

Christmas presents for wildlife lovers



What to give your wildlife-loving friends and relations for Christmas? Plumpton Wildlife & Habitat Group has come up with a list of goodies that may solve your festive gift problems.

How about a hedgehog house? Hedgehog numbers have dropped by 25% in the last 10 years so what better gift for you and your local Tiggywinkles? See www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/ or ring 01584 890 801. Locally, the Monday Group also makes and sells hedgehog, owl and bird boxes. Telephone Jim Edwards on 01273 474 112.

Slightly more costly but very chic is the 'tear drop' Schwegler Avianex nest box, which fixes to the house wall. They cost £39.95 (http://www.nhbs.com/nest_boxes_and_habitats_eqcat_420.html) but they last for up to 20 years. If you're feeling really flush, get a bird box with a built-in camera so you can watch what the occupants are up to on your tv.

Why not give someone a dormouse or hare? The Wildlife Trusts offers several wildlife species adoption schemes, such as otter, dormouse, barn owl and hare. The money raised goes to help local conservation work. See <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/how-you-can-help/adopt-species>.

How about a gift of plants/bulbs that attract and support butterflies, moths and bees? Early flowering plants, such as winter flowering honeysuckle, smell fantastic throughout the winter, give joy in the bleakest months, and help the early bumbles.

Books can be an ideal starting point for getting people interested in wildlife. For children, try *My First Book of Garden Wildlife* by Mike Unwin. Also highly recommended is *How to be a Bad Birdwatcher*, by Simon Barnes – full of good observations about why people do it and the enjoyment you can get from it. Another recommended book is *Wildflower Gardening* by Jenny Steel, which lists plants that are beneficial to bees, butterflies and birds. All are available online from Amazon or to order from a local bookshop.

How about a present for Pussy? If you must have a cat, buy it a bell for its collar to reduce its toll on the wildlife in yours and neighbouring gardens.

Give someone a year's membership of Plumpton Wildlife & Habitat Group. Just £5.00 brings you the satisfaction of knowing you are helping us do our bit to conserve and improve local wildlife habitats – plus guided walks, talks and other activities. Membership of the Sussex Wildlife Trust includes a subscription to Wildlife and Natural World magazines, plus a huge range of talks, meetings, outings and information about local wildlife and conservation projects. See <http://www.sussexwildlifetrust.com/>.

A set of bird alert decals could stop birds killing themselves by flying into your windows or mirrors in the garden. See <http://www.treehugger.com/natural-sciences/save-millions-of-birds-window-alert-invisible-ultraviolet-decals-warn-birds-about-deadly-windows.html>.

Bird feeders and a sack of bird food are the perfect gift for the winter couch potato and help the birds survive the winter months. Add a special goldfinch feeder to bring these charming little birds into your garden. You can get these by mail order from the RSPB at http://shopping.rspb.org.uk/p/BirdFeeders/Goldfinch_mini_bird_feeder.htm.

If you are sharing your garden with squirrels, it's worth investing in a squirrel-proof bird feeder. To be truly squirrel proof it has to be made out of steel mesh. Gardman (available from Amazon) is a good make – more costly, but you quickly recoup it on the bird food you save.

And last – here's a recipe for a DIY bird festive feast. Take several large fir cones. Get deliciously messy stuffing them with lard. When fully larded, roll the cones over a pile of bird seed, nuts, or both. Then hang from an appropriate branch, well out of reach of dogs and cats but within sight of your windows. Settle down indoors with a cup of tea and binoculars and enjoy.

To work off the festive excesses, why not dig a pond and bring life into the most manicured garden? You'll find full instructions at <http://www.pondconservation.org.uk/>.

Or (less arduous) create a mini-meadow. Even a very small patch of wildflowers will bring in the bees and other invertebrates and create an important source of food and shelter. See <http://www.buglife.org.uk/getinvolved/gardening/Make+a+mini+meadow>.

Happy Christmas!
December 2011