



Wild About Barrow

Autumn 2023

It's hard to believe it's now autumn with the wonderfully warm weather we've enjoyed recently, and more forecast. The nights are noticeably drawing in however, so there is no doubt where we are on the orbit around our star. Most of our wild plants have finished flowering and most of their seeds will have already germinated. However, some such as meadow buttercup, ribwort plantain, self heal, yarrow and a few other stalwarts give us joy, flowering into October. More importantly, their nectar feeds those insects that are still around.

New Wildflower Bed

You may have noticed a colourful welcome to the main entrance of Millennium Park this summer. Seven volunteers came along to help sow wildflower seeds and plant some wildflowers, resulting in a wild profusion of flowers this summer. So a big thank you to all who helped.

The seeds were a mix of annuals and perennials. They included yellow corn marigold, white daisy-like corn chamomile and purple corn cockle. The name 'corn' harks back to an earlier time when these plants were once abundant in cornfields throughout Britain. Being annuals, it fitted in well with the harvesting time: they flower and set seed in one year. Next year we can look forward to the perennials flowering as well.

Wardens

Wild About Barrow is very pleased to announce that we have warden to oversee the care of 2 wildflower areas. Kathryn Green, who helped seed the new Millennium bed, has volunteered to be the warden for it too. The other warden is Lesley Mennell. She helped enrich the biodiversity of the Cotes Road verge earlier this year and has already organised its annual cutting. A big thank you to both ladies and welcome to Wild About Barrow. If you would like to help improve the wildlife in Barrow through volunteering or becoming a warden please contact wildaboutbarrow@gmail.com.

Wild Celebration



Spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*)



Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)



Redshank (*Persicaria maculosa*)



Water forget me not
(*Myosotis scorpioides*)



Immature Heron
(*Ardena cinerea*)



Water mint with visiting bee
(*Mentha aquatica*)

Have you spotted any nature delights around the village? Send your photos to Wildaboutbarow@gmail.com or just let us know where you saw it and we'll take a snap.

We have a water theme this time and all the above pictures were taken on a walk from the Navy along the riverside towards Sileby. At first glance, there doesn't seem to be much for insects at this time of year. However, a closer inspection reveals that the plants with their small, less showy flowers than the garden ones, are valuable sources of nectar for a range of invertebrates.

The Spear Thistle, with its striking radial symmetry, is found along field edges and other areas whereas the other plants are found in wet habitats. This thistle is the caterpillar food for the Painted Lady caterpillar and 10 other species of butterfly visit it for nectar including the beautiful Adonis Blue and Dark Green Fritillary. In late summer and into early autumn, Goldfinches are attracted to the seedheads for beneficial oils and fats.

All the above plants provide nectar for a range of insects. The **Water Forget-Me-Not** is loved by finches, bees and butterflies while newts lay their eggs in folded leaves.

Water Water Everywhere

We are defined by water in Barrow with the beautiful River Soar running the length of the parish and naming our village. We also have Fishpool Brook and other small drainage courses.

This year in Barrow we've been lucky: we have had enough rain, not too much and very little flooding. Plants have grown well, providing nectar food and shelter for our wildlife. It has also allowed our crops to grow and although rain in September has led to some wheat germinating in the ears, harvests are on, roughly, a 5 year average. Grass has also grown well for cows and sheep.

At the moment, it seems that water and its supply is not a problem, right?

We may think availability of water in our taps in summer and flooding in winter will be a concern in the future with climate change but we are already making high demands on our water supply through agriculture (especially beef production), food production, textiles and fashion to name some major users. Businesses and farmers abstract water from rivers, streams and groundwater, under license. World-wide, continuing water supplies are a concern.

But we also need to think about what is dissolved in it too. This unseen dimension has changed dramatically over the last century with changes to farming practices, industrialisation and in products we use in our homes.

Eutrophication

Well, there's a word you probably don't use every day, unless you're studying GCSE Biology!

Eutrophication is enrichment of water. It's caused by fertiliser washing into water courses and water companies sometimes releasing raw sewage into rivers and seas. This causes increased nitrate runoff into water courses and the sea.

This is what happens:

1. Fertiliser and raw sewage increases nutrients being washed into water courses
2. Algae and aquatic plants grow quickly, causing blooms, blocking out sunlight and even releasing toxins in some cases
3. Nutrients are used up so algae and aquatic plants die: bacteria use oxygen in the water as they decompose the dead plants
4. There is now little oxygen in the water, so fish and other water creatures die: the river is dead

So what can we do to alleviate the problem?

See 'What to Do' at the bottom of this page for a few simple ideas that will improve our planet.

Did you know?

- Only 14% of our rivers were considered to have a 'good' ecological status according to a 2022 House of Commons Committee report of the state of UK rivers.
It concluded that no river in England was free from chemical contamination.
- A single person household uses approximately 149 litres of water per day
- About 35% of our tap water comes from groundwater
- It takes 3,000 litres of water to make one hamburger!!!!

We use a lot of water, taking it from reservoirs, rivers and groundwater and the Environment Agency plays a major role in protecting water resources so that we have water sources for a variety of purposes including supporting a healthy wildlife, enhancing natural resilience to drought and for wellbeing and recreation. We need to care for the quality of our water sources and not use too much.

What to See

1. This is the time of year for fungi to produce their fruiting bodies. What can you find around the village? Do send your pictures to wildaboutbarrow@gmail.com for us to celebrate.
2. Look out for all the beautiful signs of autumn appearing – spiders webs heavy with morning dew, the changing leaf colours and how it varies with different trees, nature's fruitfulness with hips, berries, acorns, conkers ... enjoy the awe and wonder of this colourful season!

What to do

1. If you are a pet owner, one thing you can do is to flush the doggy doo down the toilet. This is the advice of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) who say that the sewage treatment plant will remove most of the pollutants before it reaches the river. Also, dog poop should never be used as fertilizer because it isn't the same as cow manure or chicken droppings, which both generally start out as vegetation and are considered effective at recycling nutrients back into the soil.
2. Something we can all do is to avoid using any detergents that contain phosphates. Start using phosphate free laundry detergents, dish detergents, and car wash supplies. There are many alternative products on the market these days which don't contain phosphates or other nutrients, but that work just as well.
3. As gardeners, we can consider the timing of applying fertilizer and check we don't over-fertilize to avoid run off into water courses or it being just washed into ground water. In fact, in a talk given recently, RHS award winning medallist Lucy Hartley, stated that we do not need to feed our borders at all!
4. Eat more plant-based meals. Quite simply, they're planet friendly!
The UN Environment Assembly says that plant-based burgers require:
75 – 99% less water;
93 – 95% less land;
generate 87 – 90% fewer emissions than regular beef burgers.

“A vegan diet is probably the single biggest way to reduce your impact on planet Earth”, said University of Oxford's Joseph Poore, who led the most comprehensive analysis of the damage farming does to the planet.

Think global: act local

Photographs by A. Rushton