

Let's give the Bees a Boost

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How many of us have been watching Sarah Raven's programme, *Birds, Butterflies, Blooms* on BBC2? I certainly watched the second and third of the series. The gist of what she was saying is this - our gardens provide a very important habitat for wildlife, especially pollinators, and we need to do all we can to encourage the insects, the bees, the butterflies and hoverflies by planting those plants that provide the largest quantity of nectar at every time of year. Our gardens should be insect pubs open every hour, day and night (for the moths), every day of the year.

Recently, after the snow had virtually gone, and the temperature was pleasant, the bees were out and about from the hives, looking for food. We didn't have much for them, apart from snowdrops. A few crocuses were coming out, the winter flowering honeysuckle was badly damaged by the intense frost, but I saw some bees checking it over. The first cyclamen and winter aconites were out. Some hellebores were in flower, but I am not sure how much nectar they offer, and a few sweet violets were visible if you looked close to the ground. Winter flowering shrubs did not have very much to offer. *Viburnum bodnantense* looked wretched, but *Sarcococca humilis* was flowering sweetly in its very quiet unassuming way. Altogether, we were not exactly providing a feast. I must get more early crocuses planted for next year. *Crocus tomasianus* seeds itself around and comes before the Dutch crocuses, but I must see if there is one that flowers earlier still, to extend the crocus season. Primroses will be out very soon, and other wild flowers are good nectar sources in the early spring, like white dead nettle, dandelions etc.

My next job is to plan what seeds to sow for the summer. This is where Sarah Raven comes in strongly. She and I have the same love of wildlife. Our garden here is primarily grown for the wildlife, and secondly for our pleasure and production of vegetables and

fruit. Sarah last week was pointing out that there are some fabulous single varieties of annuals/bedding plants that can provide the dramatic colours that have become so fashionable, but also cater for the insects. Double varieties are not generally much good for insects. They need to be able to access the nectar from the stamens easily and quickly, which is why a daisy type flower with a high boss of stamens gleaming yellow in the sun attracts a lot of attention from them.

Sarah showed two flower beds used by Harrogate Council which she had helped to redesign with single flowers including some dramatic single dahlias. These were compared with the more conventional 'bedding' schemes. There was a marked difference between them. Colourwise, hers were a little softer; but they were alive and buzzing with bees and butterflies. The 'conventional' beds were vivid in colour, but otherwise lifeless, and perhaps a bit static and same-y. In a straw poll on the two different plantings she found that women mostly favoured her new selection, while men tended to prefer the 'conventional' bedding.

I am now planning to sow some seed, or buy some plug plants, that will follow her ideas - feed the insects, and be colourful. BUT, and it is a big but, we have rabbits in the garden, so the equation becomes more complicated - we need plants that will not immediately be eaten by the rabbits, or the slugs and snails.... Foxgloves are brilliant, Shasta daisies and ox-eye daisies, we have all these already in quantity, (and will have some at the Plant Sale in May,) but I need to find more 'easy to grow' plants to follow in flower later in the summer. Wildlings are less likely to feed the rabbits," scabious, willowherb, *verbascum* (mullein), teasles, thistles, - I am working on a list, but the greater the hunger the more varieties the rabbits will eat. Over the recent cold weeks they have really gone to town on our apple trees, stripping the bark. Heigh Ho! But the

planet belongs to us all, we all need to feed, and insects have been rubbished for years by our 'zap it' attitude, and our love of big, gaudy flower heads with masses of petals - the doubles has not helped. But yes, poppies! Wonderful varieties of colour and form beloved by insects, and the rabbits leave them alone. The annual Shirley or field poppy, can be sown in July as well as in the spring, and they will then flower until the first frosts come, maybe October. I don't find the *P.somniferum* types do so well from a late sowing. They make a dramatic summer flowering, and attract honey and bumblebees. They will pop up again year after year provided you are not too meticulous with your weeding (not a favourite job of mine anyway).

By the time this is published spring will have sprung in earnest, lots of bulbs and colour, already some of the early prunus trees are flowering, and it will be the perfect time to start sowing some annuals. Thompson and Morgan are offering wildflower mixtures. They have a Butterfly Mixture, Cornfield Mixture, Fragrant Mixture, Honey Bee Flower Mix, Meadowland Mixture, and also a Mixed Annuals which are dwarf hardy annuals selected so that they flower gradually, giving your borders ever-changing colour and texture throughout the summer. If we all did a bit, the insects would benefit and we could enjoy both the flowers and the butterflies. Did you see the stunningly dramatic displays of annuals for insects at Butterfly World last summer? Finally, those following the current Lent Course will have seen how the first session referred repeatedly to 'all living creatures' - that includes insects!

A sudden ending to our Gospel?

The Gospel that we are reading this year is mainly Mark's Gospel. We will note on Easter Day how in Mark's Gospel, the account of Jesus' resurrection ends rather abruptly. In contrast to the joy we anticipate from reading accounts of that first Easter morning, the mood conveyed by Mark is one of confusion and terror. Mark's Gospel

ends without any appearance of the resurrected Lord; and the only evidence is the testimony of the young man in the tomb who tells the women that the risen Jesus can be seen in Galilee (16:7).

Mark tells us that the women "*said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid*" (16:8), which has led some scholars to speculate that the original ending to Mark's Gospel may have been lost. So the Gospel is supplemented with two endings, believed to have been added by scribes in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The longer ending (16:9-20) includes elements from the resurrection accounts contained in the other Gospels. Most translations contain these two endings in brackets to indicate that they were probably written by someone other than Mark. As Mark's Gospel is believed to be the oldest (written sometime later than 70CE) of the four Gospels included in the New Testament, its puzzling, open-ended conclusion may lead us to ask, if the women told no one, how then did people come to know that the crucified Jesus had been raised to life? Perhaps Jesus' three earlier predictions of his suffering, death, and resurrection (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33, 34) may provide an answer as it is in Luke's Gospel that we learn that the women "*remembered his words*" (24:8).

Assuming that 16:8 does conclude Mark's Gospel, the empty tomb becomes key to the resurrection narrative. Let us remember the opening words of Mark's Gospel: "This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1) – Good News grounded in hope and in faith that the Crucified Jesus is now the Risen Christ.

For Mark's readers in the first century, the good news that shaped their life and faith is the same good news for us today. Just as the women who came upon the empty tomb and who were told by the young man to "go and give the message" to Jesus' disciples, we, too, are commissioned to proclaim the good news that Jesus has been raised to life.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!