Forum report Wild flower group - March 2023

In February there was another first for the Wild Flower Group as we held a workshop to look at how to identify trees in winter. 19 of us met in the morning at Cotherstone Village Hall where we were welcomed by the Tees Swale team from the AONB. The Tees Swale team told us a little about the work they are doing to enhance the meadows in Teesdale and Swaledale. The teamwork with local farmers and identify meadows which can be reseeded with local wild flowers. We survey the results in the increase in wild flowers and the changes to the bee population. The team are also growing wild flowers and local trees to restore the area.

We used the Woodland Trust Twig ID workshop and Simona from Tees Swale had brought in bunches of twigs numbered 1-12 which we could then match up to our ID sheets. After this we set off around the area following the route map for the Trees For Cotherstone Tree walk. We could put our learning into practice identifying the trees we passed. The village has fine examples of native and non-native trees.

We returned to the hall and were treated to a buffet lunch provided by the AONB. The walk was well subscribed and we plan to arrange another similar event for the Teesdale U3A weekend workshop programme in 2024.

On the 1st March we held another meeting focused on lichens and mosses and led by Sue and Les Knight. There was a pleasing turn out of 18 brave souls who faced the heavy rain which thankfully cleared up as the meeting started.

We looked at lichens on the siliceous/sandstone wall near the car park to introduce some of the terms applicable to this group of organisms. Lichens are a symbiotic relationship of a fungus and an alga, with both partners benefitting from the relationship. The fungus forms most of the thallus of the organism and gives it its name. It provides shelter the alga which forms a thin layer just below the surface. The fungal cells stop the alga from drying out, so allowing it to colonise this exposed habitat. The alga benefits its algal partner by photosynthesising and providing sugars for the fungus.

While looking at the range of lichens on trees it was pointed out that historical pollution may be one reason that the trunks of some of the mature trees were fairly devoid of lichens whereas some of the younger branches had been colonies. Some lichens are tolerant of nitrate pollution e.g. the yellow Xanthoria parietina.

We found several mosses which illustrated the two different growth forms in this group – upright mosses (acrocarpous mosses) – upright stems with capsules growing on thin stalks (or seta) which arise from the top of the moss stem and trailing mosses (pleurocarpous mosses) – with a branched stem, often flattened against the substrate. (We didn't see any capsules on these but their seta grow from the side). Mosses also differ in the characters of their leaves e.g., shape, +/- a hair point, +/- teeth on the leaf.

The next meetings will be taking a look at emerging spring flowers. In April we will have 2 walks.

Wednesday 12th April 23 2.00pm meeting at Egglestone Abbey

Wednesday 26th April 23 2.00pm meeting at the Desmesnes, Barnard Castle

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