

Climate Solutions - Report by Kate Bailey

This month the group discussed ways we could encourage others to support the idea of a "Park for Pollinators" in Barnard Castle. We talked about landowners we could approach, in partnership with other organisations that are properly constituted bodies and therefore eligible to apply for funding for wildlife projects. If any u3a member knows of an organisation that may be interested in supporting this wildflower planting project, please let Jane know - janemardon@yahoo.co.uk

The Big Plastic Count is being organised again, between 11th and 17th March. "Nearly 100 billion pieces of plastic packaging are thrown away by UK households every year, and just 12% is recycled in the UK. It's time we got serious about tackling the plastic crisis. You can help by taking part in The Big Plastic Count!" See the website - <https://thebigplasticcount.com/> for information on how to register and take part.

Following on from our discussions about regenerative farming practices, our main topic was around the global loss of soil fertility and the alarming implications for future food production. David brought an interesting article that suggested traditional upland farmers know more about land management on the Teesdale peatlands than many well-meaning but inexperienced 'experts' from Natural England. Gerald sent a 'doom and gloom' report about the tiny proportion (around 3%) of the earth's surface that is available for food production and the many threats to soil health that farmers and land managers face.

Being the climate 'Solutions' group we decided to start collating positive and practical responses to the major challenges faced by UK farmers. These include soil erosion by water and wind including floods and landslides; soil compaction by vehicles and/or livestock; loss of organic matter and soil biodiversity; soil contamination and pollution. We won't have a meeting in March and several members agreed instead to gather information about one of these soil topics that interests them.

Good news reported this month - two new energy-efficient houses have been built in a laboratory at Salford University and their energy use and carbon outputs are being monitored to inform future construction practices;

A Gateshead housing development, being heated by hot mine-water, and a housing project in Nevada USA, using super-heated steam pumped from deep granite rocks, are demonstrating the benefits of using 'free' geo-thermal energy;

Sea otters are stopping the erosion of a Californian estuary because of their appetite for the shore crabs that eat salt marsh roots, dig into salt marsh soil, and over time can cause a salt marsh to erode and collapse. "Erosion of creekbanks and marsh edges in areas with large otter populations has slowed by up to 90%" (Nature 2024 - Duke University Wetland and Coasts Center).



Sea Otter eating a crab