

The Journal

Nature Notes



Early spring is often a bleak time for wildlife watching, but it is a good time of the year for improving your garden. The catastrophic decline in insect species over recent decades has had a major impact on our wildlife, and not just for the insects themselves, but also all of the birds and other larger animals that rely on them for food, and the plants that need insects for pollination. One of the best changes you can make is to provide a pond - not necessarily a large one, even an old sink will make a noticeable difference. There is no need to stock it with wildlife as many species will appear on their own within a few months. Dragonflies (such as these Common Darters) and damselflies will soon turn up, as well as bugs such as Water

Boatmen, Backswimmers and Pond Skaters. Various water beetles and larvae of other insects will undoubtedly also put in an appearance.

Another way to help wildlife of all sorts is to stop using chemicals in your garden. Most pesticides are indiscriminate, killing a wide range of animals in addition to the pests that you are trying to target; this includes vertebrates, such as birds and hedgehogs that eat the animals that you have poisoned. Often the unintended victims of pesticides are insects that would have proved beneficial in the garden, including the gardener's best friends - the pollinators. Bees and Hoverflies can easily be wiped out in your back garden, leaving virtually nothing to pollinate the majority of your flowers and vegetables. The Hoverfly larva, shown here feasting on Whitefly on my kale plants, spends its time relentlessly eating aphids and other damaging insects. I lose a small proportion of my crops to pests, but in exchange I get a much healthier garden with lots of pollinating insects, and



fruit and vegetables free of toxic chemicals.

A third way of helping wildlife is to plant a range of native plants. Our native plants and animals



have evolved together with some species of insect depending on a single plant species. Many native plants look good amongst your usual array of garden varieties - for instance Foxglove and Red Valerian (shown here) make an attractive addition to the borders. They will guarantee regular visits by native insects keen to stock up on the nectar and pollen usually provided in abundance by these plants.

There are plenty of other things you can do to help wildlife, often at no expense and very little effort. If you have a range of habitats in your garden, such as a log pile, an area of long grass (mowed only once a year), or a patch of bare earth in a sunny location where solitary mining bees can nest, the biodiversity in your area will increase

considerably. A simple compost heap will reduce the amount of domestic rubbish that you have to get rid of as well as providing a haven for insects and other wildlife. Your reward will be the opportunity to sit back and enjoy the wealth of beautiful animals attracted to your own little nature reserve.