

# The Lewes Mosaic Project Allotment Biodiversity Survey Findings March 2024

The online Mailchimp survey was circulated as widely as possible among allotment holders in Lewes between October 2023 and February 2024.

The aims of the survey were to:

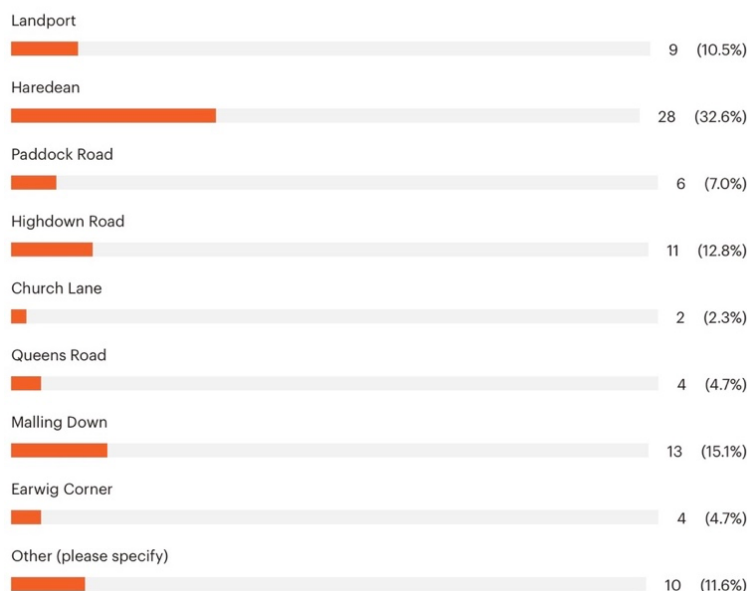
1. Understand when and how often plot holders visit their allotments
2. Understand the main challenges perceived by plot holders in managing their allotments
3. To gauge the interest in learning about and supporting wildlife on allotments
4. Gather contact details to enable ongoing communication about supporting and monitoring wildlife on allotments.

By March 5<sup>th</sup> 2024 89 replies have been received (including 74 sign ups to receive The Mosaic Project Allotment newsletter).

Limitations of the survey need to be acknowledged. As an online survey, largely circulated via email, the survey will have not reached plot holders who do not use or respond to emails. Conducting face to face surveys proved to be very time consuming as very few people can be found at an allotment site at any one time.

## 1. Allotment sites

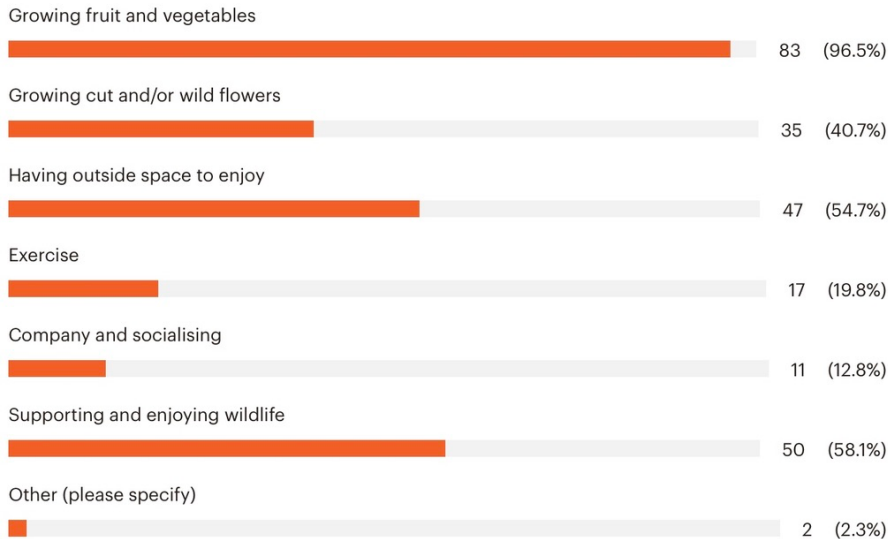
“1. Which allotment site is your plot on?”



Replies were received from the 8 main allotment sites in Lewes plus 10 from other locations. Own garden 2, Castle moat 2, Firle 3, Landport Community Garden, Barcombe, Whitehawk Hill Allotments Brighton.

## 2. What is most important to you at your allotment

“2.What is most important to you at your allotment (choose up to 3)”



Not surprisingly over 96% respondents said growing fruit and vegetables was most important. The second was supporting and enjoying wildlife (58%)

### Other replies

Reducing airmiles

Having space which is a long-term commitment

## 3.If you had more time and/or resources, what would you do more of, or in addition, on your allotment?

The 68 replies to this question illustrate that many allotment holders have plans they would like to carry out but not enough time or resources. The main categories of replies are detailed below (not in order of priority).

### More vegetables / variety

“More variety of vegetables”

“Grow more variety”.

“More companion planting”

“Grow more produce (vegetables & flowers)”

“Experiment with unusual varieties of vegetables.”

“Grow more / different veg and fruit”

“I would grow a wider variety of fruit and vegetables”

“Grow more of a variety of food.”

“I would plant more apple trees.”

“Grow more heritage varieties Trial greater variety of species and varieties”

“Expand the range of fruit, veg and cut flowers - there’s never enough time but I always prioritise bees and other pollinators”

“Replace old fruit trees and bushes”

### Dig pond

"Dig/renovate or expand pond"

"Put in a pond"

"Increase the size of the pond"

"Wildlife pond& bog garden"

"Create a pond area"

"Put a pond in"

"A pond"

"Dig a pond"

"Make a pond"

"Sort out and rebalance plants in allotment pond"

"Would like to have a small pond but not allowed in the allotment rules."

"Upgrade old bath 'pond'"

"Repair and improve exiting pond"

### Improve/build structures. Remove rubbish

"Clear rubbish"

"Put up a shed for tools, as we have to carry them up there each time, meaning we need to drive"

"Net my brassicas properly rather than my current Heath Robinson approach"

"Clear the plastic waste left by previous tenant, put up a shed."

"Build some wooden compost bins and replace the shed."

"Replacing wooden boards round various beds."

"raised beds"

"Build raised beds and motive the present structures"

"Build a little shelter from the rain Have a small greenhouse"

"stop people using plastic!"

"Have a poly tunnel."

"The only small success for me has been setting up and operating three compost bins."

### Weeding

"Weeding is always ongoing! I have paid for a gardener to help me. And Steve, next to my plot, cuts the grass"

"More weeding"

"Weeding!"

"Weed more"

"Weeding!"

"Clear brambles and some nettles."

"I'm still struggling with getting to grips with the perennial weeds"

### Improve the soil

"Improve soli (manure)"

"feeding the soil"

"I mulch with cardboard and make compost but am planning on bringing in more compost to improve the soil which is very chalky."

"Feed the soil more and"

"Access to good organic compost/manure and delivery to allotment."

"Bring more compost to the allotment"

"More compost. Improve soil quality"

"I would like to follow the principles of no dig gardening"

### Supporting wildlife

"There is a small pond and an overgrown area which would be perfect for wildflowers, but don't have the time or strength to clear it"

"More (wild) flowers,"

"If we had more space we would keep some wilder areas for local wildlife."

"Build a mini pond. Grow more wildflowers in the border of my plot. Hang up bird feeders in the winter. "

"create more insect friendly habitats"

"We also want to introduce a pond and a fruit tree and make it as wildlife friendly as possible."

"We're a small allotment site, 12 plots. We're responsible for managing the whole site. I'd like to organize a biodiversity policy for us all to follow"

"More bird feeders and nesting boxes"

"Build a bug hotel"

"Creating a pond for wildlife and cutting paths for sunlight through some of the surrounding shrubs."

"I would organise the allotment more and as part of that, establish more dedicated spaces and plants etc for wildlife"

"The biggest hindrance to biodiversity on the allotments is the Town Council who prize neatness above anything else. They know zilch about gardening. All they want is cut grass and evidence of cultivation which means goodness knows what, but they are perfectly happy with bare soil. Their constant threats to take the allotment off you if you do not comply do not help"

"Shelters etc to encourage slow worms and lizards which we feel have declined in number in recent years on our plot. Growing bee-friendly plants is a major focus but always trying to extend flowering season."

"I would cut back more of the scrub/woodland at the edges so I could plant more fruit trees. That scrub is probably good for biodiversity though - sometimes growing and biodiversity feel in opposition! Eg the war on slugs. We're organic, though."

Have hedges rather than wire between allotments"

"Have bird boxes"

### Nothing/ happy as it is

"Nothing really, it's already very productive"

"I spend as much time as I want to on my allotment"

"Happy as is"

"I have plenty of time and resources. I intend to improve my wildlife provision but am already making steps in that direction."

"I have everything I need"

"I make time to do all necessary steps."

### Other things

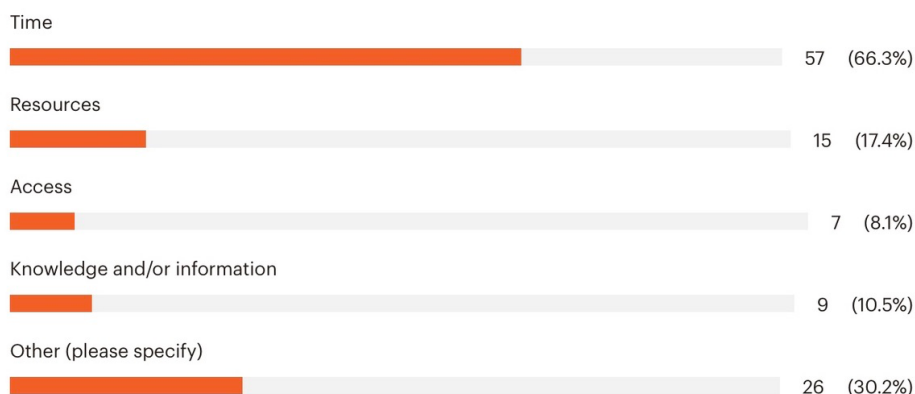
"Sit down and enjoy looking"

"Walking on the downs"  
 "To open it up for others to enjoy too!"  
 "exercise"  
 "Relax and enjoy it!"  
 "Trial more biological methods to prevent mollusc attack on young crops"  
 "having more areas to rest and chat/ enjoy the space. Would make it more beautiful and easier to maintain."  
 "Also I would find more people to help me on my allotment. It's now becoming too much for me!"  
 "Plant more bulbs"  
 "Beekeeping "  
 "grow flowers"  
 "Add more diversity to communal area"  
 "Introduce and replace old fruit trees"  
 "plant sculptural willow supports, plants wildflowers"  
 "Pruning and training berries and fruit trees."  
 "to end up with an allotment that has woodchip paths and beds with both vegetables/fruit and a few flowers/herbs, as well as a strip at the front end with more flowers and herbs for pollinators"

The replies suggest that many plot holders have specific ideas for further supporting wildlife on their allotments.

#### 4. What is your biggest constraint to doing more of what you would like to do?

"4. What is your biggest constraint to doing more of what you would like to do? (please choose up to 2)"



The greatest constraint to allotment holders' plans is time (66% of respondents) followed by resources (17%). Other constraints detailed by respondents (26 comments) were:

### Conditions on the plot

"Our allotment is covered in plastic on one side, so we want to build quite a big shed to cover it. There are no structures at present. this all takes money which we have little of"

"A huge sycamore tree which dries the soil, shades the plot and houses pigeons which foul the plot"

"Pests (foxes!), diseases and poor soil mean we care less about produce than enjoying the space"

"Lack of space, it's a half plot and I already have raised veg beds, perennial fruit and veg, a greenhouse, a shed and a forest garden with wildflower underplanting."

"Space"

"Plot size"

"My plot is surrounded on two sides by brambles and nettles which quickly become rampant and threaten to swamp the plot. I have to spend a lot of time dealing with it It is so hard to get compost up to my allotment. I wish we had wood chip delivered like some allotments do and I'd like the pathways strimmed more often and made flat as mine is very uneven and makes me wobble"

"Help to clear plastic waste from the plot - a skip at the car park would be so helpful to potholders taking sites over from others as we have to deal with their rubbish.

"Permission to have a small bonfire at restricted times. Have compost deliveries"

### Weather

"Bad weather and in winter, light.

Wet weather

"Bad weather!"

### Personal circumstances

"Motivation"

"My partner has Alzheimers and our allotment is at the far end of the site so we can only go there for a short time at the moment"

"Foot injury"

"My age and physical ability sometimes means that I have to rely on others for heavy work and that can limit my progress. I have friends and family who will do that."

"Physically unable to do a heavy project. Need to manage amount of digging

"physical ability, I have developed a physical disability which makes hard work difficult so keeping on top of everything is difficult"

"Physical constraint"

"Having somebody help me"

"Money."

## 5. Interest in wildlife activities

“5.Are you interested in any of the following? (choose all you are interested in)”

Learning more about wildlife at the allotments



Making your plot more wildlife friendly



Monitoring wildlife on your plot



Attending talks/walks/workshops about biodiversity on the allotments

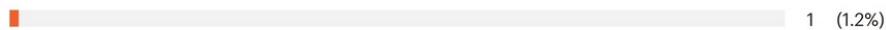


70% of respondents are interested in monitoring wildlife on their own plots.

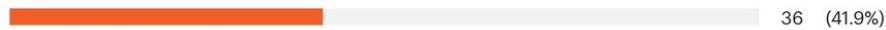
## 6. Have you done anything to specifically support wildlife on your plot

“6. Have you done anything to specifically support wildlife on your plot? (tick as many as you like)”

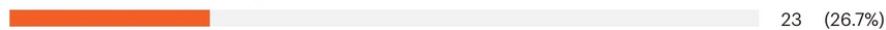
No



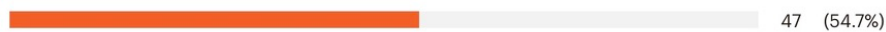
Make a pond



Provided water in another way



Made a log or stick pile



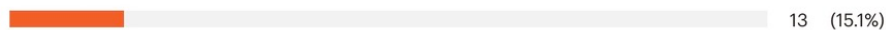
Use a compost heap



Have a bee hotel



Have a bird box



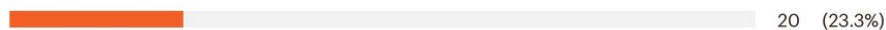
Leave seedheads over winter



Left an area undisturbed



Other (please specify)



All but one respondent had done something on the plot specifically to support wildlife. A compost heap (84% of respondents), an undisturbed area (76% of respondents) and leaving seedheads over winter (71% of respondents) were done the most. To be fair most of these activities involve not doing something rather than proactively doing something so are perhaps easier to put into practice. Interestingly 42% of respondents had made a pond. In addition, 20 further comments mentioned:

### Flowers and plants

"Grow caterpillar food plants such as birds foot trefoil and kidney vetch and a wide range of native flowers for pollen and nectar sources. Aim to have something ornamental in flower all year round for buff tailed bumble bees etc."

"Wildflower area"

"I try to encourage pollinators through growing flowers "

"Planting a variety of flowering plants to have flowering plants in as many months as possible."

"Wildflower area"

"I grow a lot of flowers & plants for pollinators. I have left an area at the end of my allotment which I am experimenting with forest garden principles- layering fruit trees, fruit bushes, herbs & allowing strawberries to run. My aim is to try & suppress weeds with crops, whilst providing some food & shelter for wildlife"

"Fedge, nettles, grow a wide variety of crops, wildflowers, trees bushes and perennials"

There is a lot of borage at the site, and we left it for a while as there were lots of caterpillars on it."

"Fedge, nettles, grow a wide variety of crops, wildflowers, trees bushes and perennials"

"I try to grow plenty of bee and insect-friendly flowers"

"Grown pollinator-friendly plants; minimised disturbances where I know wildlife is present; retained some 'weeds' that provide suitable habitat (e.g. groundsel for cinnabar moth caterpillars) where possible"

"Diversity of flowering plants so that there is always something in flower"

### Birds

"Bird table."

"Bird feeders"

"I have a bird table and a bird feeder."

"I have also put in plants with berries for birds in winter."

### Other

"My allotment is organic. I do not use any pesticides or herbicides."

"Not using pest control other than barriers such as nets and trying to encourage natural predators."

"We discovered a vole nest when we pulled back cardboard mulch, so we left the bed for them this year! We also do No Mow May and extend it as long as we can without getting a complaint from the Council."

"We've only recently got it and much of it has been left undisturbed!"

"Hedgehog home and dead hedge"

"I have a bug hotel currently in a state of collapse which I aim to improve"



"We do 'No Mow May' and also leave lots of long vegetation as the plot has very thin soil, so we need to make compost to build it up. However, the Town Council have twice told us to tidy up the plot...a shame, given they are supposed to be supporting wildlife and also handed us a plot covered in waste, including broken down plastic bags in tiny shards and a shed full of rubbish and chemicals, which we are having to dispose of. "

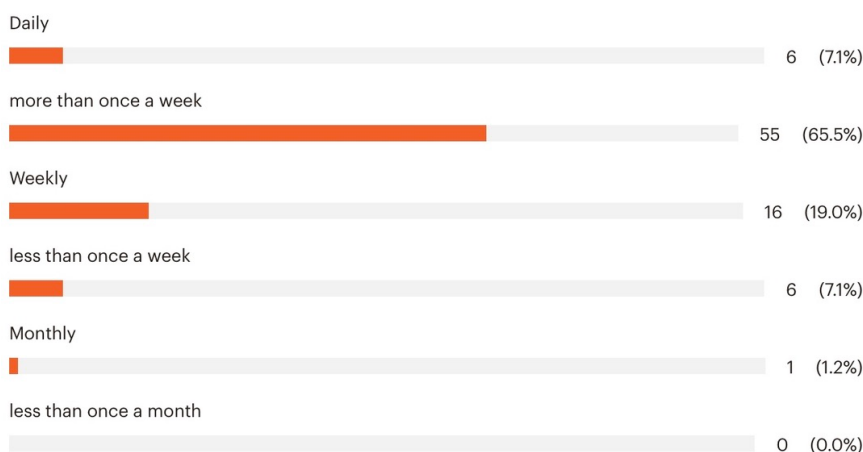
"Follow organic principles. Use of barriers rather than chemicals. Encourage birds, insects/bees and leopard slugs. No dig method with raised beds. Use of leaf litter and compost. Comfrey natural fertiliser."

## 7. This question asked for respondents to leave an email address to receive the newsletter.

There are 74 signed up to receive the newsletter to date.

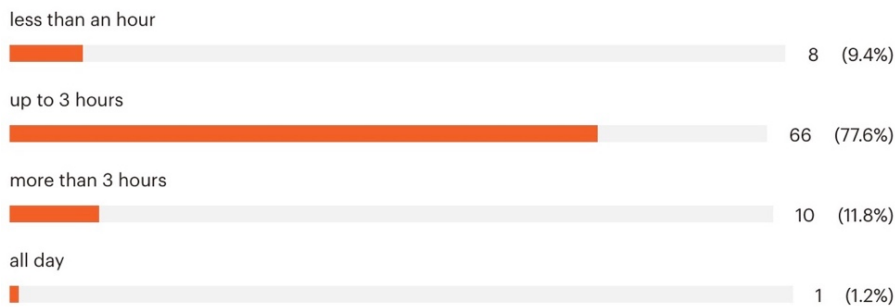
## 8-10. These questions asked about days and frequency of visits to allotments.

"8.How often do you visit your plot between April and October? (choose one)"



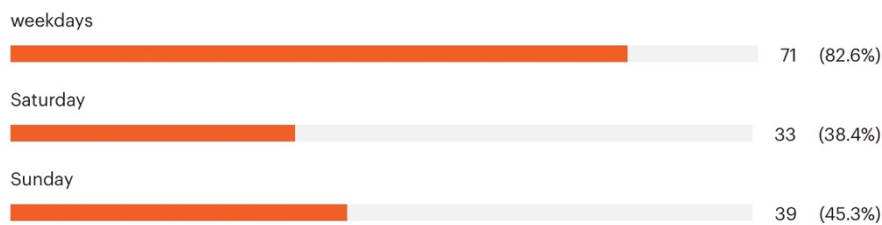
Most respondents visit their plot more than once a week (66%), while 19% visit weekly and 7% visit daily.

### “9. How long do you spend at your allotment each visit? (choose one)”



The majority of plot holders visit their plot for between 1 and 3 hours (78%)

### “10. When are you most likely to visit your plot?”



83% of respondents visit their allotments on weekdays. Marginally more plot holders visit their plots on Sunday (45%) than on Saturday (38%).