



Allotment News

WAHGA launches festive season in style

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*WHAT was the veterinary ambu-
lance doing on the Churchfields
Allotments site a few weeks ago?*

See inside for details!



REMINDER: Don't forget our
Winter Allotment Photo Competi-
tion. Shots from adults and under-
16s welcome. Please email your
pictures to:

weybridgeallotments@gmail.com

by 15th Jan.(including age, if a
child). Winner in each category will
receive a £10 shop voucher with
their photo being displayed on the
WAHGA website home page.



Bonfire night celebration a roaring success

THERE was a superb turn-out for WAHGA's bonfire night celebration on Saturday, November 6th. Vice-chair Pippa Graeme captures the dramatic spectacle beautifully in this photograph. Forty people (we had to limit numbers for H&S reasons), from the young to the not-so-young, attended. As with our summer barbecue, it was great to see established plot-holders mixing with newcomers. A special mention for two people in particular. Star of the show was WAHGA Secretary, Caroline Freeman, who constructed the bonfire, lit it, and then managed it expertly (you can see her complete with head-torch in the centre of the picture, feeding the flames). Chef David Brown fed the masses with a steady stream of sizzling sausages. Look out for more WAHGA events in the New Year.

Swanderful! WAHGA members to the rescue as 'royal' bird blown off-course

WHEN shop volunteers Caroline Freeman and Peter Hurford were close to finishing their shift on Saturday, November 27th, they noticed a large swan stuck in one of the birch trees at the corner of the car-park.

It was unable to free itself as one of its legs was stuck in the branches of the tree. Caroline and Peter called the swan sanctuary in Shepperton and it took the emergency service just 15 minutes to respond.

Their expert was able to free the swan and capture it so that they could take it back to Shepperton to check that it wasn't injured.

WAHGA Wildlife and Biodiversity Officer James Higgins explains: "Mute swans are large, heavy birds. In the exceptionally high winds that were prevalent at that time, this swan is likely to have had difficulty in swerving. Mute swans also have poor forward-vision, often resulting in collisions with wires or overhead power cables."

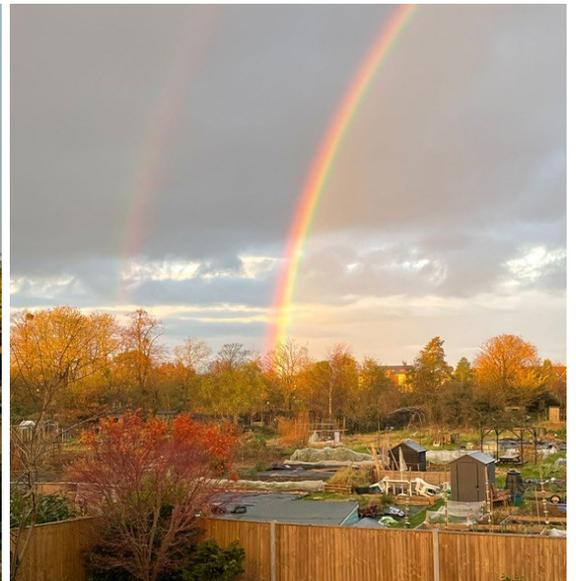
James says that mute swans fly at speeds of 30 – 50 mph, exacerbating the challenge of their swerving in flight. They also need at least 30 yards to become airborne and as much again to reach a safe height that will enable them to clear surrounding obstructions, such as houses. Thankfully, the swan, who enjoys the protection of the Crown, proved to be none the worse for wear. But thanks to Caroline and Peter for their quick thinking and awareness of a nearby swan sanctuary.



Churchfields Photo Gallery

Churchfields Allotments — a heavenly place to be...

MANY thanks to our Treasurer, Laura Yates, for capturing these fabulous shots of rainbows over our site. Looking closely at the shot on the right, I think the pot of gold is on the coppice-plot. So, if you were to help the committee dig out the brambles there, you might just find it!!!



What the allotments mean to me...

In the latest in our series, 10-year-old Alice Jackson explains in her own words how taking on an allotment has been a life-changing experience

SINCE convincing my family to get an allotment about a year ago now, I feel I have learnt a lot. Our garden at the time was fit to bursting with plants and we didn't want to put netting over the plants as this was what we saw from the windows.

The allotment however has always been entirely different. It is here that it doesn't matter so much how it looks, you can go crazy on your imagination and it won't matter.

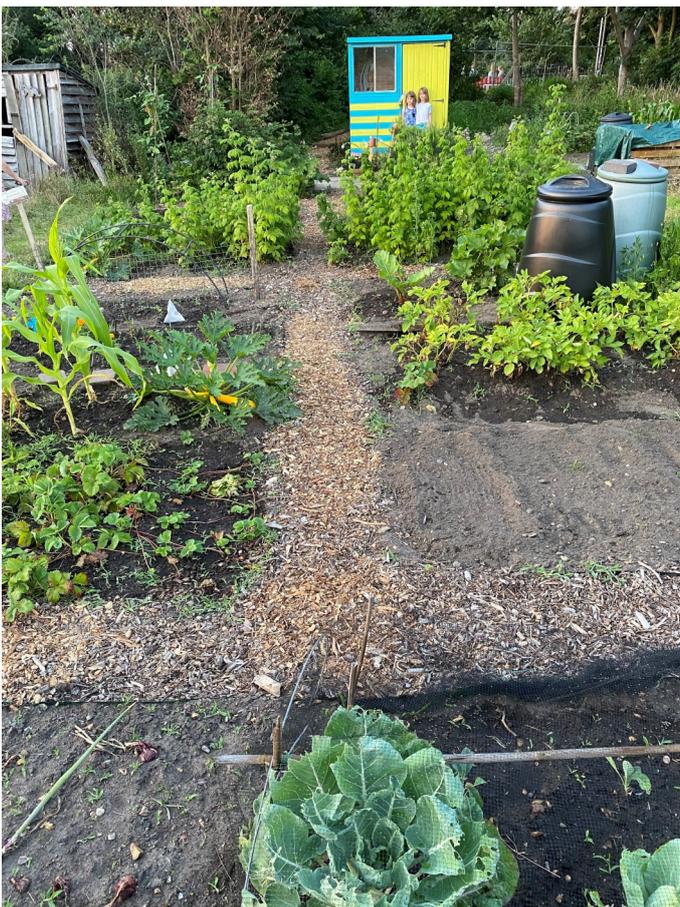
Bright, bold colours

I really like experimenting with bright, bold colours — hence the reason for our blue and yellow shed — and I would really like to add some more colour through flowers on the allotment next year along with raised beds.

Although I was quite into gardening before getting an allotment, that was really nothing compared to



Alice Jackson (left) with her sister, Katie, showing some of their produce...with their fetching blue and yellow shed in the background



now, I have been able to try so much more interesting varieties of food, and the fruit and veg I didn't like shop-bought tasted so much better home-grown.

About 85% of what we planted has survived though the rest all got blight, shrivelled or of course, got eaten by the slugs. I'd say that's what we have learnt the most — especially with all the wet weather this year. We have tried so many different ways to stop them, some failing and others turning out to succeed.

Overall, I can't possibly imagine life without the allotment or how we could ever have survived without it.

(A view, left, of the Jackson's plot, which won them the Best Newcomer award for 2021)

Wildlife round-up

Survey evidence fresh proof that Churchfields Allotments represent exceptional biodiversity asset

By WAHGA Wildlife and Biodiversity Officer, James Higgins



One of the pair of peregrine falcons we have been privileged to play host to on its perch on the church steeple

Photo credit: James Higgins

I AM pleased to report that the impressive pair of peregrine falcons that we reported on in October's *Allotment News* are still here. In fact, they have been seen catching pigeons in mid-air over the coppice plot — in the shadow of St James' Church steeple, where they roost.

As a method of cabbage pest-control, it takes some beating!

Falcons' 'snacking habits'

We did wonder whether the falcon pair had moved on but, in recent weeks, there have been sightings of them and their snacking habits.

After full analysis of Surrey Bat Group's findings of

a survey of our site, using their latest whizzy technology, I can confirm we are lucky enough to have eight different bat species regularly flying and feeding at Churchfields after dusk.

This is excellent news but probably not too surprising for many of us who have enjoyed catching sight of them in the gloaming.

Nearly 50% of Britain's bat species onsite

It means that we have eight out of the total of 18 species known to be resident in the UK today.

The species at Churchfields are: Soprano Pip-pistrelle; Common Pippistrelle; Nathusius Pip-pistrelle; Noctule bat; Leisler's bat; Daubentons bat; Serotine bat; and the Brown Long Eared bat.



Daubenton's bat, as found at Churchfields, hunting for aquatic insects

The bat survey revealed the presence on site of the speckled bush-cricket and the pygmy shrew — Britain's smallest mammal

The main advantage of using sophisticated audio equipment is that it records wavelengths of sound from fauna that are either nocturnal or not easy to spot, helping us discover many more species on our plots that we rarely get to see.

The bat survey also recorded species I had no previous knowledge of on site: the speckled bush-cricket; and the smallest mammal in the UK, the pygmy shrew (*pictured below*), which can weigh as little as 2.3g. The larger common shrew is often seen,



Speckled bush-cricket



A great year for wildlife spotting onsite

We have now recorded over 60 species of bird, 20 different mammals, 4 reptiles & amphibians and many more unusual bees, insects and native wild flowers. It has been quite a year for wildlife spotting across our plots.

The year 2021 has brought confirmation that we have onsite both the UK's smallest — the Common Pippistrelle — and the largest bat species — the Noctule bat.

What a bonus to learn that we now have also the smallest native mammal and the first recorded Churchfields Allotment sighting (or Weybridge to my knowledge) of the World's fastest animal—the peregrine falcon. Not bad going for an urban allotment site!

But let me invite all plot-holders to keep their eyes peeled and report any sightings of spe-

cies of interest. Myself and another WAHGA Committee member, Sophie Murphy, make a habit of logging with the Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre (SBIC) any interesting sightings. This not only helps build up a picture of biodiversity in our area; it also helps in the protection of any potentially vulnerable species.

Do send details to: surreybic@Surreywt.org.uk
Include photos, if you can.

Here's to another year of happy growing and wildlife spotting in 2022. Merry Christmas!



Leisler's bat

A guide to winter pruning

By our resident expert, Diane Ewart

THE aim of pruning is to encourage the habit that you're looking for in the plant: shape, size, vigour, flowering and fruiting. Certain plants are pruned in the winter when they are dormant.

On a typical allotment these include the following: fig trees; apple trees; pear trees; grape vines; Autumn-fruiting raspberries; fruit bushes, such as gooseberries, blackcurrants, red currants, blueberries; rhubarb, which will need dividing

Do not make the mistake of pruning stone fruits such as cherries and plums in winter. They risk being infected by silver leaf, a fungal disease. Prune in early or mid-summer.

Basics

Regardless of the shrub or tree, the first step in any pruning is to remove the '3Ds': diseased; dead; and damaged

Then remove one of any crossing/rubbing branches.

Then follow the methods below for specific plants. After pruning mulch around the plant.

Apple and Pear trees

Consider the shape and size of the tree - there is no point in having an oversized apple tree on your plot. Apples will form on the higher branches and be difficult to harvest. The tree will create too much shade, take water from the surrounding area and negatively impact the ability of you, or your neighbour, to grow other crops. Aim to create a goblet shape with evenly spaced branches rising from the trunk in a circle. Cut off any shoots at the base of the tree. Clear the area around the tree and mulch.

If the tree has not been pruned for a few years, the pruning may need to be conducted over a few years to get the tree back to an appropriate size, shape and fruiting capability.

Fig Tree

Fig trees can cope with hard pruning. Remove suckers at the base of the plant. Remove any secondary branches (branches growing off the main branches) that are growing at less than a 45 degree angle from the main branch. These will grow too close to the main trunk and not produce the best fruit. Cut back the main branches by 1/4 or 1/3. This helps the plant put more energy towards the fruit. The aim is to create an open structure.

Never prune fig trees in spring and summer when the sap is rising. Fig sap is phototoxic and will burn the skin. This is made worse if exposed to bright sunlight.

The resulting scarring can be serious. The release of the sap can also weaken the plant.

Fruit bushes

Remove some of the old (3-plus years) wood every year, trying to create a goblet shape. This improves air flow and helps prevent fungal and other diseases taking a hold. Leave healthy young branches, which will be heavy croppers in future years. As you prune, try and take some cuttings, pop them in some compost and even if only 1 in 10 root you have free plants to use and share.

Autumn-fruiting raspberries

Cut the canes of Autumn-fruiting raspberries down to the ground in winter. New stems will grow in the spring for fruiting late summer and autumn.

Grapevine

Prune in December or January when the vine is deeply dormant; cut back to a main 'rod' or 'arm' that's trained vertically along support wires or fixed frame.

Vines are not suitable for pruning at other times of the year as the cut stems ooze sap which can weaken the plant.

Rhubarb

Late winter is the time to divide rhubarb crowns. Do this on healthy crowns which are 4-plus years old. Dig up the rootball, and lift out of the soil. Cut away any decaying vegetation. Inspect the plant for buds (petioles). They look pink and broad bean-shaped. Cut the plant in pieces with a pruning saw, bread knife or sharp shovel leaving at least one, but ideally two or three petioles, some rhizome and roots in each piece. Re-plant or pot up as soon as possible in soil which has been heavily enriched with composted manure or home-made compost. Plants need to be one metre apart.

Ornamental Shrubs

If you have ornamental shrubs on your plot don't neglect them. Prune them back annually to keep them to a manageable size. The rule of thumb is, if the shrub flowers in winter or spring (eg: Camellia), prune after flowering has finished. For summer and autumn flowering plants (eg: Escallonia), prune in winter.

CONTACT US

If you have something you would like to share in the next newsletter or want to give us feedback, please e-mail:

weybridgeallotments@gmail.com

WAHGA Website: CTRL & [click here](#)