



Garden power

I was travelling by train recently idly looking at the passing landscape when I was struck by the realization that it was no longer a “green and pleasant land.”¹ Since the so called “green revolution” of the 1950’s farming has been transformed into an industrial process in which food is produced on vast acres of monoculture crops in dead soil doused with fertilizers and toxic chemicals. As a result, many species of wild plants and animals have lost vital food and habitat and consequently suffered population declines across the British countryside.²

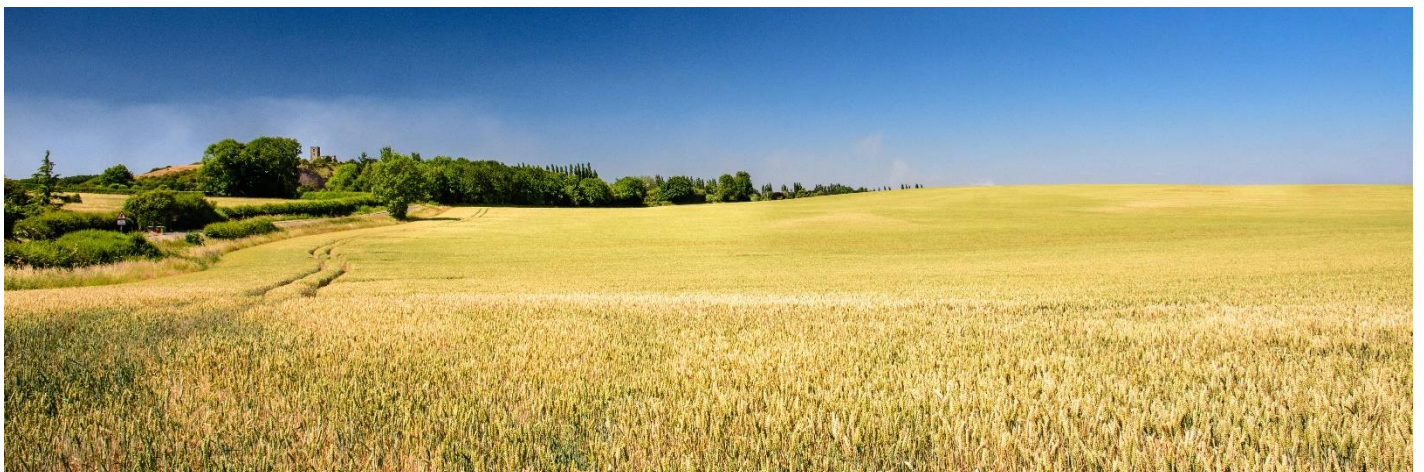
“There has been no let-up in the net loss of nature in the UK.”³

Both the abundance and distribution of many British wild species has declined since 1970. Surveys have shown that of the 8,431 species assessed using International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) regional Red List criteria, 15% have been classified as threatened with extinction - and 2% are already extinct!³

There are similar long-term decreases of many UK insects - especially pollinators.⁴ Surveys over the period 1970 to 2015 show that overall populations declined by 10%. For example, since 1970 moths have declined by -25% and since 1976 butterflies have declined by -16%. Some 382 invertebrate - that is 11% of insect species surveyed - are now classified as being at risk of extinction in Britain.³

“Gardens are habitats where people can help make a difference to these alarming trends.”⁵

Thus, contrary to popular conception, biological desert now forms vast swathes of the British landscape and so, perhaps counterintuitively, the hope of preserving biodiversity now lies in the towns and cities. This is due to green areas such as parks, road and rail verges, the landscaped areas around factories or offices - and just as importantly the humble domestic garden.⁶



“Individual gardens may be quite small, but they add together to make large, vegetated areas in our cities.”⁷

In Britain, some 7% of the land area is now urbanised² and gardens make up some 19-27% of the area of these towns and cities.⁷ About 87% of households have gardens – that is nearly 22.7 million gardens. These obviously vary in size - but the average is about 190m². This adds up to a total area of 433,000 hectares (4,330 km²) of gardens spread across the UK.⁸ A range of studies have shown that these gardens contain a surprisingly high diversity of species – including many of conservation concern.² Thus, although domestic gardens are small their large numbers mean that have enormous potential to help maintain and hopefully restore biodiversity⁶ - especially if we all play our part.

“Even the smallest...garden can provide a rich and valuable sanctuary for a whole host of wildlife.”⁹

There have been dramatic declines of wildlife, especially insects, across Britain. But there is hope - it lies in the potential of the millions of gardens across the country to help counteract some of the habitat losses that we have experienced over recent decades.¹⁰ So every one of us, whether we have a small patio or rolling acres,⁶ can contribute to saving wildlife in Britain.²



“By taking positive steps in our own gardens, no matter how small, together we can make a difference.”¹¹

There are many ways we can better manage our gardens to encourage greater biodiversity. This may include activities ranging from feeding the birds to digging a wildlife pond⁷ – but perhaps the best way is simply choosing to grow wildlife friendly plants such as trees, shrubs and most importantly flowers.⁸ Individual gardens may be small, but combined they have an enormous potential in helping to reverse the trend of wildlife species declines and extinctions of across Britain.¹⁰ We need to recognise the vital importance of our gardens and work to transform them and together create a nationwide mosaic of habitats that encourage biodiversity.¹¹

So, why not pull on your wellies, roll up your sleeves and get out there and make your garden wildlife friendly?

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