

Living in this hidden gem of countryside, largely overlooked in favour of its neighbours the Peak District and the Yorkshire Dales, it is sometimes easy not to notice the huge diversity of flora and fauna that exists on our doorstep.

When Blackshaw Environmental Action Team (BEAT) was set up in 1998 it asked local environmentalist Charles Flynn to carry out wildlife surveys of Stansfield Moor, the results of which were published in the last Village Plan.

Since then BEAT in conjunction with Calder Future has worked very closely with Charles and commissioned him to carry out two further wildlife surveys within the Parish. These surveys looked at Colden Clough, now designated a local nature reserve and Jumble Hole, both steep sided valleys, with fast flowing streams running through them.

Colden Clough

This is a large area of attractive semi-natural woodland with some areas of grassland and heathland. The footpaths and bridleway, that run along the valley sides give the visitor wonderful panoramic views. A fast flowing stream known as Colden Water runs through it, joining the River Calder at Mytholm. There are also rocky crags on the valley sides, some of which are the result of quarrying in the past. The valley floor gives more evidence to human activity, particularly to the early years of the industrial revolution - a kiln, old chimneys, weirs and millponds can still be seen.

There are many different habitats in the Clough and the following is a brief description of these.

Colden Water – runs right through the bottom of the valley and is best observed from one the footbridges that span the beck. One of the best areas to observe the natural habitats in the Clough is at the clapper bridge in Hebble Hole. Here some of the plants you will see are Common Valerian, Reed Canary Grass, Common Bent, and Cocksfoot. Most of the other vegetation is on the rocks in the beck or along its sides and consists mainly of mosses and liverworts.

Hérons, Dippers and Grey Wagtails can be seen using the beck Woodland area – this can be divided into four basic types:-

Oak-Birch-Rowan Woodland, Heather, Bilberry, Bramble, Wavy Hair Grass, Creeping Soft Grass and Broad Buckler Fern.

In spring and summer you are likely to hear the song of a Blackcap here as well as Willow Warblers and an occasional Chiffchaff.

Birch-Oak Woodland – although floristically less interesting it is extremely good for seeing birds. It is also a good place to find fungi; the Fly Agaric is particularly common under birch here as is the often-enormous Orange Birch Bolete.

Birch-Oak-Scots Pine Woodland – the understorey consists mainly of Heather, Bilberry and Moss, but there are some interesting fungi. These include the very distinctive Trumpet Chanterelle, which has veins rather than gills on the underside of the dark cap, and the Amethyst Deceiver.

Coal tits and Goldcrests live in this habitat but in summer are more likely to be heard than seen due to the leaf canopy.

Beech-Sycamore Woodland – in this habitat near the clapper bridge the ground layer is probably at its best. There is a most impressive display of wild flowers particularly in spring, with Bluebells, Wood Anemones, Ransoms, Pink Purslanes, Lesser Celandines and Dog's Mercury all in flower at the same time.

If you are here in May, you are likely to hear the song of the rare Wood Warbler coming from the sycamores.

Among the fungi found under the beech are the White Chanterelle, the Wood Hedgehog, the Beech Milkcap and the Green Brittlecap.

Just south of the clapper bridge there are some old millponds, which contain a quite special mix of plants, in particular the Eared Willow, which is at the southern limit of its British distribution in Calderdale. Also present is the Goat Willow, Marsh Marigold, Large Bitter Cress, Water Figwort and Reed Sweet Grass.

This is also one of the best places in the Clough to see dragonflies; the Large Red Damselfly and the Common Hawker are to be found here.

One of the best places to see bird life is on the paths above Foster and Bob Woods, Skylarks, Meadow Pipits, Curlews, Lapwings, Swifts, Swallows and birds of prey can be observed over the adjacent farmland. In winter sightings of Fieldfare, Redwing, Brambling, Siskin and Redpoll are quite common.

Jumble Hole

The Clough is a steep sided valley south of Blackshawhead between Todmorden and Hebden Bridge. It extends from Jumble Hole Road and Halifax road up to Hippins Bridge. Most of the valley above here is pasture and is known as Hippins Clough and Daisy bank Clough.

The main stream flowing through the Clough is known as Earnshaw Water. Two other smaller streams flow into the waters from the east while it runs through the Clough.

Most of the valley is wooded, consisting mainly of Durmast (Sessile) Oak, Downy Birch, Rowan and Holly, but both Beech and Sycamore are locally significant. In spring there is an extremely impressive display of flowers throughout the Clough.

The heathland (mainly high up on the western side, but with a few smaller areas lower down) consists mainly of Heather, Bilberry and some Cowberry. Purple Moor-Grass and Soft Rush are found in flushed areas. This is one of the few areas in Upper Calderdale that Linnets breed.

The pastures are flower rich containing large patches of Harebell, Pignut, Lesser Stichwort and Field Wood-Rush which support good butterfly populations, Small Copper, Wall Brown, Meadow Brown and Small Heath. The most important grasses in the sward are Common Bent, Sheep's Fescue and Wavy Hair Grass.

The upland Oak – Birch woods consists mainly of Durmast Oak and Downy Birch but is also home to Rowan, Hawthorn and Holly. The undergrowth consists of Bluebell, Sweet Vernal grass Lemon Scented Fern, Wood Sorrel and many other species.

Young woodland on the western side of the Clough consists almost entirely of Downy Birch. Rowan and Goat Willow are occasional here.

On the hillside Ransoms, Bluebells, Wood Anemone and Lesser Celandine give impressive displays in spring and early summer.

Near the Clapper Bridge lower down in the Clough Meadowsweet, Valerian, Yellow Pimpernel and Pink Purslane are to be found.

There is an abundance of breeding birds in Jumble Hole Clough giving wonderful bird watching opportunities throughout the year. Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Tawny Owl, Green Woodpecker, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Chiffchaff, Wood Warbler, Treecreeper and many other species are to be seen or heard throughout the Clough.

These descriptions of Colden Clough and Jumble Hole are a brief summary of the surveys carried out by Charles Flynn, local ecologist.

Phil Knowles