

Nectarworks News

January 2015

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Moss carder bee in Upper Teesdale 2014

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One of the
AONB family

Flower-rich bank in Upper Teesdale.



Ruth collecting seed by hand.



A bank rich in melancholy thistles.



Teaming up with Kew

Nectarworks project officer, Ruth Starr-Keddle, has developed an exciting new partnership with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew - UK Native Seed Hub. Ruth has been collecting the seed of wood crane's-bill, globeflower, melancholy thistle and great burnet - all upland hay meadow specialists. The seeds are sent to Kew for storage in the Millennium Seed Bank and some are being grown in production beds at Wakehurst Place. The population of these plants will be built up until it is large enough for seeds to be harvested and returned to the North Pennines where they can be added to our upland hay meadows. Ruth will be collecting more wood crane's-bill and devil's-bit scabious seeds this summer.

Fabulous flower-rich banks!

Preliminary surveys have confirmed that steep banks are much more flower-rich than adjacent hay meadows and are even richer than we had expected. In a meadow, the average number of species in a square metre is 17 - 20 whereas on the banks we have found the average number to be 20 - 39. The habitats on the banks are much more varied than expected and the most botanically important sites are wetter rather than drier. Key plants of high conservation status include wood crane's-bill, globeflower, melancholy thistle, great burnet and Lady's-mantle.



Wood crane's-bill.

Nectarworks is a North Pennines AONB Partnership project that aims to enthuse, educate and enable communities to take action for bumblebees and other pollinators by restoring and increasing flower-rich habitats across the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The project began in May 2013 and will run until March 2017.

Talking to farmers

To find out more about past and present management of steep, flower-rich banks in meadows, Ruth has been interviewing local farmers. We had assumed that these areas were unmanaged but Ruth has learned that although the banks are not cut because they are so steep, they are nonetheless a valuable grazing resource. After the hay has been cut, farmers put cattle or sheep straight into the meadows to graze the 'coarser' grasses and wildflowers on the uncut edges and bankside areas. A number of older farmers recalled scything the steep banks in the past.

What's buzzing on the banks?

During the summer of 2014 we employed entomologist Andy Jukes to survey the nectar-feeding invertebrates on ten flower-rich banks in Upper Teesdale and Allendale. He recorded a total of 177 different species of which 54 species were hoverflies and 49 species were beetles. The rare moss carder bee (*Bombus muscorum*) was recorded from a number of the banks in Upper Teesdale. This is excellent news because the presence of this bee indicates not only the existence of a rich diversity of flowering plants but also linkage between flower-rich sites. Another key finding was the importance of the wetland elements of the flower-rich banks. All the species of high conservation interest recorded are associated with wetland habitats and if these species are to persist, the wet character and botanical diversity of these sites must be retained.

Valuable verges

The roadside verges of the North Pennines are an important refuge for rare upland hay meadow plants. This summer, using our specially-designed machine that can harvest from hard to reach places, we collected seed from flower-rich verges in Teesdale and Allendale. The seed was then spread on nearby species-poor meadows. We focussed on plants such as wood crane's-bill, Lady's-mantle and water avens which were abundant on the verges but sadly no longer as common in the meadows.

On the look-out for wildflower hotspots

Places rich in wildflowers are often to be found on steep banks in meadows, roadside verges, riverbanks and railway embankments. We would like to know where these flower-rich sites are and this is where you can help. If you find a flower-rich patch, perhaps buzzing with bumblebees and butterflies, please note the location and let Ruth know. We are particularly looking for grassland patches with an abundance of flowers like wood crane's-bill, great burnet, common knapweed, betony and devil's-bit scabious.

Andy Jukes surveying nectar-feeding invertebrates.



Harvesting seed from a road verge in Allendale.



Smallholders learning about rush management.



Common knapweed.



North Pennines Smallholder Network

Over the last year, a network of North Pennines smallholders has begun to take shape and after preliminary meetings, a website was set up by an Allendale smallholder (www.northpenninessmallholders.co.uk).

With direction from the smallholder community, we have run a range of successful workshops including events on meadow management, rush management and bumblebee identification. In the coming year, further workshops will be run following the interests and needs of North Pennines smallholders. Potential topics include pesticide training, pasture management and woodland management.

Children from Forest of Teesdale Primary School planting their nectar garden.



Children from Rookhope Primary School practice their Bee Musical songs.



Bringing a meadow to people with visual impairment.



Touching the meadow

It is difficult for elderly people with visual impairments to access and enjoy the wonder of a meadow in bloom. Teaming up with Karen Scott, of Low Way Farm in Holwick, we took a different approach by bringing the meadow into Karen's Farmhouse Kitchen café. Vases of meadow grasses decorated each table and we talked about and passed around a selection of special meadow plants. This gave the group a chance to touch and smell the leaves and flowers and enjoy their different textures and scents. A bumblebee caught briefly in a pot even enabled them to feel its frustrated buzz! Hay making has a rich cultural tradition and talking about and touching the plants brought back many memories for the group.

Schools all a-buzz

Children from three primary schools in the North Pennines have created nectar gardens in their school grounds in order to help our struggling bumblebees. With support from Nectarworks Community Officer, Mandy Oliver, Rookhope, Forest of Teesdale and Brough Community primary schools have been learning all about bumblebees and why they are so important in the production of our food. The children have planted a mixture of herbs, hardy perennials and spring-flowering bulbs around their school grounds. The nectar and pollen-rich flowers will attract bumblebees and provide them with a source of food from early spring to late summer. As an added bonus, the children will be able to observe pollination, growth, lifecycles and habitats in their own outdoor classroom.

A bumblebee visitor

What's it like to have six legs? Why do you have a sting? Are your feet really smelly? These are just a few of the questions pupils from Wearhead Primary School asked Bess the bumblebee when she took time out of her busy nectar and pollen collecting schedule to chat with the children. Excited by all the fascinating facts they had learnt about bumblebees, the children then surveyed their school grounds. They will now plan how to make the school more bumblebee-friendly, create a nectar garden and graduate as Bumblebee Champions later this year.



Mandy dresses as Bess the bumblebee.

Bee musical

Children from Rookhope and Forest of Teesdale primary schools have used their knowledge of bumblebees in a creative and fun song-making activity. Working with four Community Music students from Sunderland University, the children wrote lyrics and composed music for songs about the magic of bumblebees. Once the songs had been refined and rehearsed, each school performed their own bumblebee song to an appreciative audience at the Nectarworks Open Morning at St John's Chapel Town Hall in April.

Action for bumblebees

An important aspect of Nectarworks is to inspire people to take action for pollinators by making their gardens, back yards and even window sills more bee-friendly. One of the ways we do this is by training volunteers to survey gardens. In May, the first group of volunteers took part in a day's training on bumblebee ecology and identification delivered by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. Survey skills were practiced and developed in the gardens of friends and neighbours and at an event at Eggleston Hall Gardens. The volunteers were then ready to undertake garden surveys for interested members of the public.

A passion for bumblebees

Little did Mary Crosby realise what the impact would be when she attended our bumblebee identification event. Since that day, Mary has become one of our star bumblebee volunteers, undertaking nine out of the 23 garden surveys completed this summer and she now volunteers for the Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BBCT) too. In December she shared her passion for bumblebees with the Weardale Wildlife Group and attended the BBCT Member's day in Edinburgh saying "I haven't forgotten them even if they have gone into hibernation!"

Mow a meadow

A third training course on the use and maintenance of the scythe was held in late July. Eight people learnt how to mow at Low Way Farm near Middleton in Teesdale under the ever-watchful eye of scything expert Steve Tomlin. Before setting off to mow their own meadows and gardens, the budding scythers discussed working together on scything tasks to make light work with many hands. Through our Nectarworks project, the North Pennines AONB Partnership will be running the Learn to Mow scything course one last time in July 2015. Contact Mandy Oliver for more details.



Learn to Mow scything training.



Mary Crosby getting the bug for bees!



Buff-tailed bumblebee.

Nectarworks Numbers

May 2013 to December 2014

64 flower-rich bank surveys

Flower-rich seed spread on **15** meadows (60ha)

8 workshops for smallholders

23 garden bumblebee surveys

329 children involved in Nectarworks for Schools

3 school nectar gardens created

Mini films

If you would like to see the beauty of a flower-rich bank in bloom or the harvesting & spreading machinery in action or children taking part in Nectarworks activities, why not take a look at our three mini films? You'll find them on the Nectarworks page of the North Pennines AONB Partnership website (<http://www.northpennines.org.uk/Pages/Nectarworks.aspx>).

The North Pennines is one of England's most special places – a peaceful, unspoilt landscape with a rich history and vibrant natural beauty. In recognition of this it is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The area is also a Global Geopark – an accolade endorsed by UNESCO.

Want to know more or get involved?

Please contact:

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Learning to identify bumblebees.



Globeflower bank in Teesdale.



Red-tailed bumblebee on Devil's-bit scabious.

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The AONB Partnership has a Green Tourism award for its corporate office

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