

## Spectacular Visitors to Farnham Gardens in May and June



At this time of the year, while out walking or relaxing in your garden you may be fortunate to see Britain's largest beetle, the Stag Beetle, either on the ground or flying. Males are up to 75mm long and have impressively large antler-like jaws. Females are less impressive being smaller (up to 50mm long) and with smaller jaws. They are both totally harmless and should not be harmed. Like so many of our wildlife species they are in decline mainly through habitat loss. They belong to the community of animals associated with dead wood, and today's passion for tidiness in woodlands and gardens leads to dead wood being cleared away.

The beetles emerge at dusk on warm evenings in mid-May and early June and they may be seen flying for the next 5-6 weeks. Males may fly up to 2 km in search of a female and are immediately recognisable because of their spectacularly large jaws. These are used to wrestle with other males when competing to win the favours of a female. Once a female has mated, she seeks buried rotting wood, preferably oak, and lays a clutch of about 24 eggs beneath it. These hatch into large creamy white C-shaped larvae up to 110mm (4.5 inches) long with brown heads. which feed on the rotting wood for the next 3-6 years. As they grow, they moult several times before



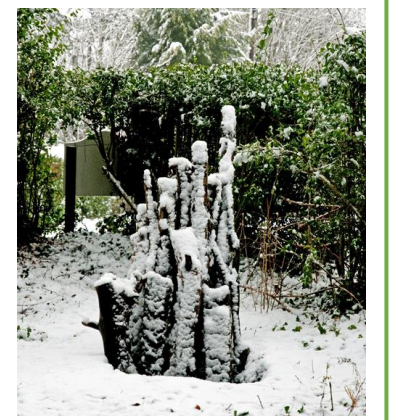
reaching full size. They pupate in autumn in nearby soil, hatching several weeks later. The adults do not feed although they can top-up their reserves by sipping sap runs from damaged trees, hence they only live for a few weeks. So most of their lives are spent as larvae hidden away in rotten wood. Once they emerge the adults have numerous enemies, being eaten by birds like crows, mammals including foxes and badgers, and even domestic cats.

Stag Beetles are quite common in South-east England. Farnham is a hot spot for them and so our gardens provide important refuges for them.



### You can make your garden stag beetle-friendly in several ways:

- By leaving any tree-stumps in situ
- Keeping water butts covered in May and June
- Letting part of the garden go wild
- Best of all, by creating a log pyramid tucked away in a corner.
- This needs to be formed of 1.5-2m (5 feet) branches about as thick as a man's arm, buried at least half a metre (18 inches) down and packed around with sawdust. The disappointing aspect of such a 'stumpery' is there is no way of seeing if your efforts have been successful for up to six years.



The Farnham Biodiversity Partnership is mapping the distribution of stag beetles in the town and would greatly appreciate being informed of where and when you see any, by messaging [contact@FarnhamBAP.org.uk](mailto:contact@FarnhamBAP.org.uk) and giving a full postcode or grid reference of the sighting.

The Partnership needs to know how common these spectacular animals are locally so as determine how best to conserve them as part of enhancing biodiversity across the whole town.