

### **U3A Gardening group November report for Forum**

In November the gardening group had a talk at Stainton Village Hall.

The speaker was Ruth Starr-Kebble who is a plant ecologist and botanist. Since 2010 Ruth has worked at the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership on various projects connected with upland hay meadows.

Ruth explained about how she is working in conjunction with the farmers of Upper Teesdale to enhance the meadows to increase diversity. One of the projects that is having a positive impact is the creation of scrapes and small wet land areas, this has proved popular with the farmers and over 100 have been created over the last year. This encourages wildlife and is helping to sustain the population of lapwings and curlews.

We are fortunate in Teesdale to have wild flower meadows and Ruth is encouraging farmers to increase the range of plants in the meadows. Some meadows which have been managed to grow only grasses are now being reseeded to include wild flowers including yellow rattle, eyebright, red clover, meadow cranesbill, yarrow, plantain and many other local species. This is done by mowing a local meadow and spreading the seeds on the target meadow. Some of the larger or later flowering plants have not responded to this method as the meadows are cut for hay before the seed is developed. To overcome this plants such as great burnet and melancholy thistle have seeds hand collected (following Kew protocols) and these are planted and nurtured for a year before being planted out in the meadows as plug plants. The wild flower meadows are surveyed for plant species and also bees are surveyed to indicate the increase in pollinators.

The project is also restoring peat bogs in Teesdale and dealing with the impact of areas contaminated by lead mining.

The talk was well received by the group with lots of questions being asked afterwards.

In December we are planning a visit to a house with a Christmas theme.

There will be no gardening group meeting in January but we will resume in February.

Julie Archer and Kate Keen