

Dunchurch Allotments

By Paul Sanders

What is a group of owls called? How far can squirrels jump? What can't frogs do when eating?

These were just some of the questions that families were asked as they explored Dunchurch Allotments 'Wildlife Wander' in August this year. Painted plaques of animals created by allotment holders were displayed around the plots, the creatures ranged from mammals and birds, amphibians and reptiles to a selection of insects and an arachnid. Next to each picture was information about the creature which would help the Wildlife Wanderers with the answer to questions posed.

On arriving back at base, a selection of refreshments was on offer with the cakes inspired by allotment produce, including classic carrot cake, delectable courgette loaf and irresistible beetroot and chocolate cake. For the more discerning kids there were a selection of cupcakes with toppings featuring insects, the favourite being ladybirds.

While celebrating and enjoying the creatures that gardeners live alongside on the allotments, we also have a love-hate relationship with some of them. The beasties that nibble our young seedlings like snails and caterpillars are a regular topic of conversation on the plots. The blackbirds that love to strip our cherry trees of the unripe fruit makes us fume at being too slow to get the netting up.



(Above) A table laden with cakes, savouries and drinks – a welcome sight after wandering around the allotments
(Below) Three of the painted wooden plaques







Wood pigeons descend from the sky onto newly germinated peas and brassica shoots leaving tiny stalks with tattered leaves. The destruction can come from underground as well. In some years mole hills dot the allotment landscape as these furry creatures tunnel the worm rich soil and disturb our plants, and mice with the occasional rat love to feast on newly sown beans or scurrying up the maize stalks for a bountiful blow-out on sweetcorn kernels.

Gardeners have to learn how to avoid the worst ravages of crop attack without resorting to the wholesales use of poisonous chemicals and tolerate a certain amount of crop destruction.



In a recent discussion with a wildlife caring allotment holder, I was told that they had in the past resorted to live trapping a rat on their plot which they took to the far side of Warwickshire to release only to find out later that this was against the law. Vermin such as the black rat (*Rattus rattus*) and grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) should not be moved to other areas but humanely killed.

The allotment site continues to be a haven for wildlife as numerous bird and bat boxes have been installed and a number of allotment holders have put in ponds which team with tadpoles in the spring. Nocturnal creatures like hedgehogs and foxes are occasionally seen and evidence has shown we are visited by badgers and muntjac deer – and this year for the first time red kites have been seen circling above the allotments.

Dunchurch Community Garden

Community gardens encourage residents to become more socially and physically active whilst at the same time, providing produce for the local community.

Situated outside the village library, the Dunchurch Community Garden has been up and running for three years and provides a wonderful opportunity for people of all ages to enjoy the experience of growing and harvesting their own produce.

We are looking for an enthusiastic volunteer to take on this rewarding project for 2024. If you are interested or know anyone that is, please do get in touch. Contact Tigs – email **victoriaputt@gmail.com**

A very rewarding experience await you.



Kale, courgettes and sweetcorn – just some of the vegetables grown this year