

## ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

At our April meeting Tony Harrison (a retired soil scientist) gave an extremely informative presentation on soil degradation. Soil is home to an amazing range of organisms (most of which are too small to see with the naked eye) and has a complex and easily damaged structure. Since it's the source (directly or indirectly) of all our food, soil health is vitally important to all of us.

Unfortunately, many current farming practices are seriously damaging our soil. Removal of hedges, the use of heavy farm equipment and overuse of pesticides have all led to soil degradation. Wind and water erosion has caused a devastating loss of soil fertility in many countries.

Fortunately there's a lot that can be done to improve matters. Perhaps not surprisingly, a return to traditional farming methods can make a big difference. Planting more trees and hedges can stabilize the soil and reduce the risk of flooding. And "no-till" methods of cultivation, removing the need for ploughing and harrowing with heavy equipment, have proved remarkably effective in improving soil structure without diminishing crop yields. So it's not all doom and gloom!

Our May meeting took place outdoors, because the Victoria Hall was being used as a polling station. Several members took part in a tour of Wilkinson Wood, currently being restored as a nature reserve. A full report on the visit by Sheila Handley appears elsewhere in this issue.

Our June meeting didn't take place at all, because it would have clashed with the Jubilee bank holiday on 2 June. So we look forward to our next meeting on 7 July, when we shall be discussing the question "do environmental protests achieve anything?". If you have strong views on this issue, why not come along and share them with us? For more details, phone me on 59365 or email me at [johnpleakins@gmail.com](mailto:johnpleakins@gmail.com).

*John Eakins*

## ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS -WILKINSON WOOD

The first visit of this season for members of the Environmental Awareness Group was to Wilkinson Wood, a small area of woodland sandwiched between Fernleigh Road and Rockland Road. This woodland of around an acre is managed by volunteers, most of whom live close by. They are called the Wilkinson Group. The land is owned by SLDC who, when approached readily agreed to allow the group to manage this area. The land which has always been woodland was originally part of the woodland stretching right up the slope to Grange Fell Road. When the houses on Rockland Road were built, the wood became separated from the main area.

The Volunteers' aim is to encourage wildlife – birds, butterflies, bees and other insects to the area. Selected trees have been felled to create a glade at one end, creating ideal conditions for plants needing a higher light intensity and which in turn will attract the nectar feeding butterflies, bees and other insects.

As we walked into the wood near the glade the floor was carpeted with wild garlic - in flower just now and smelling delightful. Groups of bluebells were dotted around and the odd forget-me-not plants. There were dandelions a plenty growing there though these are not normally found in woods. Rowan trees and hawthorns were in bloom amongst holly, hazel, sycamores, birch, elder, bird cherry and some Portuguese laurel. A horse chestnut seedling had also appeared.

Climbing up the trees and shrubs we could see honeysuckle, old man's beard and ivy. The ivy produces its flowers in late season so food is available when most other plants have finished and are in seed. A patch of St John's Wort covered one area competing with dogs' mercury and ground elder.

Wood from the felled trees could be seen in piles, creating the ideal habitat for small animals and overwintering insects and in shady areas ferns were becoming established.

We did see a holly blue butterfly flitting between plants and apparently the wood is also home to speckled wood, red admiral, orange tip, peacock, wall brown, large white and tortoiseshell butterflies.

Our guide was Mr Lamb who is one of the volunteers and has been involved in woodland management in the past. He introduced us to the wood and pointed out various plants and trees and answered our many questions. Thank you Mr Lamb for a very enjoyable visit.

This is truly a little gem of an area and needs to be enjoyed by more folk. It is a very peaceful place in which to wander or sit on the seat and watch the birds and butterflies in their never-ending quest for food.