed up, you can either collect one from the Town Council or you can read it online on our website:

http://www.sunnysideallotments.org.uk/?page_id=248

Future Events

Barbecue Saturday 26th June

Open Day Sunday 15th August



Please Note: To offset rising printing costs, an electronic version of future editions of the newsletter will be sent to all those people that supply an email address to Jenny Sippings – (jenny.sippings@ntlworld.com).

Developing a 'Problem Plot'

It's been over a year since John Driver helpfully suggested we take on a 'problem plot'. I still don't know if he was having a laugh or whether he saw a glint of something (madness) in our eyes. Either way, C27 on Sunny-side Old is finally starting to look like an allotment again.

It's been hard going though, what with the removal of a mass of mature brambles and the digging out of seven trees - most of it by hand. But it's been worth it. Bramble removal is particularly satisfying. It's such a dishonest, pernicious, chav of a plant that I get a real kick from trailing a root all the way into the clay subsoil and plucking it out in one piece. The pickaxe has been the weapon of choice to get underneath the 'spiders' (as I call the root mass) to lever them out of the soil. Then it's a case of forking, forking and re-forking the whole area. We did decide to leave a patch of bramble at the top of the plot because Peter next door said the blackberries had such great flavour. We're yet to see if that's true because after a severe pruning they refused to fruit last year. Hopefully they'll be back.

The trees were a different matter though and required a lot of digging around the root ball to get at the tap roots at the very bottom. Fortunately, hawthorn seems to quite shallow rooting - but even so it's a real commitment to get them out. We also had a big old conifer growing right on the path between us and our neighbours, which apart from being supremely ugly, was also casting a bit of a shadow. On the basis that it's not edible, myself and Simon (C23) fired up the chainsaw and set to. Fortunately we managed to coerce the tree surgeon regulars in The Boat to chip the bulk of the foliage for a 'drink' otherwise the resulting bonfire would have been visible from space.

We've left one tree in place for a bit of shade and also because it looks like it was planted there on purpose. It's

right in the centre of the plot and is a fruiter - possible some sort of cherry. We thought it was a crab apple for a while until it produced a mass of small, red fruits. If anyone knows what it is, please get in touch. Anyway, it looks pretty and when it gets too hot in the summer I'm going to enjoy sitting underneath it with a beer to cool off.

In a bid to get the bottom half of the plot ready for the season we've resorted to mechanisation and brought in a mini-digger. I realise opinions on this are polarised but to be honest it seemed the simplest thing to do. I'd been through beforehand and taken out the most obvious 'spiders' with the pickaxe, so it was just a question of breaking up the ground to get the fork in there for the fine tuning. It's made a huge difference and really cut down the time it would have taken to do it by hand. I appreciate some people might think it's 'cheating' but, you know what, I really don't care. We even managed to get the conifer stump and roots out too, which would have taken a team of Victorian navvies a week to accomplish.

Finally, a second greenhouse is on the way to replace the one we got from Freecycle. Bizarrely, the roof section of the original went walkies in between us building the base and preparing to bolt the structure back together again. There I was, spanner in hand and the side members in place, only to realise the top was gone. I had a walk round Old and New to see if anyone had 'borrowed' it for a cloche but no joy. I can't understand why anyone would just take the roof when the rest of the frame and the glass was lying there too. Weird. So that's it, we're almost there. Thanks to everyone who came up to say encouraging things and offer advice. It's been good fun and great exercise.

Lewis and Jayne Eckett



Your current Committee Members

Chairman:	Freda Earl	865661
Vice Chairman:	John Eaton	865307
Secretary:	Jenny Sippings	865890
Treasurer:	John Powell	878640
Minutes Secretary:	Prue Schofield	878559
Newsletter Editor:	Chris Locke	877326
Other members:	Nick Hood	878331
	Rachel Lyon	876311
	Annick Mulcahy	862572
	Andy Walker	07966 245732
	Angela Wheeldon	874440
Associate member:	John Driver	862734

A timely reminder from Ben McGregor, our neighbourhood PCSO:

The Berkhamsted Safer Neighbourhood Team would like to take this opportunity to remind all allotment holders the importance of keeping their sheds locked and secure and their tools and garden equipment out of sight. With the change of clocks and lighter nights there is an increase in the number of shed break-ins, and tools/equipment being stolen.

A poster has been placed in the Tea Hut with some crime prevention advice and contact details should you wish to report any suspicious activity in the area of your allotments.

If you see any suspicious persons or activity please contact us on **0845 33 00 222**

Please keep your paths clear

It is the responsibility of all tenants to keep the paths bordering their plots clear and to remove stones or any other obstacles that could cause a hazard to others. Tenants are also required to keep their paths mown. If you have difficulty doing this then you need to talk to your neighbours to come to an arrangement.

Tenancy changes

<i>Welcome to:</i>	
Geoff Halls	A31B
Susie Longboy	C33
David Atkinson & Jane Wood	New 60
Michelle Ryan	New 42A, New 42B
Catherine Bennett	New 38
Stuart & Helen Brown	A15
Peter & Marie Young	A24B
Richard & Anna Thomas	A9A
Dabby Figueirido	New 70
John Driver	A4B, A6B
Ted Dyer	B19B, B21B
Mr & Mrs Henke	B27B

<i>Goodbye to:</i>	
Ted Dyer	A15
Fay Johnstone	New 62B
Michelle Marshall	New 1D
Angela Walsh	B20, B22
Adam Driver	A4B, A6B
Michael Barwise	New 60
Jim Ellisdon & Hazel Grimwood	A9
Peter & Rina Wheeler	B19B, B21B
Brenda Baynes	B27B
Lydia Stevens	New 3
Carla Griffiths	A24B
Michaela Burns	A31B
Kevin Walker	New 69
John Driver	C33

Free rotovator

Hannah on plot 66 (Sunnyside New) has friends living in Berkhamsted with a working petrol rotovator they no longer need. It's free to someone prepared to collect it.

Claire and Rob Kenney 01442 870549.

Damage to property on your allotment

If you have the misfortune to suffer damage to or theft of any property on your allotment please report this to the town council. It would be useful to copy the complaint to a member of the SAS committee as well.

Subs for 2009/2010 (3.00) are now due and can be sent with this slip to John Powell (20 Castle Hill Avenue) or leave at the tea hut on B15. (Cheques payable to Sunnyside Allotment Society please). **If you wish to participate in the seed order scheme, subs must be paid by the end of May 2010.**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Plot Number: _____ Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Amount enclosed: _____ cash/cheque (please circle)