



Wood crane's-bill

East Allen Valley Wildflower Walk

Purple petals, whirling wings

Welcome to the East Allen Valley within the North Pennines AONB and Global Geopark

In the past, the landscape here would have been dominated by the industrial trappings of lead mining but now it is a tranquil place important for hill sheep farming. Here in its upper reaches, the River East Allen is fast flowing and bounded by trees and wildflowers. In spring and summer, the sweeping green fields that surround it come to life with the calls and displays of birds like redshank and lapwing.

This circular walk from the village of Allenheads will introduce you to some of the special plants of the North Pennines and the creatures that depend on them. Along the way you'll discover plants that are adapted to the harsh conditions of the area and get a bee's-eye view of finding food.

Walk length: 5.5 miles (9km)

Start/finish: Allenheads parking area NY860 454

The spring and summer months are the time to enjoy this walk at its best. May and June are the time of peak activity for wading birds with June to August being the prime time for wildflowers.

Terrain: Public rights of way with gates and stiles and short stretches of minor road. This walk is mainly on paths and tracks through fields and beside the River East Allen. The route is gently undulating with a few short, steeper ascents and descents. Walking boots or strong shoes are recommended. Please keep to paths, take your litter home and leave gates as you find them.

Ground-nesting birds are common here. Please keep dogs under close control.

Public transport: For timetable information call Traveline on 0871 200 2233 (www.traveline.info).

Facilities: Allenheads Inn (www.allenheadsinn.co.uk); The Hemmel Café, Allenheads (www.thehemmelcafe.co.uk). Public toilets in Allenheads. Electric bikes for hire at The Hemmel (www.electricbikenetwork.org.uk).

Useful maps: Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Explorer – OL31 North Pennines



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.

A lovely 5.5 mile (9 km) walk from Allenheads in exploring the wonderful wildlife of wildflowers in the East Allen valley.

North Pennines AONB Partnership
www.northpennines.org.uk
+44 (0)1388 528801
info@northpenninesaonb.org.uk

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



Please ask us if you would like this document summarised in another format

info@northpenninesaonb.org.uk
01388 528801

Braille
Audio
Large Print

Image credits: Dipper, redstart, mayfly, snipe © northpenninesaonb.co.uk. All other images © North Pennines AONB Partnership.

Produced by the North Pennines AONB Partnership.

Supported by



In flight, bumblebees beat their wings 200 times per second. This immense rate enables them to carry their comparatively large bodies and fly fast but it demands a lot of energy. Queen bees use their own weight in sugar every day and in order to replenish this must visit 6,000 flowers. It is therefore not surprising they are often referred to as 'busy bees' – they are busy staying alive! Even with a full stomach, it is thought that a bumblebee is only 40 minutes away from starvation. Access to a diverse range of flowering plants throughout the spring and summer is essential to keep bumblebees on the wing.



Bumblebee pollinating a runner bean flower

Fuel hungry

Anyone with a garden, allotment or window box can help to support bees and other pollinators by planting a selection of pollen-rich and nectar-rich plants. Each and every new plant will help to build and reinforce the network of nectar sources across the landscape. For more details of which plants to choose, please visit www.northpennines.org.uk.

Flowering plants and pollinating insects have evolved alongside one another for millions of years and are utterly dependent on each other. The loss of flowering plants leads to the loss of bees and vice versa. Our own lives are tightly bound to this relationship because the production of much of our food depends on pollination by wild invertebrates. Tomatoes, apples, plums, strawberries, peas, beans... Bees are thought to be essential for one in every three mouthfuls of food that we eat and the value of pollination to UK agriculture has been estimated at more than £600 million every year. We do indeed all need bees.



Some foods that depend on insect pollination

We all need bees!



Stream edged by flower-rich grassland

Dipper

Sweet cicely on the bank of the River East Allen

Buff-tailed bumblebee with large 'pollen baskets' feeding on red clover

Precious edges

The banks and margins of the rivers that flow through the North Pennines are of vital importance to our wildlife. Long-recognised as crucial corridors along which different creatures move through the landscape, they are now often the best places to see wildlife that has all but disappeared elsewhere. A walk along the River East Allen clearly shows the richness and value of this narrow strip of land.

Flying high

A lack of pollution ensures an abundance of invertebrate life within the fast-flowing waters. Stoneflies and mayflies hatch out to dance in the dappled sunlight and lurking on the riverbed, the larvae of caddis fly build miniature tubular igloos of tiny stones. These insects are fed upon by a range of birds, some more secretive than others. Easy to see is the dipper that stands bobbing on a mid-stream rock before half-submerging to root out a tasty morsel. The trees that line the river are home to other insectivorous birds. Spotted flycatchers dart out to snap up insects in mid-air and a flash of russet and flick of a tail may draw your eye to a handsome redstart.



Redstart

Bee lines

Many wildflowers bloom along the banks of the East Allen, their colours and shapes subtly changing as spring moves through summer. Look for the soft whites and creams of wild garlic, sweet cicely and meadowsweet and the pinks and purples of wood crane's-bill, knapweed and devil's-bit scabious. The abundance of wildflowers makes the riverbanks important foraging habitats for bumblebees and other pollinators and they are happy to feed from any plant that produces pollen or nectar. In places the native plants are joined by 'introduced' species such as rosebay willowherb and Himalayan balsam. These species can be invasive and may out-compete other plants but, if you're a bee, they are nonetheless good places to forage.



Devil's-bit scabious

Mayfly





- 1 From the car park, take the track with Allenheads Inn on your right and go through the gate ahead. Follow the footpath sign to the left off the track and onto a small path.
- 2 Go straight ahead towards a gate leading up to a cottage and just before the gate, cross a bridge and turn right onto a path between trees and a wall. Continue in the same direction as this path joins a track, heading uphill past buildings on the right.
- 3 Take the right hand fork in the track by the large house, following it downhill to a cottage. Take the small path to the right of the cottage, leading downhill and over the river to join the road.
- 4 Turn left along the road and continue out of the village; cross the bridge on the left.
- 5 Take the first footpath on the right and continue ahead with the river on the right.
- 6 After passing a bridge and ford the track bends to the left. Go straight ahead over a stile and continue along the bank with the river on the right.
- 7 Pass the churchyard on the left and join the road.
- 8 Turn left and follow the road past buildings. Go through the gate and follow the footpath sign to the right heading towards a building.
- 9 Cross the road and walk down the road opposite with the river on the right.
- 10 Cross the bridge and turn left through a gate onto a stony track up the hill. Follow the track left round the house and take the small stone steps on the right, through a gate into the field.
- 11 Turn left and walk around the edge of the meadow to the farm. Turn right and then go through the gate on the right.
- 12 Walk directly across the meadow and cross the stile, then head left across the next meadow and go through the gate. Follow the track down to the road.
- 13 Turn left at the road and take the first track on the right towards a house. Walk in front of the house and cross the footbridge on the left.
- 14 Go diagonally right up the field to cross the stile, then head to the buildings at the top of the field and cross the two ladder stiles.
- 15 Turn immediately left along the wall and follow this, going through a gate and over a stile to exit the field through the gate at the bottom.
- 16 Cross the road and go through the gate ahead, head diagonally right to cross the stile. Continue diagonally across the fields to a stile in front of some buildings.
- 17 Cross the road and the stile opposite. Then cross the next two fields and head to the track to the right of the building.
- 18 Turn right and follow the track to meet the road. Turn left, cross the bridge and then turn right and walk back to the village.

© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved.
Durham County Council. LA 100049055. 2015

Heavy metal fan

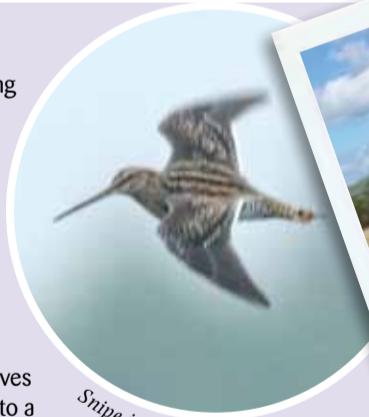
You may notice the bright faces of mountain pansies growing amid the grass along the riverside path throughout the summer. These lovely flowers vary considerably from pale yellow to deep purple and pink. Many of the soils here contain high levels of lead and other heavy metals - a result of mining in the past. Though toxic to most plants, the mountain pansy is able to thrive in these lead-rich soils.



Mountain pansy

Drumming above

You may hear a strange whirring noise as you walk through the damp meadows beyond Elpha Green. Look up and you might see a small bird with a long bill diving earthwards. This is a snipe and it is drumming. As it dives, the air rushes past its outer tail feathers generating a unique sound. This display serves to attract a mate and lay claim to a nesting territory.



Snipe in flight



The River East Allen

Cattle in the East Allen valley

Buzz pollination

Look out for a large Rugosa rose bush next to a cottage. If you pause to enjoy its sweet scent, you may notice a bumblebee frenetically buzzing as it turns round and around inside the flower. By vigorously vibrating its body, the bee causes the flower to release its pollen. This provides the bee with a nourishing source of food and when it transfers some to adjacent flowers, pollination is ensured.



Bluff-tailed bumblebee releasing pollen in a Rugosa rose

Please freeze!

Wood crane's-bill is one of the most characteristic plants of North Pennines upland hay meadows. Now largely restricted to the few remaining species-rich meadows, it can nonetheless be easily seen growing on the riverbanks and track verges on this route. In order to germinate, the seed of wood crane's-bill must be exposed to frost. The freezing action partially breaks down the hard protective seed coat to enable the first tender root to emerge.



Wood crane's bill

Where is the wood?

As you pause for breath while climbing this steep bank in spring, you might notice a delicate white flower with its face turned to the sun. This is a wood anemone. Most typically found carpeting the woodland floor, it is nonetheless not unusual to find this lovely plant out in the open in an upland hay meadow. Long ago there would have been many more trees in this landscape and plants like wood anemone, wood crane's-bill and bluebell would then have flourished within sunny woodland glades. Though the trees have disappeared, these plants remain to brighten a different view.



Wood anemone

Humming trees

In May, as you walk below the sycamore trees that line the edge of a field, pause and listen. The trees may be humming! The flowers of these trees are good sources of nectar and many of the bees that you see busy above you will be queens industriously feeding before they lay their first eggs. Most bumblebees set up their colonies in abandoned mouse or vole burrows. Here they lay their eggs on a small mound of pollen mixed with wax and incubate them like a tiny bird.



Sycamore trees