

Friends of Valley Gardens

Newsletter May 2020

No 15

Update

I must apologise for the newsletter being late this month but I've struggled to find much to say. I had hoped that Boris might have given us some indication on how the government intends to ease lockdown but I suspect many of the new rules will be in place for some time to come.

The gardens are looking very colourful with drifts of wild garlic and bluebells. The cherries, crab apples, rhododendron and horse chestnuts are in full flower and there are patches of forget me not, violets, cow parsley, lily of the valley and red campion.

There are also patches of giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed and brambles, all of which will become a problem if not dealt with.

Most of the areas we planted last year are looking good. The borders near Woodend are looking very happy with aubrietia, London pride, geraniums and saxifrages all in flower.

The one border that is looking a little sad is the shrub border. The shrubs themselves are growing strongly and are very healthy, but it does need a good weed.

However Felicity and I have been practising a bit of guerrilla gardening in our exercise time and Felicity started on the border while I planted some wild flower plugs I had grown from seed in the meadow area.

The cowslips that the Brownies planted have established well and there is a smattering of species tulips and grape hyacinths from the bulbs we planted last autumn.

We've also done a bit of litter picking and it never ceases to amaze me how dirty and selfish some people can be. Why would you clear up after your dog and then throw the bag into the grotto?

That's enough from me. Let's hope we can get back to some sort of normality in the near future.



Spanish bluebell



Valley Garden's Bluebell



Native Bluebell

Spanish and Native Bluebells

Areas of the gardens are covered in bluebells, but are they native? I think it is fairly obvious if you compare the photographs above. Spanish Bluebells tend to be a lighter blue, have more upright flower spikes with flowers arranged all round the stem and wider leaves. White and pink forms are also much more common than in the native variety. Unfortunately the two forms hybridize easily so identification is not always straightforward. Spanish Bluebells were introduced into Britain by the Victorians but quickly escaped into the wild and according to Plantlife, one sixth of woodlands are now carpeted with Spanish bluebells or the hybrid form.

From top
Cowslips in the meadow area
Purple Crab Apple
Peacock Butterfly on Aubrietia



Storytime

I've included the following story from Martin Dove, ideal for reading to children on a Zoom chat or over the telephone. I've also included one or two of Martin's photographs he has taken while on his daily stroll through the park.

"Once upon a time, in a duck pond in the Valley Gardens, there lived a kindly old otter. His name was Oliver. The ducks and geese who lived in the pond, called him Ollie the Otter, and they all loved him every much.

Oliver looked after all the birds, and kept them safe from harm, especially at night when wild foxes were roaming around the area.

Oliver played games with the ducks, and taught the geese how to get along with the ducks. No one knew how long Ollie had lived in the pond; some said hundreds of years, and some said thousands.

But he was getting more and more tired every day, and one day he called a meeting with all the ducks and the geese, and the moorhens and even the gulls and a tall Grey Heron, who had taken to visiting the pond from time to time. He told them "I'm very old now, and very tired. I'm going to have to leave you soon, but you mustn't be sad, because I will still be looking out for all of you. I will return, and I will watch over you forever and ever."

The birds were very quiet for the rest of the day, and none of them slept very well that night. In the morning they awoke to find that Ollie had gone.

Then suddenly Mal the Mallard cried 'Over there, look, it's Ollie, he has returned like he said he would, he has come back to watch over us'.

And so the ducks, the geese, the gulls, the moorhens and even the heron all cheered very loudly, and they all lived happily ever after".

