

CSGGA Newsletter

September 2020



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Sex, Lies and Putrefaction by Timothy Walker

The Gardens Association broke new ground for our September talk which was held via Zoom. It seems a long time since we last met face to face but Covid has forced us all to try new things and technology has enabled everyone to keep in contact. Timothy is a seasoned Zoom lecturer so all went well and it was good to see around twenty members who were able to hear him explain pollination in a fascinating talk entitled "Sex, Lies and Putrefaction". Timothy is a former resident of

Chalfont St Giles and was a regular visitor to the allotments with his father. There is not sufficient room here to describe his lengthy and stellar CV but suffice it to say he is a Botanist who has studied at Oxford and various Botanical Gardens, including Kew, and he now lectures at three Oxford University colleges.

Timothy shared many beautiful and stunning photographs of pollinators and plants to illustrate his talk. The study of pollination dates before Darwin but it was the eminent naturalist who put it on the map. He studied dried specimens of *Angraecum sesquipedale*, an orchid native to Madagascar. The white flower of this orchid has a foot-long tubular spur with a small drop of [nectar](#) at its base. Darwin claimed that this orchid had been pollinated by a moth with a foot-long tongue, a statement ridiculed by some entomologists. He was proved right when a Madagascan moth with a one-foot-long tongue was discovered. Apparently, the moth's tongue uncoils to sip the nectar of *A. sesquipedale* as it cross-pollinates the flowers. Timothy highly recommends Darwin's "Origin of Species" which remains, even after 160 years, a "great book on biology". The only time, apparently, when Darwin used the word "perfect" is when he described pollination and pollinators.

It is often possible to identify plant species or genera from its pollen and this has led to the downfall of many a murderer who killed or buried their victim near unusual or unique plants.

Timothy took us through the detail of how pollination occurs. Pollination may be achieved through wind, water or animals. The first flowers were pollinated by animals, so wind pollination evolved later and plants that are colonised shortly after a volcanic eruption have done so through wind pollination. Most major crops such as wheat, rice and sweetcorn are pollinated by wind.

Water is a very rare form of pollination but plants that use this method may release their pollen directly onto the surface of the water, eg, Canadian pond weed.

95% of flowering plants have recruited a wide range of animals to distribute their pollen. Timothy showed us examples of insect pollinators, including beetles, who are fairly clumsy so only robust flowers such as magnolia use this method. Biting midges are responsible for pollinating the cacao plant so out of something truly irritating comes our chocolate fix. Bees, of course, are what we all think of first when pollination comes to mind. Bees rely on pollen to raise their young and plants suitable for bees often have some sort of tube that the bee



can get into. Moths, as insects of the night, pollinate evening scented flowers, such as Honeysuckle, whilst butterflies are very different in that they have much shorter tongues and lower energy requirements. Timothy noted, however, that a visit from an animal may not always result in pollination.

Birds are generally attracted to flowers that are red, tubular and full of nectar, eg, *Tecoma Stans*. Birds can be very delicate pollinators with the Humming Bird an obvious example. Bats pollinate robust flowers with a musty smell, eg, the Agave plant. The Oxford Botanical Garden had an Agave plant that required manual pollination (a man up a ladder). As it takes around 100 years to flower, this was a major attraction at the time and was even mentioned in the Beano magazine!

It has been discovered in the last twenty years that many flowers are visited by more than one pollinator (so Darwin was not absolutely right). Interestingly, a pollinator approaching a plant in a zig zag approach is attracted by its scent, whilst those that approach directly are attracted by its colour (remember that for your next quiz). Bees see UV colours and a scent that is revolting to us may be highly desirable to certain pollinators. Some plants offer somewhere for insect young to hatch and find food, thereby providing a suitable place for their pollinators to lay eggs. Nectar is the most well-known reward for pollinators.

Orchids use deceit to attract pollinators. Bee orchids mimic the shape and scent of bees in order to lure them into 'pseudocopulation', where the male insect attempts to mate with the flower. While the bee gets nothing but a wasted effort, the orchid transfers some of its pollen to the bee. Devious indeed.



There are obvious economic reasons for understanding pollination. Timothy noted as an example that Brazil nuts need orchids to keep their pollinators happy, and when it comes to GM, maize is the only crop allowed in the UK as it is wind pollinated so when it comes off the plant it does not travel far. Pollination is key in conservation as we need to know what pollinates a plant and what are likely predators. There is currently a ten year initiative to conserve pollinators.

Manual pollination can be a challenge requiring some inventive thinking. *Encephalartos Ferox* has a large cone that is normally pollinated by a weevil but here in the UK one botanical gardens discovered that a turkey baster will do the job just as effectively!

If you missed out on Timothy's talk, you can catch up on the stunning photos and information which are included in his new book "Pollination", published by University Press, and available from 27th October.

Eleanor O'Connor

Virtual Village Show

The Village Show, another event cancelled because of the pandemic was also a virtual affair this year. We were delighted and very grateful, that our regular judge, Martin Edwards, agreed to judge the entries and here are the scores – the full list of class winners is attached and the photographs of the entries can be found via this link <http://www.csgshow.org/Gallery/index.html> Well done, Chin!

Chin Fenton	25
Briony Wickenden	25
Caroline Jackson	17
Kathleen Martin	10
Jan Bradley	10
Sarah Benson	8
Howard Bishop	8
Atanaska Lindsay	7
Ellie O'Connor	3
Jan Whitehurst	2

CSGGA Annual General Meeting – Thursday 8th October

We had hoped to be back in the Memorial Hall for the AGM and, until 14th September, when the rules for Community Halls changed again, it looked as if we could. However, we now know there are even more restrictions so we will be holding the meeting via Zoom – link and details to follow. I do hope you will be able to join us. New Committee members are always welcome to bring new ideas and perspectives and help the Gardens Association to thrive.

Reports from the Chairman and Treasurer will be emailed to you shortly together with the Audited Accounts, Minutes of the last meeting and Agenda or may be obtained from the Hon Secretary Jan Bradley. If you have any points that you wish to raise please contact Jan as soon as possible. 01494 874704 or janbradley4@btinternet.com

The AGM will be followed by Gardeners Question-time with Alison Pao from Rowans Nursery and our own Alan Clark on the panel. It promises to be a lively and informative event so have your questions ready! Further details with the zoom link will be emailed to you nearer the time.

Membership Renewal

This month sees the end of the membership year and pre-printed renewal forms should be dropping through your letterboxes shortly. The Gardens Association, like every other organisation has been hit by Covid 19 and we recognise that we have not been able to offer the range of benefits, in particular the talks and outings.

However, we have still had costs to meet. The committee agreed unanimously that it would not be appropriate to ask the Memorial Hall for reimbursement for the rental, as their costs and challenges were greater than ours. The newsletter is sent by post, at a loss, to a fair number of long standing members who do not have the technology for emails and, in addition, we bought a license to the technology to enable us to run the Virtual Spring Show. It also felt right that we should donate the proceeds of the plant sales to deserving causes again this year rather than retain them. Your support via membership is our only income and supports all the great things we like to do. We fully appreciate that everybody has found this time hard, but we hope you will renew and support us for the next year and that we will be able to offer the full range of benefits again before too long.

M's Action Diary for September

- Continue deadheading spent blooms of bedding and container plants to keep them at their best.
- Tackle bindweed and other perennial weeds by treating them with glyphosate
- Cut down border perennials when foliage starts to die back. Lift and divide every two to three years.
- Rake out the layer of dead grass and moss on lawns and aerate. Reseed bare patches or lay turf. Apply lawn sand or autumn fertilizer.
- Trim hedges and conifers.
- Plant spring bulbs, except tulips which should be left until November.
- Start pot cyclamen into growth
- Dead head roses and prune ramblers by cutting out a third of flowered stems at the base.



Green Gardening Tip

Peat comes from an ancient habitat, which would take 1000s of years to restore. Extracting the peat destroys rare wildlife and their support systems. For decades, peat-based potting composts have been used to raise and grow-on plants. Due to the concerns about the damage done to the environment, gardeners should be reaching for peat-free products as an alternative. It's best to choose compost which is 'peat free' and has the organic symbol. According to the RHS:

- Peat-free compost can perform very well
- Buy the right compost for the job by reading the label
- Homemade mixes are best avoided for seed sowing
- 'Environmentally friendly', 'compost' and 'organic' compost aren't always peat-free

Merida's No-Cook Apple Chutney

2 lbs apples
1 lb onions
1lb dates, stoned
1 lb sultanas
1lb demerara sugar
1 tsp ground ginger
1 tsp salt
Cayenne pepper to taste
450 ml white wine vinegar



Chop apples, onions and dates. Put mixture into a large bowl and stir in the rest of the ingredients. Leave for 36 hours, stirring occasionally, then, spoon into warm sterilised jars. The mixture keeps for months, if not, years!

Your Committee

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New Committee members are always welcome. We are a friendly bunch! Please contact a committee member to find out more if you're interested in joining us.