

BRIDPORT and DISTRICT ALLOTMENTS SOCIETY

Newsletter

Autumn 2012



Priory Gardens allotments, SW Bridport, Saturday 7 July 2012—photo Alan Bell

Summer 2012 - it's a Washout!

We're still expecting official confirmation that it's been the wettest summer since the Ark, but Bridport (and District) allotment-holders will not need to wait for that news - pictures and stories inside.

Date of the next Allotments Society Meeting:

Thursday 13 September 2012, 7.00 pm, at Mountfield (town council offices), Rax Lane, Bridport.



BADAS Summer meeting, Thursday 14 June 2012, West Allington

The Society's summer meeting wasn't the start of it, but it was fairly typical of the season. Our weather had been going downhill since a balmy March - generally cool and damp, interrupted by a couple of days of blistering heat in late May.

The "summer" meeting is traditionally held in mid-June, outdoors at one of the town or village allotment sites, to take advantage of the weather and daylight. This year it was the turn of the new allotments behind the Medical Centre at West Allington.

It had been raining and pitch dark all day, and the editor wondered whether it was worth turning up to get a few pictures for the newsletter.

But at ten to seven it seemed to have eased off a bit, so I set off hopefully. By the time I reached West Allington the rain had set in heavily again.

However a remarkable turnout of about fifteen Society members appeared, anonymity largely protected by hoods and umbrellas.

The Chairman surprisingly announced that he would dispense with the usual business of the meeting and would not be going through the Minutes of the previous meeting held in March.



BADAS Chairman, Colin Sparkes, commends a well-tended plot

After a happy hour sloshing about in the mud and admiring the well-tended plots, members retreated to their cars and/or homes.

Identification of the various "hoodies" for the photographs proved a bit of a problem, but Bob Driscoll (who was not present) has examined the pictures and said that he will "stake any reputation I have left" on his identifications.



Smiling in the rain: left to right (foreground), Alex Gurini, Richard Edwards, Ron and Janet Grimwood, Brian Atkinson.
photos Charles Wild

Vanishing of the Bees

The West Country's bee population is under threat from the effects of the wet summer. The government's National Bee Unit has advised beekeepers of a starvation risk and is encouraging them to leave out emergency supplies of sugar and syrup. Last winter colony numbers in England fell by 16.2%. If numbers continue to dwindle it could have a huge impact on the wider food chain.

Staple crops that bees feed on such as fruit blossom have been damaged by the rainfall in May and June. Persistent rain can also prevent honey bees from being able to fly.

In 2009 the Co-op launched **Plan Bee**, a campaign which aims to address the decline in pollinators such as bees, butterflies and moths. The Co-op has also launched a film, *Vanishing of the Bees* to raise awareness of the crisis affecting bee populations. For details visit www.co-operative.coop/Plan-Bee/.

The **Soil Association** has been lobbying the Government for a ban on the the neonicotinoids group of insecticides in the UK, which have been found to have damaging effects on bee populations. Neonicotinoids work as an insecticide by blocking specific neural pathways in insects' central nervous systems. The chemicals impair bees' communication, homing and foraging ability, flight activity, ability to discriminate by smell, learning, and immune systems – all of which have an impact on their ability to survive.

The Association advises that If you're buying any kind of pest control check the ingredients – anything that contains **acetamiprid, imidacloprid, thiacloprid or thiamethoxam** should be avoided.

For information about bees and the various campaigns to stop their decline, go to www.soilassociation.org/wildlife/bees.



Skilling North, photo Jonty Gray

The Floods of 7 July

Photographs from Robin Wilkinson and Jonty Gray show the flooding at Skilling and Priory Gardens on Saturday 7 July. Colin Sparkes reports that the Skilling South allotments were flooded at the School end, while those higher up were not affected.

However the Skilling North allotments were flooded when the River Simene burst its banks, and swept some sheds and greenhouses onto other plots.

Bridport Town Council has not made any formal recommendations concerning contamination following the floods. The council has been contacted by various individuals and has helped with clearance of debris.

Town surveyor Daryl Chambers said that the floods on Bridport allotments were very much surface water problems rather than sewage - some plots are subject to flooding fairly regularly, though usually in winter. The town council did not intend to carry out any tests, but agreed that anyone concerned should wash and boil produce before eating. He would be taking advice on whether the town council should issue any guidance or modify tenancy agreements.



Skilling South, photo Robin Wilkinson



Skilling South, photo Robin Wilkinson

Some concern has been expressed about possible contamination from sewage on plots that were flooded.

At Burton Bradstock the Southover allotments were flooded, and the parish council sent off samples for analysis. The results of the tests, carried out by Sciantech Analytical, were reported by parish clerk Fel Moore in late August. There was no detection of salmonella, while the presence of e-coli was extremely low - almost undetectable and lower than what is found in a normal garden. The advice given was that there is no need to destroy any plants, but it might be advisable to cook any current produce.



Skilling North, photo Jonty Gray



Priory Gardens, photo Jonty Gray

News from Bridport Town Council

Waiting List: There are 39 residents of Bridport parish on the town council's waiting list, with another 39 from neighbouring parishes.

Report from Skilling South

The southern section of Skilling allotments were only flooded at the School end, we higher up were not touched. The season so far has been patchy for veg. growing. Runner beans I have planted three times and even now they are poor, but other people have fared better.

Potato blight hit quite suddenly and the crop was poor but it did not touch my outdoor tomatoes even though they were only five feet away from the nearest row. In between the potatoes and the tomatoes were a row of peas on netting, not very high but it seems to have protected the tomatoes.

Onions have been good but I always lift them at the first sign of the tops going over - I do not like them too big. Strawberry is another crop that has almost failed completely although the autumn raspberries are going to do well by the look of it.

Watch out for the Cabbage White butterfly caterpillars, one day there are no signs but the next day there is a plague and the cabbages become lace like overnight.

Anyway the weeds and grass are doing fine.

Colin Sparkes

News from Gundry Lane

Much doom and gloom about the weather at the Gundry Lane allotments, but there have been some redeeming features.

As at Skilling, potato blight struck early, thanks to the damp weather, the first signs in early June. I dug up everything, earlies and main crop, before the end of July, so have a lot (or not a lot) of very small potatoes, but some of those harvested were starting to rot in the bag overnight and only very careful monitoring has saved the rest.

The lack of warmth for most of the summer has had as much impact as the rain itself, with many vegetables producing very late crops. Perpetual spinach and Swiss Chard which I habitually sow in May, and which can in most years be harvested from June onwards, yielded their first small crops in late August.

The overwintering broad beans did well, but spring sown crops hopeless and the plants coloured largely dark brown rather than green. French beans have done very badly (dwarf and climbing), while runners are yielding well in late August, perhaps a month later

than usual. Once retrieved from amongst the flourishing weeds, brassicas such as purple and white sprouting broccoli are looking promising.

One interesting side-effect – so far there is very little sign of leek moth damage, usually a plague on our allotments – perhaps they didn't like the weather either. I usually cover the leek plants with fleece, but this year haven't bothered because the fleece I put over the carrots next to them has been ripped to shreds by foxes or badgers.

The joys of vegetable growing...

Charles Wild

Greenhouse needs a home

Dismantled greenhouse wants a good home. Metal frame, four panes of glass missing, ready for collection. No cost, local. Contact Colin Sparkes on [REDACTED]

Mesh size error for peat-free compost

The Chairman has asked me to correct an error in the report of his comments about peat-free composts in the Summer issue. The article stated that green waste and wood fibre alternatives have to be sieved through a 5-inch mesh. This should have said a one quarter inch mesh. I blame the Chairman's handwriting.

Bridport and District Allotments Society

Membership of the Bridport & District Allotments Society costs £2 per annum. Our Membership Secretary/Treasurer Mandy Rathbone will be pleased to receive your subscriptions. Please contact Mandy on [REDACTED] or send her an email at [REDACTED]

Receiving the newsletter by email: If any member who currently receives the newsletter/minutes of meetings through the letterbox could receive them by email (and save us delivery cost/time), please contact Lynne Atkinson - [REDACTED]

Newsletter contributions welcome: if you have any items you would like to see included in future issues of our Newsletter (which comes out quarterly) or if there are subjects you would like us to cover, please contact the Editor, Charles Wild, [REDACTED] or email entries to [REDACTED]. Contributions to the next edition (articles, news items and/or photographs) are welcome at any time, but by **18 November 2012** please.