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Reprint from Volume 23 Number 6

Mar 24, 2011

Book Review by Brian Crumblehulme

A Bug's Eye View of Gardening

Gardening for Butterflies, Bees and Other Beneficial Insects by Jan Miller-Klein is a delightful guide into the hows & whys of bug-friendly gardening. *Butterflies & Bees*, focuses primarily on these two best-known pollinators. Miller-Klein launches into the world of insects and flowers in a soft-cover 'coffee-table' book. It begs to be picked up if only for the pictures.

Colour-coded like a reference book on birds, *Butterflies & Bees* is very accessible. Taken section by section this book guides the reader gently into a smaller, alternate worldview. It opens with the big questions of 'why' and 'how' before systematically stepping through the maze of plants, habitat, examples and garden designs, making it a handy how-to guide.

But what turns the page are photographs. We get to see Peacock butterflies the size of saucers and bees the size of teacups and we also see glorious photographs of old-world flowers with medieval names such as honesty, feverfew and vipers bugloss.

Miller-Klein is a naturalist living a dream life on an eight-acre farm in the shadows of a twelfth century castle in North Wales. Miller-Klein and husband Richard turned their sheep pasture, meadowland for the past few centuries, into an ecological centre that has become well known across the UK and Europe as a model of what can be done to turn the ecological clock back on impoverished land and restore some sort of bio-diversity.

Fortunately for them, native deer are long gone and a four-foot fence is sufficient to keep the neighbouring sheep from feasting on the jungle of flowers and foliage.

The recent world-wide concern about honey bee 'colony collapse disorder' is one of the motivations for this book. In the UK there are some 254 species of wild bees (about 400 in BC) and the fact that bees generally account for a third of the food crops we depend upon is no small

matter.

Not surprisingly, *Gardening For Butterflies, Bees And Other Beneficial Insects* provides an overview of insect friendly habitats, habitats that demonstrably work, at least in the UK. Photos and lists of butterfly and/or bee-friendly plants are provided for every season ranging in scale from meadows to raised beds and containers for the urban patio.

This book is indeed a good read and a good reference. However, it is written for the UK gardener and as anyone who has summer holidayed in that island knows, that its climate is wetter than the Gulf Islands we inhabit. The Brits tend to get summer rains which is why their grass remains green even on the hills.

Gulf Islanders enjoy wet winters and dry summers and if climate change predictions can be believed, that trend will increase over the next generation. However, almost all of the plants, wild and varietal, listed by Miller-Klein can be grown here. Some will certainly require a little extra water in the dry season if they are to flourish.

The writer includes careful notes and warnings about the introduction of non-native species to the UK that are 'one of the big threats to biodiversity.' But again, the UK list of prohibited species is different from the ones we have in our region (she promotes dandelion, broom and thistles!).

My caveat is that Gulf Island gardeners should check-out the introduction of the recommended bee and butterfly flowers before scattering seeds across their back forty.

Notwithstanding geographical and ecological differences, *Gardening For Butterflies, Bees And Other Beneficial Insects* is a handy guide and a fun read or browse for gardeners of any age. ✍



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This article was published (Mar 24, 2011) in 'Island Tides'. 'Island Tides' is an independent, regional newspaper distributing 18,000 print copies throughout the Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island from Victoria to Campbell River.

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