

The Journal

Nature Notes

Another quote from Sir David Attenborough: “If we and the rest of the back-boned animals were to disappear overnight, the rest of the world would get on pretty well. But if the invertebrates were to disappear, the world's ecosystems would collapse”. Too often, I think, we neglect the insects and other invertebrates, with many people thinking that they just don't matter. Pollinators, such as this Common Carder Bumblebee, are essential as they pollinate more than 80% of crop species in Europe, including most fruits and many vegetables. This service has an estimated value to the UK of around £690 million each year. On a much smaller scale, your garden flowers and vegetables largely depend on these pollinators. You can help them by providing flowers rich in nectar and pollen - nectar contains sugar for energy, pollen contains proteins and oils. Popular garden plants such as lavender, mahonia, honeysuckle, sedum, chives and any number of our native wildflowers will provide these essentials for a healthy bee population.



Many other invertebrates are essential as they help to recycle decaying vegetable matter thereby increasing soil fertility and improving its structure. Initially, fungi and bacteria break down the softer material before worms, insects and crustaceans tackle the tougher material. The Common Rough Woodlouse is probably the commonest crustacean in the garden, regularly found under logs, rocks and any other debris. Over the course of the year, they will feed on decaying wood, leaves, fungi, fallen fruit and animal remains, thereby performing a vital role in keeping your garden tidy. This woodlouse can tolerate many different conditions and has now been transported all over the world.

One other way in which invertebrates can help you is by predation on garden pests. Aphid colonies are a serious problem in many gardens, but they are eaten readily by a number of other insects such as ladybird and hoverfly larvae. Each female hoverfly can lay up to 100 eggs and the larvae immediately begin feeding on aphids when they hatch. It has been shown that a well-established population of hoverfly larvae, as shown here, can control up to 80% of an aphid infestation, so although they may not be the prettiest of animals they certainly contribute to a healthy garden.



So you can see that ensuring a healthy garden, with pollinated plants, all the debris tidied away, and many of the pests removed, can be achieved with nothing more than a thriving population of invertebrates. All this can be achieved at little expense by filling your garden with plants that have flowers rich in nectar and pollen and, more importantly, by giving up pesticides. This will allow the useful invertebrates to build up their populations. If you would like to know more about invertebrates, the charity Buglife has an informative website (<https://www.buglife.org.uk>).