

GEOFF STONEBANKS

The Driftwood Garden Diary



Memorable visit to royal estate

I MENTIONED last week our break in Norfolk. We certainly saw some magnificent gardens while we were away.

For me, the most memorable was the garden on the royal Sandringham estate. I last visited some 30 years ago and it was especially poignant to visit this time, as it coincided with what would have been the late Queen's 100th birthday. April 21 is also my birthday, so it was always quite special to celebrate my birthday the same day as the Monarch for my entire life, until her passing in 2022. I got quite used to the 21-gun salutes each year until my 69th birthday! The garden was beautiful and you can see me standing in front of the blue and white planters on the path and a picture of the stone planters in front of the house. The view of Sandringham House from the lake can also be seen below. We were extremely lucky with the weather too; the sun shone but there was a chilly breeze.

We also visited two interesting National Trust properties as well, Oxborough Hall and Blickling Hall. Below are images from each of these gardens. The former had a beautiful display of cowslips which are pictured in the meadow in front of the hall. It was such a peaceful and relaxing estate and very enjoyable to walk around.

Blickling Hall, has thousands of native bluebells carpet the woodland from mid-April to early May and the Great Wood becomes one of Norfolk's most spectacular natural displays. The image shows a view across the garden back to the house and the fabulous topiary.

This weekend you could go out and visit a number of gardens open for the National Garden Scheme across the county. King John's Nursery in Sheepstreet Lane, Etchingam opens from 10am to 5pm along with the Priest House in North Lane, East Hoathly from 10.30am to 5pm. Grovelands in Wineham Lane, Henfield opens both days over the weekend from 10am to 4.30pm. You could see Foxglove Cottage at 29 Orchard Road in



Geoff Stonebanks at Sandringham. Images: Geoff Stonebanks

Horsham, open from 1pm to 5pm. Please check out all the details on the scheme's website at www.ngs.org.uk.

There has been a lot in the news recently about feeding birds through the summer months and how to create a bird-friendly ecosystem in your garden. The following information is drawn from the advice given on the RSPB website about creating garden habitats for biodiversity. The larger the variety of habitats you create in your garden, the more welcoming to wildlife it will be. The RSPB says having a combination of taller, structural bushes and perhaps a tree will provide shelter and nesting sites for birds and mammals. Introducing lower, flowering plants

and shrubs, or patches of uncut grass and wildflowers, will provide good ground cover, protecting your soil from the elements, as well as offering food for birds, bees, butterflies and other insects.

If you bring an area of water into the garden, it can encourage a range of wildlife, from the insects and amphibians that use it as a home, to the birds and mammals that simply visit it to feed and drink. From a bird bath to a mini pond, or even a large pond, any water will be very welcome. Also think about time as well as space. Choosing plants which flower, seed and bear fruit at different times of the year will give year-round benefit for the different animals that live in

your garden. Choosing the right plants for you, your garden and the wildlife in it is an important part of building a vibrant, nature-friendly space. Find out what you can about your type of soil: is it wet, heavy clay, or dry, sandy soil? Is your garden sunny or shady? Many plants like specific soil and light conditions so look around and find out what grows well in your local area. Some plants take several years to mature. For example, you're not likely to see a song thrush feeding on ivy berries for at least five years. But there are lots of flowering plants and shrubs you can plant for instant impact while you wait. You may also choose to remove plants from an existing garden, but careful considera-

tion should be given in mature gardens before removing an established plant to replace with a new one. Think about how it might impact existing wildlife, and whether what you're looking to replace it with will bring the same value and thrive in the same place.

Growing wildlife-friendly flowers in your garden, on your balcony or even in a window box is a great way to add colour and interest for yourself and nature. Take a look at their website for all the details: www.rspb.org.uk.

■ Read more of Geoff's garden at www.driftwoodbysea.co.uk or follow both him and the garden on social media. You can book a visit from June 1 by emailing visitdriftwood@gmail.com.



Sandringham lake and garden



Oxborough Hall



Sandringham planters



Blickling Hall