

Report to Hessay Parish Council - Willow Garth September 2019

Willow Garth continues to be managed for the benefit of wildlife as in previous years. Upon learning the benefit of nettles to numerous butterfly species, I took the decision not to trim the nettles down until September, unlike in the previous 2 years when I have trimmed the nettles throughout the summer. Where nettles have been trimmed I have left 15 -20cm of growth as cover for ground mammals & wildlife.

Councillor Hildreth & myself removed a large willow bough in the springtime as it was dangerously overhanging the Shirbutt Lane footpath,

Deadwood and the lower branches of the small trees have been trimmed to allow more light to penetrate the canopy, some larger branches have been trimmed & removed into log piles which will themselves form a wildlife habitat.

The previously coppiced hazelnut trees are producing lots of nuts. Some of the previously constructed log piles require re building. The Hawthorn hedge which was planted using ward committee funding has established well, and is beginning to bear fruit, it will need trimming later in the autumn, The fence and gate are in good order. There is one willow tree, which has died; I do not perceive it to be immediately dangerous though I will look to see it made safe through autumn. Likewise a small willow tree has established in the wet / damp pond area which should be removed.

Wildlife

I can report the following observations (not exhaustive)

Blackbirds, Thrush, Robin, Wren, Woodpigeon and Stock Doves are known to have nested within willow Garth, this year. It is not believed that the Owl Box is being used. Bats are believed roosting in the willow trees. Hedgehogs, Field Mice, Field Voles, shrews, Moles, grey squirrel, Toads, Dragonflies & numerous butterflies have been observed, The decision to leave the nettles has seen good numbers of Red Admiral, Peacock, Small Tortoise Shell and Peacock butterflies.

Planned Jobs for the coming Autumn, Winter

Relocate Owl Box from Hessay pond, Rebuild log piles, add bat roost boxes, dormouse nest boxes.

Remove the willow tree, which is establishing in the wet pond area

General trim of deadwood / unnecessary branches

Mark Barratt, September 2019

Exert from Nettles .org

Nettles and Wildlife

The stinging nettle is one of the most important native plants for wildlife in the UK.

The nettle supports over 40 species of insect including some of our most colourful butterflies.

This may seem strange given the stinging power of the nettle but it is the presence of the stings that has allowed the relationship with numerous insect species to develop. The stinging hairs of the nettle developed as a defence against grazing animals. So effective are they that few grazers , with the exception of goats and hungry sheep, will touch nettles when the stings are active. This makes the ideal habitat for insects as there is little danger of the adult insects or larvae ending up in the stomach of a cow! Insects can also move between the spines without activating the sting.

The most notable nettle patch inhabitants are the small tortoiseshell and peacock butterfly larvae which feed in large groups hidden in silken tents at the top of the nettle stems.

Many nettle patches hold overwintering aphids which swarm around the fresh spring growth and provide an early food source for ladybirds. These same aphids are eaten in large numbers by blue tits and other woodland birds agile enough to dart around the stems.

In late summer the huge quantity of seed produced provide a food source for many of our seed eating birds.

It can be seen that the nettle plays a very important role for both rural and urban wildlife - indeed some of the insect species such as the nettle weevil live only in the nettle patch. Hopefully we can start to look at the nettle patch in a different light and pause a while to admire its effective survival strategy.

Butterflies of the nettle patch

Many of our most colourful and well known butterflies depend on nettles for the growth of their larvae. They are all members of the *Nymphalidae* (pronounced Nim-fa-lid-eye) or Brush-footed butterflies. This is due the front pair of legs (which are much smaller than the other two pairs and so not used for walking) being covered in tufts of hair like scales.

Mark Barratt