‘They’ve made it again,
Which means the globe’s still working, the creation’s
Still waking up refreshed, our summer’s
Still all to come -’
(Ted Hughes, Swifts)

It is difficult to imagine the summer’s renewal without the presence of the symbolic swift. But as natural areas continue to be degraded and lost, numbers of swifts, similar to many other creatures like house sparrows and honey bees, are falling.

Gardens are no replacement for natural areas but are becoming essential habitats for wildlife where green spaces are declining or are no longer found locally. It is these wildlife visitors- the flight of the butterfly and the sound of birdsong, who bring charm and interest to our gardens season after season, year after year.

Here at Cherry Tree, we recognise that our gardens are not only places for plants but are environments that provide food, water, breeding and over-wintering sites for a diversity of interconnected creatures which are actively beneficial for the health of the garden itself and for the wider environment. For all wildlife has a place in the natural balance of things, even slugs, without which we wouldn’t see as many toads, hedgehogs nor slow worms.

‘All wildlife has a place in the natural balance of things’

We are opening our thinking and with it the imaginary boundaries of our gardens to the wisdom of long-standing ecological ideas. It is a welcome return to an ecological view of the world as a myriad of complex relationships and interactions between all living things and their environment. We hold the knowledge and have the ability to enhance the health and well-being of the environment and all that inhabit it - starting in our gardens.

To help you to enhance your garden for wildlife, Cherry Tree is featuring wildlife symbols with our plants to highlight those plants that are especially attractive and beneficial to a variety of wildlife. The wildlife and plants are however not in any way exhaustive and are not meant to deny the importance of the many other insects, small mammals, amphibians, and soil-dwelling organisms, which sustain plant growth.

We have also provided advice on simple actions and considerations that you can make to encourage and support wildlife in your garden. The result will be a garden that bolsters local biodiversity and creates an active place to see wildlife and where children can encounter it close up.

Our wildlife symbols

Bumblebees
Bumblebees are vital pollinators of many plants and fruiting trees, feeding on the nectar and pollen. They live in colonies of up to 200 worker bees and usually nest under grass or moss. Although some species can emerge as early as February, bumblebees can usually be seen in spring when the queen emerges to collect pollen. She uses this to line the waxy cells in which she will lay her eggs. Come autumn, all of the bees in the colony will die apart from the new queen bees, which will hibernate underground through the winter.

Butterflies
Butterflies are probably the most conspicuous insect visitors to our garden and it is possible to see up to 22 of the 60 British species there. Butterflies primarily feed on nectar. They need the sugars in this nectar for energy but will also feed on pollen and drink water from damp patches in order to get certain essential minerals. It is best if nectar-rich plants are grown in sunny, sheltered spots in the garden as butterflies like the warmth. They will also benefit from planting a variety of different plants that flower from spring through to the autumn as they have four different life stages (egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, adult butterfly). Plants that flower in spring are an important source of nectar for butterflies emerging from hibernation and those flowering in the autumn provide necessary winter reserves. The majority of butterflies lay their eggs on nettles, honesty, sweet rocket and other wild flowers and will cause little damage to other plants.

Garden Birds

Our gardens would be unnaturally still and silent places were it not for the beauty and charm of our garden birds. Their movement, colour, calls and songs connect us to the changing seasons. As agents of seed dispersal and insect pest control, garden birds are positively beneficial for our garden and the wider environment. Invasive weeds can also be controlled by encouraging seed-eating birds into the garden. Gardens with a high diversity of shrubs, flowering plants, creepers, thick hedges and a mixed structure of trees will provide a real haven for garden birds. Water has the greatest benefits for wildlife and is important for birds' ritualised bathing and drinking.

Honey bee

'If the bee disappears…..then man would only have four years of life left.' (Attributed to Albert Einstein)

Our existence is said to be intimately connected to that of the honey bee as they pollinate so many of our food crops. The pollen and nectar that honey bees can be seen collecting from a variety of flowering plants and trees, are important food sources for them. Healthy bees need a great diversity of both pollen and nectar. Foraging bees laden with nectar and pollen will perform a waggle dance to other worker bees to communicate the location of the flowers in relation to the position of the sun. It is this nectar that is used to produce honey.

Hoverflies

Hoverflies cleverly mimic wasps and some species of bees to protect themselves from predators but they are true flies. Hoverflies are true champions in the insect pest control stakes. With 250 species in the British Isles, their larvae can eat over 50 aphids a day and also feed on scale insects, mites and young caterpillars. Adult hoverflies feed on nectar, pollen and honey dew but some species also feed on insect pests. These garden visitors can largely be seen on flowers from spring until autumn, but are active at much colder temperatures than other aphid-preying insects.

Lacewings

Lacewings can largely be identified by their green bodies and transparent wings with green veins. Although some of the 14 species in the British Isles are browner in colour. As voracious consumers of aphids and other small insect pests, both lacewing larvae and adults are actively beneficial for the garden but are generally most active at night. Without aphids and other insect pests, these natural predators wouldn't be seen in our gardens, nor would we see ladybirds, hoverflies, beetles and many insect-eating birds. This predator/prey relationship is essential for a healthy ecological balance in our gardens and in the wider environment.

Ladybirds

The most common species of ladybirds in the British Isles are the two-spot and seven-spot beetles. They are important for plant survival as they help to control numbers of destructive pests, including aphids, whitefly, scale and mealy bugs. Adult ladybirds lay their eggs close to greenfly aphid colonies so that the larvae have a plentiful food supply. Their larvae can consume hundreds of aphids and thousands of aphid larvae over a period of a few months. The adults will then feed until the autumn. Further up the food chain, hoverflies, lacewings and blue tits all feed on ladybirds. Clusters of ladybirds can often be seen in cracks and crevices in the garden where they will hibernate to survive the winter. By providing insect boxes for nesting, ladybirds as well as lacewings and solitary bees, can be encouraged into your garden.

Moths

Moths rival butterflies with over 2,400 species in the British Isles. Despite popular belief, many moths are brightly coloured and with exceptions, they are largely active at night. Like butterflies, adult moths are important pollinators of wild flowers and trees and benefit from planting a variety of native grasses and nectar-rich plants that flower from spring to autumn. Moths are also attracted to strongly scented plants such as evening primrose, jasmine, honeysuckle and night-scented stocks. Moths have an important place in the food chain, as a food source for many garden birds, bats and other small mammals.

'At its simplest, gardening for wildlife is about variety'

Although wildlife gardening can conjure up images of abandoned wild gardens, gardening for wildlife recognises that all gardens are valuable and can be managed and enhanced to help to conserve wildlife.

At its simplest, it is about variety. Creating a variety of habitats and niches in your garden that will provide places to shelter and nest; providing a variety of food, by growing many different plants that flower over a long season and by providing water.

- **Create a garden pond**. It's one of the best ways to encourage wildlife into your garden. Water provides some of the greatest benefits to wildlife especially for animals that live in or on the water surface for part of their life cycle. They provide refuge for frogs, toads, dragonflies, damselflies and newts to name but a few, and act as a watering hole for mammals and birds. Birds also benefit from access to clean water for their ritualised bathing.

- The best time to create a pond is during the late autumn or winter months when disturbance to the wildlife in your garden will be minimised, meaning that it will be ready in time for spring. When it comes to clearing, this is best done in the autumn before the pond life becomes dormant.
  .....if your garden is too small and your children want to go pond dipping, try sinking a washing-up bowl into the ground or put out an old fish tank filled with water and it will soon become a hive of activity, with pond skaters, water boatmen and pirate spiders.

- **Embrace a little informality in your garden….** What you refrain from doing, can be just as beneficial as what you actively plant and create in your garden.

- Leaving small undisturbed areas can create ideal niches for nesting and sheltering for small mammals, amphibians and insects.

- Leave small areas in sunny, sheltered spots for nettles and wild flowers to grow. These will encourage butterflies like the Peacock, who lay their eggs on these plants and are also good breeding sites for other beneficial insects and spiders

- Take a winter break. During the winter, leave perennials and grasses standing – the longer the better, for they provide habitats for insects which are in turn important food sources for small mammals and birds during the winter months.

- Just by leaving piles of cut plant material in sheltered spots, you will provide suitable shelter for many invertebrates. This is vital to ensure that there is a good food source for other creatures when spring arrives. The decaying plant matter will also return nutrients to the soil and damp leaf mulch will hopefully attract slugs keeping them away from your plants!

Put out log piles in the autumn. They will make ideal shelter for amphibians, hibernating hedgehogs and other small mammals as well as benefiting invertebrates that feed on decaying wood. Piles of logs and stones also provide sanctuary for solitary wasps and bees to nest in. These bees are vital early pollinators.

'An active garden indicates a healthy environment'

- **Bundles for bees**. Get the children involved to cut a few stems of bamboo to the length of about 20cm and bundle them together with garden twine. These can be left in cracks or between tree branches for bees and over-wintering insects such as ladybirds and lacewings.

- It is best to improve natural nest sites such as hollows in hedges and evergreens but where this isn't possible, open-fronted nest boxes or even upturned terracotta pots can be put in your garden during late summer.

- Avoid cutting your hedges, trees and evergreen plants in the spring and summer as they will have nesting birds and mammals in them. Cut back in the autumn, but check first to ensure there haven't been any late broods!

- **Dig less** to benefit many predatory insects which lay their eggs in the soil.

* Support natural predators and use green manures instead of chemical pesticides and fertilisers.

- **Planting with wildlife in mind.** Flowers, shrubs and trees provide nectar, pollen, seeds and berries for birds, insects, invertebrates and small mammals. In turn, some of these creatures are food for other insects, birds and mammals.
- **Nectar-rich flowers** are the key to attracting bees and butterflies. Herbs and wildflowers in particular, are best.
- **Go native** –native plants are important food sources for wildlife especially insects which have specific food plants during their larval stages. Native grasses are especially important for moths.
- **Ornamentals** are still important, as colourful flower borders are an important source of nectar and pollen for bees and butterflies. Flowers with open or flat forms will encourage hoverflies and ladybirds, helping to keep garden pest populations low.
- **Wildflower meadows** encourage insects as well as seed-eating birds like nuthatches and finches. During the summer months, many birds collect insects to feed their young and so will also benefit greatly. A diversity of food is the key to attracting birds year after year. Their numbers are mainly affected by the availability of natural food sources but bird feeders can help to sustain them throughout the winter months.
- **Plant in blocks**. Both bees and butterflies benefit from planting the same plants together.
- **Climbers** provide good shelter and nesting places for birds as well as food for insects. The fragrant flowers of honeysuckle for example provide nectar for hawk-moths and Ivy flowers are a rich source of nectar for bees and butterflies.

*** Create living boundaries** – planting hedges and shrubs will benefit wildlife by proving shelter, nesting sites and food as well as improving the microclimate for predators. Native trees like oak and lime support large communities of life but faster growing species such as native cherry are also beneficial.

- **Sustainable gardening and water**. Water is essential for plant growth and functioning. There are a number of ways that you can help to conserve water in your garden:

  Collect rainwater. It's free and water tanks and butts are widely available for rainwater harvesting.
  Recycling your domestic water. Grey water is best used for ornamental plants. This is water from bathing, washing-up and laundry if the detergents use biodegradable potassium salts.
  Add mulch to beds and containers - it reduces the evaporation of water.
  Replace the hose with a watering can. It's a more accurate and efficient way to water.
  Create a water berm or dam around the base of the plant so the water gets to where it is needed.

'To harm one is to harm all.' (Diana Anthony, 2000)

Useful reading

Websites

- For more ideas to help children get back in touch with nature see the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts website www.wildlifewatch.org.uk
- Natural England's wildlife gardening: www.naturalengland.org.uk
- The RSPB: A-Z of wildlife gardening http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/wildlifegarden/
- The Butterfly Conservation Trust: www.butterfly-conservation.org/
- The Invertebrate Conservation Trust www.buglife.org.uk

Books

- Anthony, D. (2000) *Creative sustainable gardening*. Powys: The Centre for Alternative Technology.
- Flowerdew, B. (2007) *Going organic: the good gardener's guide to solving the problems*. London: Kyle Cathie Limited.
- Moss, S. (2000) *Gardening for birds*. London: HarperCollins Publishers
- Ryrie, C. (2003) *The Daily Telegraph: wildlife gardening*. London: Cassell Illustrated
- Titchmarsh, A. (1999) *Gardeners' world complete book of gardening: The essential guide to planting and practical techniques*. London: Kyle Cathie Limited.

Wilson, M. (2007) *Royal Horticultural Society. New gardening: How to garden in a changing climate*. London: Mitchell Beazley.