

# Ecology

Having visited the Upland Allotment site in Handsworth, it is apparent that there is little evidence of biodiversity on site during the winter months. Most plots seemed to be empty or neglected. However after speaking to a plot owner we discovered this was due to the very mild winter we have experienced. He said, "There was much rain for having an optimal winter sowing" and that he would prefer a colder winter because the frost would kill pests and weeds easier.

Despite this he still had vegetables such as, garlic, potatoes, spinach, Japanese onion and brussel sprouts growing. I also saw cabbage growing on other plots and also peppers in a green house.



The allotment website states that in late February, a wildflower meadow will be planted at Uplands. This will be hugely valuable to the ecology and biodiversity of the site. And that they also have support from Park Rangers who are surveying the site, checking on the water course and advising on the health of trees and bushes on the site and where to plant them. (<http://www.allotmentgarden.net/Uplands/news.html>)



Nevertheless, a list of vegetables outside the Uplands office, show that a much wider variety of plants are grown throughout the whole year.

Despite this, there is little in the way of plant/tree growth, both of which provide fruit, food for a whole range of wildlife species. A matrix of different plant species flowering at different times could provide a solid platform for the wellbeing of bees and their pollination. Also, introducing a hierarchy of flowering plants will ensure the provision of fruit for a greater period. For example, presenting species to the ecology of the Uplands Allotments such as Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Bird Cherry (*Prunus padus*), Midland Hawthorn (*Crataegus aevigata*) and Dog Rose (*Rosa canina*), will hugely increase the biodiversity of the site, and will increase the window of flowering plants.

The introduction of more evergreen plants to the site will also increase the aesthetic quality during the winter months by softening the look of the sharp winter twigs.

Hawthorn is an important plant for wildlife, its early spring flowers provide nectar for early emerging insects, and its branches create a spiny thicket, providing secure nesting for birds. ([www.kew.org/plants-fungi/Prunus-spinosa.htm](http://www.kew.org/plants-fungi/Prunus-spinosa.htm)) Its fruit are one of the last to remain during winter and is covered in white flowers come early spring. The fruit will attract a wide range and birds and flowers encourage insects to the area to pollinate. The Dog Rose bush also flowers early spring and although their fruits ripen early Autumn, the birds are grateful recipients of the fruit all the way through to the late Autumn and Winter months. ([voices.yahoo.com/rose-hios-fruit-rose-bush-3099256](http://voices.yahoo.com/rose-hios-fruit-rose-bush-3099256))

Similarly the fruit of the Birch Cherry are relished as some of the earliest fruit to be available in the summer. ([www.treesforlife.org.uk/forest/species/bird\\_cherry.html](http://www.treesforlife.org.uk/forest/species/bird_cherry.html))

The flowers are pollinated by insects such as bees and flies and the leaves are food for larvae.

Finally Midland Hawthorn would be a great contribution to the biodiversity of the allotments site, as well as being a plant that is native specifically to the Midlands. Its dense foliage is a perfect habitat for many bird species, "it is a food plant for a vast number of insects (over 300). The flowers are eaten by dormice and provide a good nectar source for many pollinating insects."

([www.rfs.org.uk/learning/Hawthorns](http://www.rfs.org.uk/learning/Hawthorns))

The addition of these plant species will open up the site to various different wildlife. But why are these wildlife important to the ecology of the allotments? Introducing a wider range of flowering plants will attract pollinating insects such as bees to the site which will increase the pollination amongst the plots. Birds will be encouraged into the area due to nesting spots and the large variety of food, be it insects or fruit. Birds are hugely beneficial as they are excellent at controlling pests. It creates an equilibrium, an ecology in sync.



This is a suggestion of where we can introduce more hedgerows in the allotments along the footpaths/roads, without interfering with plotholders land.

There is a lack of trees on the allotment site. We are aware of a small communal orchard on one of the sites which was established 2 years ago where the fruit is free to be picked by all plot owners.

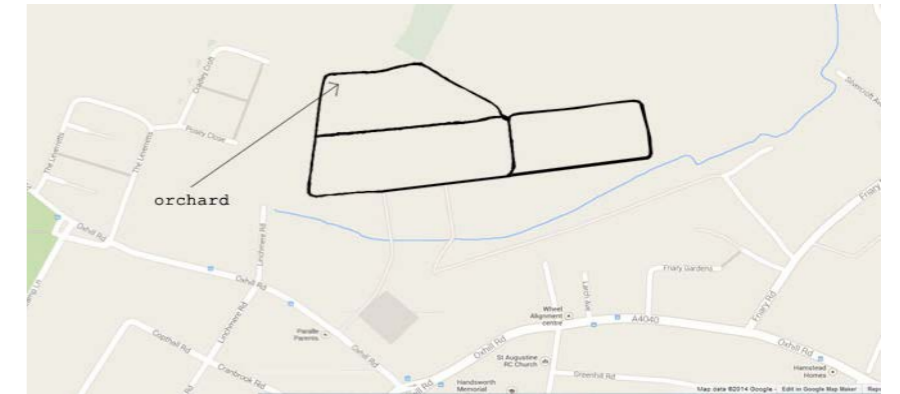


Photo by Sabine Van Andel

However this location is at the top of the hill on site. It is situated out of the way of passersby and may even be inaccessible for older plot holders. The introduction of more orchards around the site would increase accessibility and biodiversity as a wider range of produce will be grown, such as apples or pears from native trees. Nuts can also be harvested through native trees such as the Common Walnut (*Juglans regia*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Common Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). Nuts encourage squirrels into the area, which along with the birds are great at dispersing seeds.

These provide great habitat and shelter for animals, and small mammals are perfect for attracting birds of prey. Birds of prey are extremely powerful yet create an awe and excitement.

As well as producing natural habitats for wildlife, plot holders can create habitats through built structures.