

Wildflower Group - April & May 2019

Prepared by Rose Pude

Fourteen members attended our first wildflower walk of 2019 on 24th April at Egglestone Abbey. We started by walking to the meadow by Thorsgill Beck where we found many spring flowers, including butterbur, that flourish in damp conditions. Then we walked along the road to Abbey Bridge, spotting ground ivy and moschatel as well as several more common roadside flowers. We crossed over the bridge and entered the woods walking downstream. Here we found an abundance of spring woodland flowers including bluebells, wood anemones, wild garlic, primrose, sweet woodruff, goldilocks, wood speedwell, wood sorrel and wood violet. However, the highlight of the walk was toothwort spotted by Ruth. This is a parasitic plant that lives off the roots of trees, mainly hazel, ash, beech and elm. Only the white flowers appear above the ground. We are lucky to have so much natural woodland in Teesdale where wildlife can flourish.

We found a total of 42 flowers, many of which had not been seen on previous group walks. A very successful excursion! We ended up with refreshments at Penny's Café in Barnard Castle where we discussed our finds.

Bruce Shepherd

Our second outing of the season, on 9th May, was to Bowlees, where the group split into two - one going to the quarry and the other to Low Force, where the Tees was in full spate. Bowless, by the way, is one of the best places in Teesdale in which to find wildflowers, hence we go there a lot throughout the season.

Walking along the footpath on the south side of the river, we saw a few early purple orchids and several clumps of lousewort - a small semi-parasitic flower growing on the roots of other plants (as with the toothwort reported above) but with a few pale pink petals on leafy spikes. Fortunately, the lousewort was on the other side of a post-and-wire fence and thereby out of danger from being trampled upon as a result of over-recreational use of the river.

In total, the two groups logged 53 different flowers, which because of the recent cold weather was beyond expectations.

Tuesday 14th May was a fine sunny day with good visibility, making it a perfect day for a visit to Cow Green in search of spring gentians - perfect in that sunshine ensures the bright blue petals are open and not closed.

Blue gentians are the flower which puts Upper Teesdale on the international 'botanical map' as they can only be found in one other place in the British Isles, namely an area called the Burren in Western Ireland.

Although we saw several clumps of gentians, the season was drawing to a close - as a member of the group had been up at Cow Green a couple of weeks earlier.

(ie. late April) when there had been many more. Other interesting flowers included birds-eye primroses, mountain pansies, spring sandwort, blue moor grass and a single tormentil by the roadside. Given the relatively harsh weather conditions in Cow Green, most of the flowers were what can best be described as 'stunted' ie. miniature versions of the same flowers which can be found only a couple of miles lower down the dale.

Our meetings in June are as follows:

Mon 3rd June Bowlees walking downstream from Wynch bridge. Meet 2:00 pm

Wed 19th June Smardale. Meet 11:00 am Lune Springs Café, Newbiggin on Lune. Bring packed lunch.

Fri 28th June Hayberries. Meet 2:00 pm We hope to find bee orchids.