



Haslemere Herald column - September 2010

Why we need biodiversity

This is the International Year of Biodiversity. Why is biodiversity important? Bees and a range of other insects pollinate many of our crops. Other creatures break down waste and bring fertility to the soil. Birds and bats are part of complex food chains that keep pests in check and distribute seeds. Trees and other plants hold the soil, help filter our water and provide many of our medicines. In other words, we are heavily dependent on the rich variety of ecosystems around us and we damage them at our peril.

One way of working with Nature and respecting her ecosystems is permaculture. Originally developed as a way of creating healthy and abundant farms, allotments and gardens, permaculture can have a wider application in the design of housing, public spaces and communities. Permaculture's first principle is 'care for the Earth', so the preservation and promotion of biodiversity is at the heart of its approach. The 'transition town' movement, where community groups develop local responses to the challenges of climate change and the decline of cheap fossil fuels (known as 'peak oil'), has its origins in permaculture and its principles underly the transition philosophy.

Transition Haslemere has a number of community-based projects under way. The one that best illustrates our commitment to working with Nature and promoting biodiversity is our community garden at Lower Roundhurst Farm.

The community garden is 100% organic in keeping with the farm's registered organic status. Instead of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, we use more natural methods to control pests and improve the fertility of the site. Our comfrey bed in particular is very successful, where we compress the leaves over a period of a couple of weeks to produce a rich fertiliser. We produce large amounts of compost ourselves and also use the farm's well rotted manure as a way of increasing the quality of the soil. All of our natural methods of soil fertility promotion and pest control help improve the biodiversity of the site and the

local area.

Hedges are a particularly important wildlife resource, but with the increase in field sizes and of farm mechanisation over the last 50 years, thousands of miles of hedges have been lost. The fence lining the site of our garden has been planted with native species of hedging plants, and we have a bed containing a large number of other hedging species, which we will use to fill any gaps and to increase the quality and diversity of our hedging over time.

Transition Haslemere is one of the organisations featured in Haslemere Museum's 'Wild Things' biodiversity exhibition. The exhibition highlights what the museum is doing to promote wildlife and improve habitats for less common animals and plants, and looks at how local organisations are involved in the fight to save endangered species and habitats.

'Wild Things' runs from Saturday 4 to Tuesday 28 September at Haslemere Museum.

Produce from Transition Haslemere's community garden will be available at DIY Food, a mini festival celebrating do-it-yourself food including bee and chicken keeping, herbal teas and tinctures, dishes from blackberries, etc. 12-4pm, Saturday 18 September at Haslemere Museum.

For more information see www.transitionhaslemere.org

Press contact: Clive Davidson

Tel: 01428 641241 work/01428 656671 home

[Email: cdavidson@cix.co.uk](mailto:cdavidson@cix.co.uk)