



Wild About Barrow

Spring 2024

What a wonderful time of year Spring is, with all the joy and hope this season brings! Our village has burst into colour with the many blossom trees, primroses and other spring flowers. With the days lengthening and improving weather (hopefully), it is now easier to get out and explore the wild side of Barrow.

Making Space for Nature

Leicestershire County Council has launched a survey asking for peoples' views to help draw up the priorities to be included in the strategy 'Making Space for Nature'. This will identify locations to create or improve habitat and to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment. This is a chance to improve the biodiversity of our village and help the national and world nature crisis. The link for you to take part is given below in **What To Do**.

Bat Boxes

Following the very successful Bat Box Workshop last summer, the boxes are now installed around the village with some imaginative and witty decorations by their makers.

Bats have one of the slowest reproductive rates for animals their size. After mating in the autumn, fertilization is delayed until after hibernation which ends around April. Females give birth to just one pup a year. The boxes can only be opened by a licensed bat worker but you could look out for droppings, urine staining below the access and chittering noises from within on warm afternoons and evenings. Do be aware though that bats are vulnerable to disturbance and fully protected by law.

Hopefully, we will see an increase in numbers of this declining species in our village and delight in this unique mammal's evening athletic flight.

Cotes Road Verge

As with all wildflower meadows, the verge was cut at the end of last summer. After cutting, the arisings were gathered in by Barrow in Bloom volunteers and they filled 19 brown bins no less! This was a mammoth task and so, sadly, although it hosted at least 42 species of

plants and insects, it has been decided to reduce the area managed for nature. The new verge area to be managed lies in front of the wooded edge between the field gate and the fenced edge of the field on Cotes Road.



New Cotes Road verge

Lesley Mennell, our new warden, has already put into action plans to control the grasses with yellow rattle and enrich the plant species so we hope to increase biodiversity in a manageable way. Watch this space!

Wild Celebration



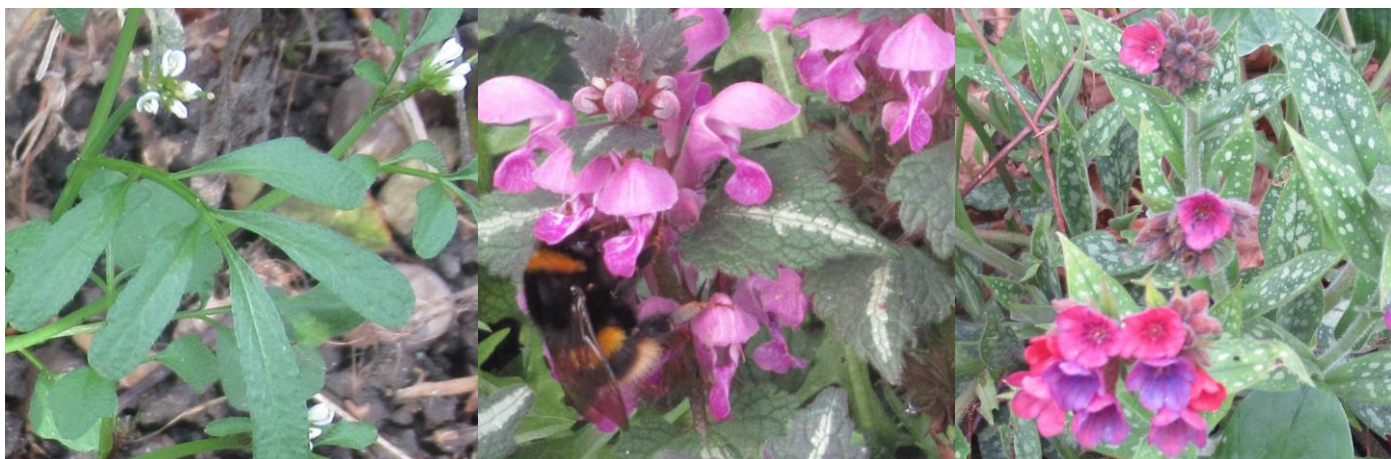
Primrose
(*Primula vulgaris*)



Salad burnet
(*Sanguisorba minor*)



Forget-me-not
(*Myosotis arvensis*)



Hairy bittercress
(*Cardamine pratense*)

Spotted dead nettle
(*Lamium maculatum*)

Lungwort
(*Pulmonaria officinalis*)

The spotted dead nettle clump, a garden escape, was found growing on Thirlmere Road and attracted several buff-tailed bees feasting on its nectar and pollen. The lungwort is also not a UK native plant but sustains itself in the wild without human intervention so is a naturalised herb. Both plants, though, are of great value to wildlife, proving nectar to hungry insects in early spring.

The hairy bittercress has tiny white flowers and can easily be overlooked by us but not by the orange tip butterfly, bees and other insects who visit it, not least because it flowers for most of the year. The seed pods burst explosively projecting the 20 or so seeds up to 1m away.

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.

Did you know?

- ❖ Primroses have two types of flower called 'pin' and 'thrum'. Plants have either the pin or thrum form. In pin flowers the stigma is at the top of the flower tube with the anthers positioned halfway down. Thrum flowers are the opposite, having the stigma positioned halfway down with the anthers at the top. This difference helps avoid self fertilization and so leads to greater genetic variation.
- ❖ Hairy Bittercress is a brassica, and therefore a relative of mustards and edible. It has a lovely cress-like flavour to add to a salad and, like cress, works very well with scrambled eggs or egg mayonnaise. Salad burnet is also edible, as the name suggests.

Pond Pleasures

I have renewed my overgrown and partly cracked pond and taken the opportunity to redesign it with nature in mind.

There were an enormous quantity of smooth (or common) newts lurking in my pond – there must have been well over 60! They were carefully scooped out with a fishing net and put in a large container of pond water until their new deluxe abode was ready. No wonder we only found 2 frogs – tadpoles are on the newts' menu.

Having researched creating a wildlife pond, I found these points useful:

1. **Most pond life** is found in the shallow marginal areas of less than 30cms and a lot in less than 10cms. A gradual slope will provide a safe drinking area and allow creatures such as hedgehogs to safely escape the pond.
2. **Reptiles** will appreciate a gravel area to soak up the sun.
3. **Don't share** pond plants or animals as it can spread disease and invasive species. Just look at the spread of pennywort in our river that is so hard to control. It is thought this non-native plant was a garden escapee, first identified in Leicestershire in 2004.
4. **Rain water** is by far the best for ponds. Tap water contains chlorine which will evaporate if left for 1 or 2 days but it also contains chloramines and nitrates. Nitrates cause excessive nutrients so encouraging duckweed and blanket weed which leads to a less healthy and diverse pond.
5. **Chlorine and chloramines** (both now added to our tap water) are toxic to fresh and saltwater fish, amphibians and reptiles. Products to remove these chemicals are available.

6. Planting up a Pond – the best bit!

The plants that provide the best habitat are those that create a diverse and complex structure at the water's edge.

The plants I chose (all UK native) include:

Floating plants:

Water soldier (*Stratiotes aloides*),
Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*)

Emergent Marginals:

Flowering Rush (*Butomus umbellatus*), Lesser spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*)

Marginals:

Brooklime (*Veronica beccabunga*),
Water plantain (*Alisma plantago*),
Marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*),
Water forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*)

Waterlilly: Pygmy waterlilly (*Nymphaea pygmaea Helvola*)

7. **Wildlife ponds do not need pumps or filters** and they can be harmful to creatures that get sucked in. Submerged plants, such as hornwort, add all the required oxygen to the water.
8. **Pond water doesn't need cleaning** (different advice applies for fish ponds but these are not wildlife friendly). It may become cloudy from time to time, usually after heavy rain, but this will settle after a few days.

If you put in a pond, or already have one, do let us know what wildlife you have in it and/or send photos. We'd love to celebrate your success. Send them to:

Wildaboutbarrow@gmail.com

What to See

1. **Take a walk** around the village and find the 15 newly installed bat boxes.
2. **Keep an eye on** our uncut grassy areas to see what wildflowers now have a chance to grow.

What to do

1. **Let the Council know** your views on how we can make space for nature at <https://surveys.leics.gov.uk/snapwebhost/s.asp?k=171137078709>
2. **As No Mow May approaches**, plant some wildflowers around the edge of your lawn or even dedicate an area of lawn for them – and of course, don't mow!
3. **All of the Wild Celebration plants** would be a great addition to your garden for wildlife. A warning about the hairy bittercress though: it does spread easily.
4. **Grow plants from seed.** Not only will you have enormous satisfaction from growing your own, but you will avoid buying plants which are grown in peat based compost. Defra has confirmed that while some peat-containing products will be banned from shelves in 2027, others will be exempt from a ban until 2030. Peatlands are precious habitats and store vast amounts of carbon so we need to avoid buying peat-based products.

Alison Rushton

Think global: Act local

All photographs by A. Rushton