Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

Nature of the Tees Valley

Tees Valley Museums

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Tees Valley Museums

Welcome to another edition of the Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

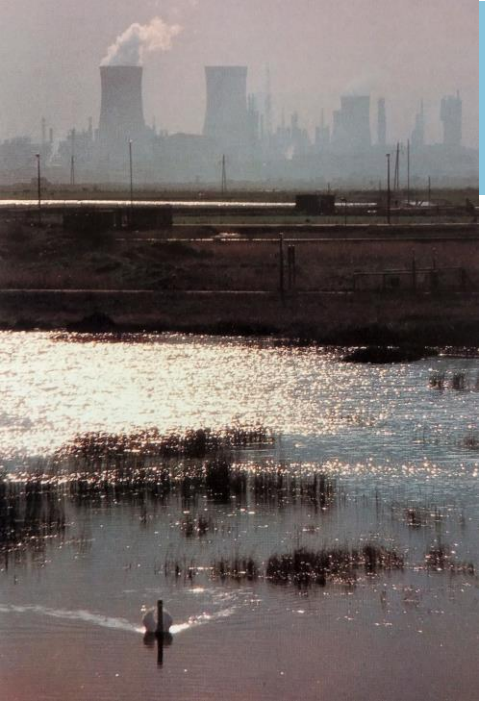
Each month we use objects and photos from our museums in the Tees Valley to take a closer look at the lives and stories from people in our area.

This month we look at the nature and wildlife of our home. We will look at the places you can go and some of the animals you can see, and we have activities you can take part in to enjoy our wildlife safely and creatively.

There are many different areas for nature to thrive in the Tees Valley, living between housing and industry. These include -

- **Woods**, like Lazenby Bank at Eston and Saltburn Gill.
- **Marshland**, including Portrack Marsh in Stockton and RSPB Salthome.
- **Meadowland** at Cowpen Bewley Park and Bowesfield Nature Reserve
- And don't forget our public parks like Preston Park and Stewart's Park, the beaches at Redcar and the grounds of Kirkleatham Museum.

Wildlife is all around us! You don't have to look far to find it!



The River Tees

The River Tees winds its way for 85 miles from its source in Cross Fell in the Pennines to the mouth of the river between Hartlepool and Middlesbrough.

Today the river is home to a wide range of wildlife. Salmon swim along the river and are frequent prey for predators like otters and seals who are skilled at water-based hunting, and birds like swans and cormorants are also seen peacefully living by the water.

The river has also had a long history with the industry in the area. Between the 1840s and 1970s it was heavily polluted and was impossible for nature to thrive. In recent years measures have been taken to reduce pollution and clean the river and nature has slowly returned.

If you were to take a walk through one of the many nature reserves by the banks of the River Tees you will see that our home is abundant with all kinds of wildlife!

Seals

Seals have appeared in the River Tees as far back as the 1500s, and used to breed in great numbers. However, their numbers plummeted in the 19th century with the arrival of heavy industry to the area.

Seals only started returning to the River in the 1960s, as industry collapsed and the water became cleaner, but it would take them another 40 years to start breeding again in the area.

You can see colonies of seals in the River Tees today, particularly at the aptly named Seal Sands.

Did you know…

When the Prince Bishops owned and managed Durham they would serve seals during special banquets!

Bird Watching

Birds are our most common kind of wildlife. You can see them anywhere and are pleasant to watch.

The Tees Valley, like the rest of the UK, is home to many different types of birds, from birds of prey, birds that prefer the river like terns and herons, and common garden birds like this Blue Tit painted by G. A. Julian.

Sit by an open window or somewhere quiet outside, take a moment to watch the birds. Watch how they interact with each other, listen to the sounds they make, and you could make a list of how many different species there are. You may be surprised what you see!

Starlings

On clear evenings, sometimes high above the Bowesfield and Portrack Marshes, thousands of starlings fly together in huge flocks. These are called murmurations and, while it is unknown why they do this, starlings do this in autumn and winter for around an hour before they roost for the night.

Have you seen a starling murmuration?

How would you describe the shapes they make in the sky?

A Rare Sight!

Birds of Prey, like sparrowhawks and kestrels, used to be a rare sight in the wild between the 500s and 1500s, as they were often used by people to catch pests and clean towns of waste.

They were then almost hunted to extinction as they would hunt game and farm birds on their own. Thankfully from 1954 it was made illegal to hunt them and they were successfully reintroduced into the wild.

Peregrine falcons are rare to see in the Tees Valley but they have been known to pass through the area on their way to breed.

Woodlands

Woodlands, like those at Saltburn Gill, Roseberry Topping and Guisborough Woods, are home to many kinds of bird and insect life. At certain times of the year flowers also bloom in these woods, like the bluebells near Roseberry Topping around May and June.

If you are lucky, and quiet enough, you can also find other kinds of mammals.

Roe Deer

Roe Deer are one of the most common deer in Britain. They like living within the area's woodlands, although they have been spotted around Coatham Marsh. They can be difficult to see in the wild since they are skittish and wary of humans.

There is an old tale from the Middle Ages about the last Lord of Romaldkirk who lived at Cotherstone Castle near Barnard Castle. He went out hunting one day but was warned to stay away from white animals.

However, when the hunt was almost over, he caught sight of a White Hart – possibly a white Roe Deer – and gave chase, only to meet his end when he plunged down a cliff.

Have a Go! Leaf-rubbing art

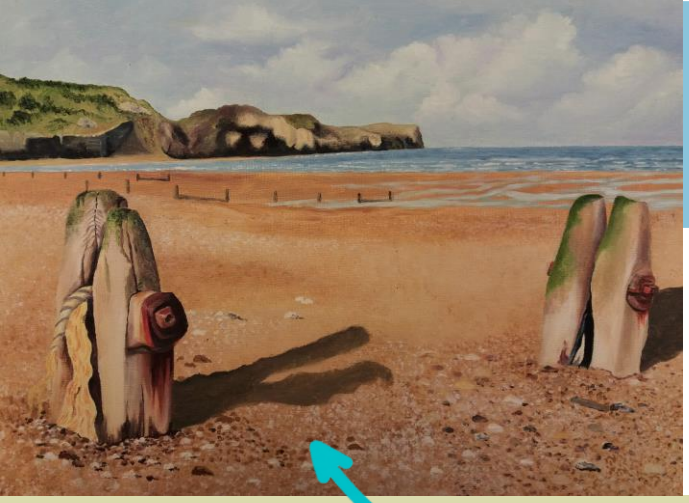
Try this fun activity to make your own colourful nature inspired art.

You will need:

- Paper
- Pencils, crayons and/or pastels
- A selection of leaves, please ask permission before you take any that are not from a garden or park.

Simply lay the paper over your leaf and gently rub your pencil or crayon on the paper. You will start to see the veins of the leaf come through.

Try experimenting with different shaped leaves. You can also try going over the details of your leaves with felt tip pen, and colour-in the background!



The Seaside

A lot of fun can be found walking by the beaches of Redcar and Seaton Carew, collecting shells, and looking for fossils, and taking in the sights.

Sensory Activity

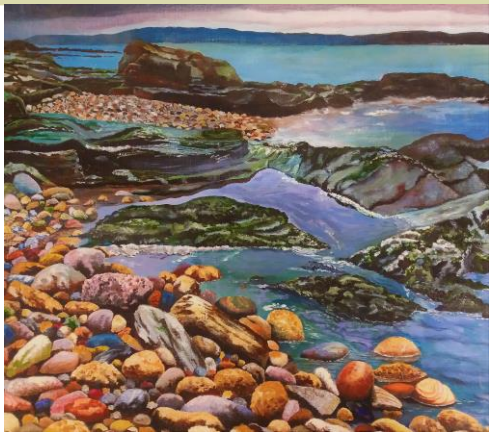
Look at this painting of Sandsend. If you could put yourself in this painting, what would you hear, feel and smell?

Would you hear the waves crashing in the sea?

Would you smell the salty sea air?

Would you feel the sand between your toes?

Rock-pooling



Rock-pools are formed when the tide goes out, leaving sea water trapped between the rocks. All sorts of strange animals can be found in rock-pools, like crabs, limpets and barnacles stuck onto rocks, and some wormy-looking creatures like ragworms and butterfish.

If you decide to try rock-pooling, remember that any wildlife you uncover cannot survive outside of its habitat for very long, so always return wildlife exactly where you found them.

Also remember that these animals are fragile and must be handled with care, and some may sting or nip in defence!

All images used in this pack are courtesy of Preston Park Museum and Grounds and Kirkleatham Museum and Grounds.

You can find all our Talking Tees Valley packs through the Tees Valley Museums website under ‘Latest News’ or here: https://teesvalleymuseums.org/news/

If you would like to share your stories or contact us about the packs, please e-mail teesvalleymuseums@stockton.gov.uk