

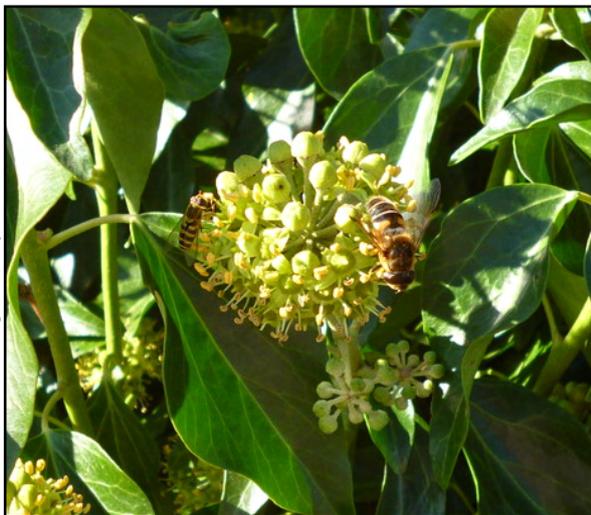
## FOUR NATIVES AND A FLEETING VISITOR

*Eileen Shone*

In my garden I have deliberately allowed the native ivy, *Hedera helix*, to colonise the top of Atrocity Corner - a part of the garden that I first tackled 5 years after moving in. The flowers provide nectar for winter-flying insects and, of course, the berries are appreciated by many birds. The plant itself supplies excellent nesting sites, and this year we have had blackbirds in residence again.

Intermingled with our twenty-foot beech hedge, and in many other places in the garden, there are honeysuckles: *Lonicera periclymenum*. Many are self-sown, and provide excellent flowers for colour and wonderful evening scent. Countless insects feed on the pollen and drink the nectar, and a few years ago we had an elephant hawk moth hatch and feed on the honeysuckle. I was recently weeding out *Epilobium parviflorum*, commonly known as hoary willowherb, but had to stop when I came across five elephant hawk moth caterpillars. At 3" long - the same size as my middle finger - they were almost ready to pupate, and quite unnerving!

Along the boundary fence there are several smallish hawthorns, *Crataegus monogyna*, again self-sown or gifts from the birds. In spring, they provide beautiful May blossom and, as I write this on the last day of July, the berries are forming nicely.



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**Insects on flowering ivy**



© Jacques Rocquet

***Lonicera periclymenum***



© Very Well health.com

***Crataegus monogyna***



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***Sambucus nigra***

The fourth native is elder, *Sambucus nigra*, which I generally consider to be a weed and regularly pull out, as it grows anywhere and everywhere in the borders and even in the gutters! There are a couple on the boundary which, just like the other three native species mentioned, support a diversity of wild creatures.

So where does the visitor in the title come in? Yesterday morning, on the conservatory door, I noticed a beautiful pale cream moth. My daughter's moth guide helped me to identify it as a swallow-tailed moth, *Ourapteryx sambucaria*. One of its food plants is suggested in its species name. The caterpillars feed on the leaves of these four native species, and overwinter as pupae in the soil. The adults are short-lived; they fly, mate and lay eggs in June and July.

These four native plants support a variety of wildlife, including the native moth that I marvelled at yesterday morning. I'd like to encourage everyone to allow native plants to grow, and help support our wildlife.

**Footnote:** In addition to the weeds, I was under orders by Him In The Garage to tidy up the debris around the Belfast sink by the front door. Amongst the detritus, I found a smooth newt. She was christened Tiny, as she was 'my newt'. (Sorry.)



**Swallow-tailed moth**

❧ *First published in the East Yorkshire Group Newsletter, 2019* ❧