

Biodiversity improvements

Garden office and garden area at Blackbirds Perch,
St Martin's

Context

The development area was, until 7 years ago, a disused field covered in gorse, bracken and brambles. Since then we have cleared the area, turning it in to a garden and have planted a lot of hedges and trees. This transformation is having positive impacts on biodiversity, and will only improve over time.

Hedges

On the East side of the garden is a row of Pittosporum hedge plants, now between 3 and 4 feet high. This borders the public track and extends for around 55 metres. Within 5 years these will be full height and start to become habitat for nesting birds.

The microclimate this hedge will create enables the growing of a wider range of species in the garden.

Trees

Across the garden area we have planted the following trees, ranging between 1 and 4 years old:

- 50m row of Italian Alder
- 2 x Golden Leylandii
- 1 x Macracarpa
- 7 x Monterey Pine (varying stages of maturity)
- 2 x Elder
- 4 x Sessile Oak
- 3 x Elm
- 3 x Hawthorn
- 3 x Privet

Other woody plants including palm, dogwood, hydrangea and camelia have been planted and are establishing well.

Planting plans for winter 2020/21

In addition to existing plants, we already have plans for planting of various species for this winter on the site:

- Sessile oak x 6
- Rosa rugosa x 10
- Pittosporum (filling in gaps in existing hedges)
- Elder x 5
- Elm x 6

Nesting sites

We are not planning to put up a bird box on the garden office as superior nesting sites abound in the near vicinity, including pine woodlands and Pittosporum hedges. However with the increasing height and numbers of trees and hedges on the area we expect to see birds finding nesting opportunities in our garden area within the next five years.

Bats

We have seen bats flying in the area, and indeed our garden is a feeding area for Pipistrelle bats. We will install a bat box on the East (sheltered) side of the completed garden office, with the hope that a small colony will start.

Grass sward

The lower area of the garden is largely grassy, but within contains a good range of species, benefitting from the naturally low level of fertility in the soil:

- White clover
- Yellow trefoil
- Ground speedwell
- Red campion
- Cats ear
- Daisy

Through a sympathetic mowing regime we always have wild flowers in flower throughout the spring and summer months, offering good habitat for insects.

In the higher part of the garden (in the area of the solar panels) we are also seeing an increase in species, which is improving now that we have largely cleared gorse and bracken.

Around the edges of the garden we have significant amounts of brambles, honeysuckle and foxgloves, all providing valuable nectar for bees.

The area immediately around the garden office will be managed in a similar way, enabling similar wild flowers to establish, flower and seed.

Management

To ensure the garden area has good levels of biodiversity we employ the following management techniques:

- Minimal mowing (once a month in spring and summer) and always allowing at least 30% of wild flowers to remain until the next cut.
- Cut hedges only from October to March (inclusive)
- Carry out any tree pruning from October to March (inclusive)
- Replace any diseased or dying plants with the same or similar species, on an annual basis
- Managing the whole site organically, with no chemicals whatsoever

We enjoy a garden that is managed for biodiversity and will continue to do so.

House

Whilst not on this particular Planning site, it's worth noting that our house, Blackbirds Perch, on the adjacent plot has the following features on and around it:

- Sedum roof on the house
- Retaining wall with many flowering species including valerian, evening primrose, aeonium, sedum and mesembryanthemum
- Areas of Rosa rugosa, Rosa canina and broom provide shrubby areas of habitat for bees
- 4m long planting box outside the conservatory full of flowering plants such as snapdragon, calendula, statice and sweet william, covered in bees all summer

Next to the house we have a bird feeder out from November to April, attracting sparrows, greenfinches, robins, blackbirds, thrushes, collared doves, dunnocks and great tits.

