

**T**he Lady of the Wemyss, Lord Rosebery, Tam Montgomery and Scarlet Leadington could easily be characters in a Victorian romance set among the landed gentry. Likewise, the Bloody Ploughman, Lass O'Gowrie, Scrog and the Lemon Queen are perfect titles for the players in a Shakespearean comedy.

What they all have in common, however, is they are the names of native Scottish apples. As people around the UK celebrate Apple Day today – Scots are being encouraged to maintain existing orchards or plant new fruit trees.

John Hancox is the chair of Scottish Orchards, which is a developing network of schools, community groups and experts on fruit growing in Scotland. "The aim is to get people planting more fruit and enjoying picking it," he says.

The project was set up in 2009 after a discussion between Hancox and co-founder John Butterworth on a train back from planting an orchard near Inverness.

"We were discussing what would happen if we both got hit by a bus and orchard growing in Scotland disappeared, and we came up with the idea of setting up a national network," says Hancox.

With 300 members already on board, the hope is that existing orchards will be protected and new ones planted and looked after in the future.

"The value of these things is getting people together so they can learn from each other and share experience. There was an awful lot of good work going on but in isolation from each other. Bringing people together to share ideas was really good."

Part of the project's remit is to help preserve varieties of Scottish apples, plums and pears, by developing skills in pruning and grafting.

"There are 40 or so Scottish varieties of apple and also various plums and pears. We're quite keen to encourage people to grow old

# Core values

After years of decline, Scottish apples are growing in our orchards again, writes **Rosemary Free**



PHOTOGRAPH: IAN RUTHERFORD

varieties – not exclusively because there are good reasons to grow mainstream ones – but it's nice to keep the old varieties going."

With names like Stirling Castle and White Melrose, these apples have a long history behind them.

Having been grown in their local areas for hundreds of years, they are well adapted to the climate and are more likely to be disease-resistant than varieties imported from other areas.

"I think the local provenance thing is good," says Hancox. "The local varieties tend to be low

maintenance, suit the area and you don't need to do much with them."

The initiative also aims to create a market for Scottish produce in order to develop fruit growing in Scotland and provide support to growers.

"What we're trying to do is get the good quality apples picked and used for eating and culinary use," says

"The idea is to make it really easy for the public to find a suitable place to go to see apples growing, and also places with Scottish apples and apple products to sell."

Hancox originally started the Children's Garden – a child-friendly community project in Glasgow's Botanic Gardens – in 2003. This led

**“We're keen to encourage people to grow old varieties”**

Hancox, who encourages anyone with an excess of fruit to contact him.

"Growing in Scotland over the last 50 years really collapsed to the point where people were not bothering to pick the fruit. It's quite encouraging they are now looking for fruit and prepared to pay a reasonable price for it. While last year we had a terrible year, this year is a bumper harvest. It's all looking really good right across Scotland."

The project has just been awarded a £10,000 grant from the Community Food Fund to support 20 open orchard events across Scotland – including five in schools.

to the creation of the Children's Orchard two years later with the aim of introducing children to fruit growing. "Since then we have planted hundreds of trees in about 500 school and nursery orchards across Scotland," he says.

"I think what's nice about that is it's a generation of kids growing up knowing fruit grows on trees. A lot of urban kids haven't really had the opportunity to see that.

"I think having even a few trees, where the kids can see blossom and trees fruiting, is really interesting. It's really taken off."

Hancox's own love of fruit trees started when he was a child picking





plums in his aunt's garden.

"I just loved picking plums as a kid. It thought it was super. It was just fantastic. I think that's a really important experience for people."

Hancox says that while their work was regarded as radical when they first started out, there is now more of a focus on school gardens and getting children outside to do planting.

"One of the nice things about fruit growing in schools is an orchard neatly fits with the school year in the sense that you plant over winter, have the blossom in spring and then come back from the summer holidays to find the fruit on the trees ready for harvest."

A knock-on from the Children's Orchard was the Fruitful Schools initiative which, for a small fee, provides orchard starter packs – including four apple trees and two plum and pear trees or four fruit trees and 16 soft fruit plants – for schools.

The trees are sent out between November and the following April or May and come with planting instructions to ensure the orchard is a success.

And with an eye on Glasgow's role hosting the Commonwealth Games

Clockwise from main: John Hancox, co-founder of Scottish Orchards; Scottish apple variety Lass O'Gowrie; White Melrose waiting to be picked; a planting workshop in Haddington; children try an apple press at a Scottish Orchards event

in 2014, Hancox also set up the Commonwealth Orchard with the aim of getting whole communities to plant fruit trees and soft fruit plants ready to be picked and used at events next year. A final string to Hancox's bow is nursery work and running a mail order business selling Scottish fruit trees.

"We grow varieties with a strong record of growing in Scotland. It's interesting looking at what does well in the extremities of Scotland. One needs to experiment and be flexible. I don't think a rigid view is sensible."

While many people dread the end of summer, having fruit trees makes autumn a time to look forward to.

"When you're starting to lose the long days, it's a wee bit sad," says Hancox. "Autumn is a beautiful time of year. I have just harvested plums, damsons, early apples. It's a real pleasure you get in autumn that compensates for the end of summer. It's rather a special time of year."

For more information about Scottish Orchards visit: [www.scottishorchards.com](http://www.scottishorchards.com) where you can also find links to the other projects and information about local open orchard events.



## WILDLIFE WATCH

KATE HUMBLE



I love September. For some it means the end of summer; leaves are slowly turning shades of brown and red, days are getting shorter, and temperatures are slowly cooling. For me, though, it is a wonderful month – the air is still warm, there are blackberries to pick and the country basks in the gorgeous golden light of early autumn. It is also a busy time for our wildlife and one of the best times of year for watching it. Our migrant birds will be preparing to head south; telephone wires will be full of chattering swallows all lining up for the marathon ahead. Other animals will be preparing for winter. If you live in a part of the country that still has red squirrels, this is the season where they are at their most visible, foraging in the undergrowth and building up their winter stores.

The leaves on trees will gently start to turn, and vegetable gardens will be full of things to harvest. Look out for squash, courgettes and tomatoes in particular – a great basis for a lovely ratatouille or some jars of chutney. You may also have autumn raspberries and the first hand-picked crisp apples of the season that could make up a delicious pie.

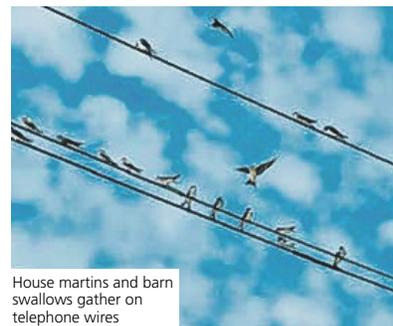
There is some planting you can do too – lettuce, spring cabbage and winter spinach – and this is also a good month to do a bit of tidying in the garden. However, your resident wildlife will thank you for leav-

### Red squirrels are foraging and at their most visible

ing seed heads, teasels, thistles and sunflower heads – all rich pickings for birds like the handsome goldfinch. And remember piles of leaves, stacks of wood and compost heaps are valuable habitats for a number of species and feeding grounds for many more.

Autumn is a good time of year for moths. Often overlooked in favour of their more garish day-time counterparts, butterflies, moths come in an extraordinary number of shapes, colours and sizes and with more than 2,000 species recorded in the British Isles, the chances of spotting one you haven't seen before are very high. Another nocturnal specialist, the bat, chooses the autumn as mating season, so if you want to see these fascinating creatures, this is the perfect time of year to look for them.

The RSPB has launched its biggest-ever campaign, *Giving Nature a Home*. To find out more, and to get a free guide on how you can give nature a home in your outside space, visit [rspb.org.uk/homes](http://rspb.org.uk/homes)



House martins and barn swallows gather on telephone wires