

# **VENTNOR WILD GARDENS CHALLENGE 2022**

## **For nature, for climate, for us!**

A community competition to encourage residents to leave at least an area of their garden to rewild, and to enhance that area with plantings and some facilities for wildlife to feed, drink, swim, nest, overwinter and travel from one garden to the next in safety. In addition, our kitchen garden challenge encourages people to grow their own vegetables and fruit the veganic way, without reliance on artificial fertilizers, and using only vegetable compost, and herbs to ward off pests.

### **The rationale for this project.**

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted how important being in natural environments is to human mental wellbeing. This project brings nature right to our doorsteps. Those who cannot easily spend time in a nature reserve can enjoy watching wildlife from their windows or patio.

They can also be satisfied that they themselves are contributing to nature's recovery, as part of a community initiative.

The UK has long suffered from impoverished biodiversity compared with most other countries in the world. Most of our top predators were hunted to extinction centuries ago. Natural food chains are broken. Industrial and housing development, together with intensive farming have caused the destruction of a very high percentage of wildlife habitats, especially hedgerows and woodland, leaving only isolated pockets of land, where many species are trapped and have become inbred. Efforts are now, however, being made to join up these isolated nature reserves.

Our gardens could help to mitigate this biodiversity loss in a big way. We cannot just leave it to governments to solve this problem. Research by the Wildlife Trusts demonstrates that if one in four of the population were to engage in some way with helping wildlife recover, this rapid decline could be halted.

According to DEFRA's UK Biodiversity Indicators 2021 Revised report, "In 2018, 11% of people surveyed were highly engaged with biodiversity loss in the UK. These people stated that they were aware of the threat to UK biodiversity, they were concerned about the loss of biodiversity and they undertook actions that help to support and protect biodiversity. At the other end of the scale, 31% of people surveyed stated that they were not aware of a threat to biodiversity in the UK."

### **The aims of this project**

This project is intended as a pilot, to work towards the following outcomes:

- To raise public awareness of biodiversity loss in the UK

- To raise awareness on how we (humans) can act positively to help nature and to aid the climate crisis.
- To raise awareness of how engaging with nature can be good for our mental wellbeing
- To raise awareness of the importance of our native flowering plants to a great variety of insects, and how these insects form the basis of many food chains that are crucial to biodiversity
- To raise awareness of the importance of our wild plants to insect pollinators, and the importance of insect pollinators to our crops and food security
- To raise awareness of the harm caused to our native wildlife by largely unnecessary use of weedkillers and pesticides in our gardens and suggest alternative, sustainable practices
- To raise awareness of imported invasive plant species that harm wildlife and accelerate species decline e.g. parrot feather in ponds and Japanese knotweed
- To reduce the amount of water needed for plant survival in our gardens – native plant species tend to be more drought resistant than cultivated ones
- To reduce the amount of fertilizer used in our gardens which can be washed into streams and rivers, deoxygenating the water and killing aquatic life
- To raise awareness of the detrimental effects on the climate of the loss of peatlands for the garden peat industry and suggest alternatives

These aims can be explained in press releases to local media and in our competition leaflet.

### **Objectives.**

Rewild an area of garden to attract insects and invertebrates, which will in turn attract animals higher up the food chain. Here are some ideas as to how to achieve this:

- Stop mowing an area of lawn to let wild flowering plants spread across it. Seeds can lay dormant for years in the soil, just waiting for a chance to germinate.
- Plant wildflowers from seed. Choose bee and other pollinator friendly seeds.
- Swap artificial turf for grass. Nothing can live in artificial turf.
- Use porous paving for your patio to prevent flooding after heavy rain.
- Swap fences for hedges. They can shelter nesting and over-wintering birds, and provide food for birds and insects.
- Use a rainwater butt, saving water.
- Compost garden waste or subscribe to the Council's Garden Waste Collection Scheme.
- Don't use compost on wild plants. They thrive on unimproved soil.
- Don't use any chemical weedkillers, insecticides or slug and snail-killing chemicals. Weed by hand when necessary. Slugs and snails can be caught at night and removed from seedlings.
- Plant specific herbs to deter certain insects from eating your vegetables.

- Don't use peat-based compost. Peat is an important carbon sink and should not be dug up.
- Provide bird-feeding stations and water. Keep them clean to prevent bacterial infections in wildlife.
- Provide insect hotels to provide shelter in winter.
- Provide bird and bat boxes for nesting.
- Provide a pond with sloping sides for wildlife to drink from and not fall in.
- Provide a pond to encourage aquatic life. Choose only native plants and avoid invasive species that can deoxygenate the water and entirely cover the pond in dense foliage.
- Provide red squirrels with rope bridges and tree feeders to keep them safe from predators on the ground.
- Leave gaps under fences for hedgehogs to travel between gardens and for newts and frogs to travel to and from your pond.
- Join others in community seed and plant swaps (Ventnor Library has a swap table).

We could hold community workshops to help people make their own bird feeders, insect hotels, etc.

We could research model wildlife gardens and use some photographs of different features in our publicity.

### **The promotion of this project**

- Offer presentations to community groups to inspire members to take part in the Wild Gardens Challenge and encourage family, friends and neighbours to join in.
- Offer presentations to local schools and youth groups to inspire them.
- Through the Town Council's Forum, as an email and a column in The Chronicle
- Press releases to newspapers, both in print and online, local radio, On The Wight News, Nextdoor online.
- Posters in local shop windows, public libraries and community halls
- Postings on social media platforms, where news can spread rapidly and people can be reached who do not read newspapers.

### **Time-frames**

- This is a pilot project. It is hoped and has the potential to grow in popularity, as public awareness of it also grows. If it is perceived by residents to be a good idea in its first year, many more people might want or expect to join in. In that case, we need to run it for more than one year, and preferably it would become established as an annual Ventnor event.
- With it being potentially an annual event, perhaps VTC should consider that it should be, as wild plantings, e.g hedges and trees, need time to develop, people need to be encouraged to continue gardening for wildlife, and the project's

influence on public attitudes to wildlife and sustainable gardening needs time to take effect.

### **Suggested timings**

- April - Contact local community groups and schools. Offer to give a presentation about the Wild Gardens Challenge.
- April – Design poster and leaflet and arrange printing.
- April – Design entry form (online and paper) and photocopy.
- May – Launch the Wild Gardens Challenge.
- May - Hold community workshop(s) on making bird feeding station, insect hotel, etc.
- May – Send out press releases, put up posters; deliver leaflets to library, schools, youth groups, community groups
- July or latter part of September Judging in categories
- July or latter part of September – Prizegiving.

### **Suggested competition categories**

Best garden

Best small garden: courtyard, balcony, garden less than 10 square metres

Best wildlife facilities: e.g. bird feeding station, insect hotel, squirrel rope walks, bird box, bat box

Best garden pond

Best kitchen garden using veganic/natural composting techniques, and herbs to deter specific insect pests

Best child's garden – under 11 years old

Best school/youth group garden

### **Judging and prizes**

- To present the prizes and make a speech, we could ask Chris Packham, celebrity wildlife broadcaster, or Debbie Tann, CEO of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust; or Ian Boyd, co-founder and director of Artecology and other multi-award-winning companies, pioneering artificial inter-tidal species habitats as sea levels rise, and co-founder of Hullabaloo, Sandown's Science and Arts Festival.
- As judging could take up a lot of time, I recommend asking local wildlife professionals and enthusiasts, such as Dr Colin Pope, former Ecology Officer at the Isle of Wight Council, Vice-President of the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society with a particular interest in Botany; Jim Baldwin, a highly dedicated and experienced wildlife recorder and photographer; Andy Butler,

Ventnor resident, former National Trust ranger, and highly experienced wildlife recorder; Dave Trevan, St Lawrence resident, former horticulturalist and college lecturer, with a wealth of knowledge of wild plants.

### **Criteria of success**

- Success can be judged from the number of people and groups that enter our Wild Garden Challenge, but we should be aware that numbers might increase in subsequent years, as news of the competition spreads, through word of mouth and recommendation to family, friends and neighbours.
- Success can be judged from how much public awareness we raise about the issues outlined above, through publication of our press releases and the public comments they engender.

### **Funding our project**

The Wild Gardens Challenge project will need funding for:

- Printing posters
- Printing leaflets
- Paper entry forms for those not digitally connected
- Hire of hall for the prizegiving event and provision of refreshments
- Paying travel costs for someone to present the prizes at a prizegiving event.
- Thank-you gifts for the judges

Most of the list of things and tasks that require funding could come from VTC without specific funding or asking for special funding. Hire of halls to give our presentations may be unnecessary, as community groups might invite us to give a talk at one of their regular meetings.

Advertising in the local media may be unnecessary, as press releases are published free-of-charge and can attract far more attention and we can advertise via the Clerk's regular newsletter, Facebook (Ventnor notice board page), Town's notice boards, etc....

Competition prizes could be donated by local businesses. They are always looking for publicity and would receive a mention as sponsors in our publicity.

Lastly, I am working closely with a Ventnor resident on this potential project and at the last meeting of the working sub-group (biodiversity and carbon emissions reduction), all attendees agreed upon putting this suggested project forward to the VTC for consideration and potentially implementation. I hope you can support this potential project endeavor.

Councillor Steve Cooper, (Lowtherville Ward)9999999