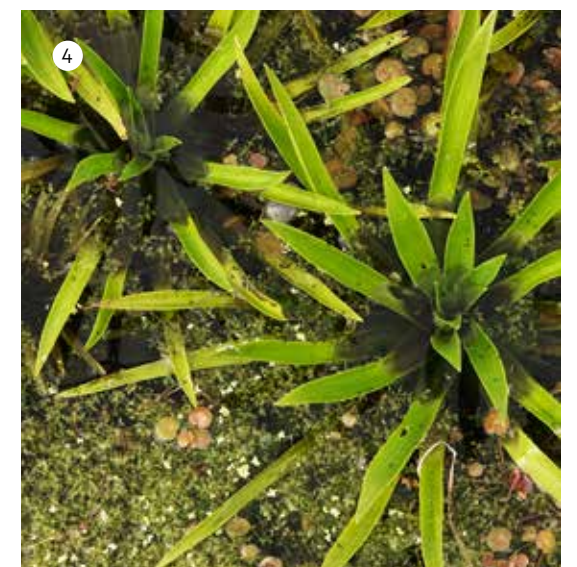
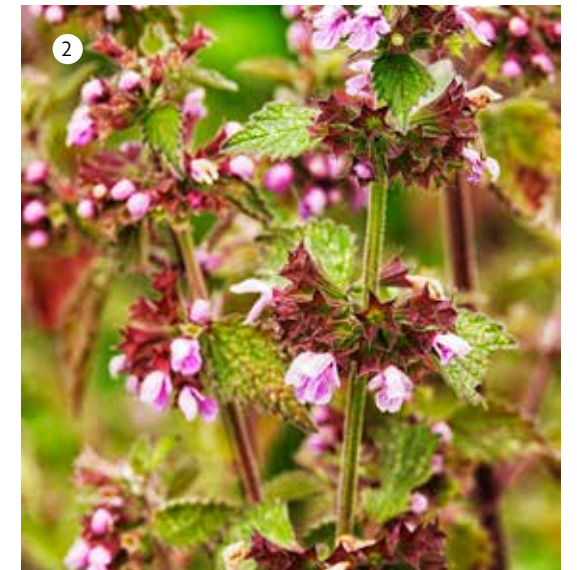




Your gardens

Gardening for wildlife? Share your achievements with adrian.thomas@rspb.org.uk



Wildlife observations and recordings

Adrian Thomas visits a verdant Norfolk garden where a couple seek to discover and identify all the wildlife they attract

"It's organised chaos!" Megan Crewe says as she and her husband, Mike, show me the half-acre garden they've been creating since moving to north-east Norfolk in 2017. "That's our basic ethos. We want flower borders because they attract pollinators, but we also want wilder areas."

When the couple arrived, the bulk of the garden was just mown grass with a Whitebeam tree in the middle. Since then, they've created meadows, dug a large pond, built log piles, planted hedges and added a diverse array of plants, all targeted at wildlife.

They also record all the wildlife they

find here. Both Mike and Megan have an enquiring mind and an eye for spotting the 'small stuff', from fungi to furrow bees. The pair also seek to name their finds and understand more about them.

Mike and Megan tally up the number of species that visit their garden, and the numbers are impressive. So far, for example, they've seen 22 species of butterflies, 29 of bee, 63 birds and a whopping 411 types of moths. Their latest total stands at 1,223.

It means that every part of the garden has a story to tell of a particular plant, fungus or animal.

Take the pond, for example. It hosts

hordes of Smooth Newts and Common Frogs and Toads, and is the main reason that 18 species of dragonfly and damselfly have visited. One of these guests was the rare Green-eyed Hawker dragonfly, attracted by its favoured plant, Water-soldier.

All the pond plants are native, even curious residents such as Bladderwort. Indeed, there are native plants throughout the garden.

"But it doesn't all have to be native plants to deliver success," Mike says. "Our Deutzia shrub, for example, originally from eastern Asia, is a magnet for bees in June."

Once the couple turned the lawn into a meadow, it became an ever-evolving delight. Field Voles arrived. Then, bumblebees moved into the voles' nests. Later, Badgers dug out the bees' nests.

We head into the 'secret garden' where Mike and Megan sit and where Goldfinches come down to nip the tips of Common Cudweed flowers. Megan shows me a patch of Wormwood, and on it a population of Artemisia Aphids.

"It's lovely to see what's out here. It makes us slow down and look," she says.

Despite all their efforts, Megan and Mike say that even their garden is showing signs of the nature crisis. "Sometimes we look and think 'Where are the hoverflies? Where are the beetles?'" Mike says. "We try not to panic, but it is getting ever harder for wildlife. That's why every little positive change we make feels so important."

Megan and Mike's Top Gardening Tips

1 "If you want to make an established garden more 'wild', don't be intimidated. Just do what works for you, and then go for it. For example, we've found out that it doesn't work to have a mini-meadow right up against a flower border, so we mow paths in between."

2 Megan loves inviting people into the garden as they're walking past to inspire them. "When we explain what we're trying to do, people think it is amazing."

3 "Don't view unplanned plants as weeds – they may have an important role for wildlife, or might just be fascinating in their own right!"

1. Megan is usually found with camera in hand and at insect-eye level, always on the look-out for a curious find

2. Black Horehound is an attractive native wildflower and an excellent nectar source for many bee species

3. This curious plant is Yarrow Broomrape, a nationally rare plant that grows in Megan and Mike's back lawn

4. Water-soldier is a dramatic-looking pond plant, sinking in winter and then rising to the surface in summer



How to:
Photograph garden wildlife

The advent of digital photography has made it that much easier to take photos, and then review and share them instantly. The much-improved lenses available also make it possible for everyday people to take incredible shots of garden wildlife, including ones of tiny creatures.

Mobile phones are often fine for 'record shots', but Megan uses a bridge camera – a medium-sized camera with a powerful zoom – to capture even clearer

images. "It is one of my most important gardening tools. If I can get a good photo, I can generally find out what the creature is," she explains.

Whether you use an SLR camera (the big ones with interchangeable lenses), a bridge camera, a compact or a phone, the most useful features for taking photos of garden wildlife are the zoom and, ideally, a macro function, which allows you to get very close to a subject.

Spotlight on
Bush-crickets

This Speckled Bush-cricket in Mike and Megan's garden is colour-matched to the geranium leaves it lives upon.

- Most leafy gardens in the southern half of the UK are likely to support at least one species of bush-cricket. Megan and Mike have recorded four of the 13 British species.
- Bush-crickets (and their cousins, the much-rarer crickets) can easily be distinguished from grasshoppers thanks to their incredibly long antennae. Most members of the family have long back legs, which are used for jumping.
- This photo is of a male; females have a sickle shaped 'blade' on their rear ends for egg laying.



What to grow
Hardy geraniums



- This is a large group of mainly herbaceous perennial flowers (which means they come up each year, but the top growth dies back in autumn).
- The simple, open flowers, mainly in pinks, lilacs and blues, are very popular with a wide range of pollinating insects.
- Their English names are crane's-bill and stork's-bill, named after the pointed seedpods that catapult seeds from the plants. Geranos is the Greek for crane.
- Don't confuse them with windowbox-favourites pelargoniums, sometimes called geraniums – they're a different group of plants.

- Many hardy geraniums do best in sunny positions, but some, such as *Geranium phaeum* and *Geranium macrorrhizum*, both from mainland Europe, do well in shade.
- There are dozens of cultivars to choose from, including the very popular 'Rozanne'. But why not try the beautiful native Meadow Crane's-bill *Geranium pratense*, in mini-meadows, or the intensely coloured Bloody Crane's-bill *Geranium sanguineum*, which, thanks to its habit of growing low on dunes, cliffs and limestone areas, will do well at the front of a border.
- Cut back hard after the first flush of flowers to prompt geraniums to begin a second flowering.
- They tend to suffer little damage from slugs, snails or Rabbits.

Activity:
Identifying wildlife

So, how do you go about trying to identify all the plants and creatures in your garden?

"When I find something, I take a photo if I can," Megan says. "Then I can go and look it up. There are some brilliant resources online. For example, there are 600 species of aphid in the UK, and a website to help you identify them. Who knew?"

There are also many apps these days that can automatically generate an identification. "They're great," says Megan. "But always treat what they come up with as a suggestion to go and research further."

"Importantly, I also put all our records on i-Record to help build the national database. That's where there

are experts who will help verify your identifications for you."

Thanks to online resources, Megan and Mike have identified creatures in their garden that are new for their area, including a rare harvestman – *Dicranopalpus caudatus* – which was a first for East Anglia.

"Identification can be hard at first," Megan advises. "But stick with it."

Here are some of Megan's favourite sites:

- bwars.com** (bees, wasps, ants)
- britishbugs.org.uk**
- leafmines.co.uk** (moths)
- coleoptera.org.uk** (beetles)
- ukbeetles.co.uk** (beetles)

And check out Megan's blog: **halfacreproject.blogspot.com**



Your letters:
Are back lanes the hedgerows of a town?

Last year we moved to a northern industrial town and swapped our large garden for a much smaller one that was largely decking, lawn and laurel bushes. We thought we would recreate our wildlife-friendly garden, albeit on a much smaller scale. So far, we've created two borders and filled those, as well as pots and baskets, with nectar-rich and colourful plants. The bees found the garden very quickly, which puzzled me. We live in a horticultural desert of tiny back yards and miniscule front gardens largely composed of artificial grass, gravel or paving stones.

There are, however, quite wide cobbled back lanes separating the terraced houses. Could these be the route by which the bees reached our flowers? I went to check and found over 40 different plants, a mix of garden escapees and wasteland natives and, yes, a lot of insects. One of the back lanes is a riot of colour with lavender, Chives and more. These back lanes are like the hedgerows of the town, providing a way for animals to move safely between garden habitats.

Graham Stephenson, Darlington

Grassroots

Our Nature on Your Doorstep web pages are full of advice and inspiration for how to make your garden, balcony or community spaces better for wildlife.

You can also join our Facebook group, sharing ideas with people across the country. Start your journey here: **rspb.org.uk/natureonyourdoorstep**

Don't forget to buy your RSPB roses from Harkness Roses, which are good for pollinators and help raise money for our conservation work with every sale. Go to **roses.co.uk/rspb**

