

## France: The allotment gardeners and biodiversity

### **How to live in harmony with the fauna and flora in your gardens?**



In 2005, at the Congress of the Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux in Lyon, the German and Dutch member gardeners demonstrated, following a four-year study, that leisure gardens hosted a level of biodiversity largely superior to that of all other urban green areas, to include public gardens, parks, cemeteries, playing fields and semi-urban agriculture.

A study conducted in Germany revealed that there are an average of 0,5 plants per 100 sqm in public parks, but 22,4 on allotments. There are also more fruit and vegetable species on allotments than in the commercial horticulture. Thus, there are 114 vegetable species in private gardens, but only 35 in the commercial horticulture. Similarly 59 fruit species can be found in our gardens, whereas there are only 30 in the commercial fruit cultivation.

**The term "biodiversity" was used for the first time by U.S. scientist Edward O. Wilson at the Rio summit in 1992. It is the contraction of the expression "biologic diversity" that qualifies the wealth of living tissue of our planet.**

**It extends to all forms of life and the relationships that exist between them and their surroundings, to include gene diversity, species including Man and ecosystems. It also takes into account all scales of size, area and time because in the universe of the living, all is inter-related, everything is interdependent.**

Now the French Federation of Allotment and Collective Gardens (FNJFC), with the support of GrDF (the gas distribution firm), the Bird Protection League (LPO), the

National Museum of Natural History (MNHN), Natureparif, the OPIE (Office For Insects and their Environment), Plante&Cit  and AgroPariTech (a European Engineering and Management school in the domain of living things and the environment) who kindly offered their premises, hosted a **scientific colloquium on Friday 10 April**, entitled "**Garden biodiversity**". This was the **first nationwide initiative** offering amateur gardeners who cultivate a leisure garden the chance to easily access fundamental naturalist data and to themselves become privileged players in the knowledge chain.

The objectives of this event were:

- Recommend specific models of favourable habitats
- Encourage exchanges of horticultural practices
- Make knowledge regarding insects, birds, molluscs, etc., accessible
- Make people aware of the principles of participatory science by following inventory protocols that constitute databases that can be used in scientific research

The event was attended by around one hundred participants including federal administrators, ambassadors, gardening trainers and persons who completed the "Natural Vegetable Gardening" course.

The day began with several presentations that underscored the importance of biodiversity in general, and more particularly in our gardens. A wide range of biodiversity is an excellent sign in gardens, and it exempts us from having to use plant protection products that are costly and toxic to the environment. In a balanced natural environment, each parasite has its own predator...there is no need for man to intervene in the balance.

This point was illustrated by the remarkable presentation of Nicole Gelli, a gardener and trainer in the Local Committee of Marseille.

The participants were divided into three groups that attended six workshops presented by the LPO, MNHN and OPIE to discover the six participatory sciences protocols:

- Pollinators
- Butterflies
- Snails and slugs
- Earthworms
- Volunteer flora
- Birds



The end purpose was to convince attendees to become observers and stakeholders in the knowledge cycle.

This is what is termed participatory science. There are not enough naturalists, specialists and scientists to cover all of the territory in a country, to monitor changes in species that reveal increases in pollution, climate change, etc. The assistance of thousands of gardeners will prove very useful and be a decisive factor.

All participants were convinced of what they saw, appreciating widely the quality of exchanges and the tools available to carry out the exhilarating work that participatory science represents.

All of the tools have been freely accessible on our site since 10 April, by clicking on the bubble to the left of the banner or at the following address: <http://www.jardins-familiaux.asso.fr/jardinez--la-biodiversite.html>

With the support of our partners, the efficient supervision by the personnel of the Federation and the participation of the gardeners, this exceptional event was a major success and will generate another like it next year, which could be entitled "**Garden for the climate**".

Hervé Bonnavaud

