

# Wildlife Gardening in Action

## CASE STUDY: Eco-Friendly Garforth Community Garden at the Lord Gascoigne



### Describe your garden/outdoor space before you started gardening with wildlife in mind:

Although the land had previously been used as an allotment, it hadn't been used for years and had become overgrown with thick blackberry briar. There were large amounts of broken glass, metal debris and rubbish, making it an unsafe place for people and wildlife. We got permission from the brewery and landlord to make it into a community garden in October 2023. It was so overgrown it was hard to get in! It was mostly brambles, thistles and nettles but there was a large Bramley apple tree dripping with fruit and a couple of other large trees on the boundary, a pear and a goat willow. There were four ramshackle sheds and two broken greenhouses so it was a bit of a health and safety nightmare with broken glass and rusty iron everywhere!

### How did you get started on your wildlife gardening journey?

We began by clearing a path into the garden to see what we were dealing with and initially thought we would just work half of the area up to a dividing ramshackle terrace. However, once



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we got started and there was a bit of room left in the skip for that terrace, we just carried on! We wanted to make it a good space for all sorts of people, to enjoy time together in nature



and learn about climate and wildlife-friendly gardening. Before we could open the garden to people safely though, there was a lot of waste clearance to do. Luckily our volunteer team kept growing from the original group of eight to a regular sixteen at our weekly sessions. The group includes retired people, working people on their day off, and young people between college and work. Working together and enjoying each other's baking at coffee time, people shared knowledge and skills and made new friendships.

We filled four large skips and did many trips to the tip between us as well, which took us six months – then we had our first open day in April 2024 which was very satisfying. On the day children planted strawberries, helped build a pop bottle greenhouse and did a quiz trail around the garden while we chatted and explained to their families what we were trying to do. One little girl brought an apple tree she had grown from a pip to plant in the garden and one of our volunteers led a drawing workshop helping people to really look at the garden and some of the things we had unearthed.



### What actions have you taken for wildlife in your garden/outdoor space and why?


We planted five new fruit trees to give blossom for pollinators and fruit for people and birds to enjoy. The mature Bramley meant cross pollination would be assured so that was encouraging. We dug a large wildlife pond to create a different habitat and improve biodiversity. We used a flexible pond liner and made sure to have a sloped access for mammals to be able to drink and get out of the water. We hit on the idea of using all the brambles we were cutting down to make a dead hedge to surround the pond, as a safety feature that doubles as a great habitat for insects and small mammals. This provides us with a sustainable way of dealing on site with tough waste that doesn't compost easily and will also be good for sunflower and sweetcorn stalks. We made sure to leave a hedgehog tunnel at one end. The site for the pond was chosen with a mixture of sun and shade in mind but may in fact be too sunny as there was a lot of blanket weed in the summer. It is early days, and it may just mean we need more aquatic plants so this is a learn-as-we-go area. We are really hoping for frogs this year as the pond wasn't completed until summer 2024 so we didn't have any last year. We did however have dragonflies and water boatmen, and the garden cats are frequent visitors to drink there.



Two of our team maintain a number of bird feeders on the large Bramley tree; we have long tailed tits, sparrows, robins and wood pigeons visiting regularly. Another team member built a large bug hotel with a green roof which provides a great talking point with children visiting the garden. She also built a herb spiral which should be good for pollinators too. We are working to enhance the planting in the garden to extend the season for pollinators and their larvae.



Our volunteer Angela, who is a nature journaling artist, is creating a dye garden:

 The dye garden will be a learning process. I have made my own inks for several years, and dabbled with using natural dyes, but I am not an expert. I will use this opportunity to learn and share the process with others."

#### **Angela, volunteer and nature journaling artist**

She also constantly draws our attention to wildlife, helping us to try and balance gardening instincts to tidy with nature's need to be undisturbed.

We've also built three compost bays from pallets and will be working on our composting this year.

#### **What resources or support have you used?**

There is a lot of knowledge within the team – experienced gardeners, bird watchers and a nature journaling artist, as well as inexperienced volunteers who want to find out more about gardening.

We also benefitted from team visits to the Kippax Wildlife Corridor and support from Victoria there, in terms of seeds, plants and encouragement. We had a great day out at Brunswick Organic Garden and the Archbishop of York's walled garden, which they manage. Mike, the land manager there, gave us a really good tour and was so knowledgeable about plants for wildlife – it was also a very beautiful garden.

We topped that off with a visit and talk from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's own Jo Rawson who was so encouraging, gave us great information to share and told us about #TeamWilder, which we're now part of and find really interesting. The Lord Gascoigne pub gave us room for Jo's talk which was very helpful and have supported all of our community events too. Crucially they also allow use of their loos for which we are truly grateful!



A neighbour to the garden had helped with electric and water supply as there is no mains water on site, but we have increased our water capture significantly over winter so hope to be self-sufficient this year. We have repurposed a lot of the salvageable elements we found on site and locally, including a lot of wood for benches, shelving and a raised planter. We have also been gifted plants from local residents' gardens.



#### **What differences have you noticed as a result of your actions?**

It's an amazing transformation of an inaccessible overgrown space with a limited range of plants for wildlife, into a people-friendly and hopefully increasingly wildlife-friendly, accessible and peaceful place to spend time in nature. The vegetable beds and wildflower beds provided lots of colour and interest and the toddler area has been well used by younger visitors. We aimed to make part of the plot accessible and are planting for maximum sensory benefit in this area with accessible planters and a wide path, although there is more to do. We have just completed a shelter to enable activities in the rain and provide shade too, as well as more water capture. The plot is bounded by houses along two sides, an alley on a third and the pub car park on the fourth so there is a lot of opportunity for people to see what is going on. We have only had positive feedback so far and practical support from two of the neighbours which has been really encouraging. We got to the point where we felt the garden was safe to make openly accessible and installed a gate at the entrance which is unlocked. We are now using the garden for monthly group activities and hope to host school visits too.

#### **How did it make you feel?**

Hugely proud of what we've achieved together and of the welcoming space it has become for so many people at the weekly sessions and other events. Excited about the prospects of using the garden to engage more people in enjoying the natural world around them and learning about sustainable living too.



**What have been your favourite nature moments or encounters with wildlife in your garden/outdoor space?**

*"Noticing a dragonfly camouflaged on the blackberries I was picking."*

Moira

*"Sitting in the garden and carrying out bird and wildlife counts."*

Dave

*"Nettles sting, and it hurts! But it's strange when you work with them how you begin to get used to the feeling. To understand the plants need for protection. I gathered, and got stung, studied, sketched and got stung, processed and got stung. I saw how the structure of the leaves changed whilst heating, and how a smell of iron was released. Dipping fabric into the essence of nettle, I saw a beautiful, delicate, soft green infuse itself into the fibres. Watching the ink slowly spread itself across a piece of watercolour paper, I learnt about the insects and animals that rely on this plant to survive, and found there were countless fairytales and folklore with nettles as one of the characters."*

Angela



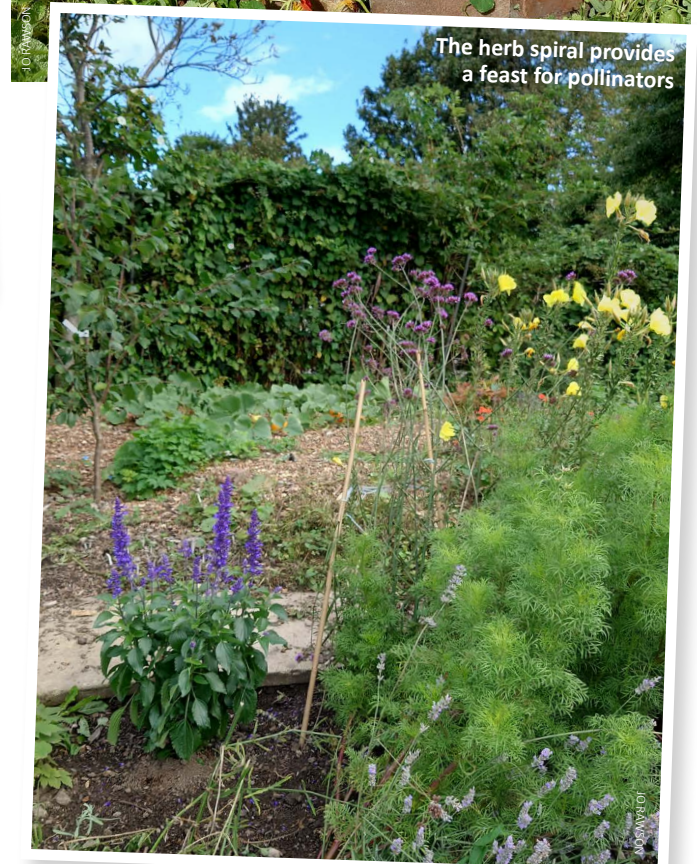
Angela Hennessy, nature journaling artist:  
[www.angelahennessy.co.uk/new-home-page](http://www.angelahennessy.co.uk/new-home-page)

**Has receiving a Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Wildlife Gardening Award made you consider doing more for wildlife in your garden? If so, what will you do next?**

Yes, it's made us aware that we're a bit short on winter flowers so we will work to remedy this. We will continue to welcome the community to see and experience what we are developing and hope to help those who are inexperienced or lack confidence, to develop their own wildlife gardening skills to make the most of their own gardens.



Growing flowers and food from spring to autumn



The herb spiral provides a feast for pollinators