

**Wildlife Gardening 1962-2021: An examination of an increasingly
popular movement
by
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Introduction

This research examines the trend of wildlife gardening that emerged during the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s, analysing how it has changed over the past 50 years and locating it within its broader social context. It will furthermore investigate the extent to which wildlife gardening has developed a distinct aesthetic identity. This study will focus mainly on developments within the UK, though it will necessarily acknowledge and incorporate influences from abroad such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*.¹

A theoretical definition of 'wildlife gardening' might be as follows: gardening practices and styles that consider animals, birds and insects as the primary beneficiaries of the created space. Such a definition importantly distinguishes wildlife gardening from other naturalistic planting styles (such as New Perennials). While there are similarities and overlap - for example, drawing direct inspiration from natural habitats - wildlife gardening is distinguishably different in that its primary motivation is making a space that provides shelter and sustenance for wildlife. Whereas previous gardening trends have been mainly aesthetically identifiable, wildlife gardening is varied in its physical manifestations but unified by a common ideological starting point. Given that the purpose of this work is to examine change over time, it is important that this definition is not used as a tool for exclusion but rather as a guiding point of departure in identifying material that is worth including.

The wildlife gardening movement is further defined by its crucial relation to the escalating climate crisis. In many ways, this context positions the garden as a player in a much larger, even global, picture, and provides motivation and significance for the work done in the garden which extends beyond the usual aesthetic pleasures of its human audience. As such, gardens are understood as spaces that are imbued with planetary importance through individual action. This aspect importantly raises the focus of this dissertation: though wildlife gardening does not exclusively take place in small, personal gardens - a point in case is the work of the charity Plantlife in encouraging local councils to wild their verges - much of its energy comes from individual efforts and concerns.² Therefore, this dissertation will largely be focused on vernacular wildlife gardening, which is to say, wildlife gardening situated within domestic scale gardens,

¹ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, London : Penguin Classics, 2000).

² <https://plantlife.love-wildflowers.org.uk/roadvergecampaign/inspiring-stories> Accessed 14/07/2021.

because it is this aspect of the movement that seems to be particularly overlooked in the limited theoretical discussions of the topic in general works of garden history.³ This will not, however, preclude mention of bigger, more professional projects, since these necessarily are important context and inspiration for smaller projects.

Sources

Secondary sources on wildlife gardening are fairly limited, without any historically theoretical work devoted to the development of this new style of gardening. Though there is an extensive instructive literature to guide the amateur gardener in ways to make a garden a more welcoming and suitable wildlife habitat, there does not yet seem to be any historical or analytical overview of wildlife gardening. This is a gap that this dissertation will address. As such, the works explored in the historiography section are more general overviews of garden history that include the time period during which wildlife gardening can be said to have had an influence. In spite of this, it is often the case that wildlife gardening, if mentioned at all, is often an aside in a broader study of naturalistic planting trends such as New Perennials and the Sheffield School. When it is addressed, it often focuses on specific sites or high-profile garden designers, rather than looking at the popular uptake of the ideals. Though more famous gardens and their designers will feature in this dissertation, the focus is the more popular side of the movement, and links to broader social trends.

Since wildlife gardening has no work that specifically focuses on it, its treatment in more general works are often brief and thus fail to identify its distinct features. Tim Richardson's *English Gardens of the Twentieth Century*, for example, includes only a short description of wildlife gardening. This may well result from the subtitle 'from the archives of Country Life' as wildlife gardening does not always make for the photogenic vistas that predominate the glossy pages of the magazine, for all the joy and ecological benefits it may provide. Though unsatisfactorily, he does mention the growth of organic gardening throughout the 1980s, rising to prominence in the 1990s with the public endorsement of celebrities such as Geoff Hamilton and the Prince of

³ See, for example, Brent Elliott, *The Royal Horticultural Society: a history, 1804-2004* (Chichester : Phillimore and CO Ltd., 2004).

Wales.⁴ Though the wildlife gardening movement might be understood as arising from a similar cultural moment as organic gardening, its popular uptake in particular deserves a more considered and detailed examination. Like Richardson, Ambra Edwards skims the surface of wildlife gardening in *The Story of the English Garden*. Her work deals with the topic in two paragraphs about the efforts of Dame Miriam Rothschild and Chris Baines.⁵ Wildlife gardening is addressed as a potentially influential tangent of other naturalistic styles, rather than being recognised as deserving separate treatment.

Given the presence of wildlife gardening in contemporary gardening practice - a plot named 'Weed Thriller', designed for its wildlife benefits, won an RHS Gold at the 2021 Tatton Park flower show (Figure 1) - it is remarkable that it is missed out from a number of books that purport to cover modern gardening. Jane Brown's 1999 *The Pursuit of Paradise* offers a momentary hope that her chapter on 'Future Gardens' might address wildlife gardening when she turns from her analysis of gardens being



Figure 1: 'Weed Thriller' show border at RHS Tatton Park, designed by Sandra Nock (<https://www.sunartfields.com/rhs-tatton-flower-show-2021>).

⁴ Tim Richardson, *English Gardens in the Twentieth Century: from the archives of Country Life* (London : Aurum Press, 2005), p.177.

⁵ Ambra Edwards, *The Story of the English Garden* (London : National Trust Books, 2018), p.295.

designed in innovative locations, to ask 'What of sustainability, durability, integrity with the earth?'.⁶ This, however, swiftly becomes a discussion of the 'Dutch Perennial Wave, wave upon wave of more wonderful-looking plants' with a brief paragraph on the contemporary trend for native trees as a gesture towards gardening with biodiversity in mind.⁷ Though she acknowledges growing concerns about gardening with an ecological conscience, her discussion falls short of discussing wildlife gardening as a separate style, instead blurring it into other modern styles. The total exclusion of the movement from Guy Cooper and Gordon Taylor's work, *Gardens for the Future* raises an important point about the nature of wildlife gardening. The book is subtitled 'gestures against the wild' which misleadingly suggests that modern gardens will be increasingly controlled and sterile. As principals of the company Landscape Design Ltd., their narrative of contemporary garden design is one that revolves around modern art and landscape architecture. Though they do make mention of 'ecological awareness' as an important influence on twentieth century landscape design, the scale and nature of the examples they use demonstrates how wildlife gardening - largely ephemeral, uncontrolled and informal - struggles to fit into trends in modernist landscape architecture.⁸ In many ways it is considered as a way of gardening, rather than an artistic design that might be laid out on a large scale; all this is in spite of the examples of large-scale wildlife gardening such as at Highgrove and increasing drives for green infrastructure in cities, as well as the distinct visual style engendered by such activity.⁹

Among those works that do address wildlife gardening, few acknowledge it as something new, instead conflating it with a recurrence of other historical wild gardening styles. Richard Bisgrove's chapter on 'The Modern Garden' does recognise that, especially from the 1970s onwards, 'ecology, conservation and nostalgia have pervaded all aspects of English gardening'.¹⁰ He goes on to explore the idea of 'the flowery mead - again', recognising the work of Terry Wells

⁶ Jane Brown, *The Pursuit of Paradise: a social history of gardens and gardening* (London : HarperCollins, 1999), p.315.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.316.

⁸ Guy Cooper and Gordon Thomas, *Gardens for the Future: gestures against the wild* (New York: Moncelli Press, 2000) p.21.

⁹ See, for example, <https://panorama.solutions/en/solution/storm-water-management-and-urban-regeneration-malmo> Accessed 26/08/ 2021.

¹⁰ Richard Bisgrove, *The National Trust Book of the English Garden* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p.279.

at Monks Wood and the growing trend among retail seedsmen of offering wildflower seed mixes.¹¹ He links these modern examples with William Robinson and his 1870 publication *The Wild Garden* (Figure 2), which seems in some ways to undermine the status of wildlife gardening as a new and separate fashion. Similarly, Jenny Uglow's treatment of the subject in *A Little History of British Gardening* recognises its link to the publishing of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, but also is somewhat dismissive of it. She comments that 'new' twentieth-century styles have forebears in earlier eras - as if

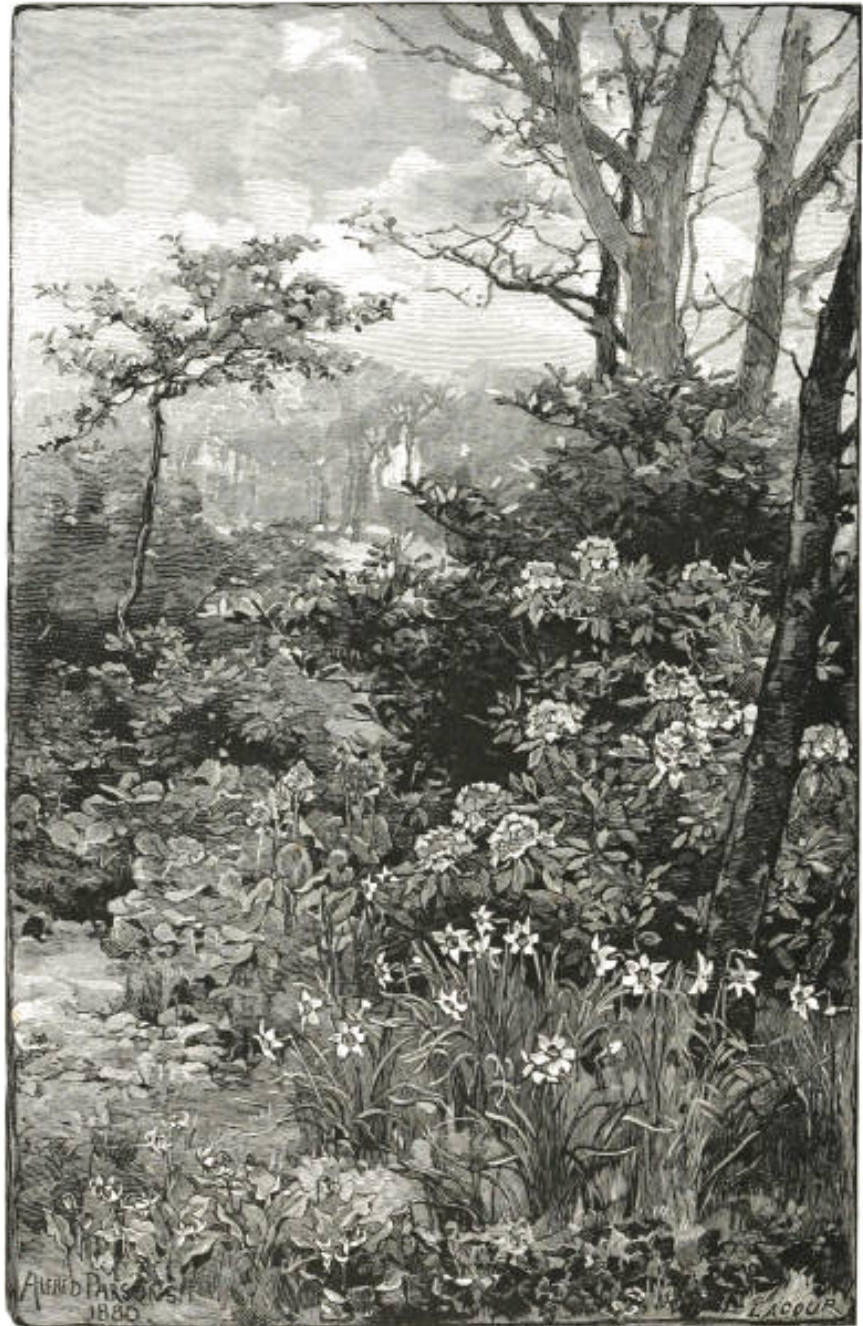


Figure 2: Frontispiece from William Robinson's *The Wild Garden* (1870). (<https://www.gutenberg.org>).

we were perpetually discovering the wheel'.¹² Undoubtedly, wildlife gardening can, to some extent, be identified with earlier styles of 'natural' gardening and it is important to acknowledge the constant reconfiguration of the idea of 'nature' that has occurred throughout garden history. Wildlife gardening, like the Victorian ideal of a cottage garden, responds to a social nostalgia for a pristine and beautiful rural past, threatened by modern life. That said, wildlife gardening is

¹¹ Ibid., p.283.

¹² Jenny Uglow, *A Little History of British Gardening* (London: Pimlico, 2005), p.294.

importantly motivated by unique twentieth- and twenty-first-century stimuli such as the climate crisis, intensive farming and species extinction.

This specific context of wildlife gardening, is perhaps a reason why it is, elsewhere, treated as a part of ecological gardening. While it is true that wildlife gardening does have ecological benefits, it deserves individual treatment as other parts of ecological gardening such as green roofing and dry gardening have already received. In *The History of Landscape Design in 100 Gardens* Linda Chisholm devotes a chapter to 'This Fragile Earth, Our Island Home' which, though it includes examples of sites of interest for wildlife gardening like Highgrove, largely focuses on ecological gardens.¹³ This focus is based around six large publicly accessible gardens and, as with so many works of this kind, amalgamates wildlife gardening with other types of natural gardening such as recreations of local landscapes and exclusive use of native plants. Her treatment of Highgrove and the current stewardship of Gravetye veer towards certain aspects of wildlife gardening without expressly identifying them as part of anything new. In particular, the discussion of the compost heap at Highgrove as 'the high altar' and the notice given to the arrival of wildlife at Gravetye and the Native Plant Garden at New York Botanic Garden suggests that Chisholm's choice of twenty-first-century gardens reflects a growing interest in wildlife in gardens, without expressly identifying this as novel.¹⁴ While her choice of contemporary gardens seems to reflect the existence of wildlife gardening, she stops short of treating it as a topic separate from gardening ecologically in naturalistic styles. Perhaps as the result of the task she set herself, Penelope Hobhouse's *Gardening through the Ages* deals only very briefly with ecological gardening. She addresses the trends of the second half of the twentieth century only in specific case studies such as the Garden in the Woods in Massachusetts and the xeriscape movement in the south-western United States. Her coverage of the ecological movement is skewed by an American perspective, though she does include J. P. Thijsse's innovative designs for Dutch public gardens in the 1920s.¹⁵ She also makes the link between the Daisy Lloyd's pioneering meadow designs at Great Dixter and William Robinson's criticism of lawn mowing for its destruction of

¹³ Linda A Chisholm, *The History of Landscape Design in 100 Gardens* (Portland, Oregon : Timber Press, 2018), p.1095.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1145.

¹⁵ Penelope Hobhouse, *Gardening Through the Ages: An illustrated history of plants and their influence on garden styles - from ancient Egypt to the present day* (New York : Barnes and Noble, 1997), p.298.

native flowers. Though a rich and interesting overview of early twentieth-century garden trends, including as they do some more ecologically motivated styles, the focus of Hobhouse's work means that she does not address gardening with the specific interest of promoting wildlife.¹⁶

The most satisfactory treatment of wildlife gardening is to be found in Brent Elliott's history of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), which comes closest to acknowledging it as a distinct trend. He identifies the increasing importance of biodiversity in judging criteria for gardens throughout the 1990s and draws attention to the award-winning Chelsea garden designed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) being re-erected as a model at RHS Garden Wisley as emblematic of the organisation's increasing acknowledgment of gardens being spaces shared by multiple species.¹⁷ He also points out the interesting parallel between the importance of parks as urban lungs for Victorian town planners and the contemporary trend of considering them as wildlife havens and important parts of biodiversity action plans. Such an intriguing and topical trend in garden history surely deserves specific research.

Despite the limitations of secondary sources, there is a substantial contemporary literature on wildlife gardening for amateurs, addressing ways to transform their gardens into spaces that welcome and support a wide variety of wildlife. Its canonical work is Chris Baines's *How to make a Wildlife Garden* (Figure 3), first published in 1984 and now in its third iteration as the RHS text *Companion to Wildlife Gardening*.¹⁸ The trajectory of this book alone well illustrates the growing normalisation and inclusion of wildlife gardening from a radical and idiosyncratic activity, to one that has become a concern of most horticultural activities. That is not, however, to suggest that all gardening today is wildlife gardening. Wildlife gardening books continue to illustrate the breadth and differing degrees of uptake that exists within gardening. For example Kate Bradbury, in *Wildlife Gardening for Everyone and Everything*, begins from a point of pleading for toleration of all insects (including wasps and flies) and planting in their interest rather than the gardener's to such a degree that is unlikely to be adopted by the majority of her audience.¹⁹ Recognising this

¹⁶ Ibid., p.301.

¹⁷ Elliott, *The Royal*, p.249.

¹⁸ Chris Baines, *How to make a Wildlife Garden* (London : Elm Tree Books, 1984); *Companion to Wildlife Gardening* (London : Frances and Lincoln, 2016).

¹⁹ Kate Bradbury, *Wildlife Gardening for Everyone and Everything* (London : Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2019).

dissonance, between audience and author, Ken Thompson's book entitled *No Nettles Required* (Figure 4) seeks to guide the reader in wildlife gardening, whilst not scaring the novice with overly outlandish suggestions.²⁰ The attitudes and activities encouraged and prescribed in this literature will form the basis of this dissertation's primary sources, and thus be closely read for aesthetic similarities, ideological consonance and societal context. This literature will be enriched with analysis of archival gardening magazines such as the weekly *Amateur Gardening* and the RHS monthly publication *The Garden* in order to track more immediate and popular interest in wildlife gardening. The dissertation will further use some televisual and audio sources, though not to the same extent due to the limitations of access and dissertation length; it would be an interesting line of enquiry to follow up in further research on the topic. The attitudes of relevant organisations such as the RHS, the RSPB, the Wildlife Trust and Natural England will also be important considerations.

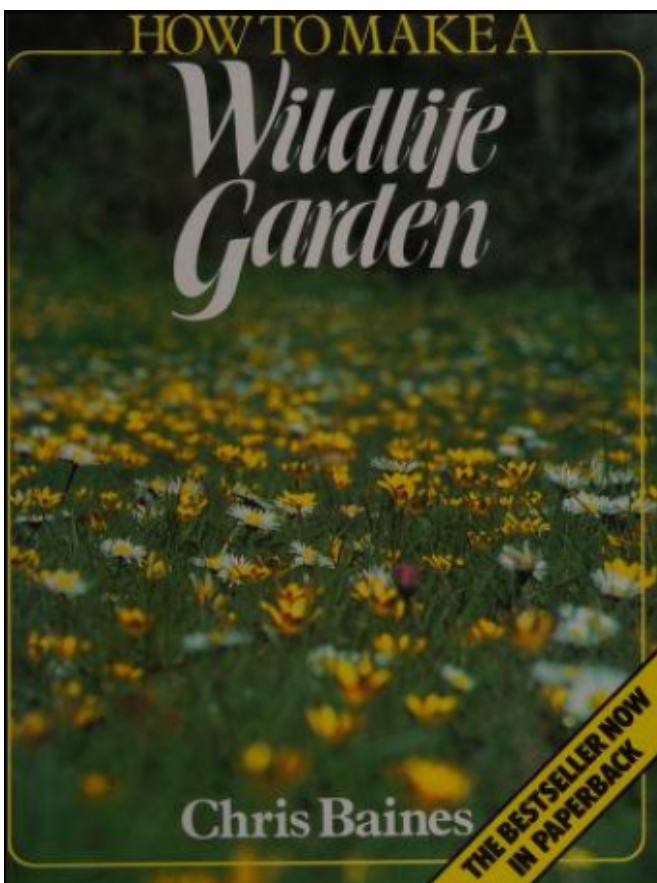


Figure 3: *How to make a Wildlife Garden* by Chris Baines.

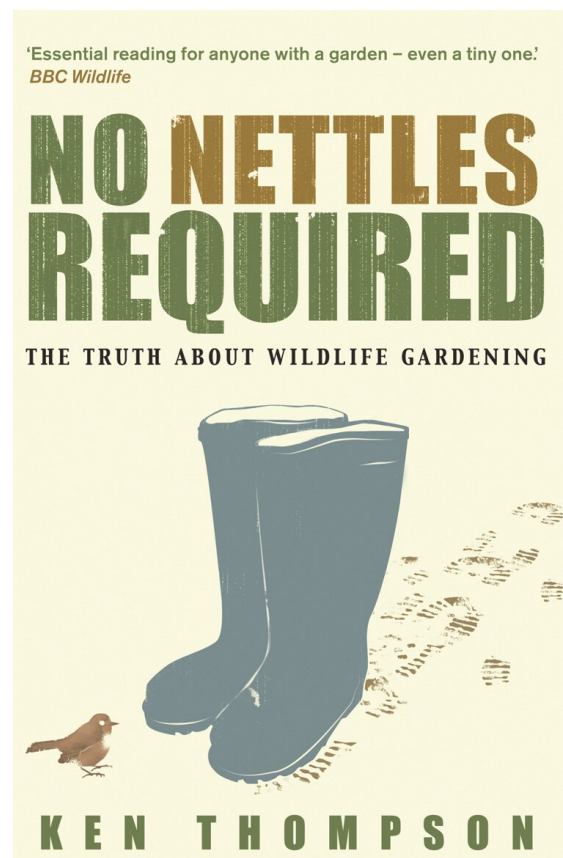


Figure 4: *No Nettles Required* by Ken Thompson.

²⁰ Ken Thompson, *No Nettles Required* (London : Transworld Publishing, 2007).

Structure

The dissertation will begin by further elaborating on what wildlife gardening is and, more specifically, how that definition has changed over time. It will further examine previous trends that have associated their style with the wild to help disambiguate wildlife gardening from other similar trends. This section will largely use wildlife gardening books as primary sources since the introductions to such texts provide a wealth of individual interpretation and justification of wildlife gardening. With an overview framework sketched, the second chapter will then move closer to the amateur gardening development of the trend, focusing specifically on activity in the twentieth century. Using regular gardening magazines as source material, it will examine how the theories and ideas of wildlife gardening translate to their physical manifestations such as water features, pollinator friendly planting and 'houses' designed for various animals. The final chapter will then explore wildlife gardening in the twenty-first century and how its beginnings in the previous century have been adapted and consolidated to address the requisites of modern society. Even if gardens can often feel like oases, the activity in them is not isolated from the rest of society, and wildlife gardening in particular is crucially motivated by contemporary concerns.

Chapter 1: What is Wildlife Gardening?

Before looking more closely at changes in the attitudes and practicalities of wildlife gardening, it is as well to establish what this dissertation will include when talking about wildlife gardening. Though this was considered briefly in the introduction, it will merit closer examination given the grounding of this dissertation in the literature of the wildlife gardening movement. In order to understand this, this first section will examine what a garden is and how this changes when a garden is planned and tended for wildlife. It will also look at earlier attitudes to insects and animals in the garden, before the advent of wildlife gardening as an established trend. Furthermore, given the frequent association of wildlife gardening with fashions for natural or wild gardens, these trends will be briefly considered in order to understand how these gardens are different from wildlife gardens of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In *A Philosophy of Gardens* David E. Cooper defines gardens as 'natural places that have been transformed by creative human activity, and contain natural items, such as flowers, chosen, placed and organized at least in part with aesthetic considerations'.²¹ Wildlife gardening is encompassed by this definition, though arguably the extent to which some authors recommend prioritising the interests of insect-life over aesthetic considerations might make the inclusion of some wildlife gardens less certain. This is especially important to take into account given that the rest of Cooper's work goes on to demonstrate that gardens are primarily spaces created for human enjoyment. Even if the gardener enjoys the arrival of wildlife in the garden, wildlife gardening is different to some extent due to its displacement of humans as the primary beneficiaries of the designed space. In her 2015 article on guerrilla gardening, Suzanne Patman makes the incisive point that regardless of how gardens are defined, gardens have historically been 'a particular place, one with a private and owned enclosure'.²² That is to say, even if it is possible to fit something into a definition, it is nonetheless worth examining the historical record to fully understand its meaning. Patman uses this critique to point out the novelty of guerrilla gardening but it might further be noted that the audience for whom a garden has been designed has historically been human, with garden designs being the result of a search for visually attractive scenes, productive use of space or a display of a particular fashion or idea. Wildlife

²¹ David E. Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens*, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2006) p.21.

²² Suzanne Patman, 'A New Direction in Garden History', *Garden History*, 43 (2015), p.273.

gardening might begin with human activity but its designs are informed by the use and enjoyment (if such an emotion can be ascribed to animals) of users other than humans. Due, in part, to the range of scales and styles of historical gardening, definitions of a garden are often loosely edged, like Cooper's. Another relevant example is John Dixon Hunt's extensive and more exploratory definition in *Greater Perfections*, which includes specifics such as

a garden will normally be out-of-doors, a relatively small space of ground...The specific area of the garden will be deliberately related through various means to the locality in which it is set...A combination of inorganic and organic materials are strategically invoked for a variety of usually interrelated reasons - practical, social, spiritual, aesthetic...The garden will therefore take different forms and be subject to different uses in a variety of times and places.²³

His definition does include the same reference to aesthetic considerations as Cooper's but his inclusion also of 'practical, social, spiritual' makes his definition more appropriate to the practice of wildlife gardening.²⁴ It goes some way to explain how even a deliberate abandonment of certain plants to caterpillar predation might be considered a form of gardening as it could be interpreted as social (gardening activity that declares a personal standpoint of wildlife protection) and spiritual (sacrificing parts of one's own harvest for the benefits of others). Furthermore, Hunt's observation of the importance of temporality and society in shaping a garden is crucial for understanding the growth in popularity, and the accompanying stylistic developments, of wildlife gardening.

The question of defining a wildlife garden is bedevilled by the reassurance that commences so much literature on the topic that wildlife gardening is not so different from other types of gardening or, as Ken Thompson put it in *No Nettles Required*, 'We are all wildlife gardeners now'.²⁵ The argument goes that all gardens have wildlife in them, regardless of the intentions of the gardener, and thus, even before one seeks out such company, a wildlife garden exists simply by default of nature. Such a theory, comforting though it may be to the amateur gardener, is rather undermined however by the proliferation of literature on the topic; if every

²³ John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfections: The practice of garden theory* (London : Thames & Hudson, 2000), p.14-15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.14-15.

²⁵ Thompson, *No Nettles*, p.1.

garden is truly a wildlife garden, why and how are so many books published on the topic? A quick keyword search for 'wildlife' and 'garden' of the British Library catalogue shows that 222 books have been published on the topic since 2012, and this does not take into account literature that is titled more inventively and thus is not included in the search results.²⁶ So if wildlife gardening is something other than the mere presence of some invertebrates that naturally occur in a garden, what is meant by wildlife gardening? Unfortunately, the volume of literature on the subject does not mean that there is an equal volume of simple answers to this question which might be easily compiled into an all-encompassing point of reference. In the introduction it was suggested that wildlife gardening is gardening practices and styles that consider animals, birds and insects as the primary beneficiaries of the created space. By examining the existing discussions of wildlife gardening, it will become apparent how this definition was arrived at.

On their page on 'What is Wildlife Gardening', The Wildlife Gardening Forum begins with the customary defence of avoiding definition: 'It's very tempting to write complicated definitions of Wildlife Gardening, but they really don't help anyone'.²⁷ In spite of this obfuscating opening, there are some useful points to draw out from this page: firstly, their capitalisation of 'Wildlife Gardening' reassuringly suggests that it is in fact something distinct. Secondly, their argument that 'ALL gardens have wildlife in them - whether we like it or not' is followed by a series of more useful points and images, which includes the quasi-definition that 'the key thing about wildlife gardeners is that they are aware of and interested in the creatures in their garden and they manage their garden with wildlife in mind'.²⁸ Wildlife gardening is therefore a mindset and a principle that guides both garden design and activity; importantly, as many advisory literature introductions point out, it is distinct from simply letting one's garden become wild. Though an abandoned patch of nettles and brambles are beneficial for pollinators and small animals, the consensus of contemporary wildlife gardening literature is that such an approach fails to maximise the potential of the garden.

Another important element of what wildlife gardening is, therefore, is the focus on habitat creation. More recent wildlife gardening especially has focused on this idea of gardens as a national resource that can be used as a collective good to make up for losses elsewhere. In their

²⁶ http://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=BLVU1 Accessed 16/08/2021.

²⁷ http://www.wlgf.org/wlg_intro.html Accessed 21/08/2021.

²⁸ Ibid.

1988 book, *Creating a Wildlife Garden*, Bob and Liz Gibbons identify this trend, pointing out how, as attitudes to nature conservation have changed, gardens have been increasingly influenced by 'the idea of recreating miniature examples of natural habitats, often in combinations that would occur naturally, although of course on a much smaller scale and at a much higher density'.²⁹ Not only are wildlife gardens not simply gardens left to wildlife, but furthermore they are carefully constructed so as to maximise the benefit they can have for the most number of species. Much of the theory behind wildlife garden design comes from a view of gardens as habitats. This works in two ways: firstly, each person's personal garden is one component of a potentially massive, though disparate, nature reserve. By understanding gardens from the perspective of wildlife visitors, the human vision bounded by marked property boundaries is superseded for a literal bird's eye view that links green spaces together rather than dividing them along household divisions. In 1984 Chris Baines pointed out that 'there are a million acres of private gardens....in area alone, private gardens represent a land sources which is worth taking seriously', thereby setting a trend for the recurrence of this point in many books of a similar genre to his *How to Make a Wildlife Garden*.³⁰ The second case in which gardens are considered as habitats is in their potential to be designed to include many different habitats. A woodland edge is frequently cited as the most adaptable and varied habitat that can easily be created in a herbaceous border (Figure 5) - with trees, shrubs, rotting wood, flowers and open grassland in the lawn - but ponds with bog gardens and varied depths of water are also habitats held up for inspiration. This second concept of habitat gardening, of creating a selection of appropriate microcosms to replace the larger vanishing versions, further demonstrates the skill required of the wildlife gardener. Far from allowing their plot to be abandoned, they must carefully consider the various aspects and microclimates within their space, especially in respect of installing more permanent features such as ponds or trees. Wildlife gardening is thus crucially informed by a view of the garden not just as space in which to create an aesthetic effect but also as an ecological entity - the garden is a space in which to create ecosystems, meaning that the gardener is required to

²⁹ Bob Gibbons and Liz Gibbons, *Creating a Wildlife Garden* (London : The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, 1988), p.10.

³⁰ Baines, *How to*, p.19; see for example Helen Bostock and Sophie Collins, *How Can I Help Hedgehogs: A gardener's collection of inspiring ideas for welcoming wildlife* (Brighton : Quarto Publishing plc, 2019), p.180 and Jim Ashton and Joel Ashton, *Wild Your Garden* (London : Dorling Kindersley, 2020), p.10.

care for all life within (and outside) the garden bounds rather than simply seeking mastery over plants and their habits.



Figure 5: Chris Baines in his garden in Wolverhampton, demonstrating the ornamental value of a woodland edge style garden (http://www.wlgf.org/forum_patrons.html).

The natural relationship between animals and plants means that taking the presence of animals in a garden into consideration when designing the space is far from new. The importance of honey as an early sweetener has led to bees being considered part of the garden since at least the Roman times. In his *Georgics* Virgil noted that ‘bees are to be in a shady corner out of the wind...Yet water is present, and in it are stones and wood to help the bees dry themselves’ and the presence of hives in productive kitchen or herb gardens has a long tradition.³¹ Thomas Hill’s 1609 *The Arte of Gardening* includes a treatise on ‘the mervailous government, order and usage of the bees’ which instructs the reader on ‘which are the best and fittest Hives for the Honnie Bees’, as well as biologically dubious information on beekeeping and the uses of honey.³² Not only have manmade houses for bees been traditionally incorporated into garden design - before

³¹ Cited in Penelope Walker and Eva Crane, ‘The History of Beekeeping in English Gardens’, *Garden History*, 28 (2000), p.234.

³² Thomas Hill, *The Arte of Gardening*, (London : 1608).

the advent of modern frame hives, alcoves for skeps were often built into garden walls - but specific plants have also been recognised as particularly popular among bees, much in the style of contemporary descriptors of 'plants for pollinators'.³³ Penelope Walker and Eva Crane point out that 'Varro gave the names of crops 'that are most attractive to bees', and Columella listed many in which 'the region should...be rich' ', and furthermore include an appendix to their article on beekeeping listing the plants that seventeenth-century authors recommended for enticing bees.³⁴ This history demonstrates the extent to which pollinator attractiveness may be a relatively recent marketing campaign, but it has a long past of being included in garden design. That said, wildlife gardening does still represent a point of departure from this tradition since gardening for bees has previously been linked to human projects. Bee-friendly plants were planted in order to produce honey and it was not until the late nineteenth century that the frame design of hives allowed for the bees more peaceful existence - the wicker skeps often required destruction of the hive and many of the bees in order for the keeper to access the honey. Such a tradition is obviously different from the practices of wildlife gardening. Furthermore, wildlife gardens actively provide for all types of bee, whereas previous focus on honey production has meant that even if bees are referred to without any distinguishing adjective, the object of the garden design attention has been *Apis mellifera* (the honeybee). An interest in animal life in the garden may not be unprecedented but the perspective of wildlife gardening, whereby the garden's main purpose is to provide sanctuary for wildlife, distinguishes it from past attitudes which have been rooted first and foremost in human enjoyment and use.

As outlined in the introduction, wildlife gardening has often suffered from being treated as an undistinguished part of other trends that seem similar to it in aesthetic culmination or ideological beginning. Given that part of the purpose of this dissertation is to dispel that status of wildlife gardening, arguing rather that it is a distinct trend worthy of individual attention, it will be useful to briefly consider how and why wildlife gardening is more than just an extreme version of naturalism, for example. In the interests of clarity, the relationship between wildlife gardening and ecological gardening will also be explored.

³³ See, for example, https://www.rhsplants.co.uk/plants/_/vid.211/numitems.100/canorder.1/ Accessed 24/08/2021.

³⁴ Walker and Crane, 'The History' p.249.

William Robinson's 1870 *The Wild Garden* argued for a looser style of gardening that celebrated the English countryside and it would be easy to understand the scenes inspired by his work as proto wildlife gardening. Reacting against the formality and fashion for bedding out of the nineteenth century, Robinson advocated the 'naturalising or making wild innumerable beautiful natives of many regions of the earth in our woods, wilds and semi-wild places, rougher parts of pleasure grounds, etc., and in the unoccupied places in almost every kind of garden'.³⁵ The influence of the Arts and Crafts movement, with its nostalgia for a golden age of rural idealism and belief in Nature as a potent source of inspiration, encouraged Robinson to call for the creation of wild areas in gardens through judicious mixing of natives and appropriate non-native species in loose and interactive planting designs. Looking at some of the plates from *The Wild Garden* (Figure 6), it is certainly tempting to see Robinson as encourage gardening very like today's wildlife gardening. That said, there are important points of divergence, namely Robinson's focus on flowers and plants. It is not impossible that the aesthetic culmination of advice from *The Wild Garden*, especially specifics based on British wild flowers, might look similar to a herbaceous border filled with plants recommended by wildlife gardening literature for attracting insects. The difference, however, is motivation. Robinson was not concerned with creating a garden as a place of refuge for either wild flowers or wild animals, but rather with saving gardens from what he described as 'base and frightfully opposed to every law of nature's own arrangement of living things' - the bedding system.³⁶ His rallying cry for gardens to be returned to more mixed informality came from an artistic concern for the fate of 'the old mixed-border'.³⁷ While wildlife gardening can be aesthetically delightful, it is not so motivated by a concern about the degradation of the art of gardening. Rather, wildlife gardening sees the garden as a space to be used for a purpose - not so much an art form or craft, as a potential means to a higher end. Even if the results are visually comparable, the interests driving the choices are vastly different and thus it is as well not to associate contemporary wildlife gardening with the wild gardens fashionable at the turn of the twentieth century.

³⁵ William Robinson, *The Wild Garden*, (London : 1870), p.7.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 6.

³⁷ *Ibid*.



Figure 6: Plates from William Robinson's *The Wild Garden*, 1870 (<https://archive.org>).

The end of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twenty-first saw a new kind of park management that sought to create ecological parks - that is, parks that accurately imitated certain wild habitats. Designers such as Jacobus P. Thijsse and Eli Heimans in the Netherlands, and Jens Jensen and Ossian Cole Simonds in the U.S.A., designed parks that carefully recreated landscapes which they saw as being in danger of being forgotten and lost. The idea behind these 'heemparks' (heem meaning environment, yard or home in Dutch) was to ensure that current generations appreciated native flora, and were able to maintain contact with such informative parts of their national identity, even as urban expansion destroyed the real versions of these habitats and made it increasingly difficult for the majority of the population to access what

remained.³⁸ These parks were a sanctuary of kinds, intent in providing a safe and protected space for a specific kind of national identity based in a type of blood and soil identity of races that swiftly became distasteful after the excesses of fascism in the middle of the twentieth century. Regardless of the political agendas and relations, however, these heemparks could well be understood as early forms of wildlife gardening, since they specifically sought to preserve certain species, and provide space and sanctuary for them in urban areas. Indeed, there are definite similarities between these early twentieth-century efforts to preserve certain types of landscape and the reaction in the 1960s to the effects of intensive agriculture. Early efforts to make gardens into wildlife sanctuaries were not aimed at saving insects or animals, but rather at preserving wildflower species, hitherto seen as weeds, that were being wiped out by herbicides and hedgerow destruction. These examples of natural landscape design then, intent on preserving an artificial replica of disappearing ecologies, might be seen as the predecessors of today's wildlife gardening movement. Though different in the focus of the preservation efforts and in the scale of the created sanctuaries, there is a similarity in the thoughts and theories motivating these efforts to create reserves for disappearing species.

As a result of the shared informal and habitat style plantings, wildlife gardening is often seen as a less refined version of twentieth-century natural planting styles such as New Perennials. The verb 'seen' is used advisedly here since it would seem that the confusion arises from an almost exclusively visual impression of the two garden design fashions. They both share a recommendation for mixed perennial plantings, leaving seed-heads for winter interest and using grasses among flowers to recreate the impression of untamed nature. Piet Oudolf at Maximilianpark, for example, includes plants such as *Phlomis* and *Echniacea* that provide strong visual contrast to swathes of grass once the rest of the foliage has died back (Figure 7). The impression of informality given by large areas of herbaceous plantings and the seed-casting styles pioneered by James Hitchmough and Nigel Dunnett can easily fool the uninformed observer that these are spaces for wildlife. This, however, overlooks the intricacies and complications of both garden design styles and fails to fully appreciate the skill required to create such convincingly

³⁸ For a more detailed exploration, see Jan Woudstra, 'The changing nature of ecology: a history of ecological planting (1800-1980)' in Nigel Dunnett and James Hitchmough, *The Dynamic Landscape: Design, Ecology and Management of Naturalistic Urban Planting* (London : Taylor and Francis, 2004).

natural plantings. Though aspects such as desiccated stems, clumps of grasses and stands of dead plant matter that frequently feature in New Perennial gardens will undoubtedly benefit wildlife to some degree, their being maintained in such a way is not done with the single intention of providing shelter. New Perennial plantings are motivated by a search for visually attractive and interesting beds during the winter months, whereas the decision to leave teasels standing in a wildlife garden, for example, is done with the intention of providing food and shelter for a host of insects and birds. It is important to consider motivation and theory behind the aesthetic manifestations of garden design because this distinguishes the ornamental value of seed-heads in New Perennial planting from the practical considerations informing decisions in wildlife gardens.



Figure 7: Maximilianpark, showing standing vegetation for visual effect rather than wildlife benefits. (<https://www.maximilianpark.de/en/attraktion/piet-oudolf/>).

Another point of overlap between modern natural planting styles and wildlife gardening is the use by both of closely observed vegetation patterns from uncultivated spaces as the inspiration for planting design. In New Perennial plantings, this is commonly referred to as using ‘plant communities’ (originally an ecologist’s term) and is ‘an abstraction, a naming convention we use to describe vegetation so we can study it’, used as a model that ensures simpler maintenance plans and prevents inter-plant competition disrupting the planting designs.³⁹ Analysis of naturally

³⁹ Thomas Rainer and Claudia West, *Planting in a Post-Wild World: Designing plant communities for resilient landscapes* (Portland, Oregon : Timber Press, 2015), p.30.

occurring plantings are thus used to benefit the gardener and the plants (in the case of mycorrhiza, for example), and ensure that the garden's design is relatively stable in spite of its loose and informal style.⁴⁰ In contrast, the use of naturally occurring plant combinations and ecosystem structures in wildlife gardening is part of a deliberate plan to recreate habitats. It typically advises the recreation of something like the edge of a woodland as the best habitat for welcoming a diverse range of wildlife. Already this is different from many natural planting styles which are often inspired by open prairie-scapes, though more silvan gardens do exist as well. Chris Baines suggest that the new wildlife gardener 'imagine leaving a belt of solid woodland around the edge of the garden to provide shelter, to screen you from the neighbours, and to give more timid wildlife a secluded access route around, and in and out of your garden', clearly demonstrating the very practical approach that wildlife gardening has in its adoption of plant communities.⁴¹ This favouring of woodland landscapes is advised not only on the basis of the range of habitats it includes - the open grassland of the lawn, leaf litter and logs, trees, small shrubs and flowering herbaceous plants all in one harmonious area - but also on the basis of it being appropriate specifically to the British wildlife that is of particular cause for concern. As Baines points out, 'much of Britain used to be covered with deciduous woodland...[so] many of our native plants and animals are most at home in this dappled shade of the woodland edge'.⁴² In this case, the transfer of habitats to the garden are not merely the attempt of a garden design team to evoke a sense of natural beauty, but rather seeks to use such a similarity to attract other members of the ecosystem as well.

The relation between ecological gardening and wildlife gardening can be dealt with much more simply. Firstly, it is worth noting that if ecological is 'relating to ecology (the relationship between living things and the environment) or the environment', then surely all gardens are ecological simply by virtue of being an art form that combines plants, space and humans together in a production reliant on wider environmental factors such as weather and climate.⁴³ That, however, is a separate moot point and therefore it is more useful to understand ecological

⁴⁰ Mycorrhiza refers to the symbiotic relations formed between plant roots and fungal networks existing in the soil, which benefit the growth of plants by extending the range of nutrients available through their roots.

⁴¹ Baines, *How to*, p.24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁴³ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ecological> Accessed 18/08/2021.

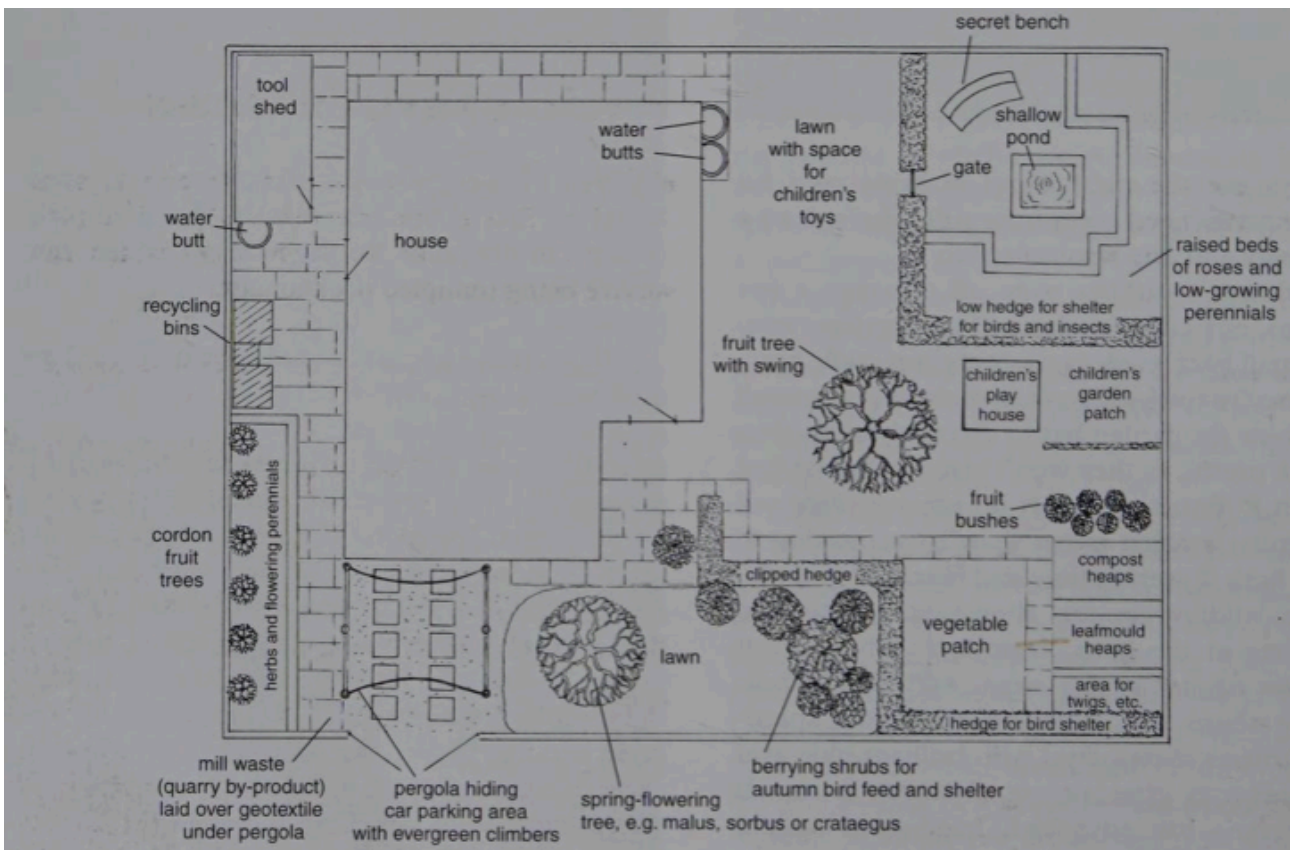


Figure 8: Plan for an ecological garden from Sally Cunningham's 'Ecological Gardening' (p.14) showing how the garden is designed to maximise sustainable harvest.

gardening as being gardening with sustainability in mind. Wildlife gardening is undeniably part of this and often features in literature that addresses the topic. That said, it is often only a small section since, important though biodiversity is for sustainability, sustainable garden practice is often more concerned with resource management, such as water usage, recycled materials and crop rotation (Figure 8). Wildlife such as bees, insects, frogs and hedgehogs are often seen as component parts of organic gardening - specifically, as useful pest control - and therefore gardening that encourages wildlife into the garden has a purpose above and beyond merely caring for wildlife and offering a space of sanctuary. Furthermore, ecological gardening, interested as it is in generating a harvest for the gardener, diverges from more extreme wildlife gardeners who might encourage the growth of some plants simply as caterpillar fodder. Instead, as Sally Cunningham points out, feeding the birds is 'not always practical: you may want to eat brassicas yourself rather than feeding pigeons', demonstrating how human concerns take priority over those of visiting wildlife in most ecological gardening models.⁴⁴ In contrast, wildlife gardening authors such as Kate Bradbury value the brassica family for its popularity among insect larvae:

⁴⁴ Sally Cunningham, *Ecological Gardening* (Marlborough : The Crowood Press Ltd., 2009), p.30.

one of her main tips for attracting wasps to one's garden is 'don't net your cabbages. (Oh go on - what's the worst that can happen?)'.⁴⁵ Although biodiversity advantages and the benefits of a balanced ecosystem within the garden make wildlife gardening a useful component of ecological gardening, the different motivating factors mean that the two types of gardening are distinguishable, and wildlife gardening is not fully understood or appreciated if it is simply considered as a small subheading under ecological gardening.

⁴⁵ Bradbury, *Wildlife Gardening* p. 232.

Chapter 2: Wildlife gardening in the Twentieth Century

For the ease of readable structuring, the following examination of the wildlife gardening movement will be split into two chronological sections. The first (this section) will deal with the emergence of wildlife gardening in the twentieth century, and the second will address twenty-first century activity and how it compares to the previous century's activities. This is an arbitrary division - wildlife gardening was not obviously affected by any millenarian emotions - but it is useful as a way of exposing any dramatic changes over time. This twentieth-century section will examine the beginnings of the environmental movement and those of nascent wildlife gardening. It will draw out common themes within advice on the topic in order to provide points of comparison for the next section. These will include efforts to preserve wildflower species, societal attitudes to nature that had a bearing on wildlife gardening and early design suggestions that recur in the literature.

Given the influence that is now attributed to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* it is remarkable how little impact it appears to have had on the development of wildlife gardening in the UK. In her afterword to the Penguin Modern Classics edition of the book, Linda Lear compares it to Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* and Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, pointing to its influence in 'initiati[ing] the contemporary environmental movement which undeniably influences the social policy of every nation'.⁴⁶ It might be expected that such a contemporarily well-regarded work would make some mark on gardening literature. However, evidence for such an influence in magazines and books for a gardening audience is very limited. Using keyword searches of online library catalogues, it would seem that the publishing of wildlife gardening books does not significantly increase until the late 1970s.⁴⁷ Such a research method is not, of course, infallible: it includes a significant amount of human decisions such as librarian purchasing choices and the lag between interest and the publication on books to meet that demand. That said, a similar slow reaction is evident in gardening magazines. Whilst still subject to the same delay between opinion and printed evidence of such a mood, magazines have the advantage of more immediate and

⁴⁶ Linda Lear 'Afterword' in Carson, *Silent Spring*, p. 258.

⁴⁷ See, for example, the graph of results arranged by publication date at https://libraries.rhs.org.uk/client/en_GB/default/search/results?qu=wildlife+garden&te= Accessed 16/08/2021.

regular printing, thereby more closely reflecting contemporary interests. In spite of this, archived copies of *Amateur Gardening* fail to document an interest in wildlife gardening until the 1970s.

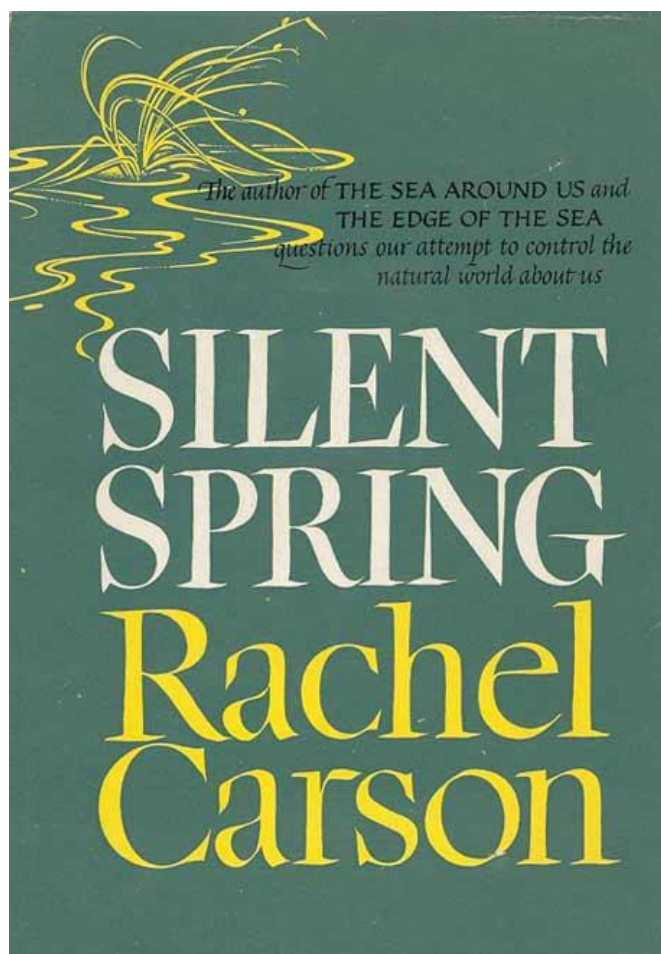


Figure 9: Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, first published in 1962 in the US and 1963 in the UK (<http://www.rachelcarson.org>).

Indeed, an article that appeared in the *Amateur Gardening Annual* of 1966 is much more indicative of the dismissive attitude Carson faced at the time of publishing, rather than of her reputation today. Though the article's author, John Forsyth, acknowledges that 'The publication of Rachel Carson's book 'Silent Spring' [sic] in 1963 did much to focus the attention on the dangers which could arise from the use of insecticides and other chemicals in the garden', such a beginning is undermined by his criticism that 'she [Carson] had a tendency to blur the distinction between fact and inference when she thought it would lend weight to her case'.⁴⁸ Given that his article is advice to the reader on the choice of pesticides, it is evident that Carson's argument has not made

a great deal of an impression upon him, even if he does recommend choosing chemicals that have 'a minimum of side effects on other insects, animals and plants'.⁴⁹ Rather than taking the key point from Carson's book that everything on earth is linked in one great, carefully-balanced ecology - or, as she puts it, that 'the history of life on earth has been the history of interaction between living things and their surroundings' - Forsyth seeks alternatives to the specific chemicals incriminated by her work.⁵⁰ This trend persists throughout the archives of the

⁴⁸ John Forsyth, 'Insecticides for the Amateur Gardener' in Ed. A. G. L. Hellyer, *Amateur Gardening Annual 1966* (London : Amateur Gardening, 1966), p.74.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.74.

⁵⁰ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, London : Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 23.

magazine, with articles on chemical control and treatment of gardens persisting in spite of the increasing proof of the problems arising from their usage. Authors might recommend more careful spraying - for example, spraying in the evening when bees are less active - but the subjects and fashions documented in the magazine betray the priorities of the writing team and their readership. Emerald lawns and their care dominate the material from the 1960s and 1970s and adverts for herbicides and insecticides maintain their popularity; such habits continue to be sticking point for advocates of more environmentally conscious gardening even today.⁵¹

Evidence of a trend towards wildlife

gardening begins to become apparent in the 1970s in two separate but related aspects. The first is a growing concern about the extinction of Britain's native wildflowers, and the other is a rising trend for observing garden wildlife. As the most obvious and immediate victims of the intensive chemical agricultural industries that boomed in the post-war years, wild flora in Britain soon became a popular cause for concern in gardening magazines. The combination of hedgerow destruction for more efficient fields, herbicides eliminating species from farmed areas and insecticides endangering the pollination of flowers and thus limiting the reproductive population of wild plants all combined to significantly alter the floral landscape of rural Britain.

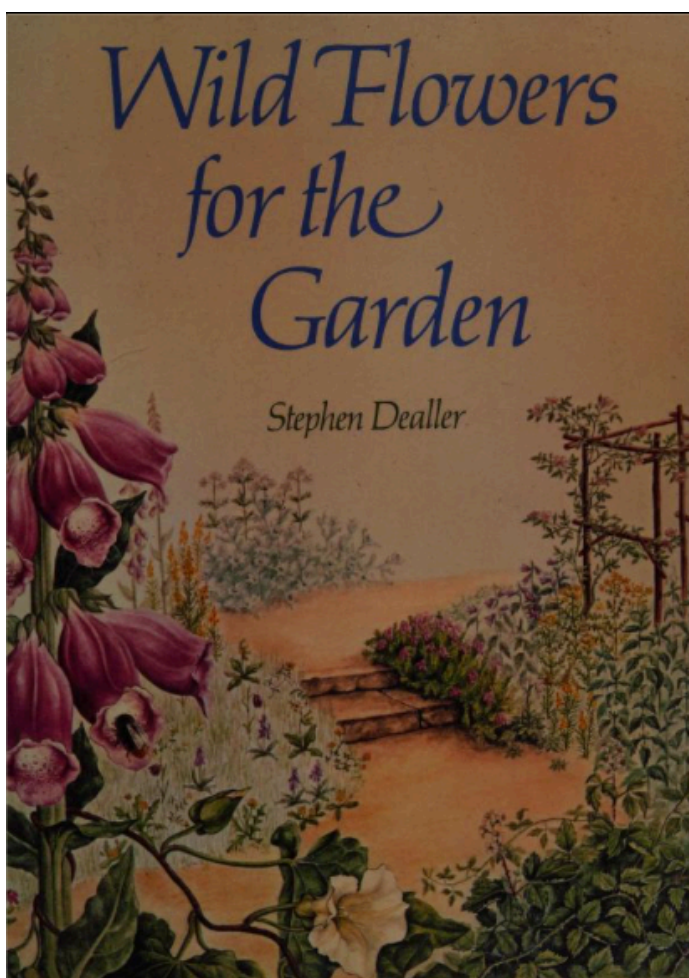


Figure 10: Stephen Dealler's *Wild Flowers for the garden* (1977), showing the early attitude to wild flower preservation for romantic garden design (<https://archive.org>).

The corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*), for example, was often held up as an attractive species made virtually extinct as a result of agricultural developments of the 1950s, and even today is

⁵¹ See, for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/25/the-insect-apocalypse-our-world-will-grind-to-a-halt-without-them>.

listed as critically endangered by the charity Plantlife.⁵² The extent to which this became a significant public concern is evidenced by the fact that by 1985 a wildflower selection of seeds was available from *Mr Fothergill's Seed Catalogue*. The author of the accompanying information points out how 'even poppies, once the scourge of every farmer's field, have met their match in modern herbicides', describing them with all the impartiality of advertising as the 'essence of summer'; species such as cowslips and primroses are promised as 'incomparable' and 'the most beautiful', respectively.⁵³ The impact of modern agricultural techniques seems to have resulted in such rarity of certain native flora as to influence aesthetic opinion, laced to some extent with that inevitable nostalgia for an indistinct idea of things past and lost. In a similar vein, Stephen Dealler in *Wild Flowers for the Garden* (Figure 10) laments that 'some plants, now becoming extremely rare, are still being eradicated by farmers', listing 'the corn cockle, corn marigold, ragged robin, delightful flowers [that are] being ruthlessly removed'.⁵⁴ Though his introduction evidently points the finger of blame for these losses at the history of increasingly intensive agriculture, he does include everyone in the problem, and thereby also in the potential remedy. Criticising the 'age of functionalism and efficiency' and its eagerness to categorise plants into weeds to be pulled out and crops to be left to flourish, he further suggests 'wouldn't it be nice not to have to (gardening-book rule) fill your time with maintaining the order of your garden against the "chaos" of beautiful wild flowers'.⁵⁵ Here, then, is an author who is not only concerned by the floral victims of increased efficiency, but also seems, himself, to be pressed by a sense of limited time and hankers for a more relaxed approach to gardening which allows flowers to flourish regardless of their traditional categorisation. This idea of wildlife gardening as good for other species and more enjoyable for human gardeners is a recurring theme throughout the literature.

Such concerns were not confined to individual gardening writers. The Nature Conservancy Council was set up in 1973, charged with the management of national nature reserves and providing scientific advice for nature conservation at various levels of government. Their efforts to raise awareness of the degradation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest

⁵² <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/plant-fungi-species/corncockle> Accessed 25/08/2021.

⁵³ *Mr Fothergill's Seed Catalogue*, pull-out pamphlet in *Amateur Gardening*, 100, No. 5211 (1985).

⁵⁴ Stephen Dealler, *Wild Flowers for the Garden* (London : B. T. Batsford, 1977), p.15.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.15-16.

throughout the 1970s culminated in the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981, demonstrating both the damage to wildlife occurring at this time and also the powerful public engagement with the problem.⁵⁶ In 1975 the Private Member, Peter Hardy's Bill passed into the Conservation of Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Act, making a concern for the welfare and survival of wildlife a legal requirement of individuals by outlawing killing of animals or wild plants.⁵⁷ Though it did include caveats for agricultural and forestry concerns, section 4 forbidding the uprooting of wild flowers is simultaneously indicative of worries about the longevity of indigenous plant populations and also of a public interested enough in the idea of including wildflowers in their garden to pilfer them from their natural environments. At this same time Miriam Rothschild was beginning her project of cultivating wildflowers at Ashton Wold, Northamptonshire, by leaving grass tennis courts to revert to their un-mown state and enhancing other areas with seed collected from other untamed sites. In gravel paths she grew 'idle weeds - poppies, cornflowers, corncockles, feverfew, marigolds and flax - a mixture I [Rothschild] have named "Farmer's Nightmare" '.⁵⁸ She went on to use this



Figure 11: Dame Miriam Rothschild with wild annuals that were used in her 'Farmers' Nightmare' seed mix. (<https://canceraction.org/gg/miriam-rothschilds-wildflower-seed-project/>).

⁵⁶ <https://naturenet.net/status/history.html> Accessed 26/08/2021.

⁵⁷ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1975/48/pdfs/ukpga_19750048_en.pdf Accessed 26/08/2021.

⁵⁸ Miriam Rothschild, 'Ashton Wold' in Miriam Rothschild, Kate Garton and Lionel de Rothschild, *The Rothschild Gardens* (London : Gaia Books Limited, 1996), p. 105.

in her work with The Prince of Wales and marketed the combination as an annual seed mix available for those wishing to develop their own similar patches of pretty wilderness.

Whilst these changes represent a gardening public who are significantly concerned about the role that their spaces can play in preserving nature, it is important to read the developments of the 1970s as the beginning of a wildlife gardening movement, rather than understanding them as the same wildlife gardening practised today. As mentioned above, an important aspect of early wildlife gardening was the naturalist's perspective, of observing nature rather than simply providing refuge for it in the space one could offer. This is not to suggest that modern-day gardeners do not take pleasure from watching the wildlife that arrives in their garden as a result of their efforts, but rather to draw attention to the change in tone that has occurred in the past 50 years of wildlife gardening. Miriam Rothschild might have been happy to leave parts of her estate to run so wild that a visitor was overheard remarking ' "I don't believe anyone can LIVE here..." ' but she opens her description of 'Gardening with Butterflies' by stating that 'I garden purely for pleasure' - her efforts to entice butterflies into her garden are unashamedly almost wholly for her own delight.⁵⁹ According to her 'we are anxious to attract butterflies to the garden because they add to its beauty and charm and interest' and the potential for gardeners to do butterflies 'a considerable service by providing them with a copious flow of nectar' is a secondary motivation.⁶⁰ This conceptual sequencing is the reverse of contemporary wildlife gardening which sees the garden as sanctuary first and enjoys the human benefits as a happy bonus. This idea of wildlife gardening that is for human entertainment, is backed up by the second-half of that book which, co-authored with Clive Farrell (founder of the London Butterfly House in 1981), describes how the reader can keep butterflies in a greenhouse in order to be able best observe 'the vast majority [of butterfly species, which] are tropical rather than temperate'.⁶¹ If the title of their book *The Butterfly Garden* is deceptively like a modern-day book on rewilding one's plot for insects, the inside reveals the authors' simple pleasures in lepidopterology. Indeed, Farrell remarks, seemingly without any awareness of the plight of Britain's wild flowers mentioned in the first half of the book,

⁵⁹ Cited in Miriam Rothschild 'Gardening with Butterflies' in Miriam Rothschild, and Clive Farrell, *The Butterfly Gardener* (London : The Rainbird Publishing Group Ltd., 1983), p.11; *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.62

⁶¹ Clive Farrell, 'The Indoor Butterfly Gardener' in Miriam Rothschild, and Clive Farrell, *The Butterfly Gardener* (London : The Rainbird Publishing Group Ltd., 1983), p. 65.

that ‘to-day the greatest threat to tropical butterflies is the destruction of their habitat’ demonstrating how gardens can be designed for wildlife without the urgency of sanctuary-creation that drives so much contemporary wildlife gardening.⁶²

Such attitudes are evident also in the case of gardening for birds during the 1970s. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (R.S.P.B) was initially founded at the end of the nineteenth century to save birds from the ornamental feather trade. During the early twentieth century its efforts increasingly became focused on the plight of wild birds and their habitats, with reserves such as Grassholm and Havergate being founded in the 1940s, and in 1979 the first Big Garden Birdwatch took place.⁶³ This event demonstrates a strong awareness of the importance of gardens as both a space that can be useful for birds and also a potential arena for human-wildlife interactions. Such an enthusiasm for watching wildlife is reflected in the literature of the 1970s that addresses wildlife in the garden: compared to contemporary work, it is very much focused on the human experience of wildlife observation, rather than seeing the garden as a place of refuge for threatened species. The encouragement of Tony Soper in his 1978 book *Wildlife Begins at Home* is a perfect point in case. Having described how to create enticing habitats for birds through the planting of berry-bearing bushes, allowing in some weeds and covering walls with creepers, he moves on to consider human comfort: ‘Four walls and a roof make a very comfortable naturalists hideaway. All mod cons and no weather problems, you can sit comfortably by your garden window and watch to your heart’s content.’⁶⁴ The rest of his book bears out this naturalist’s perspective from which he approaches wildlife gardening: the longer sections are entirely devoted to specific forms of wildlife that one might hope to see at certain times, their various habits and identification aids. In the ‘Further Reading’ section that concludes the book, it is notable that the recommendations are all books or societies to do with animals and nature watching, without one being devoted to plants or gardening. A similar attitude is evident in other wildlife gardening titles from the 1970s such as Ron Wilson’s *The Back Garden Wildlife Sanctuary Book* and Roy Genders’s *Wildlife in the Garden*, both of which seem to suggest that the arrival of wildlife in the garden is more to do with the convenience of the space and artful

⁶² Ibid., p.65.

⁶³ <https://www.rspb.org.uk/about-the-rspb/about-us/our-history/> Accessed 30/06/2021.

⁶⁴ Tony Soper, *Wildlife Begins at Home* (London : Pan Books, 1978), p.83.

arrangement by the garden-owner, rather than being the result of gardening activity.⁶⁵ The observation attitude evident in Soper's work is also present in Genders's book as his chapter on bees is dominated by a guide to beekeeping (though he does mention bumblebees and their favoured plants later on) and a chapter on butterflies is mostly devoted to how to raise butterflies of one's own - a far cry from contemporary literature that encourages the reader to hope that butterflies and moths might pass through a garden with the correct plants tempting them. Genders's enthusiasm for birdwatching is most indicative of the early attitudes to wildlife gardening as he encourages his reader to 'buy as many books about birds and birdwatching as you can and carry about a notebook to record all that you discover'.⁶⁶ For him, wildlife gardening is an activity of correctly ornamenting a site that will be convenient for observation from the comfort of one's home, of maximising one's enjoyment of garden wildlife rather than of seeing the garden from their perspective. Wildlife gardening thus seems to have emerged out of a natural history tradition, rather than a horticultural one, although it has evolved to fit more into the latter as the movement has gained momentum.

During the 1980s wildlife gardening significantly took off as an economically viable concern. The number of books on the topic proliferated, wildflower seed mixes became available from an increasing number of seed merchants and interest in urban wildlife took off from its beginnings in local wildlife trusts. Thus it is in the 1980s that ideas common with contemporary wildlife gardening begin to emerge, notably designs for entire garden spaces focused on creating wildlife habitats and also the idea of wildlife gardening as a call to the gardener to relax. Chris Baines's *How to Make a Wildlife Garden* cannot be underestimated for its importance in making wildlife gardening accessibly popular, nor for its impact on today's wildlife gardening movement. Jim Ashton, one of the Butterfly Brothers (who until recently ran a garden design company specialising in wilding people's gardens) interviewed Baines in 2018, describing him as a 'real hero of mine', and the contents of their discussion make it evident how much of the wildlife gardening of the 1980s is still the basis for similar activity today.⁶⁷ In particular, Baines made wildlife conservation accessible and practicable to an increasing population of urbanites whose

⁶⁵ Ron Wilson, *The Back Garden Wildlife Sanctuary Book* (London : Astragal Books, 1979); Roy Genders, *Wildlife in the Garden* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1976).

⁶⁶ Genders, *Wildlife*, p.83

⁶⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7yNbjYTeHg> Accessed 21/06/2021.

own personal patch of green space was (and is) often dauntingly small. His description of private gardens as ‘a vital wildlife corridor’, as one part of a bigger ecosystem of urban green space is an encouragement that echoes throughout the literature that follows.⁶⁸ In contrast to large scale wildlife gardening projects like the sowing of the wildflower meadow in 1982 at Highgrove (Figure 12), Baine’s work suggested that wildlife gardening need not be the preserve of those with the space to recreate the lost rural wild spaces.⁶⁹ His importance in making wildlife gardening popular was furthered by his 1984 BBC series *Blue Tits and Bumblebees* (Figure 13), which demonstrated how an



Figure 12: The Prince of Wales in the wildflower meadow at Highgrove, July 1986. (<https://www.houseandgarden.co.uk/gallery/inside-highgrove>)

average back garden of a simple lawn could be transformed into a refuge for wildlife, as well as his Wildlife Garden’s success at Chelsea Flower Show the next year. Rather than seeing the size of the ordinary suburban back garden as a limitation in its ability to welcome wildlife, he argued rather that it was perfectly set up as a space that wildlife would associate with shelter in the wild, such as a small glade in a forest. His illustrations demonstrate that ‘even the smallest of back yards can house a lot of wildlife’ by covering walls with ivy, using ‘batboxes and birds’ nesting

⁶⁸ Baines, *How to*, p.18.

⁶⁹ <https://www.countrylife.co.uk/gardens/prince-wales-garden-highgrove-196231> Accessed 27/08/2021.

boxes [to] make up for the lack of large old trees' and creating log piles for hibernating animals, making wildlife gardening more easily available and, importantly, appealing to the increasingly urban population.⁷⁰

The later decades of the twentieth century saw a kind of democratisation of wildlife gardening as it was promoted increasingly as available to anyone, regardless of garden size and furthermore often described as a way that the individual could become more active in their environmentalism. Baines described this aspect in his introduction as a feeling that 'as individuals we are powerless - that 'they' will decide', which he categorically refuted by pointing out the influence the public can have on a 'decision-maker' as well as the opportunity represented by private urban gardens.⁷¹ Similarly, in a 1985 article in *Amateur Gardening* Peter Hilman asserts that 'These days everyone should be an eco-gardener' since the widespread destruction of traditional rural habitats 'affords all gardeners with the moral duty to consider providing a safe refuge for wildlife, both animals and plants', making wildlife gardening not only accessible to everyone but also moving gardening out of the apolitical sphere to which it is so often relegated.⁷² In order to avoid such moral quandary, Hilman helpfully suggest some rules



Figure 13: Stills from Chris Baines's 'Bluetits and Bumblebees', first aired in 1984 with great popularity (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qG0aClbw5Wk>).

⁷⁰ Baines, *How to*, p.25.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.12.

⁷² Peter Hilman, 'Eco-Gardening' in *Amateur Gardening* 100, No. 5212 (1985), p.36

that the amateur gardener might follow, which include cutting down on pesticides (possibly the influence of Carson's work had finally started to percolate), planting bright flowers for insects, especially native species, and cultivating log piles, all of which are wildlife friendly activities that could be adapted to a plot of any size. Though Hilman declares a generation of 'eco-gardeners', not five pages later 'Irish Peat Moss' is advertised as the 'best thing for your garden since the common earthworm', betraying the extent to which wildlife gardening might have promoted as available to all long before the horticultural industry adopted it.⁷³ This widespread acceptance of wildlife gardening as a baseline concern in horticultural activity would be a twenty-first century development. Twentieth-century gardening then provided essential groundwork in importantly linking urban gardening to the plight of rural wildlife, making it increasingly accessible to any gardener. Such popular foundations would be essential for the developments of the movement in the twenty-first century.

⁷³ Advert in *Amateur Gardening* 100 (1985), p.41.

Chapter 3: Twenty-First Century Developments in Wildlife Gardening

By the start of the twenty-first century, wildlife gardening had become increasingly accepted as a concept motivating gardening design and the use of green spaces more generally. Factors that had driven a concern for the potential of wildlife to survive in their usual habitats in the twentieth century continued to be an issue in the twenty-first century, increasing both literally and in the popular awareness. As such, wildlife gardening has continued to expand in popularity and public uptake, evidenced by the growing market for its literature and accessories, and its presence in public spaces and institutions today. There are some points of commonality with the previous century - such as nostalgia for a lost rural landscape - and many of the practical suggestions for encouraging wildlife into one's garden are similar, but attitudes have shifted somewhat, influenced to a significant degree by the escalation of the climate crisis. Consequently, the tone of wildlife gardening literature is more urgent and gardens are increasingly portrayed as a final place of refuge for many species. Developments in media might also be attributed with having altered the importance of aesthetic values in wildlife gardening, and the Covid-19 pandemic has been identified as having importantly increased popular uptake of wildlife gardening efforts.⁷⁴ The development of wildlife gardening in the twenty-first century has been dually influenced by its own standing within horticultural practice and the changing demands of the wider society within which it exists. As a result of both of these factors, there are certain aesthetic features that might be identified with the wildlife gardening movement.



Figure 14: Greyfaced Dartmoor sheep used for habitat creation at the Wildlife Garden at the Natural History Museum (<https://www.nhm.ac.uk>).

⁷⁴ <https://www.ft.com/content/51f9520b-2677-4c2e-aa45-fa16cc6bf3b2>

A useful demonstration of the increasing loss of natural habitats and the public concern it has caused is the creation of the Wildlife Garden at the Natural History Museum in 1995, and the expansion of its space and activities as part of The Urban Nature Project in 2020.⁷⁵ Designed to be multi-faceted, it acts as a haven in the middle of the city (providing practical refuge for wildlife and a mental refuge for its human visitors), it is an invaluable educational resource, and it has evolved into a kind of living exhibition of a range of natural habitats traditionally found in the South of England (Figure 14). These include hay meadows, ponds and wetlands, coppiced woodlands, hedgerows and chalk grasslands, with the pathos of these habitats becoming as endangered and rare as the museum's other exhibits unavoidable.⁷⁶ It further demonstrates a societal concern about the need for some sort of natural education, even for inner-city children, especially since the exhibition cost an estimated £60,000, with the additional burden of its continued upkeep with traditional techniques. In spite of nature studies being dropped from the national curriculum, increasing awareness of the mental health benefits and spending times in natural environments has seen a resurgence in interest in outdoor education.⁷⁷ An increasingly urban population is often identified as detrimentally falling out of contact with the natural world and in 2005 Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods* coined the phrase Nature Deficit-Disorder to describe the non-medical condition of children growing up without green spaces in which to explore and develop.⁷⁸ Wildlife gardening is thus not simply the result of a concern for the preservation of threatened flora and fauna - though this is, of course, its essential motivation - but it is also intimately linked to ideas about how society ought to understand and relate to the natural world. There exists a certain continuity of thought between it and the heemparks of the early twentieth century. Twenty-first century valuation of wildlife and its habitats are the consequences of other human actions creating the global circumstances where nature has become so scarce and isolated as to be recognised as precious and, whilst wildlife gardening emerged as a concern

⁷⁵ <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/twenty-five-years-wildlife-museum-garden.html>, <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/urban-nature-project.html> Accessed 31/08/2021.

⁷⁶ Roy Vickery, *Wildlife Garden at the Natural History Museum* (London : The Natural History Museum, 2004), p.3.

⁷⁷ https://naee.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/NAEE_The_Environmental_Curriculum.pdf Accessed 26/08/2021.

⁷⁸ Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill : Algonquin Books, 2005); <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/parenting/nature-health-benefits-coronavirus-outdoors.html> Accessed 30/08/2021.

before the true extent of climatic damage was fully understood, in the twenty-first century its proliferation has been driven by an increased sense of time running out.

Though the subject of this dissertation is wildlife gardening activity in the domestic sphere - the efforts made to welcome nature into private gardens - the increasing presence of wildlife gardening in public spaces is an important development of the movement in the twenty-first century and deserves mention for its influence on private individuals. Few things better demonstrate the changing status of wildlife gardening than the insect hotels now found in most communal spaces. These range in size and design from small bee hotels that can be attached to fences or other vertical surfaces, to multi-storey creations that stand alone in wild areas of gardens and provide potential shelter to as great a variety of insects as possible. It is not easy to track the history of such vernacular objects, especially those that are made by groups or individuals for their own use (as these insect hotels so often are), but suggestions for encouraging nesting solitary bees in the twentieth-century are very loose and make-shift in design. One book suggests that the reader 'fill a hanging basket with dried grass and then push some hollow tubes into this' or 'make up bundles of hollow tubes - bamboo or elder - and place these under a window ledge'.⁷⁹ Similarly, Michael Chinery's best suggestion in *The Living Garden* is the hope that 'if you leave pieces of old wood in the garden, you may see it [the solitary bee] at its nest'.⁸⁰ In March 2000, however, *Amateur Gardening's* What's New section includes an advert for a 'bee nester which includes '74 nesting tubes with replacement liners' and are apparently a response to the endangering of bee populations in the previous year by the varoa mite (Figure 15).⁸¹ In the next couple of decades the presence of similar artificial homes for insects made homeless by the destruction of their natural habitats would become an almost inescapable signifier of a garden with worthy values. By 2020 few public gardens or community growing spaces were without the model based on a series of stacked pallets filled with straw, twigs and bricks with nesting holes in. It is now even possible to buy specially perforated bricks to include in the construction of real houses.⁸² Tom Hare's sculptures at the centre of the 2021 project at RHS Garden Wisley, The Wildlife Garden, filled with pine cones, twigs and other dried plant matter, epitomise this trend and

⁷⁹ Wilson, *The Back Garden*, p.89-90.

⁸⁰ Michael Chinery, *The Living Garden* (London : Dorling Kindersley, 1986), p.45.

⁸¹ Advert in 'What's New' *Amateur Gardening*, 25 March 2000, p.13.

⁸² <https://www.nhbs.com/bee-brick> Accessed 31/08/2021.

demonstrate the extent to which wildlife gardening has come to be an important part of the creative horticultural world in the twenty-first century.⁸³ Wildlife gardening has become so established as a trend within both gardening and wider society as to make its influence almost all-pervasive, significantly diversifying its image and thus also the spaces it can occupy.



Figure 15: Progress in artificial bee nesting site design. Left to right: advert from 2000; Instructions for pallet based insect habitation from The Wildlife Trusts (<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-bug-mansion>).

This expansion and increasing flexibility has helped wildlife gardening respond in relation to its paradoxical place within an increasingly urban society. Wildlife gardening exists as a result of urban expansion and the resultant pressure on agriculture, and yet urban dwelling would seem to make such gardening more difficult. The number of people living in cities in the UK has seen a constant upward trend, and while this growth limits personal access to green space, it is also precisely this development that makes wildlife gardening so important.⁸⁴ In the twenty-first century wildlife gardening has adapted to include gardeners who have limited space and access to real wilderness, focusing on the creation of so-called 'wildlife corridors'.⁸⁵ Obviously, gardening for wildlife in built-up areas is not new - Chris Baines pioneered the idea of how

⁸³ <https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley/garden-highlights/the-wildlife-garden> Accessed 31/08/2021.

⁸⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/trend-deck-2021-urbanisation/trend-deck-2021-urbanisation> Accessed 20/08/2021.

⁸⁵ See, for example, <https://www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/S7ZN1-28pp-Booklet-WEB2.pdf> Accessed 31/08/2021.

important urban green spaces are - but twenty-first century city dwellers who are interested in bettering the condition of wildlife cannot rely on the assumption of having even a small garden, which was often the basis of earlier wildlife gardening manuals. Frances Tophill makes an important point when she acknowledges this relatively new gardening context, pointing out that ‘many of us find ourselves renting our houses or our flats without wanting to spend a fortune on a garden we may only have for a few years’, and thus even wildlife



Figure 16: An example of a container pond, ideal for the urban wildlife gardener with limited space (<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/wildlife-gardening-for-balconies/>).

gardening has to be developed for short-term gain.⁸⁶ Although large scale wildlife gardening remains aspirational for many, container gardening is more often the reality, with the consequence that this diminutive style has expanded greatly (Figure 16). Tophill’s suggestion of ‘ways to attract wildlife in a small space’ include ‘containers brimming with nectar-rich flowers...bird and bat boxes...insect houses and food and some water throughout the year’ and are all scaled to fit on an urban balcony or an ambitiously designed windowsill.⁸⁷ This perspective is taken even further in Emma Hardy’s *The Urban Wildlife Gardener* in which she recommends the introduction of container ponds created in ‘an old bathtub, sink or half-barrel’, backed up by her own ‘mini pond in an old galvanised washing tub’ which has boasted ‘many different insects and several toads too’.⁸⁸ Even though a wildlife gardening book can barely be written without some mention of the contentious bed of nettles, there is an increasing awareness that the audience cannot necessarily be relied on to have a large plot of land where they can allow some part to go wild or be planted

⁸⁶ Frances Tophill, *Rewild your Garden: Create a haven for birds, bees and butterflies* (London : Greenfinch, 2020), p.166.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.167-168.

⁸⁸ Emma Hardy, *The Urban Wildlife Gardener: How to attract birds, bees, butterflies, and more* (London : CICO Books, 2015), p.58.

less aesthetically. Although not causally linked, the urban wildlife gardening literature addresses the issues raised in the 2021 *Wildlife-friendly attitudes and practices in British gardens* report, which found that 21% of people's limited helping of wildlife was due to insufficient space.⁸⁹ Building on the ideas of the 1980s and 1990s about how wildlife gardening can be even more important in urban areas, twenty-first century wildlife gardening has increasingly embraced small scale possibilities, encouraging anyone with any kind of space to convert their efforts for the benefit of wildlife.

This climate crisis-induced alteration of how gardens are understood has further changed the types of wildlife that are actively welcomed, even within wildlife gardening. That essential context, combined with 50 years of wildlife gardening activity, has given authors the confidence to try to re-educate their audience on what is desirable in one's garden. Whereas early work advising the amateur gardener on how to better welcome more wildlife approached the topic from a norm of gardening purely for human interest, wildlife gardening in the twenty-first century is building on decades of gardening that is adapted for non-human usage. In spite of that progress, only so many assumptions can be made about how far gardeners are likely to stray from more traditional practices. For example, nettles are a sticking point in many books, since they are almost synonymous with a garden left to go to waste and yet are also a firm favourite of many caterpillars for whom one is trying to design a garden. The RHS book *How Can I Help Hedgehogs* offers a strategic compromise as they do list common nettle (*Urtica dioica*) as 'a favourite, eaten by the caterpillars of peacock, red admiral, comma and small tortoiseshell butterflies' but also point out that gardeners ought to 'check out what grows in your garden's vicinity...if you're near a brownfield site with large nettle patches, there's a strong chance that you already have a breeding site nearby'.⁹⁰ Many other works include nettles in the introduction as a friendly gesture to their audience that, although this is a wildlife gardening book, the author thinks like themselves.⁹¹ Though the urgency of the global ecological situation has inspired wildlife gardening authors to personally adopt certain methods, their literature reveals their awareness of

⁸⁹ http://www.wlgf.org/wlgf_survey.pdf Accessed 21/08/2021

⁹⁰ Helen Bostock and Sophie Collins, *How Can I Help Hedgehogs: A gardener's collection of inspiring ideas for welcoming wildlife* (Brighton, Quarto Publishing plc, 2019), p.46.

⁹¹ See, for example, Adrian Thomas, *RSPB Gardening for Wildlife* (London : Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2017).

a readership who are not all wholly converted, signifying the continuing dynamism within the wildlife gardening movement.

This position of still seeking to persuade a newly interested public makes less traditionally welcomed insects an important part of more contemporary wildlife gardening work. Kate Bradbury's *Wildlife Gardening for Everything and Everyone* is perhaps most indicative of the extremes to which twenty-first century gardening has been able to aspire, in ways that 1970s precursors did, or perhaps could, not. In contrast to earlier work, her book encourages the wildlife gardener to truly design a garden for all animals that might pass through, including dedicated sections for wasps, true flies and true bugs.⁹² Rather than catering to societal prejudices against certain insects, Bradbury acknowledges the importance of paying attention to reasonable fears whilst also trying to persuade her reader to 'not let this [reasonable wariness] stop you from loving them and catering for them in your garden, because they really are wonderful'.⁹³ Like Frances Tophill in *Rewild Your Garden*, Bradbury highlights the importance of wasps as predators for aphids and caterpillars, and how they might thus be of significant benefit to the gardener seeking to maintain a balanced, productive garden without chemicals.⁹⁴ The links between wildlife gardening and organic gardening clearly remain, but Tophill widens this sphere in which to understand insect life, as she describes wasp's place in the ecosystem as 'an essential function in our gardens and in the world at large'.⁹⁵ Contemporary wildlife gardening is understood as part of a global, interrelated ecosystem, a point that is explored most pertinently in Dave Goulson's latest work *Silent Earth* (Figure 17).⁹⁶ His title pays tribute to Carson's *Silent Spring* (suggesting that even if her immediate impact on the horticultural world was not noticeable, her legacy is nonetheless influential) and the work highlights the catastrophic future faced if insect numbers continue to decline at the present rate. His hope, outlined in the introduction, is a radically changed world where humans 'invite more insects into our gardens and parks, turning our urban areas and the interlinking road verges, railway cuttings and roundabouts,

⁹² Bradbury, *Wildlife Gardening*.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.223.

⁹⁴ Tophill, *Rewild*.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁹⁶ Dave Goulson, *Silent Earth: Averting the insect apocalypse* (London : Vintage Publishing, 2021)

into a network of flower-filled, pesticide-free habitats'.⁹⁷ Wildlife gardening in the twenty-first century can be seen to have matured into a movement that, aware of the growing environmental and societal pressure sharing its aims, makes increasing demands on how humans garden and how they understand other users of that space. Where earlier authors might have seen the garden as a space that could be adapted for human observation of enticed wildlife, twenty-first century wildlife gardening is more pressingly aware of how gardens and gardening relate to the rest of the world and a global ecosystem. Increasing alarm about species-collapse and its impact on the future - both human and ecological - mean that requests made about gardening can be increasingly demanding, requiring gardeners to alter their assumptions about certain plants and insects in the interest of a planetary conservation effort.

Connectivity often figures in twenty-first-century wildlife gardening author's arguments for why they personally have converted their efforts to wildlife gardening. As a result of its reliance on passing trade and wildlife visitors, as well as its identity with global ecological issues, wildlife gardening can be a way of expanding the boundaries of a gardener's sphere of activity. Not only does it give the gardener a sense of political purpose and agency, but it connects people to others and the natural world in an age of increasing isolation from society and nature. Richer countries in the twenty-first century are often said to be going through a 'loneliness epidemic' as especially younger generations report an increasing sense of lacking meaningful connection.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.19.

⁹⁸ See, for example, <https://www.sciencefocus.com/news/a-psychologist-explains-how-modern-life-is-making-us-lonely-but-it-doesnt-have-to/> Accessed 01/09/2021.

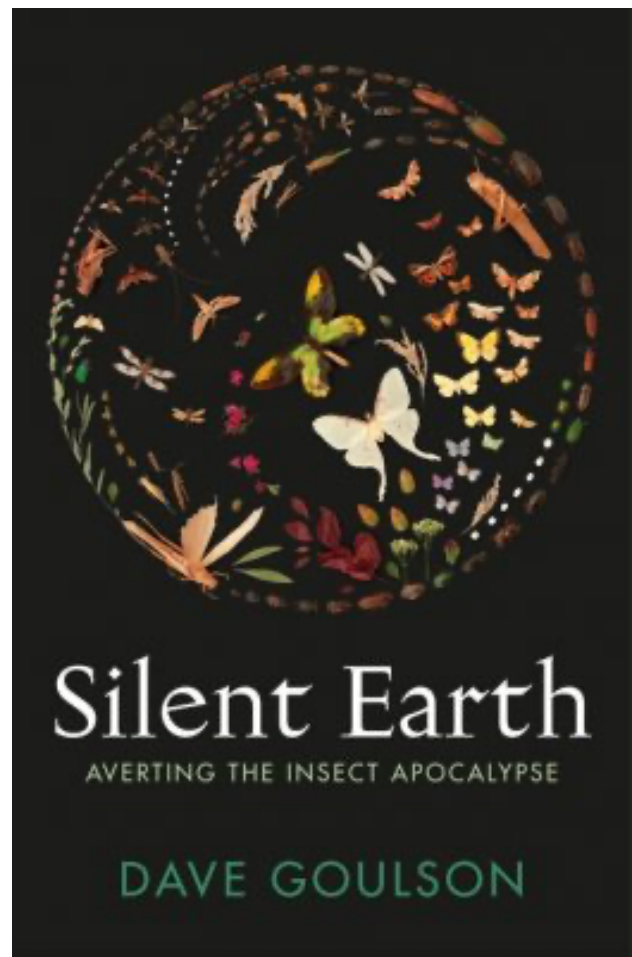


Figure 17: Dave Goulson's 'Silent Earth' (2021)

This seems to be crucial context for the popularity of the way that twenty-first century wildlife gardens are so often seen as a way of figuring oneself in a wider, even global, context. Jane Powers, for example, in *The Living Garden* describes her excitement at understanding the garden as a system of perfectly ordered cycles and ‘most exhilarating of all was that I too played a major part in this intricate opus’.⁹⁹ She goes on to discuss the ways in which choices made in the garden reach across borders in their impact, citing the use of peat in compost mixes and the ‘clouds of unnecessary carbon’ created by horticultural imports, enjoying the way that ‘gardening helps me know my place in the world’.¹⁰⁰ Gardening, and particularly wildlife gardening is so intimately connected with global concerns that it provides a kind of community for the gardener to connect with, and a network through which they can see themselves and their actions as important. In an age of increasing isolation and a sense of systems, political and ecological, beyond the control of the individual, wildlife gardening has an additional purpose. In *Creating Your Own Back Garden Nature Reserve*, Chris Packham explains that wildlife gardening is, for him, ‘a little practical, direct action [that is] satisfying and effective’ - a political action that soothes the individual.¹⁰¹ As well as providing gardeners with the power to buck the trend of habitat destruction, it provides them with a sense of belonging and positive identity that reverses the vision of humans as a negative planetary force. This idea of a wildlife gardening community is taken further by campaigns like ‘Wild about Gardens’ and online platforms such as the Wildlife Gardening Forum, who themselves include a section on ‘Public Benefits’ of wildlife gardening, exploring the health benefits such activity has for the individual and community.¹⁰² Far from being merely a space to observe animals and insects, tending to a wildlife garden essentially reconfigures the identity of the gardener, linking their actions into that mosaic of urban gardens that form such an important reserve for nature.

In the introduction to his seminal work *No Nettles Required*, Ken Thompson makes the incisive point that the proliferation of wildlife gardening literature has not necessarily led to a

⁹⁹ Jane Powers, *The Living Garden: A place that works with nature* (London : Frances Lincoln Limited, 2011), p.9

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Chris Packham, *Creating Your Own Back Garden Nature Reserve* (Leicester : Silverdale Books, 2001), p.13.

¹⁰² <https://www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk> (Accessed 02/09/2021; http://www.wlhf.org/public_benefits_intro.html Accessed 02/09/2021.

directly proportionate increase in expertise or variety in wildlife gardening. Though his work was published in 2006, and wildlife gardening has developed since then, it is nonetheless important to include such a critical but well considered review. Furthermore, his is one of the few works that has looked back over a history of wildlife gardening, even if not from a garden historical perspective, and thus it is important that his views be included and addressed. He highlights the fact that such a wealth of advice on wildlife gardening is not necessarily useful to the newcomer as it is apt to be overwhelming; perhaps, therefore, its literary success ought not to be taken as unduly correlated to social values or gardening practice. His analysis coalesces into the points that 'wildlife gardening is in that unsatisfactory state where anecdote, commercial imperatives and the opinions of a few self-appointed 'experts' are far more prevalent than general evidence'.¹⁰³ Though he is keen to persuade the reader that these qualities do not preclude use or fact from the contents of that literature, the points do stand as significant qualifiers to any exploration of wildlife gardening literature. In spite of developments and expansion within the movement in the past fifteen years, Thompson's criticisms remain valid. In particular, his point that 'it simply recycles what everyone else believes' certainly pertains, as any regular reader of contemporary wildlife gardening tips would admit.¹⁰⁴ This might, however, be explained by the nature of wildlife gardening: it calls for a relaxation of more controlling, traditional gardening activity in order that natural processes can re-establish themselves. Surely it is unsurprising that a practice that requires, at its base, practicality and standing back, can only require a limited amount of precise instruction. Thus, the continued publication of new wildlife gardening titles might be an even more significant indicator of the trend's popularity: if new advice is not strictly necessary, something else must be driving the sector's economic success. It is harder to judge the continued appropriateness of his follow-up admonition about the lack of the scientific approach to wildlife gardening, especially without conducting extensive biological analysis. That said, Dave Goulson, a Professor of Biology and a wildlife gardening author himself, offers a very similar critique in his 2019 *The Garden Jungle*. Indeed, when looking at useful scientific studies that have contributed to the field of wildlife gardening, he offers the much-lauded example of Jennifer Owen and her thirty year study of her Leicestershire garden (which Thompson cites) and Thompson's own research into The Biodiversity in Urban Gardens in Sheffield (BUGS), which supplied the

¹⁰³ Thompson, *No Nettles*, p.2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

informative basis of Thompson's *No Nettles Required*.¹⁰⁵ His criticism is based on the lack of cohesion in the work on plants that are recommended as particularly recommended for insects, pointing out a the apparent flimsy scientific basis in marketing that uses wildlife gardening trends as a selling point. That said, the RHS and Natural England do now provide a collaborative list of plants that are particularly useful to the wildlife gardener, and the RHS ran a 4 year research project from 2015 investigating the popularity of various flowering plants with insects, with particular focus on the native/non-native debate.¹⁰⁶ This increase in attempts to provide a formal scientific basis for wildlife gardening demonstrate the standing which it has gained in both the horticultural and public eye during the twenty-first century. Though Thompson's criticism off the science promulgated in wildlife gardening literature may remain pertinent to some extent, this fact does not undermine the significant development of the movement in the twenty-first century.

With this increased reputation, however, there does not seem to have been a significant definition of an aesthetic style. There are certainly some features that often recur (like the insect hotels mentioned above, considerately designed ponds and pollinator friendly plants), and the injunction to relax does often lead to a similar overall visual impression, but the adaptability of wildlife gardening in the twenty-first century means that it is difficult to describe or identity a specific aesthetic culmination of its theories. There is no blueprint for a wildlife garden, but a combination of certain features can often be a good indicator that a space is being gardened, at least to some extent with nature and wildlife in mind. These signs of wildlife gardening can be roughly split into two sections: the mood of the garden and the physical features included in the design and ornamentation. The injunction to relax that features as the introductory step in a lot of wildlife gardening literature has a significant influence on the aesthetic of a garden. It does not exactly exclude formal gardens, though such a combination is a challenging design specification, and often leads to features such as lawn areas being mown less frequently, plants elsewhere classified as weeds being allowed to grow and more loosely styled designs arising from self-propagated plants. Such results are often combined with a predilection towards wildflowers that

¹⁰⁵ Jennifer Owen, *The Ecology of a Garden: The first fifteen years* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1991); http://wlgf.org/bugs_project.html Accessed 31/08/2021.

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/pdf/conservation-and-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators-garden-plants.pdf> Accessed 20/08/2021; <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/plants-for-bugs> Accessed 31/08/2021; the native-non-native debate is the discussion among gardeners planting for wildlife benefits about the comparative advantages of plants indigenous to the UK and those that have been imported.

can evoke lost habitats and are particularly attractive to native insects, often resulting in cottage gardens style planting and a rustic feel to the space. Teasels and thistles are especially favoured among recommended plants since they are popular with bees while in flower, produce seeds for small birds such as goldfinches in the winter and the desiccated stems provide shelter for insects. The relaxation precept also discourages efficient tidying everywhere since constant clearing of dying plant matter also removes an important part of the garden's natural ecosystem. A failure to clear leaves most obviously provides a traditional hibernation space for hedgehogs but the decaying material also supports a whole variety of insects and organisms that form an essential base for other food-chains. The understanding of the garden as an ecosystem, an essential part of the wildlife gardening movement, ensures that a garden is not simply seen as a space in which a design can be incarnated, but rather as a constant interaction between all species in an interdependent structure of flora and fauna.



Figure 18: An instructive illustration of a wildlife friendly pond (<https://www.discoverwildlife.com/how-to/wildlife-gardening/how-to-make-a-wildlife-pond/>).

In addition to the common visual results of gardeners relinquishing control to some degree, wildlife gardens (where space allows) often share common features that are particularly useful replacements for lost wild habitats. Bird feeders are an obvious indicator of a space being

given the dual purpose of welcoming wildlife, though given Britain's reputation as a country particularly enamoured with back garden bird feeding, their presence ought not to be taken as a standalone indicator.¹⁰⁷ A more reliable sign of a gardener concerned with the welfare of wildlife, at least theoretically, is insect hotels. Though this must be recognised with the caveat of the ease of putting them up compared to their upkeep and creating a garden that supports their residents, insects using a garden as a service station does not so easily come with the personal pleasure concomitant with bird feeding: insect hotels are thus a much more reliable indication of a garden being specifically understood as a space for wildlife. In addition to this, the creative developments in insect hotel design further supports the argument that wildlife gardening can be just as influenced by visual desires as more traditional gardening styles. Perhaps the most reliable visual clue of wildlife gardening is the presence of a pond with sloping edges and an absence of fish. Wildlife ponds are one of the most valuable wildlife resources that can be created, replacing the desert that water-dwelling animals face in the countryside as standing water is drained from increasingly efficient agricultural land and waterways are often polluted by chemicals. Furthermore, all wildlife requires access to water, so provided they are considerably constructed, they are universally attractive. Their design is specifically modified from the ornamental, vertically-edged ornamental ponds, and instead they have gradated depths to allow for multiple users and a diversity of environments (Figure 18). The shallows are often shingle in order to create safe bathing and drinking spaces for birds and small mammals, and careful planting surrounds the pond in order that the space is sheltered (and thus perceived as safe by wildlife) without falling foliage promoting algae growth. Not only do such features require the sacrifice of a substantial part of the garden, but the labour costs of their creation are far from insignificant: a wildlife pond is might thus be considered as an archetypal part of the wildlife gardening aesthetic.

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/05/how-britain-s-backyard-bird-feeders-are-shaping-evolution/> Accessed 04/09/2021.

Conclusion

This dissertation came from a sense of the overwhelming presence of wildlife gardening in modern day popular horticulture, and of its palpable absence from most of the history of gardening. At some point a disjuncture had occurred, where humans were displaced as the sole users of gardens in the eyes of their designers and insects, birds and animals became considered as not only cohabitants of the space, but as visitors whose presence should be sought above other considerations. Gardens as they had been conceived for millennia had undergone a modification in the public eye, triggering, among other things, the development of a new consumer sector of literature and accessories. In spite of the significant change that had evidently taken place, wildlife gardening remained absent from the vast majority of garden history works.

Taking inspiration from the wild is nothing new, as various historic formulations of wildernesses and naturalistic plantings attest, but even twentieth-century natural movements in park and garden design are quite different from wildlife gardening. While the former continued to be driven by aesthetic aims, wildlife gardening was, and is, motivated other values and a different idea of what the garden can, and ought to, be. Thus even more contemporary movements such as New Perennials, whose loose style of planting can sometimes resemble the relaxed borders of a wildlife garden, are distinct since any benefit they provide for wildlife is secondary to the visual design. Concurrently with the growth of the environmental movement, wildlife gardening became an increasingly significant influence on how people designed and gardened their private spaces in the 1970s, as natural habitat loss was recognised to be making refugees of Britain's native species. Though these early wildlife gardens were not exactly identical - in motivation or design - to contemporary versions, they were significant in their reconfiguration of private gardens into spaces in which the environmentally engaged individual could demonstrate their allegiance and offer shelter for a wide variety of flora and fauna.

As the climate crisis has escalated, this language of the garden as a place of sanctuary, of refuge, has increased along with an expansion in the species for whom the garden is expected to offer these services. The twenty-first century, in addition to making wildlife gardening attitudes applicable to traditionally less favoured species (such as rats, wasps and nettles), saw its significant expansion in the popular imagination and practical output. The resultant proliferation

has led to identifiable features and styles that can be used to mark a garden as specially adapted for wildlife, such as insect hotels and relaxed borders with specific plants. The demands of twenty-first century living have also meant that wildlife gardening has been understood as beneficial for its human hosts as well, most particularly in the links such practices provide to the greater ecological community, but also in creating horticultural value even in limited urban spaces. In the later decades of its existence then, wildlife gardening has seen a kind of maturation with more public presence and definition. Though the material advice offered in the literature might have seen only limited development - as evidenced, perhaps, by the regular republication of Chris Baines's *How to Make a Wildlife Garden* in 2000 and 2016 - the movement more generally has made significant gains and has adapted accordingly. As it continues to evolve it will certainly merit further examination.

Given the influence that the climate crisis has on society today, from international politics to mental health, it is crucial to study this new form of gardening that is so entangled with it. In many ways, it is gardening adapted for the Anthropocene and an age of human guilt about their relationship to nature.¹⁰⁸ Rather than the gardener creating art or demonstrating taste, wildlife gardening first demands that they engage their small space in a planetary vision that elevates the gardener from an individual professional or amateur to a member of a species. This change in perspective alters the garden also, making it a place of retribution and refuge in a global age of natural devastation. In consideration of this significant new role that gardens have come to occupy, and the times of change and upheaval, wildlife gardening deserves significantly more recognition than it has hitherto received, and will greatly reward further study.

¹⁰⁸ Anthropocene: a term coined in the 1970s, referring to the fact that humans are now the distinguishing force for planetary change in the geological record. Originally a scientific term, it has been taken up in academic circles to refer to human experience in the age of climate crisis. See, for example, Jedediah Purdy *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Harvard : Harvard University Press, 2015).

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