



Globe flower

# Upper Teesdale Wildflower Walk

## Double dumplings and diddery docks

### Welcome to Upper Teesdale in the North Pennines AONB and Global Geopark

At the heart of this wide valley, the River Tees snakes through a series of rounded hummocks or 'drumlins' that were deposited and smoothed by glaciers more than 12,000 years ago. Now an area dominated by grassland, livestock grazing is central to the local economy and attractive white-washed farm buildings scatter the landscape.

This circular walk from the parking area at Hanging Shaw 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 dance and others that keep insects captive. You might even see rare bees and long-distance visitors from Africa.

**Walk length:**  
3.5 miles (5.7km)

**Start/finish:**  
Hanging Shaw parking area  
NY867 297

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 Tees & Harwood Beck. 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:**  
Bowlees Visitor Centre: café, information, toilets, parking, e-car charging point, activities (www.visitbowlees.org.uk). Langdon Beck Hotel (www.langdonbeckhotel.com).

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



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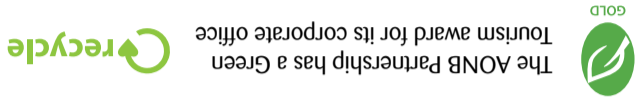
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A dramatic 3.5 mile (5.7km) walk from Hanging Shaw parking area in Upper Teesdale exploring the wonderful wildlife of wildflowers.

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.



### High value for nature

On this walk you may be lucky enough to see wildlife that is so rare as to have almost disappeared from other parts of the country. You will pass through grassland vivid with the colours of flowering plants as the haunting song of a curlew floats on the breeze. A loud 'plop' from a small stream will tell of the presence of a water vole.



Water vole

### Traditional farming

Why is there so much wildlife here when so much has been lost elsewhere? An important reason is the type of farming practiced in Upper Teesdale and other parts of the North Pennines – low intensity, traditional livestock farming. Through special 'agri-environment' schemes, farmers here are supported to maintain their hay meadows and care for ground-nesting birds. These 'high nature value farmers' do much more than this though; by farming extensively and using few chemicals they help to protect soils, store carbon, supply clean water and maintain a breath-taking landscape for us all to enjoy.



Alpine bistort



Low intensity farming maintains a mosaic of grassland habitats



Curlew



Grazing by cattle creates a varied vegetation structure

### Viviparous

Upper Teesdale is renowned for a number of plants that are characteristic of arctic and alpine regions of Europe. One such plant is alpine bistort and it grows along the banks of the river here. The short flower spikes are topped by small white flowers and below these you may see tiny round 'bulbils'. Rather than reproduce through seeds, each of these miniature bulb-like structures is able to develop into a new plant and sometimes tiny new leaves can be seen growing from them while they're still attached to the parent plant.

### Look out for dumbledore!

The range and diversity of flowering plants along the banks of the Harwood Beck means that bumblebees and other nectar-feeders have access to a source of food from spring through to late summer. Queen bees that have newly emerged from hibernation will feed on riverside willows and as their colonies develop the workers will feed on a succession of plants from wood crane's-bill and water avens to meadowsweet, knapweed and devil's-bit scabious. In times past, bumblebees have been known by many names including 'dumbledores' (in Somerset or Sussex) and 'foggie-toddlers' (in Scotland).



Bumblebee feeding on melancholy thistle



Common carder bee feeding on water avens

The carder bees are so named because they gather and comb or 'card' dry vegetation when they make nests amongst tussocks of grass. This is unlike most species of bumblebee which simply use abandoned mouse or vole nests underground.

### Bee nests

There is a wonderful example of this in Upper Teesdale. The meadows here, support a great diversity of plants and edges within them, support a great diversity of plants and edges also a species of bumblebee that has all-but disappeared elsewhere in the country – the moss carder bee. Though virtually indistinguishable from the common carder bee, if you 'know your bees' and see a carder on this walk that looks bright and more yellow than normal, you may well be looking at a moss carder.

### Moss carder bee

greater range of bee species. plants are able to support a large variety of flowering

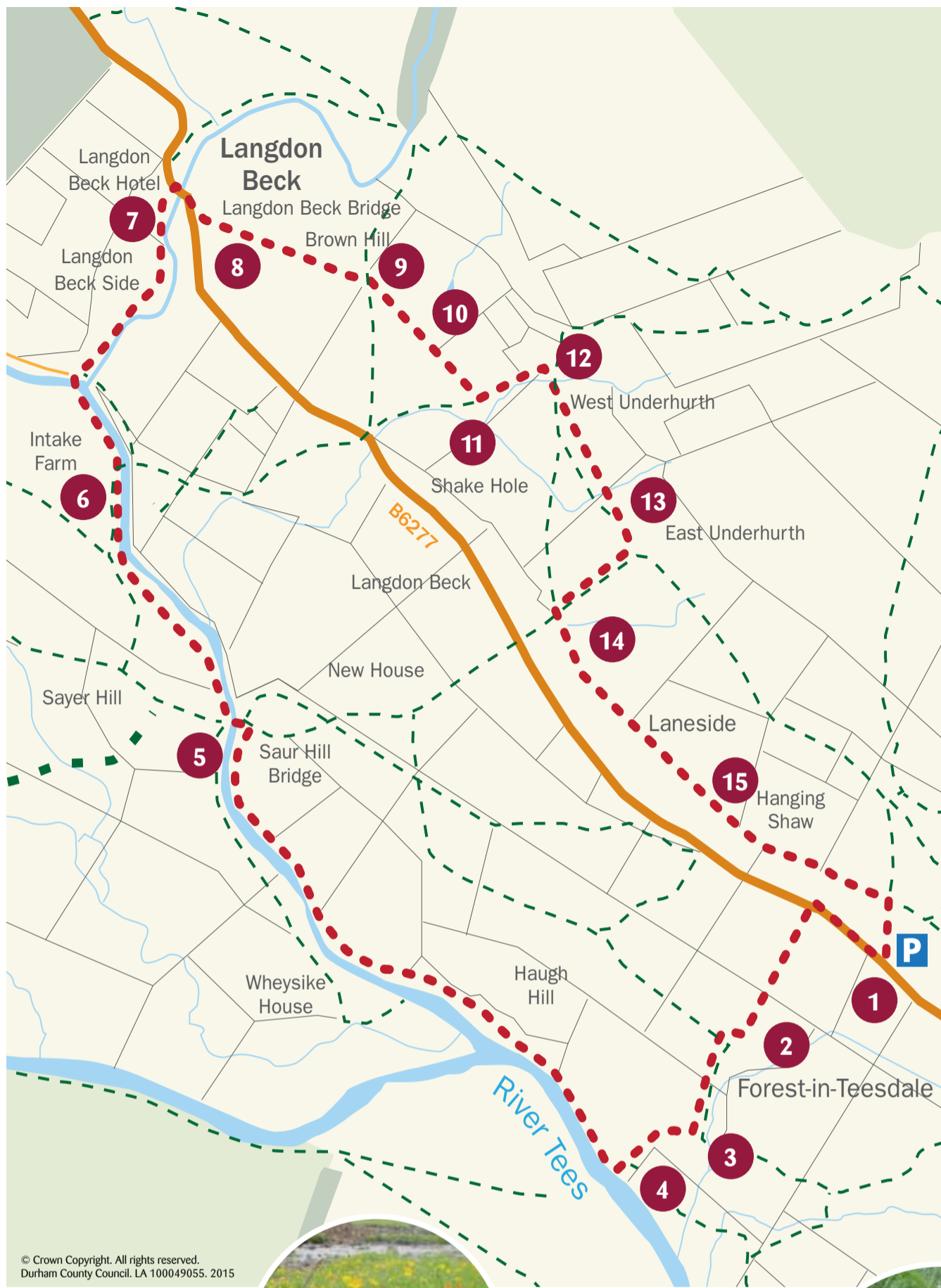


Moss carder bee

means that habitats with one another. It also from competing with separate species anatomy prevents tiny difference in tubular flowers. This the nectar in long, tongues can reach and bees with long from shallow flowers tongues are able to feed too. Bees with short different lengths of tongue stripes and, amazingly, they have

### Tongues and flowers

Different species of bumblebee have different patterns of



- 1 From the parking area, turn right along the main road and then left at the footpath sign, along a track.
- 2 Pass to the right of the farm buildings and continue down the hill and through a gate in the wall.
- 3 After passing the white building on your right and just before reaching the metal gate in front of you, turn right at the footpath sign through the wall; continue through the gate ahead.
- 4 Turn left along the fence line and walk down the bank towards the river. Just before the bridge turn right along the Pennine Way. Continue along the bank with the river on your left until you reach a bridge.
- 5 Cross the bridge and turn right through a small gate. Continue along the bank with the river on your right, keeping walls and fences on your left.
- 6 At a small gate leading into a farmstead, cross the paddock and go through the gate opposite. Continue on to cross the river at the weir and turn right to join the road.
- 7 Continue along the road with the river on your right. When you reach a T-junction, turn right over a stone bridge, cross the road and take the track heading up the bank.
- 8 Go through the gate, turn left and walk up the field edge with the wall on your left.
- 9 Cross the ladder stile and walk towards the farm, keeping the wall on the left.
- 10 Cross the next two stiles. Walk straight through the farmyard and continue along the track.
- 11 At the sharp, right-hand bend, turn left through a gate onto another track. Walk uphill and follow the footpath sign off to the left and through a gate, keeping the farm on your right.
- 12 Continue up the track and below the ruined house, turn right through a gate; cross the field to a stile. After crossing the small stream, follow the track down and head across the field to the stone stile, keeping the wall on your right.
- 13 Cross the field with the wall on the right and cross a stile. Bear right and follow the wall to meet a track. Turn right and follow the track down.
- 14 At the second gateway turn left and keep going ahead through fields keeping the wall to the right.
- 15 Continue past the building on the right to join a track. Follow this until you reach the road, turn right and return to the parking area

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## Rainbow hues

The banks of the River Tees and Harwood Beck abound with a wonderful range of flowering plants in a host of colours. The flowers of some are tiny but exquisite. Here you may find mountain pansy, milkwort, wild thyme, tormentil, pignut, butterwort, bird's-foot trefoil, orchids and hawkbits.



Bird's-foot trefoil

## Quaking grass...

...diddery docks, totter grass, ladies' hands... these and many other names have been used to describe the grass *Briza media*. If you find this delicate plant dancing amongst the other grasses you will see why it has inspired such imaginative descriptions.

The purplish, flattened seed heads are suspended on fine, stiff branchlets which shiver and quake in

the breeze. Especially associated with the most flower-rich upland hay meadows, quaking grass is one of the first plants to disappear if too much fertilizer is added.

## Golden globes

For a short time in early summer a dramatic plant flowers in Upper Teesdale. Known locally as 'double dumplings', globe-flowers can be seen along the bank of the Harwood Beck and in swathes on steep slopes within hay meadows. A delicate pale yellow, the petals of these large flowers overlap to form soft spheres. If you gently part the petals you might find small flies trapped inside. In return for pollinating the flower, these special flies lay their eggs here and the larvae feed on some of the developing seeds.



Globe-flowers

## Steep refuges

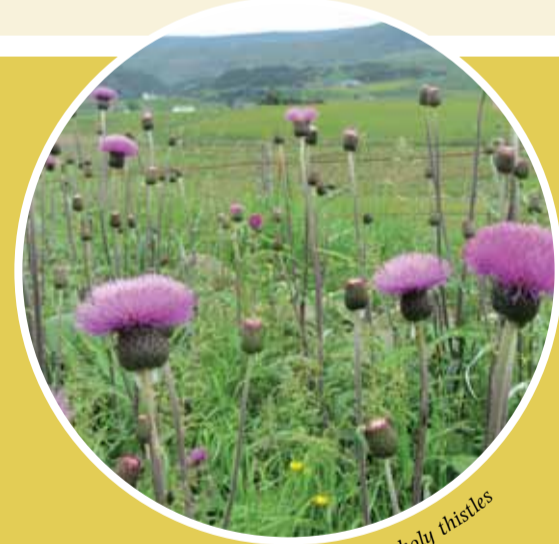
Slopes and banks are good places to look for interesting and unusual wildlife. The inaccessibility of these places means that they tend to escape the impact of farm machinery, grazing livestock and fertilizers. The footpath passes close to several banks; here you might see the scalloped leaf of Lady's mantle with a bead of dew at its heart. Upper Teesdale is one of the most important places in the country for Lady's mantles, with nine different species found here. Banks are good places for carder bees which make their nests at the base of tussocks of grass. In open meadows these nests are vulnerable to farm machinery but on steep banks they are safe and undisturbed.

## Good for birds too!

As you walk up the road towards the Langdon Beck Hotel, look to your right across the stream and you will see another bank. This one is soft and eroding but is nonetheless wonderful for wildlife because in summer it is home to a colony of sand martins. These birds nest in burrows excavated in the silt and then hunt for insects on the wing as they swoop up and down the river. Long-distance migrants, sand martins spend the winter in southern Africa. House martins, a close relative of the sand martin, can be seen nesting on the nearby Langdon Beck Hotel.



Steep bank with Lady's mantle



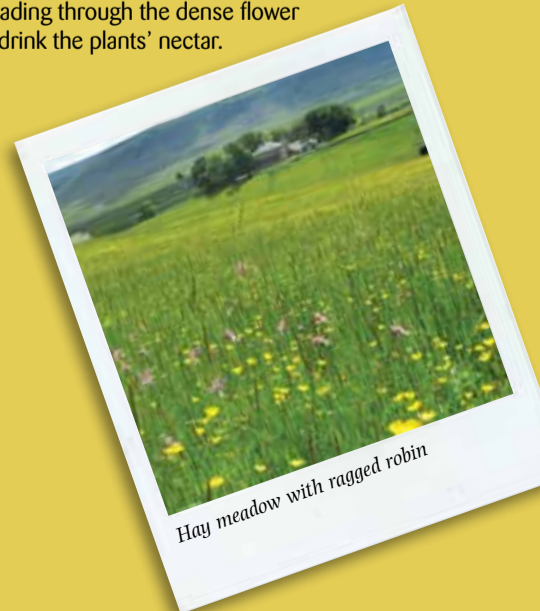
Melancholy thistles

## Feasting bees

In late June, at the edge of a flower-rich hay meadow you will walk through a mass of melancholy thistles. Lower your eyes from the fantastic view across Teesdale and watch the bumblebees wading through the dense flower heads as they drink the plants' nectar.



Sand martin



Hay meadow with ragged robin



Quaking grass