

## Ivy

As I write this in mid September, ivy is just coming into flower. Not that you'd particularly notice this as the flowers are very low key – each individual flower is pale greenish and small, with 5 stamens. But what they lack in appearance they more than make up for in the quantities of nectar they supply - a flowering ivy plant will be abuzz with a large selection of bees, wasps, flies and especially hoverflies. The plant will carry on supplying this nectar right through the autumn when very little else is in flower – this provides an invaluable resource for autumn insects, including many butterflies and about 70 species of moth.



Then in the late winter and early spring, the bitter black berries ripen – and they again provide a critical food resource when there is very little else to be found. Members of the thrush family in particular are heavily dependant on ivy and can be seen eating ivy berries all through the early spring.

And the plant itself, being evergreen and good at shedding water from its leaves, provides a very dry and comfy winter home for a whole range of insects and other creepy crawlies. It also supplies suitable nest sites for wrens and spotted flycatchers.

The Small Dusty Wave moth is completely dependant on ivy, and the second generation of caterpillars of the Holly Blue butterfly feed on the buds and flowers.

In fact the plant supplies so many valuable ecological services that you would almost have to invent it if it didn't exist!

Now I know that not everyone is a fan of Ivy – it can shade out the crowns of trees, it can cause old trees to topple in the wind and it can damage soft mortar. Indeed we have removed a lot of ivy from the hawthorn trees in our garden as it was shading the crowns and making the trees grow lop-sided. But we have left it to prosper where we can – on fences, in hedges and on garden walls – and are rewarded by the sight of clouds of insects in the autumn and grateful birds in the winter.

So please leave Ivy to grow and flower wherever you can – you will be doing your local wildlife a real good turn! For more information on ivy, and a discussion on the damage which it does or does not do, look at Wikipedia here <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hedera>