**Stratford sub Castle Garden Club 28th Feb 2019**

**Bees Need People and Passion Rebecca Twigg**

Some plants are pollinated by the action of wind but many rely on insects to move the pollen so that fertilization occurs and seeds form. Without the insects, the next generation of plants could not occur unless we went round doing the job in their place. There are two things to note here**: insects are vitally important and most of us know so little about them.**

Rebecca had two aims. First, she wanted to give us the correct information about pollinating insects because much of what is implied or written about is incorrect or misleading. Secondly, she wanted us to know how to help the insect population because insect numbers are falling rapidly.

The information we need to know is that all kinds of insects pollinate plants, for example, butterflies, moths, lacewings, and hover flies. These insects bring about approximately two thirds of all insect pollinations. The remaining third is done by bees. There are about 260 species of bee in the UK and these are wild bees. Honey bees, that most of us know, are a domestic species. They, of course, pollinate plants, but their number is tiny compared to the number of wild bees.

The causes of the decrease in the insect population are many, such as pesticides, pollution, climate change and loss of habitat. There are things that we can do, to help. One way is to take an interest in them, photograph and identify them. Next, find out about their life cycle. Are you doing anything that would stop them breeding successfully? Are you providing some overwintering protection? Are you growing the kind of plants that they need for food?

If you haven’t time for all of this then be generally insect friendly. Don’t have a perfect lawn. Keep the daisies and the clover and the many other wild flowers that prosper in short grass. Insects do much better in gardens than on agricultural land. Grow a wide variety of flowers, not just wild ones because many of our cultivated species are still very closely related to the wild ones from which they have been developed, but they flower for longer. Also, have a few untidy corners that make good overwintering areas. These are probably much more useful to insects than a specially made or purchased bug hotel. Also very useful, is a bank of soil with very short grass and in full sun. Solitary bees can use this.

Many wild bees are tiny, only a few millimetres long and some feed on very specific flowers. This is the reason for growing a wide variety of plants. Lupins, sweet peas and wisteria have high protein pollen while sedum and campanula are attractive to many insects. If you have a choice, a mixed hedge of native plants is obviously much better than a fence or wall for the insect population. Some bees, such as the Ivy Bee or the Wool Carder Bee resemble wasps so increasing our knowledge is important. Honey bees have protective hives and are bred, so their population is more secure.

Rebecca has set up two things in Salisbury that indicate her passion for bees and other insects. In 2015 she obtained permission to turn the green space that is St. Clements Churchyard into a Community Garden designed to protect wild bees and other wildlife. It is called the Secret Garden and is in Mill road, Salisbury. Starting in May 19, it is open one Sunday per month so the public can visit. The date you want is 5th May and it is open 12-4pm. She has also produced a ‘Bee Trail’. Information about this is available at the Visitor Information Centre.

If you want to learn more about bees then look at the website called ‘ISPOT’. This will let you identify bees from photographs.

Two books you might like are:

Plants for Bees by W.D.J. Kirk and F.N. Howes

Field Guide to Bees of Great Britain and Ireland by Steven Falk.

Both are ‘in depth’ books but shorter guides exist.

Our meeting for 28th March, ‘Behind the Scenes at Chelsea’ given by Andy McIndoe is our celebrity lecture for this year. There are a few tickets left, £8.00 for members and £10 for visitors. Do come, he is such an entertaining speaker with over 20 consecutive Chelsea Gold Medals for the Hillier display in the giant marquee. Be there, 7.15 for 7.30pm in the Reading Room, opposite St Lawrence Church, SP1 3LL. Tel 01722 321431 for tickets.

**Dorothy Richards**