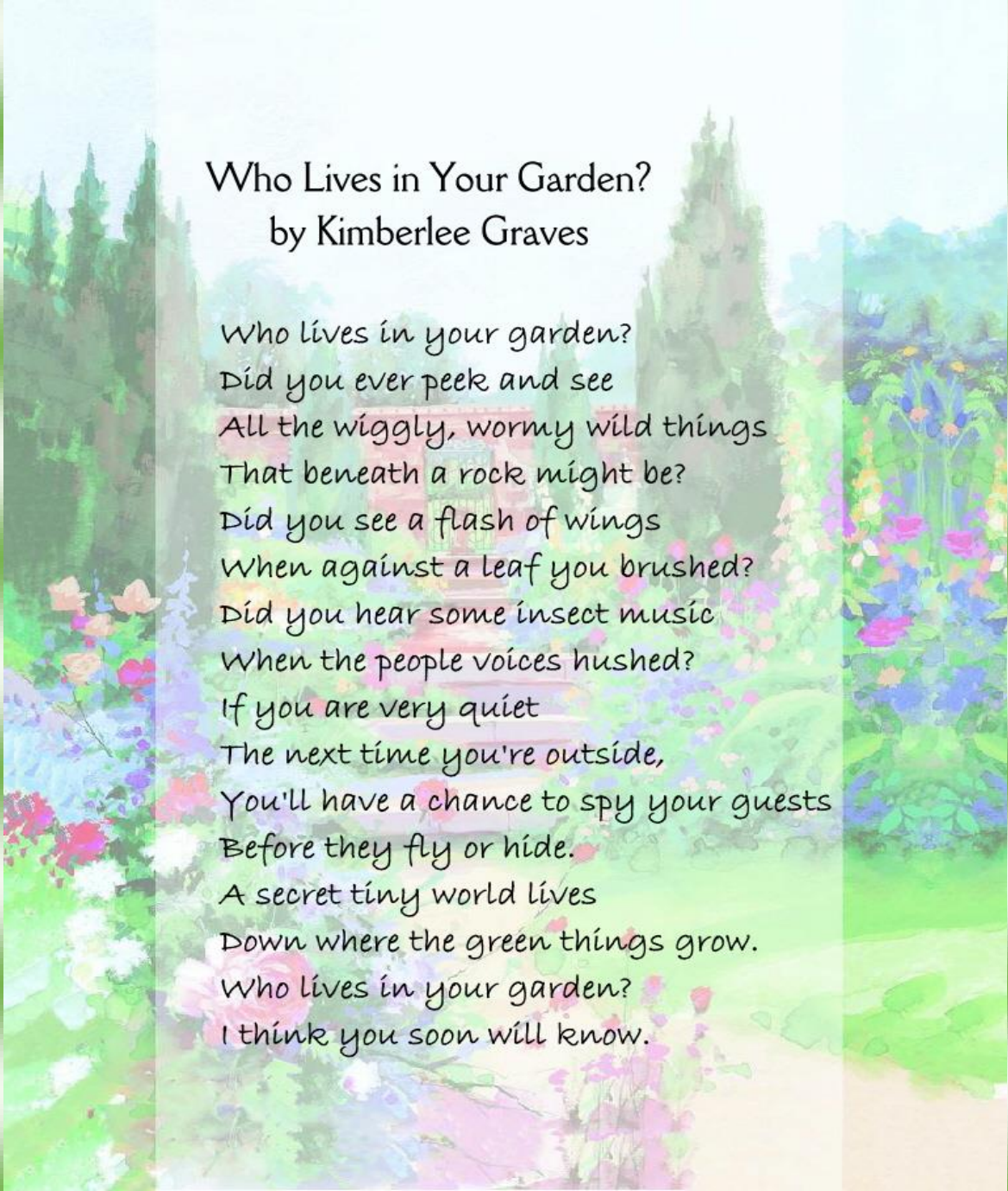






Who Lives in Your Garden?

by Kimberlee Graves

Who lives in your garden?
Did you ever peek and see
All the wiggly, wormy wild things
That beneath a rock might be?
Did you see a flash of wings
When against a leaf you brushed?
Did you hear some insect music
When the people voices hushed?
If you are very quiet
The next time you're outside,
You'll have a chance to spy your guests
Before they fly or hide.
A secret tiny world lives
Down where the green things grow.
Who lives in your garden?
I think you soon will know.

Discover

This is the garden I grew up in with my parents and brother, and where I have many happy memories. I consider myself exceptionally lucky to have grown up in such beautiful surroundings.

One of my fondest memories which my parents always remind me of is the time when I was very young, and they could not find me in the house anywhere. They searched frantically but when they looked in the garden, they could see I was quite happy sitting in the mud eating worms.

We have had a pond since as long as I can remember; we would always get excited when we went and bought new fish because me and my brother would always compete at who's fish would swim out of the bag first. I always used to say my fish would win but looking back that might not have always been true. Even now over 30 years later as soon as I step foot in my garden, I go straight to see the pond.

I find it so relaxing, I sit on the bench, watch the fish swimming around and listen to the water trickling down, it makes me feel like I am a million miles away.

Now my daughter has the pleasure of running round the garden, feeding the birds, planting flowers, watching the fish and watering the fruit and vegetables in the greenhouse. Come rain, shine or snow my garden is the place to go.



Discovering the area -

Our house is situated near Drummau mountain in Skewen and is a stone throw away from the Cwm Clydach/Dyffryn pond and the Dram roads.

Drummau Mountain is a beautiful place to explore the woodland and take in the view of the surrounding valleys. I remember when I was young I use to walk through the dram roads and jump in the puddles, swing on the tree swing, feed the horses in the field or run for my life going through the cow fields. Since taking part in this John Muir Award and researching about these places I realised there is so much more to Drummau mountain.

On top of the mountain is a 13 foot high famous stone called 'Carreg Bica', the rationale behind this stone is still a mystery. Ancient history says the Celtic Chieftain is buried there but others believe it is the capstone of an ancient cromlech.



The Cwm Clydach or Dyffryn pond as it is also known use to be the water supply for the Abbey Ironworks, just below the dam is a stunning waterfall where many people travel far and wide to see.

As you walk along the muddy paths, you can hear the birds calling, the crashing of the water against the rocks and if your lucky enough you can watch the squirrels eating the food that is left from people's picnic baskets.





Explore

We have several types of bird houses and bird feeders in my garden, just like humans they need a safe and warm place to bring up their young and protect them from predators. A bird house attracts many different species of birds to the garden which can have many positive factors, for instance some birds help to pollinate the nectar from the flowers and birds eat insects which means you do not need to put harmful chemicals down on the grass. The bird house on the left-hand side is the robin's nest, we have one robin that comes and visits the garden daily, it sits on the window ledge tweeting away until we bring some bread out for him. The other two bird houses have been used for nesting by the blue-tit, if you look very closely on the right-hand side picture you will see the blue-tit poking their head out just about to look for food to bring home to their young.



Sparrowhawk – Small Birds of Prey

Sparrowhawks like to hunt in dense woodland and my garden is ideal place for them. The difference between the male and female is the male has blue/grey back and wings where the female has brown back and wings. There are over 120 different species of Sparrowhawks, and they can be seen anytime of the year, however they are not seen in the Scottish Highlands, the Western Isles and Shetland. There are always sparrows in my garden, but you always know when there is a sparrowhawk around because the sparrow's tweet so loudly to warn the other birds and then everything falls silent. Unfortunately for this little Sparrow the callings came to late.





When exploring my garden I photographed several different birds from the little robin to the very large seagull. There are several food boxes and bird baths for them all scattered around the garden, and we always put bread out for them, we do try to make sure the smaller birds have a chance to eat it first as the seagull tends to take it all. We also use to have a rabbit called Flopsy and he use to sit on the grass for hours, the birds were never frightened of him and use to sit next to him eating the bread, which to me shows how nature can live together harmoniously in this world.

We have a beautiful pond in my back garden where you can sit for hours and watch life pass you by. My favourite time to watch the fish is when they are jumping up for the flies, they make such a splash when they come back down, and you do get a bit wet especially if it is the koi carp. There are over two million garden ponds in the UK which attract many species, we have seen several herons over the years and unfortunately lost a few fish to them. We have had various frogs and dragonflies in the pond, and I have been chased by a dragonfly many a time. According to the Woodland Trust (2019) dragonflies were around before the dinosaurs and the brown hawker dragonfly and the emperor could have wingspans of up to 60cm. Dragonflies catch insects with their legs and carry it back to their habitat to eat, they can fly up to a speed of 30 miles per hour and have thousands of lenses in their eyes which allows them to see their prey up to 12 metres away.





The *Nymphaea alba* also known as the White water-lily is often found in slow moving water between the months of June to August. The Water lily is one of the UK's largest flowers and it can grow up to 5 metres deep and have leaves as wide as 30cm. The water-lilies provide shelter for insects and frogs and are found all around the UK except for Southwest England and Northern Scotland.

The koi carp are said to symbolise good luck, love, wealth and career success, if kept in the right conditions they can live up to one hundred years old. Koi fish are more recognised for their beautiful colours, and even you may not think it, but koi can get sunburnt, so it is extremely important to have some shade in the pond, for instance having plants and bushes on the sides so they have somewhere to hide. Below is one of several koi carps in my pond.



Koi Carp – I am over 25 years old

*I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.*

*Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.*

*The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:*

*For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.*

By William Wordsworth.



Some interesting facts about Daffodils -

- Daffodils were brought to Britain by the Romans.
- Daffodils are one of the first signs that's spring has arrived.
- Daffodils are the National Emblem of Wales.
- Daffodils can poison animals and squirrels will refuse to eat them.
- There are over 200 different species of daffodils.
- Extracts from daffodils have been used to treat Alzheimer's disease.
- Daffodils can bloom for up to 50 years if they are kept in an area of good sunlight and drainage.



Why are plants and flowers so important?

There are several varieties of flowers and plants in my garden, anything from a cherry tree to a daffodil. The Woodland Trust (2018) believe flowers and plants reduce stress and anxiety, and I personally agree with this as I find my garden very relaxing and a happy place to be.

Plants are extremely important for the earth; they absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen, which is what we need to breathe, they also help improve air quality by absorbing pollution. Plants not only provide food for birds and mammals, but they provide a habitat for wildlife to live in.

Some of the medicines we use today are made from plants, so it is vitally important we protect these to ensure we discover new medicines for the future.

Flowers are not only beautiful to look at, but they play a vital part in enticing pollen substances to plants they also circulate genetic material to the following generation which subsequently shields growing seeds.

Flowers and plants need insects and bees to reproduce, and seeds need to be pollinated to make a flower. Bees collect the pollen from the flowers and spread this to other flowers which subsequently helps fruit and vegetable to grow.

Source: National Geographic (2013).









Over the years we have been lucky to have snow in my garden, I remember when I was younger getting so excited waking up in the morning at 5am to see if it had snowed and we would be out the garden in our pyjamas, wellies and coat building snowmen. However, it was not only us in the garden, if you look closely in the picture, you can see the footprints from the birds. Now me and my daughter get to enjoy our garden in the snow and hopefully this will carry on for generations to come.

Conserve -

Before completing this John Muir award I thought my garden was perfect for wildlife, it has no litter, its clean and it has plenty of flowers, plants, bird houses and bird feeders. But I have realised my garden needs to be more biodiverse, so I have now made a small patch of my garden into woodland to ensure different insects can use this for their habitat.

I used to have ant repellents in my garden, but I have now removed these as every insect/animal has the right to live, I also now have a bug hotel in my garden to encourage more wildlife to my garden.

I have always been frightened of bees, but I now realise how important it is to have bees around as without them we would not have flowers, fruit or vegetables.

I also use to dig up stinging nettles, but I have learnt the peacock butterfly lays its eggs on it and it is food for the caterpillars so in future I will not be digging these up.

In future I plan to save water by fixing a water butt to the drainpipes of the house so I can use this to water the garden and I will continue to look after my garden and the wildlife in it.

This photo was taken in 2021 in my garden during the pandemic, I searched straight away to see what it was.

This atmospheric phenomenon is called a 22-degree halo, it contains millions of crystals and is caused by the splitting of light, and every person will see the halo differently.

Some people believe it is a warning that rain or snow is on its way, and others believe it is a sign that good luck is on its way.

I hope this is true for all of us and some good luck is on the way for 2022.

