

CULPEPER POND GETS A SPRING CLEAN by Vivienne Palmer

Here are some photos from the Culpeper Pond renovation which proved to be a bit of a bigger job than we thought! Everyone who was there worked extremely hard, and ended up with clothes that I don't think the Daz challenge would be able to cope with at all. Many, many thanks to Jo and the team from Women With Waders who got muddier than any human beings that I've ever seen and who were a pleasure to work with from start to finish, and also to Kate, Laurie, Tommy, Lucia, Lloyd and Paula for working so hard and with such wonderful team spirit. Also thanks to Jane and Robin for sorting out the food so that everyone had the energy to keep going. For more photos visit <http://flickr.com/gp/67569325@N00/3y784d>. Just click on the link - if you click on 'slideshow' you should get the photos in order of time taken, which makes a bit more sense. Also, turn your sound down before you look at the video, unless you like the sound that a generator makes!



Getting started



3/5s of the way there



One of the many treasures found in the mud



Some of the frogs



Filling the clean pond



Lucia releasing the frogs back into the clean pond

SPRING PLANT SALE

The daffs, snowdrops and aconites are out, the frogs are getting used to the clean pond and are getting ready to spawn. Spring is in the air so it's time for Culpeper's members to turn their hands once more to the Spring Plant Sale. Twice a year the gardeners of Islington pour through our gates to snap up some hardy bargains - whether its vegetable seedlings, herbs, ornamentals, indoor plants, or just the home-made tea and cakes, there's always something for everyone! Sunday 10th May is this year's date, we hope you will be able to join us. It is always a great social event, as well as being a good fundraiser and way to introduce new people to the garden.

We rely on volunteers to get the day running smoothly – doing a hundred and one tasks from potting on spare plants from your plots or from home (compost and pots available from behind the tea hut,) setting up the tables & bringing out plants, serving tea, giving advice and packing away at the end of the day. Please sign up on the sheet in the tea hut or leave a message for Kirstie or Kate if you can help out.

SUBSCRIPTIONS. 2009 subscriptions are still due. Culpeper depends on the support of its members in many ways including needing your money! THANKS

THE FUN OF GROWING FROM SEED

The hard winter this year gave us a good break for tilling the soil but with signs of spring emerging daily now is the time to get into action again. For the energetic, getting on top of the weeds early is a good idea, and best done before you feed your soil (or you'll be feeding the weeds). For a gentle warm up there is great pleasure to be had from leafing through seed catalogues, and dreaming of the promise of things to come. Sowing seeds is only just a bit more energetic and you'll be delighted and amazed with the results that just a little tender loving care can bring. It may seem unlikely that anything will really happen when you put seeds in compost and add water, heat and light. Providing you have a sunny window ledge (or similar) and don't go away for a months holiday without leaving someone keeping an eye it's impossible not to have success. And of course any surplus will be great for the Culpeper for the Spring Plant Sale, with all proceeds going directly to Culpeper.

- If you fancy having a go at home and want some advice, seeds, or compost contact the garden worker. Culpeper will happily supply you with the materials in return for a cut of your seedlings for the sale. We also have lots of catalogues.
- New garden member Martina has a wealth of experience of growing from seed for her allotment and wants to share her knowledge with Culpeper. She will run a seed sowing workshop at Culpeper.....details to follow.
- The Southwood Gardeners raise veggie plants from seeds at the Southwood conservatory annually for Culpeper. They meet on Monday mornings at the centre from 10.30 –12 and would welcome help. If you fancy joining in let the garden worker know and come along.
- To read more about growing from seeds look at

http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/schools_organic_network/leaflets/GrowingFromSeed.pdf

<http://theseedsite.co.uk/seedsowing.html>

<http://theseedsite.co.uk/seedsowing2.html>

GROW YOUR OWN DAY - Saturday 18 April, 12-4pm St Luke's Centre, 90 Central Street, EC1V 8AJ

This event is open to everyone and will feature a range of gardening activities for all ages, including sowing seeds, taking cuttings, making salad boxes and the ever-popular pot painting. Demonstrations will show people how to cook simple recipes with home-grown vegetables and herbs. There will also be the chance to get building and help construct a new compost bin for the centre, as well as a habitat wall to attract mini-beasts. Home-made cakes with tea and coffee will be provided.

For more information please contact Heather on 0203 142 5049 or hstabler@ec1newdeal.com

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 8th March - Workday & Wildlife Mosaic 11 – 2

Thursday 26th March - Growing Stuff: An Alternative Guide to Gardening - Black Dog Publishing. .RSVP

Sunday 5th April – Members Meeting 12

Thursday 23rd April – Trip to Kew.

Sunday 19th April – Workday (*this is a week later than usual due to Easter holidays) Vivienne Palmer will give an illustrated talk and walk-about on Culpeper Wildlife

Saturday 2nd May Caroline Foley will give a talk on Edible Flowers & Companion Planting. 12.30

Sunday 10th May - Spring Plant Sale

Friday 16th May – Trip to St Marys Garden

Sunday 14th June - Open Day. Martina Dervis will give a workshop on Veg growing in small spaces

Thursday 16th July – Strawberry Tea

Sunday 11th October - Autumn Plant Sale

GROWING STUFF BOOK LAUNCH at Culpeper Community Gardens

To celebrate the release of Growing Stuff: An Alternative Guide to Gardening, Culpeper Community Gardens will be hosting the launch event, in association with Black Dog Publishing, on Thursday 26th March, from 4pm until 8pm.

- Contributors to the book, including Richard Reynolds (the founder of the Guerilla Gardening movement), Emily Hill and Will Gould (St Dunstan's Horticultural Society) and Madeleine Giddens (www.madaboutherbs.org) will be holding interactive workshops and demonstrations throughout the event.

- Culpeper Community Garden members can benefit from an exclusive 40% discount on all orders of the book (rrp £16.95). Please email jess@blackdogonline.com <<mailto:jess@blackdogonline.com>> to reserve your copy, quoting Culpeper in the subject line. Other Black Dog Publishing titles, Making Stuff and Making Stuff for Kids are also available at the same 40% discounted price.

- Children are very welcome to the event and everyone will be encouraged to participate in the workshops.

- Refreshments will be available to all throughout the evening.

Please join us to celebrate the launch of Growing Stuff and the beginning of Spring!

Contact Rosie at Black Dog Publishing to reserve your place at the event.

Email: press@blackdogonline.com <<mailto:press@blackdogonline.com>> .com

Phone: 0207 713 5097 Website: www.blackdogonline.com



Bike planter from the book

Welcome to new members & visitors

New members - Paul, Catherine, Martina, Thomas, Gillian, Stephen, Richard, Mark, Mathias & Mia. Welcome to ploholders - Mathilda, Edwin & Chance UK

Unusual visitors to the garden on the February workday were brothers Robert and Frank, two beautiful white ferrets who enjoyed exploring the garden with their owner.

Culpeper Nature Notes February 2009

It has been an unusually cold winter. We have the heaviest snowfall for twenty years at the beginning of February and there was also a whole week in January when the pond was frozen solid. This is particularly challenging for the small birds in the garden, such as the wren and the goldcrest. These birds need to eat for 90% of their waking hours to take in enough calories to help them survive the night, and in a bad winter up to 50% of the UK wren population may die. So it was with great relief that, after a week of sub-zero temperatures, I saw both the goldcrest and the wren flitting about in the garden. I like to think that the grated cheese that many of the garden members scattered about made all the difference!

The feeders are now up, and the first thing that happened was that a small flock of greenfinches took up residence for most of the day. These are tough, aggressive little birds, so it was fortunate that we had a lot of feeders so that they couldn't keep their rivals, the blue and grey tits from feeding too. In the last few weeks, the goldfinches have also been coming to the feeders, especially the one in the weeping ash on the lawn.

The goldfinches were already singing their hearts out in early February while there was still thick snow on the ground – their breeding behaviour must, I think, be triggered by the increasing day length rather than the temperature! As February wore on, lots of birds got into the breeding mood, including the normally reclusive dunnock (a little grey and chestnut bird resembling a sparrow, but with a much more delicate bill). The male commenced by sitting in the pear tree and singing vigorously: by the end of the month he had found a mate, and was displaying to her by raising his wings and following her about. The love life of the dunnock is very interesting – there appear to be less females than males, so once a male has found a mate he stays very close to her, so that she cannot mate with any other males. Unfortunately, the female often has other plans, and will slip away for an illicit liaison at the drop of the proverbial hat. In this way, the variation in the gene pool is preserved, as it is quite possible for every egg in a clutch to have a different father. Of course, the 'official' male doesn't know this, so helps to feed all the offspring, whether they belong to him or not.

The magpies are also breaking off twigs and constructing a huge nest in the London plane tree opposite the garden. They are still quite a young pair, and the nest doesn't look that proficient to me, so maybe they are still only practicing. They are very territorial though, and last week spent half an hour barracking and mobbing the black and white cat who seems to think that he owns the garden. So, while they may take baby birds and eggs, they may also help to draw attention to the cat, which will alert other birds who may not be so wary. Nothing in nature is every straightforward.

One of the highlights of the year so far has been the appearance of a sparrowhawk, which swooped down over the teahut and into a forsythia bush, scattering terrified sparrows in all directions. I got a fairly good look at her as she flapped away, empty-taloned. The females are a bit larger than a pigeon, with heavy chocolate brown barring on their chest and tail, and rounded wings. They have yellow 'staring' eyes which make them look very fierce, but they are only successful in one in ten hunts. Having a sparrowhawk around is a good indication that the other birdlife is thriving enough to support a 'top predator'. Birds of prey are often the first to suffer when there is an environmental problem, because they are at the top of the food chain and absorb all the problems of the creatures further down the chain. So the use of the pesticide DDT in the 1960's impacted birds of prey because they ate the small birds who had eaten the insects who had ingested the pesticides. The result was that the pesticide made the egg shells of the birds of prey too thin to be viable (in addition to gradually poisoning the adults) so whole generations of sparrowhawks, peregrine falcons, kestrels and other raptors were lost. This effect on birds was noted worldwide and continues to this day in the Arctic where 40 year old DDT concentrates in the food chain. It is a good sign that a sparrowhawk has been seen again, especially right here in the heart of London, though I don't imagine the small birds will be so thrilled.

Finally, I must (briefly) mention the pond, which has been cleared out and replanted. When we started clearing out the pond, we discovered a small amount of water, and a thick layer of smelly mud and rocks several feet deep. One more season, and what we would have had was a kind of toxic bog. We managed to catch fifty one frogs and three newts, and these have now been put back into the pond, where, if you watch closely, you will see they are already starting to mate. Over the next few weeks we start to see lots more frogs (most of the frogs who stay in the pond are probably males waiting for the females to turn up, though there were some females already in residence). We should also start to see some toads. And, if last year was anything to go by, we might also get our annual visit from the ducks and the heron – one keen eyed gardener has already noticed the magpies trying to eat the frogs!



Dunnock displaying to his mate



Female Sparrowhawk

TRIBUTE TO JOHN SLADE

In February 2008 we celebrated the 80th birthday of our oldest, most involved, and furthest travelling (from Harrow Weald) participant, John Slade. Sadly, that turned out to be John's last birthday. John attended his last Stuart Lowe Trust event shortly after Christmas. Having already survived one stroke and being unwilling to take medication, he knew as well as anyone that he was on borrowed time, but there was no suggestion that the end was imminent. He was sparky as ever, full of determination to improve his health and work on his allotment. John was such a friendly, cheerful man that the world seemed brighter and friendlier when he was around. His poems and his recipes will be read and enjoyed even when those of us who knew him are gone. But there are a lot of us who will remember John and feel inspired by his example for a long time. All of us at SLT will miss him a lot.

Harry Fenech from Siren Arts had a very successful exhibition in the resource centre. The work will be up for another month so pop in and have a look. Thanks to Hayden, Andi and the Frame Factory for all their help and of course to the artist Harry for his beautiful work.



FANCY GETTING INVOLVED?

Archive project

Volunteer/volunteers wanted to help arrange materials on the history of the garden Wed 12-2? Ask Kirstie, Kate or Gillian from EPP for more information

Website update

Have you looked at our website recently – we are trying to raise some money to update it. What should we include – any ideas or if you have technical skills and would like to help please speak to Kirstie or Ahmet or send an email to gardenworker@gmail.com

Knitting Club

Paula has started a knitting club on Tuesdays – 4.15-5.15 in the resource room. Everyone welcome.

Volunteers wanted to come and help us reorganise the yard on Friday 27th March – we are going to create a better working space for propagation and small greenhouse area. We will also need a hand erecting the small greenhouse - contact the garden workers if you are interested

CULPEPER ARTS

The wildlife paintings are finally up by the soon-to-be Bog Garden in the wildlife area – thank you to everyone who painted, made cups of tea and was involved but an extra big thank you to Daisy (artist) and Danny (who wisely and patiently helped me to install them and who has also put up Bat Boxes around the new building). There is still a butterfly life cycle series to go up and the signage for the wildlife garden – so dont worry if you cant see your piece displayed yet it will be up soon.

On Sunday 8th March there will be a MOSAIC WORKSHOP as part of the usual workday and we will be creating a mosaic for the wildlife garden – if you have ever wanted to learn this craft come along and get involved – the course is designed for complete beginners and all are welcome. The workshop runs from 11am-2pm. It will also be a chance to meet new garden members who are coming with the mentoring charity CHANCE UK – and will be taking over a plot right next to the wildlife area.



Culpeper Wildlife paintings up at last!



Work on the beautiful banner continues – come and join in on Thursday afternoons

Have you spotted a beautiful bit of enviromental art in the garden – thanks to Bill

