

Out on the Towans:

The scent of blackthorn and the skylark's song

by Martin Rule, Towans Ranger

As you receive this magazine, the brown winter plumage of the Towans will be gradually shifting to its palette of summer green.

All those amazing, colourful flowers, along with the birds, insects, lizards, adders and other creatures will be emerging from their dormancy or arriving back from foreign parts to uplift us once again. What a lovely time to be out and about in this huge natural garden!

Among the first flowers to appear are cowslips – paler relatives of the primrose, but growing right down in the short turf. These plants are quite localised in Cornwall, needing the calcareous soil found on the dunes. In April, one of my favourite natural 'combos' appears in some of the scrubber areas, as the white flowers of blackthorn appear on the bare branches, sometimes mixed in with lovely yellow gorse. It's a special spring moment for me when I suddenly catch their coconut scent on the air for the first time – it never ceases to make me smile!



If you would like to learn more about the wealth of flowers on the Towans, keep an eye on our website for guided walks this year. I would also recommend the highly readable book *Flora Britannica* by Richard Mabey. It's full of fascinating facts about old medicinal uses, folklore and various country names for plants.

We will also be running other wildlife events such as learning about the Dawn Chorus – another spring favourite. Again, just keep an eye on our website or Facebook page. Due to increasing demand, you'll need to book ahead for all our events to help us manage group safety, parking, and insurance requirements – thank you!

A popular summer bird – the skylark – has been heard singing already. This reminds me to issue a plea to the many of you who own and exercise dogs on the Towans. Please could you keep your dog on a lead during April to the end of June, in particular when close to tussocky areas of grass. Skylarks and meadow pipits both nest on the ground and can be seriously impacted by free-running dogs during the nesting season. Please spread the word among your dog walking friends!

Our wonderful Friends of the Towans volunteer group has had a very active winter season, mainly cutting back encroaching brambles, privet etc, to safeguard and expand the grassy areas and expose more bare sand. About 70% of the specialised invertebrates – beetles etc – which live in dunes need the open, younger phase dune vegetation. This is the very part that declines as dunes become more densely vegetated, or 'stabilised', over time. We've welcomed quite a few new people into our group already this year, but newcomers are always welcome, so if you'd like to get involved with our work just email me at martinrule@talktalk.net