



Allotments in Holland are very different from ours in the UK. You can stay overnight in your chalet, for example, and must grow ornamentals.

protection against frost, put pieces of timber between the rubble to rot down and give off heat. We left corridors among the stones for toads, frogs, snakes to travel through and make nests.'

Walking down the wide paths that separate the plots Wim and Joop point out how the vertical canal sides have been banked up with willow branches so that wildlife can drink and go in and out with ease. Next to a verge planted with butterfly-friendly plants – groups of buddleia, verbena, lavender, wallflowers and daisy-type plants including marigolds and asters – is a written explanation with a plant list both in Dutch and Latin. In the car park, drought-loving wild flowers have been allowed to spring up through the gravel and are left to colonise freely.

'We do everything we can to encourage and help nature, though it is difficult to gauge the degree of success,' concludes Wim. He adds with a wry look, 'For example, we have not seen any snakes around the amphibian hill as yet. However, we have noticed a greatly increased number of butterflies, hedgehogs and

birds – particularly owls.'

It was not long after Amstelglorie went green that the AVVN, in response to pressure from members, decided to promote organic gardening. The first step was to refuse all advertisements for chemical products in their magazine *Amateurtuinder*. By 1996 they had introduced the National Quality Mark for 'natural' gardening.

Herman Vroklage from the AVVN explains that, as the national organisation, they feel that they must set an example. 'Our aim is to encourage the inclusion of native flora in allotments for flourishing wildlife in towns and villages. If clubs are interested in the scheme we send a team of experts to make an inventory of the flora and fauna and suggest a two-year plan,' he says.

'Recommendations might include making a pond, a relaxation of mowing, planting for butterflies and making habitats along the lines followed by Amstelglorie. Needless to say all chemicals are forbidden. A supervisor will visit the club on a regular basis to check on progress, encourage and teach by giving talks

and putting on workshops. After two years a second inventory is made and successful clubs are awarded the National Quality Mark. It comes in the form of a ladybird with one to four spots according to excellence.'

Sadly, despite all the honours that have been showered on Amstelglorie a shadow hovers over it. The City Council is threatening to move it again to build houses. There is little protection against closure for allotments in Holland.

This is heart-breaking for Wim and Joop and all the other members who have worked so hard and devoted so much of their lives to the project. Along with the rest of the Amstelglorie committee and the AVVN, they are preparing for battle.

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Caroline Foley is an author and freelance journalist. Her recent book, *Practical Allotment Gardening*, is published by New Holland at £12.99.

