SUSTAINABLE WHADDON

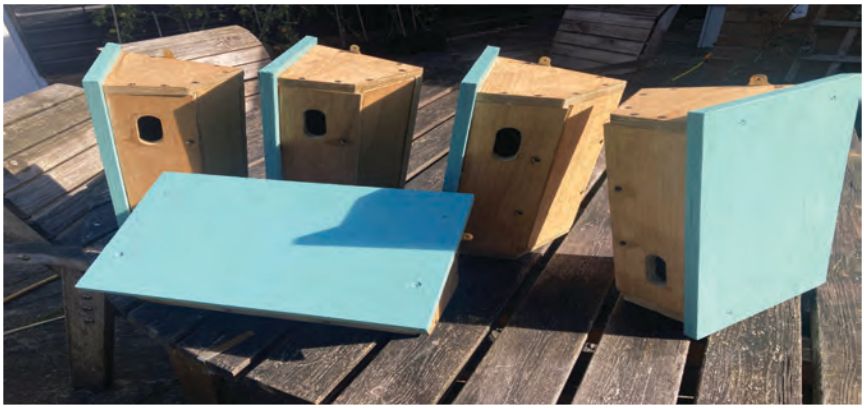
Opportunities to enhance ecology and biodiversity

Opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint

HOMES FOR SWIFTS

Would you be interested in providing a much-needed home for a migratory swift ? In the last twenty years their numbers have fallen by over 60% and the lack of nest sites is definitely a contributing factor to their demise. The plan is to create a swift corridor running from Gamlingay through Bassingbourn and Whaddon all the way to Sawston, with each village committed to hosting a number of next boxes.

Swifts really need a nest site that is on a north or north east facing wall, so, looking towards Wimpole, be at least five metres or twelve feet off the ground with an unobstructed flight path, so no trees but wires seem to be fine. The boxes are free and we'll even put them up for you during March. Once installed we can await their arrival in April before they return to northern Africa in the early Autumn. If you're interested in hosting a box or just exploring it further, then please just contact us at sustainablewhaddon@whaddon.org



SUSTAINABLE WHADDON

Gardening in Whaddon in the last five years- Loretta Day

We moved to Whaddon between lockdowns in December 2020. We came from a property that had a postage-stamp sized garden and were now in a position to grow vegetables and more flowers. Our garden covers a third of an acre and is divided in two, the top half is for growing plants and flowers and the bottom half is for growing vegetables. The lower part did already have raised beds but we set about creating more.

The soil in Whaddon is different to what we were used to. It is an alkaline chalk-based loam soil which can contain stones. It is also free draining and difficult to keep fertile so needs lots of humus and compost. Plants like lavendula, clematis and geraniums like this type of soil. Many gardens in the east of England have clay in the soil. In contrast clay soils retain water and are prone to becoming water logged, so in a small area we can have a variety of soils. Clay soils are good for roses, pears and plums.

It is more alkaline than what we were used to, so our acid loving plants such as azaleas, rhododendrons and camellias did not do very well here, unless kept in containers and fed ericaceous (acid) plant feed.

We are a nature-oriented couple and want to be as self-sufficient as possible, and try to do things as naturally as possible. The first thing we did was set up as many water butts as we could on the house, shed, and greenhouse, so we could use rainwater which is softer and better for plants than tap water.

Climate change

In the five years that we have been here we have noticed a climate change. The weather is becoming drier, the summers are becoming hotter and the winters are becoming wetter. One year we had a really cold spring which delayed and shortened the growing season that year.

Compost

We create our own compost, using all the cuttings and plants from our garden with the exception of ivy, laurel, bramble and roses. These we put in our green bin. We collect leaves in the autumn and make our own leaf mould which we use as a mulch to protect our plants from frost, and we add it to our compost. We obtain horse manure for free from generous locals who leave it by the roadside and we mix it in with the compost whenever we use it. We go to the recycling centre at Waterbeach yearly and get soil improver for free and use it in our flower beds. It is not to be used on edible produce. We accept the offer of compost from good neighbours too.

Weed Control

We do not use chemicals on weeds, we rely on ourselves to weed regularly. Ivy is our biggest challenge; we have to pick this by hand. When sowing vegetables, we leave a space in which the hoe can work to dig up the weeds

Pest control.

We put up netting around our brassicas to prevent the cabbage white butterfly from laying eggs on our cabbage, broccoli and brussels sprouts. One year our successful cabbages were invaded and eaten by slugs. We could not believe how deep the slugs got into our cabbages. Since then we have lain slug beer traps or a mixture of sugar flour and yeast. We may give copper tape or collars a try.

Companion planting

We mix strong smelling herbs and flowers among the vegetables e.g. rosemary, chives, mint, nasturtiums, marigolds or garlic. We use crop rotation to make sure that the same pests don't build up in one area and attack the same crop year after year. We use washing up liquid in water to combat greenfly and blackfly. A spray containing garlic and chilli can be used too. We have used nematodes to combat slugs but can't say if they were very effective, and also for asparagus beetle, and again waiting to see the results.

Animal friendly

We encourage wildlife into our garden e.g. hedgehogs as they eat slugs. We also have bird feeders to attract birds who do the same and we have a bog garden to attract frogs and toads. We put water out for wildlife in summer and winter.

We have a patch where we have wild flowers to attract pollinators.

Seed Bank

We save seeds of vegetables and flowers to put in the seed bank in Meldreth Road

Greenhouse

We are lucky enough to have a greenhouse which is invaluable in sowing seeds in the spring. It means we can start growing seeds earlier than usual. This year we grew a variety of tomatoes in the greenhouse, cucumbers did well and we also grew chillies (2 varieties), aubergines and bell peppers which were very successful.

Fruit trees

Fruit trees do well in our soil type. We have a mature apple tree in our garden which produces wonderful eating apples. It needs pruning every year. We have sown a pear tree which is still young but should bear fruit next year. We have a patch with berries; gooseberries, jostaberries, loganberries and blackcurrants, and another with raspberries. These all grow successfully in our soil.

Satisfaction

We really enjoy the pastime challenge and satisfaction of growing our own fruit and vegetables. We are learning from experience. We enjoy the taste of our produce which is more intense and natural than the produce bought from the supermarkets, and we love not having to buy apples, tomatoes and cucumbers during the summer months.

Herbs we have grown:

Parsley
Dill
Thyme
Coriander
Rosemary
Mint
Fennell
Basil
Sage

Vegetables we have grown:

Onions (Very Successful)
Green Beans (Very Successful)
Runner Beans
French Beans (Very Successful)
Potatoes (Very Successful)
Beetroot Red and Golden (Very successful)
Cabbage (Very Successful)
Brussels Sprouts
Broccoli
Cauliflower
Sweetcorn
Celery
Carrots
Chard
Leeks
Parsnips
Garlic
Rhubarb (Very Successful)

The Big Garden Birdwatch

Many thanks to the five households who sent the results of their RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch to Sustainable Whaddon as well. A total of 19 species were seen across the village with the number of species in each garden ranging from 6 to 14. Blue tit and Woodpigeon were present in every garden, with Blackbird, Dunnock, Great tit and Robin seen in four gardens.

Looking at the highest number of a particular species seen at any one time and adding these together for all five gardens, the biggest total was 30 House sparrows. At first it seems strange that no House sparrows were seen at all in two of the gardens, but this is quite characteristic of these gregarious birds. They gather together in large groups, but then are completely absent from areas where you might expect to see them.

I have been doing the Big Garden Birdwatch ever since we moved to Whaddon 20 years ago, and I am beginning to see some patterns. For example, I saw Greenfinch in my first two years, but haven't seen them in our garden since, and I have only seen Chaffinch once in the last seven years when I used to see them quite regularly. It is encouraging that they were seen in two and three Whaddon gardens respectively this year, and reflects that they are making a comeback from the effects of Trichomonas infection which decimated the breeding populations of British finches a few years ago.



Sustainable Whaddon hopes to gather information on all species present in the parish and, over time, build up a picture of which species are doing well and which are declining.

Jenny Grech

SUSTAINABLE WHADDON