

## TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

So you thought having an allotment was just about gardening? Think again! Our allotments host a wide range of wildlife, many of which also play their part in the success of your allotment. Here are some of our local residents:

**Foxes** are sometimes thought of as vermin but they can be a friend to the allotments as they hunt the mice and rats which can damage seeds and crops. Foxes are carnivores, so they will not eat your crops (though they may occasionally root about for large grubs/larvae). And, contrary to popular myth, they do not eat cats (with the possible exception of roadkill), so the local moggies which also visit to catch mice and rats are perfectly safe.



**Slow worms** look like small, silvery snakes but in fact they are legless lizards. They are perfectly harmless and eat slugs, snails and small insects, so are very much the gardener's friend. They hibernate in winter and emerge in spring, usually taking refuge in nice warm compost heaps (so take care when you dig out your compost) or under carpet. Slow worms are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and it is illegal to intentionally kill or injure them.

**Frogs.** You might think they always live in ponds, but that's generally only true during the breeding/spawning season. At other times you may find them on moist land areas eg. in long grass, where they hunt for their favourite foods, slugs and snails, which thus makes them the allotmenter's friends.



As with frogs, you'll probably first spot **newts** in a pond or water tank during the breeding season but they also like moist areas eg. long grass. In summer/early autumn they may roam on land, usually at night, looking for slugs and snails to eat. During the winter be careful when disturbing logs, leaf piles, compost heaps, etc. as these may be hiding hibernating newts. Newts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

**Field voles** might be mistaken for mice, but the sharp-eyed among us may notice that they have rounder faces, smaller ears and shorter tails. They feed on seeds, roots, leaves and occasionally insect larvae, and nest in shallow burrows close to the surface of the ground, under leaf litter. They form an important part of the diet of owls and can also be preyed on by kestrels and foxes.



**Birds.** Almost too numerous to mention, but including crows, jays, robins, wrens, blue tits, great tits, blackbirds, thrushes, magpies, and the perhaps less popular (to the allotmenter!) pigeon.

**Beetles:** Again, a huge range. Here are a few which have been spotted at Martin Way:

The **stag beetle** is Britain's largest terrestrial beetle (up to 7cm long) and the male has striking 'antlers'. The larvae feed on rotting tree matter, so you may find them in old logs/tree stumps. Protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act



1981, it is harmless (as long as you're not another stag beetle!) and will do no damage on your allotment.

**Cardinal beetles** can often be mistaken for the dreaded red lily beetle but, at approx. 20cm long, they are about twice the size of lily beetles. And, unlike the lily beetle, they don't do any plant damage, as they prey on other insects. Adult beetles emerge in about May and you'll find them on tree bark and flowers.

**Soldier beetles** are also friends as the adults beetles eat aphids and the larvae, which live in soil, hunt for snails, slugs and other insects.



**Rose Chafer beetle.** You are more likely first to come across the larvae, which are fat and creamy-white, in your compost heap, where they help in making excellent compost, feeding on decaying leaves and vegetable matter. The adult beetles are usually seen in sunny weather feeding on the petals of flowers, especially dog roses.

**Butterflies:** again, many and various, including peacock butterflies (pictured), red admirals, common blues, brimstones, meadow browns, fritillaries and, of course, cabbage whites (whose caterpillars so love our brassicas!).



**Ladybirds:** our most common native ladybird is the 7-spotted (pictured), which loves aphids and scale insects. You might find its unusual larvae (also pictured) on plants in May/June. On the increase is the non-native harlequin ladybird, which comes in various colours/patterns of spots.

**Bees:** vital for the success of your fruits and flowers. Not just bumblebees and honeybees but many more. Take a picture and let's build up a gallery of all these friends.



Spotted something else? Take a picture and let us know. If you don't know what it is, we'll try and help identify it.