



Ashington Allotments © NBP Photographer John Williamson

*Working with Wildlife*

## Gardens & Allotments Habitat Action Plan

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### Description

Gardens and allotments are managed heavily by man to provide spaces that are aesthetically pleasing, or produce food on a small scale, or both. Many gardens now perform other functions such as outdoor storage or animal housing, such as a shed, an extra room for entertaining friends and holding barbeques or have been adapted to include or become a parking space for cars. It is usual to discover a wide range of plants and habitat types (and so wildlife) within a relatively small area as gardeners seek to maximise the space they have to grow plants to provide a range of colour, structure or food over the seasons. Gardening was once seen to be with an aim of excluding nature or controlling it, but now gardens can be good for wildlife.

Recently the increased density of the human population coupled with intensive farming methods and gardening chemicals that leave less space for wildlife, has greatly increased the significance of gardens as biodiversity refuges. Both gardens and allotments serve a crucial role in helping wildlife. They now make up the largest area of green space in a typical British city, some 15% of the land area, usually far more than public open spaces such as parks. Fragmentation of habitat into a series of 'islands' surrounded by development is particularly damaging for slow-moving species, and several small areas cannot support the same diversity of life as one larger fragment, even if their total areas are the same. Gardens can help to extend some habitats or help link together 'islands' of habitat.

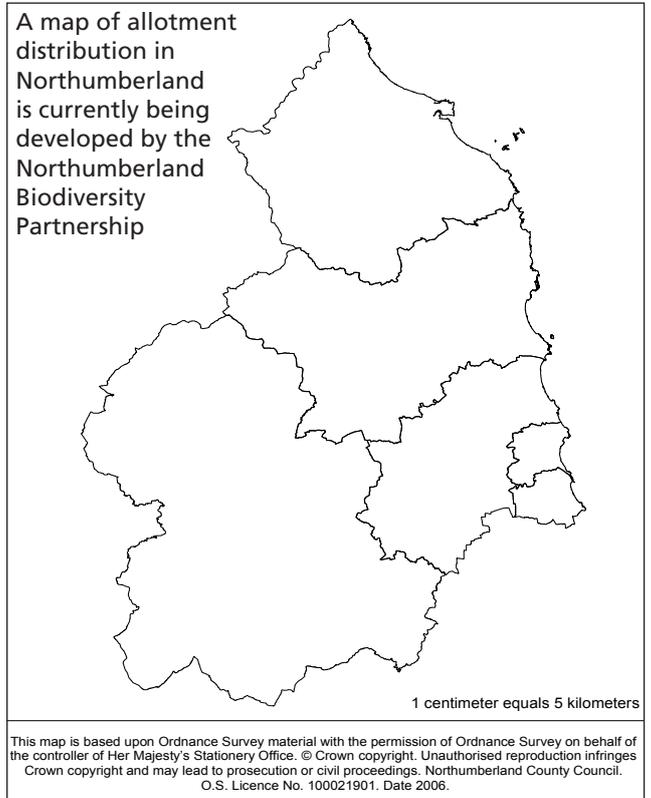
Increased environmental awareness has led to high profile articles and programmes being produced to help gardeners work with wildlife. Garden pond creation can reap great benefits for biodiversity, as can tackling pests while avoiding harmful effects on other organisms and the careful choice of gardening materials. Trapping or collecting slugs and snails is preferable to putting out slug pellets, a hedge is better for wildlife than a fence and a gravelled area with low plants is better

than a poured concrete parking bay. It should be noted that gardens could not only be a force for good or bad in terms of biodiversity, but also in terms of other environmental issues such as water conservation, waste minimisation and carbon emissions (woody plants absorb and retain carbon, but transport of goods bought for the garden, and power tool use emits it).

### Conservation Status

Gardens and allotments as habitats are not covered by legislation. However, some of the species that may use them do have protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act. For example, it is illegal to take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built

### Current Extent in Northumberland



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In the UK gardens cover an estimated 3% of the land surface area of England and Wales whilst allotments cover over 13,000ha, most of which are in urban areas. The extent of gardens and allotments in Northumberland is currently unknown but as a collective resource they are an essential part of wildlife conservation in the county.

### Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Permanent loss of garden area due to conversion to hard-standing such as parking areas, patios, paving, decking or gravelling reducing forage opportunities for garden birds and habitat to a range of invertebrates
- Development of part of the garden into another domestic dwelling or development of allotment sites into housing or industrial premises
- Use of herbicides such as lawn weed and moss killer and pesticide sprays or pellets that either directly kill invertebrates, or other animals higher up the food chain
- Use of plants with low nectar production, inedible seeds or low nesting value
- Removal of trees, hedges or climbers from walls reducing hibernation sites and nesting sites
- Excessive 'tidying' under hedges and around herbaceous perennials removing habitat for invertebrates and small mammals such as hedgehogs
- Use of peat in gardening does not affect the biodiversity of the gardens, but dramatically reduces the biodiversity of peat bogs as they are depleted for sale as compost materials
- Aquatic alien invasive plants such as Australian Swamp Stonecrop (*Crassula helmsii*), Canadian pondweed (*Elodea canadensis*), Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) and Water Fern (*Azolla filliculoides*) and fish in ponds reduce biodiversity by either blanketing out other species, or in the case of fish, eating them.
- Introduction of non-native plants via dumping of garden waste "over the fence" or in flytipping can cause problems through blanketing out of existing wild plants (Sedum), enrichment of the soil leading to proliferation of aruderal species (thistles and nettles) or hybridisation with the native plants, diluting and altering the populations, (bluebell or Geum species)
- Regular short mowing of grass reduces opportunities for invertebrates and so birds and other animals. Inventive retention of longer grassed areas should be promoted

### Associated Action Plans

Bats  
Garden Birds  
Great Crested Newt  
Hedgehog  
Trees and Hedgerows

### Further Information

Northumberland Wildlife Trust Wildlife Gardening pack - <http://www.nwt.org.uk/index.php?section=helping:merchandise>

BBC Gardening website - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening>

Royal Horticultural Society website - <http://www.rhs.org.uk/>

Plant Life website, non native invasive plants, species to avoid – <http://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/plantlife-campaigning-change-invasive-plants.html>

### Targets

**Set up three demonstration wildlife gardens at public venues in Northumberland by 2010.**

**Create 20 wildlife gardens in school grounds and other community areas in Northumberland by 2010.**

**Hold 4 wildlife gardening open days at established wildlife gardens, allotments or garden centres in Northumberland by 2010.**

Code	Priority Actions	Date
GA A01	Encourage provision of bird and bat boxes	ongoing
GA A02	Encourage the planting of native trees, shrubs and hedgerows	ongoing
GA A03	Promote home and community composting schemes	ongoing
GA A04	Promote wildlife friendly gardening practices such as discouraging the use of pesticides and planting of nectar rich flowers	ongoing
GA A05	Promote the Northumberland Wildlife Trust wildlife gardening pack	ongoing
GA A06	Create information sources to encourage people to create wildlife friendly gardens and allotments	ongoing
GB A03	Encourage responsible and continuous feeding of birds, especially in the winter, by the public and at country parks	ongoing