

HILL CLOSE GARDENS

The hidden hedged gardens of Warwick



June 2019

New Head Gardener for HCG

A very warm welcome to Neil Munro, Hill Close Gardens' new Head Gardener. Neil graduated in Horticulture from Birmingham University in 1997 and later undertook a MSc in Conservation and Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources in 2006 under the CUPGR scheme.

Neil's early horticultural experience has been with Birmingham Parks department and subsequently with St Paul Community Development Trust.

Since then he has spent most time with the Henry Doubleday Research Association at Ryton, eventually heading up the Heritage Seed Library until 2017 when he left to join The Gaia Foundation as Programme Manager, Seed Sovereignty of UK & Ireland.

Neil will bring different experience and expertise to the gardens which will build on the work of Gary Leaver. We expect interesting vegetables next year!



Adieu but not goodbye

Becky Coates has successfully completed her practical training at HCG and this is her first step to be coming a professional gardener. She is now working part time at Upton House where her HCG experience is proving valuable.

However because of her special interest in succulents, cactus and others which are in the glasshouse, she will be returning as a volunteer to look after these plants.

She will also be helping with the proposed workshop on sempervivums in early autumn. (More details to follow, so please watch the next newsletter for details).

Thoughts from a new volunteer

"I have recently started volunteering with the education team at Hill Close Gardens and I can guarantee it ticks all the boxes! New volunteers are immediately made to feel welcome, from the initial chat and tour with the team leader to the first volunteer session with the team of friendly volunteers.

"Volunteering at Hill Close has given me the opportunity to engage with children and their families in a range of fun, stimulating activities with a focus upon exploration and investigation. The rewards are endless, hearing the children giggle as they splash in puddles, seeing the wonder on their faces as they find a worm whilst digging and their delight in their achievements as they create their own picture of a flower. The sessions buzz with chatter, laughter and activity - not just from the children but from the parents, grandparents, family members, childminders and volunteers.

"I can wholeheartedly recommend becoming a volunteer at Hill Close Gardens - what could be better than working as part of a friendly team of volunteers in beautiful surroundings with young children and their families?"

If you are interested in joining our wonderful team of volunteers, please contact Chris, the team co-ordinator by email educationofficer@hcgt.org.uk

An abundance of Coleoptera

Like all gardens, Hill Close has its share of beetles and most welcome are our native Ladybirds. From the tiny 22-spot to familiar 7-spot their larvae avidly demolish aphid infestations.



Not so welcome are the over 40 invasive species of Ladybird *Harmonia* with their voracious, cannibalistic appetite. Same variety of colours but larger, with big white cheeks and scruffier spots.



Even less welcome, the destructive Lily and Asparagus beetles plus the weevils, who all drop to the ground and disappear. Catch them using your nearly finished cuppa under the leaf and a tap to nudge them into it.



The RHS are asking us to look out for a new invader, the blue Mint beetle, since both adult and larvae destroy the plant. It looks similar to this *Chrysolina* taken at Hill Close.



From pests to two favourites, both easily spotted. The iridescent green 'Swollen-thighed beetle', *Oedemera nobilis* found feasting on pollen, however only the male sports the swollen thighs. And *Clytus arietis*, in stunning black and yellow, which mimics a wasp in colour and movement but is totally harmless.



Thank you!

The Trustees and I are tremendously grateful to the many members of Hill Close Gardens who offered their pledges towards the costs of “Transforming the Visitor Experience” (TVE).

As those visiting the Gardens recently will have seen, construction of the Bleasdale Room is well underway (as you can see in the photograph) and we expect completion early in July.



Heritage Lottery Fund were very firm with us – every penny of the £167k project cost had to be underwritten before we could start. The pledged total, which with Gift Aid amounted to about £15k, was invaluable in closing the gap in our funding quickly enough to allow TVE to start this February.

We plan a celebratory event in October 2019 by way of thanks to everyone, members, staff, and volunteers alike, who have helped to launch TVE so successfully.

Chris Begg, TVE Project Manager

Welcome John Plumb, our new treasurer

John Plumb, a chartered accountant, has been appointed Treasurer and Trustee. He has had considerable experience in industry as Financial Director for Autocar Rugby and Power Torque Engineering, as well as personal accountancy work.

After retirement he became a Trustee for WDC, Citizens Advice Bureau and is Chair of Warwick Folk Festival.



A bit from the Centre Manager

As one year passes on to the next a lot of change is happening not least the progress with the new visitor room (TVE Transforming the visitor experience) this is very exciting and will vastly improve our offering to visitors.

Weekday visitors continue to come to the gardens from far and wide and an increase in coach tours is very helpful.

Looking ahead

On Saturday 17th August we are holding our “Art in the Gardens” event, a summer exhibition of arts & crafts around the gardens. There will be artists’ workshops, family Arts & Crafts workshops, live music, as well as food and drink.

We look forward to seeing you there. (Normal entrance fee applies.)

Our famous Auricula Theatre

The first auricula theatre was built in wood and has given good service to show other plants throughout the year - snowdrops, hostas, spring and harvest displays. It was moved from Plot 17 to make way for the new shelter which has proved to be such a success and is much used by visitors.

When it was moved to the bottom of Plot 24 by the potting shed as a temporary measure, it was discovered that some of the main structure was in need of considerable repair. Fortunately, just at that time Mrs Minion, a relative of Mike Sheldon gave a generous donation which has enabled a smaller brick plant theatre to be built at the top of Plot 24. It now occupies the previous site of a summer house.

Work had now started and the foundations have been laid (below): it will soon be time for curtain up on the new Auricula Theatre, so watch this space for further news.



More good guys at work here!

Tree Bumblebee Nest
(*Bombus hypnorum*)
These bees are not aggressive, but please do not disturb.
Small workers and swarming (non-stinging) males are active pollinators.
First recorded in Britain in 2001.

Bombus hypnorum

Bombus hypnorum



Tree Bumblebee

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