Although the primary purpose of allotment sites is to grow food they offer many other benefits and their contribution to supporting wildlife in urban areas is significant. They form some of the best habitat mosaics and wildlife corridors, often linking up with parks, tracks, hedgerows, churchyards and rivers; providing food, shelter and breeding sites for insects, birds, mammals and amphibians.

By managing individual plots, or collectively managing a site, with wildlife in mind plotholders can help to promote a balanced eco-system that contributes to local bio-diversity; it will also increase the productivity of their plots and help to deter pests. Many of the ideas within this leaflet can be incorporated without changing the essential nature of the plot as a place to grow vegetables fruit and flowers.

Taking children to the plot and involving them with projects such as building an insect hotel or bird box helps to raise their awareness of the natural world.

Useful contacts

Wildlife Gardening Forum
http://www.wlgf.org/index.html

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
http://www.rspb.org.uk/

Froglife
http://www.froglife.org/

Bumblebee Conservation Trust
http://bumblebeeconservation.org/

Buglife
https://www.buglife.org.uk/

Plantlife
http://www.plantlife.org.uk/

Become a member of The National Allotment Society

Membership of The National Allotment Society comes with a raft of benefits, from discounts on horticultural products through to initial legal advice and horticultural expertise. To become a member visit **www.nsalg.org.uk** or call **01536 266576.**

O'Dell House, Hunters Road, Corby, Northamptonshire NN17 5JE
T: 01536 266576 • E: natsoc@nsalg.org.uk • www.nsalg.org.uk

IP 11144R

The National Allotment Society
National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Ltd

What can your plot do for wildlife?

With such a large army of creatures at your disposal capable of controlling a wide range of pests it makes sense to encourage and sustain their presence on the allotment. With some careful thought and planning this can be achieved with very little effort.

Most allotment holders will not want to give over valuable growing space to a pond but the site may have a suitable area that is not cultivated. A pond in a sunny location, away from trees and offering a range of depths will provide an ideal breeding ground for frogs as well as a source of drinking water for visiting mammals and birds.

Untended plots and site margins are invariably progressively overtaken by brambles. These bushes can be a welcome nest site for songbirds like Robins, Wrens, Song Thrush and Blackbird. Such a natural habitat will also serve as a refuge for hoverflies, bees and lacewings.

A more controlled way to encourage the presence of birds is the use of correctly sited nest boxes. Most plots should be able to accommodate one small box and if rodents are a problem, an owl box, perhaps in a tree at the margin of the site, may prove beneficial.

Log and stone piles are an easy way to create a refuge for frogs, toads, centipedes, slow worms and ground beetles, all of which help to control pests.

Many insect predators need a sheltered place to hibernate when their food supply falls away in the autumn. Piles of plant litter serve this function very effectively; ensuring your pest control army is still in place next year.

Strips of uncultivated ground covered with matted grass are ideal breeding sites and refuges for predatory ground beetles. On many allotment sites these could be the grass paths throughout the plot. If slugs are a major problem you may even consider widening these paths and allowing the grass to grow longer thus affording greater protection for the beetles.

Another way to help beneficial insects to hibernate is the creation of a simple bug hotel. This may simply be a block of wood or tree trunk in which holes of various sizes have been drilled to allow insects to burrow inside for shelter and warmth. Ideally such creations should be away from direct sunlight to avoid overheating and drying the wood.

Most people understand that bees are vital for pollination. This dwindling resource can be attracted by planting blocks of flowering plants. Open flowers like wild carrot and yarrow are most effective, although clover, peas and beans are also useful for this purpose. The inclusion of some scented flowers will also attract moths after dusk thus drawing in bats to eat the night flying pests. The provision of bat boxes would help to complete this food chain with all the benefits it brings.

What can wildlife do for your plot?

As an allotment holder you would be unusual not to have experienced crop damage by slugs, bugs and caterpillars. However, not every creature that flies, scuttles and creeps is a pest and many should be welcome residents on your plot. The list of beneficial wildlife is extensive and the following outline will help decide which ones are your best ally in your quest to improve yield and quality.

Ground beetles: possibly the number one predator of slugs, they also consume snails and caterpillars.

Ladybirds: a single adult can consume 100 aphids each day as well as whitefly, potato beetle, bean beetle and mealy bugs, larvae also eat aphids and small insects.

Hoverflies: the larvae of hoverflies eat aphids, scale insects and young caterpillars.

'...many bird species have a voracious appetite for pests...'

Centipedes: these have a great appetite for soil dwelling insects and also help to control slugs by eating both adults and their eggs.

Earwigs: their diet includes aphids, codling moth caterpillars and vine weevil eggs.

Bees and Wasps: these are vital for crop pollination and the decline in numbers of Bumblebees is a great cause for concern.

Birds: many bird species have a voracious appetite for pests, with a pair of Blue Tits consuming as many as 1500 caterpillars for each brood they raise.

Frogs: amongst the best slug control available.

Hedgehogs: yet another species in serious decline but hugely effective in controlling slugs on their night time patrols.

Lacewings: Adults and larvae feast on aphids.

Shrews: rarely seen because they are mostly active at night when they tirelessly hunt for insects and slugs.

Bats: another night time hunting predator that eats large numbers of flying insects.