

GROWING TOGETHER

The Self-Sufficiency Group

May 2024

Newsletter



GROWING TOGETHER Self-Sufficiency group exists to enable and encourage its members to practice self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and maintain a "sustainable life style" in a fast changing worldwide environment

View this newsletter at:-

www.ehss.org.uk

Indoor meetings are held at 19.30 on the 2nd Wednesday of the month in the:-

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Our meeting in May will be the first of the outdoor meetings; it will be at RAMSTER garden on SATURDAY 11TH MAY at 13:00.

Our meeting in May is outdoors and will be at Ramster Gardens, Petworth Rd, Chiddingfold, Surrey GU8 4SN

It will be a Saturday visit. The normal entry fee to these gardens is £9. However as decided at the AGM the club will be subsidising this entry fee so you will only need to pay £4. To enable us to do this it is important that we all meet at the gardens at the same time to enable Andy to take your money and then pay everyone's entry in one go. Therefore we will meet at the gardens at 13:00 on Saturday 11th May. Once inside you can wander at will. They also have a good tea shop.

May is a really good time to visit these gardens as not only are the stunning azaleas and rhododendrons in bloom but they are running the Surrey Sculpture Trail which should make it a very enjoyable trip. See

<https://www.ramsterevents.com/>

As this is an outdoor meeting we are somewhat reliant on the weather. If it suddenly looks to be very unsavoury we will of course post on Facebook and the WhatsApp group. Or you can call 07946 411483 to check it is still going ahead.

Resume of the April talk by Frances Bassom.

This was the last of our arranged indoor talks and so it was good that our April talk was given by a very experienced speaker namely Christine Stevens the president of the Chichester Beekeepers Association.

Christine began the talk by giving us a lot of information on identifying the invasive Asian Hornet, its impact not only on honey bees but also on other vital pollinators with each hornet nest consuming up to 17 kilos of insects a year. Around seventy hornet nests found in the Kent area were mostly eradicated last year however DEFRA are aware that a number of nests were in the cliffs and totally inaccessible hence this year will be starting off on a worrying note. As these hornets can easily spread 50 km a year, we can certainly expect some to be found in our area this year, as some nests were also found in Portsmouth last year. The hornets seem to often come in via ports. Unlike bees, hornets produce a large multitude of queens each autumn that hibernate until early spring. She brought an Asian hornet preserved in perspex for us

to look at.

Amazingly Christine still keeps bees even though she is now very allergic to the stings. She did undergo three years of desensitisation program at Southampton hospital which was partly successful but her allergy came back. She said she wears a lot more protective clothing than most other beekeepers. She always has her EpiPen handy and never goes beekeeping alone, but even her allergies can't shake her love of these fascinating insects.

Christine then went on to cover many aspects of bee keeping history from early keepers using skeps up to the modern day hives and the discovery of bee space, that allows the use of frames for storing and harvesting of honey. The behaviour of bees throughout the year was very interesting. She explained the hierarchy of the hive from Queens and workers to the male Drones. These latter being stingless and easily recognised by being large, fat and having very big eyes so they can see the queen in flight. It's these males who also get physically dragged out of the hive and unceremoniously dumped outside in autumn when the hive decides they are no longer needed!

She described the roles of the bees throughout their short lives including nurse bees caring for the eggs and larvae, housekeeping bees, some who produce wax for combs, foragers who gather nectar and pollen and scout bees who seek out potential new nest sites.

She discussed necessary equipment for both hives and humans as well as explaining what flowers and plants are the most popular amongst bees. Christine suggests we all visit the RHS web page to download their list of plants for pollinators which she said was excellent.

(See <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators>)

It was interesting to find out such things as red clover is not a good food for bees as they can't reach the nectar due to the length of the flower head but once it is cut the next batch of flower heads are shorter and more easily utilised. While white clover is excellent. It was surprising to find out that allowing for the times when bees can't fly such as it being too windy, raining, cold, damp dark and other factors there are only around 21 days a year which are perfect flying days for bees to forage. This makes their production skills all the more impressive!

Christine brought along a number of jars of their honey for us to buy. And a very lively question and answer session followed, with Christine explaining a lot about identifying differing allergic reactions. Being someone who gets stung by all sorts of creatures I will certainly be getting some of the faster acting (the ones that start working in 15 minutes) antihistamines available for our first aid box in future rather than my usual brand.

It was a very interesting and informative talk much appreciated by all present. Indeed feedback has already been received saying it was the best beekeeping talk one former beekeeping member had ever attended! Please see our facebook page for more information about identifying the hornets. Do also download the Asian Hornet Identification App to your phone so you are ready to report it if you think you see one (don't kill it or people won't be able to track it back to its nest). The slogan for those watching out for the the Asian Hornets is See it, Snap it, App it.

THE COMPOST BIN

What a crazy month April was: Starting off with gales that blew off some of the fleece covering the large field at the bottom of our garden, then the temperature shooting up to 18.7C in the middle of the month, dropping to near-freezing nights the following week. My earliest crops apart from parsnips left in the ground all winter, have been spinach (freshly grown from seeds sown in the discarded window box inside the greenhouse last autumn), and rhubarb (forced in a rhubarb pot) giving us some delicious early crumbles.

I have been so surprised at the ongoing success of our WhatsApp group; I was half-expecting it to fade away to a few faithful members, yet so many of you have joined us and there have now been over a hundred messages exchanged. It's been delightful to compare descriptions or photos of our results with those of others as the weeks progressed, and many handy tips have been exchanged – not to mention many offers of surplus equipment and plants. It's very easy to join: just send your mobile phone number and name to Antonia Taylor (Toni) on 07771 927903 and she'll include you.

Gunnera tinctoria– in case you didn't know – looks like giant rhubarb and grows up to about 8ft

high in damp places, and it's been in the news. It is the latest plant to be officially listed as a species of special concern under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019, which makes it an offence to plant or otherwise encourage it to grow in the wild. There's so much concern about it that the environmental group ERA has arranged a meeting on invasive species blocking our rivers on 19th May, the speaker being the Ranger from the South Downs National Park Association responsible for guarding the River Rother (see separate details).

This is of particular interest to me as the stream at the bottom of my garden flows into the Rother, and – upstream from us – are two such plants. One of them was even growing over our boundary.

It's not illegal to have such a plant as long as it isn't allowed to shed seeds from its giant flower stems into the river, when the fine is £5000.

Talking of new regulations, if you keep chickens – even if just one in your back garden – you must now be officially registered as a smallholding by October. What next – bring back dog licensing? – even that might make more sense. Everyone I've spoken to about this massive registration exercise think it's absolutely ludicrous overkill. I accept the serious nature of bird flu, but this isn't the best way to go about controlling it. Imagine the cost to the Ministry (and ultimately to the country's taxes) to have to manage the paperwork involved in this huge increase in the number of smallholder licences, and to track down and fine those who refuse or fail to register. Their website reckons that only 40% of hens are owned by backyard keepers – but they seem to have overlooked the fact that most backyard flocks number six or less, as opposed to potentially ten thousand birds in a commercial venture; so the powers-that-be could now be handling a hundredfold increase in registrations – maybe even more! Also, as a registered smallholder you will become liable to all the petty rules followed by commercial enterprises during bird flu restricted periods – such as, the need to maintain a book which all visitors will have to sign that they do not keep poultry, and so on. Ridiculous!

Alec.

Photo of the month



photograph by Charles Dowding and reproduced by kind permission

I reproduce this photograph by kind permission of Charles Dowding, whose regular online newsletter of gardening tips is extremely popular. It shows seedlings being ingeniously raised over a hotbed of horse manure in his greenhouse. What a wonderful idea – greenhouse heating for free (providing you live near a source of the stable muck)!

This clever combination reminds me of someone I knew who used to brew wine and beer in his greenhouse – the fermentation revelled in the warmth, and he reckoned the generated carbon dioxide that was given off during photosynthesis boosted daytime plant growth.

-Alec

The garden is going like a train: yesterday was the first warm day and sunny and although the plants had all been growing well and budding up yesterday was a massive growth spurt. This morning I have roses out, peonies about to burst, as is the white wisteria. A mass of colour and splendour. Just what I need as working life is full on and complicated involving times outside of normal working hours etc, and several friends have been away on holidays and left their dogs with us.

I am hand removing the grass from our drive while the ground is still wet and intend to scatter wild flower seed instead. Should do ok as soil is poor, although not poor enough to deter grass....

Trying to appease the gods of weather! As its Lodsworth fete on Sunday and its my favourite one of the year. 12 o'clock! I wonder if the plant stall will be as good as usual with it being so early...not that I need a plant!

~ Dru

ERA – Eco Rother Action

ERA May talk:

Angela Ward

From South Downs National Park Authority



Reviving the Rother

16 May, 7.00 pm

At the Henry Warren Hall, Nyewood

Angela is the South Downs National Park Ranger for the River Rother from the Hampshire border to Hardham, with a particular focus is invasive species. There are 2,721 non-native species living in England, of which the majority, 66%, are plants. The annual cost of invasive non-native species to the economy is estimated at £1.3 billion in England, the biggest cost being to agriculture.

Learn about key invasive species affecting the Rother, what work is already happening and how community groups, volunteers and landowners can help.

Everyone Welcome. Please car share.
<https://ecorotheraction.org/>