

Insectageddon: a grim decline



Insect numbers have crashed globally in little more than 50 years – numbers down by a half, according to Peter Smith, the keynote speaker at the Surrey Tree Warden meeting and AGM in July. In ‘nature-loving’ Britain, the decline has been even more marked. In just ten years, said Peter, he had noticed a 50% fall in the moths he traps, records and releases. The reasons are not hard to find. First, pesticide and fungicide use on farms. He told of one survey in Sussex that counted the number of times a field of winter wheat was sprayed in the course of one season - an unbelievable 18 times, he said. Deadly to bees, neonicotinoids are now banned in the UK - but are they really banned? Sugar beet farmers can get a derogation for their use, and frequently do.

Then there’s habitat loss: hedges are still vanishing or are in poor condition; pastures are no longer flower rich meadows; gardens flaunt decking, paving and artificial grass. Yet insects are an integral part of the system that support modern human life. The most obvious are the pollinators, pollinating 76% of our food crops worldwide. But industrial agriculture, and the loss of natural pollinators, has led to a new industry. In America, bees are shipped round the country in vast numbers: spring in the Californian almond orchards; down to Florida to the citrus trees; back north for the blueberries. It happens in Britain too.

Which are the good pollinators? Bees, especially bumble bees are obvious, but lacewings, hoverfly, and many others are good too. What do these insects need from us? Gardens without chemicals; flowers that extend the seasons – for instance, ivy flowers in mid-winter are a vital source of food for early foragers. And lawns? Go for No Mow May; Let it Bloom in June; and why not try Grow it High in July.

These are the organisations that Peter recommends for more information on the dangers to pollinators and how to help them. Pesticide Action; Plantlife; Buglife; Bumblebee Conservation Trust; and the RHS for gardening tips for pollinators.

... and the better news

After the thought provoking and gloomy talk on Insectageddon, it was the turn of Sam Village who heads the Tree Warden Network for the Tree Council to lift the mood and give AGM members an overview of the many campaigns and activities the Tree Council undertakes. For instance, Life on the Hedge, the new campaign to promote hedge planting and care, and another promoting Community Tree Nurseries. Both will help pollinators.

The Science and Research team are supporting several PhD projects: on the national distribution of mistletoe; on agroforestry - how to get farmers to plant more trees. Other projects: on hedgerows - what works best: planting whips, sowing seed, or natural regeneration? Do bioplastic tree guards work? For details on all of these activities and more, go to The Tree Council website www.treecouncil.org.uk

news from the groups

LINGFIELD



Congratulations to Anne Richards a long standing Lingfield Tree Warden who received an “Outstanding Level 5” award for conservation planting that has seen the return of the Brown Hairstreak butterfly to the Lingfield Nature Reserves. The award was made at a ceremony at Wisley Garden for the South and South East In Bloom competition. This elusive butterfly was found on one of the new blackthorn and hawthorn hedges. Young blackthorn is their larval foodplant and a hunt with UV light revealed 20 tiny eggs on the small branches.



SURREY HEATH

*Acute Oak Decline has been found in several locations in the UK, including in Warren Wood, the pocket woodland managed by the Surrey Heath tree wardens. The primary cause is usually a beetle *Agrilus biguttatus* which introduces a fungus to the cambium of the tree with stem bleeding visible on the surface. You can find out more on how to identify it, and what to do here:*

<https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/pest-and-disease-resources/acute-oak-decline/>

BOOKHAM

Last winter, 30 Scouts, their parent helpers and the Bookham Tree Wardens planted a new hedge at Tithe Barn, and what a successful, professional planting it turned out to be. Bookham Tree Warden, Frances Fancourt inspected the hedge in August, and found only 20 failures among the 500 whips that were planted. Some beech and hawthorn looked dead, but they remain in situ: some beech that had struggled were putting out new leaves. A mesh fence was put up by the landowner after planting, and this has had a positive effect: it keeps rabbits out, allowing guards to be removed for re-use, and provides some shelter for the new plants from wind and sun.



ELMBRIDGE

Elmbridge Tree Wardens will be helping out with tree planting this winter, filling in gaps at the Xcel centre in Walton and at Molesey Wilderness in October and November, then helping out Surrey Council's planting in and around Elmbridge in late November. They need lots of volunteers so if you want to plant trees – and who doesn't – get in touch with Elmbridge tree warden Rod Thorn elmbridge@surreytreewardens.org.uk

EPSOM AND EWELL



Howard Gregory, from the Epsom and Ewell Tree Advisory Board, has always wanted to make a difference. During lockdown, he had the idea to create an elm studded woodland. It took him three years and tremendous perseverance to get the plan off the ground, and planting is underway. He had the support of Dorah May Hancock, of Age Concern Epsom and Ewell, and together they managed to arrange finance and get the go ahead for a new mini woodland in one of Epsom's open spaces. The Age Concern Memorial Woodland is being planted with elms resistant to elm disease taking centre stage. Those who know Howard will know his passion for these trees.

In the new woodland, Elms such as *Ulmus 'New Horizon'*, *U. 'Lutece'* and *U. 'Wingham'* mingle with Flowering Cherry, Rowan, and Walnut, and will be under-planted with *Alder Buckthorn*, *Wild Plum* and

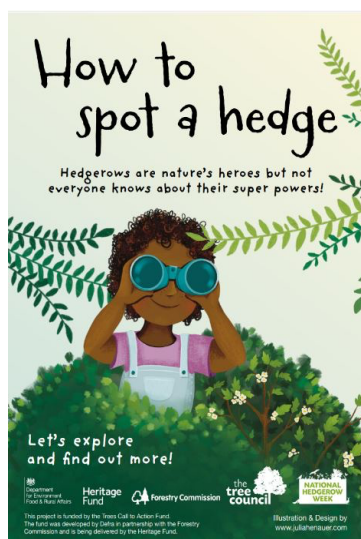
Hawthorn to provide wildlife cover and tree protection. A group of *Himalayan Birch* border the mini woodland and extend winter interest.



The centrepiece of the woodland is the blue foliage of *Abies concolor* 'Swifts Silver' which may eventually reach more than 60 feet. Another unusual tree is *Staphylea colchica*, the Caucasian bladdernut. This plant originated from Howard's time training at Kew Gardens where he collected the seed. The fragrant late spring white flowers attract many bees. There's also a community bed which will be planted with donated home grown saplings around a special elm, *Ulmus* 'Ademuz'. Spring bulbs will be planted around the trees as well as the native *Butcher's Broom* to act as small people barriers. Planting should be completed this winter with an official opening in June 2025.

Age Concern Epsom and Ewell contributed hugely to the project, and it reflects the charity's commitment to the environment in promoting memorial legacy donations and putting them towards environmental projects such as this.

TADWORTH & WALTON



How to Spot a Hedge – that was one of the activities organised by Tadworth tree wardens as part of two Nature Detective Days put on by the Banstead Commons Conservators in Tadworth this summer. The children really enjoyed learning about hedgerows and the many ways they benefit wildlife. The REALLY MESSY nest making activity went down a treat. They also liked taking home the beautiful hedgerow activity card – something for them to keep for their next walk in the wild. The cards, and the ideas, are available from The Tree Council – contact Sam Village. The Nature Detective Days also included a nature walk, ride the tractor, meet the sheep, and a bug hunt.



news in brief

At the Surrey Tree Warden AGM, the following office holders were elected unopposed: Trefor Hogg in the Chair, Patricia Brookwick, Secretary, and Elaine Griffith, Treasurer. The committee would dearly like new members to join them. If you are interested please contact Patricia. It's not onerous - five meetings or so a year, and a love of trees! Patricia our very hardworking and inspiring secretary makes it easy for the rest of us – our thanks to her for that.

Don't forget: National Tree Week runs this year from 23rd November to 1st December. This is the optimal time of year for tree planting. Young trees are dormant, and can be dug out the ground and distributed. Just don't let those exposed roots dry out. Check out the Tree Council website for details of the Branching Out fund, designed for schools, community groups and tree wardens.

<https://treecouncil.org.uk/grants-and-guidance/our-grants/branching-out-fund>

Surrey Council also have free trees for street planting and other schemes. Applications for 2025 have already opened. Check out the details:

<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/permits-and-licences/planting-trees>

Surrey aim to plant 1.2 million trees, one for every resident by 2030, and are halfway to that target. It is an important part of making the Council carbon neutral by 2050.

Sally Pemberton, long standing tree warden who runs The Ranges, a willow coppice in Staines, has found this research which might help mitigate the global warming methane produced by grazing animals: the answer is willow coppice of course.

<https://www.agrecalc.com/home/insights/coppice-willow-for-cattle-grazing/>

contact us

www.surreytreewardens.org.uk

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SurreyTreeWardens>

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