



# Wild About Barrow

February/March 2023

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Spring is in the crouched position, ready to launch the new year. Buds are swelling, the ground is slowly warming and the days lengthening. Some cannot wait, however! Birds are already declaring their territory, beginning courtship and nest building. With climate change, the nesting season is changing. The British Trust for Ornithology reports the nesting season now starting a whole 30 days earlier than it did in the 1960s.

Some plants too, have started early. Blossom is blooming on some bushes and other little gems can be found heralding the eagerly awaited spring: see Wild Celebration.

There is a distinct tree theme to this edition with both a delve below and gaze above ground to find out more about these amazing life forms and two significant days coming up to mark their importance.

## Wild Celebration



Lawson cypress  
(*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*)



Primrose  
(*Primula vulgaris*)



Midland Hawthorn  
(*Crataegus laevigata*)



Garlic mustard  
(*Alliaria petiolara*)

Robin on hazel  
(*Erithacus rubecula*)

Sweet violet  
(*Viola odorata*)

Have you spotted any nature delights around the village? Send your photos to [Wildaboutbarow@gmail.com](mailto:Wildaboutbarow@gmail.com) or just let us know where you saw it and we'll take a snap.

## **A lifeline of nectar**

While early flowers are a joy to us, they are essential for moths and butterflies that rely on their nectar when sources in late winter are scarce.

The easily identifiable garlic mustard is frequently found under hedges as it dislikes being in the sun all day, hence its other name, Jack by the Hedge. It is also used by no less than 4 butterfly caterpillars: the orange tip, green veined white, bath white and orange tip.

This common plant is useful to us humans too. Being a member of the cabbage family, it is edible. The seed-containing pods can be fried or the seeds crushed as a condiment, while the leaves can be added to savoury dishes or eaten raw.

## **Bejewelled Lawson Cypress**

Coniferous trees, including the Cyprus shown above, evolved earlier than deciduous trees and do not bear flowers; they are wind pollinated. The pollen may be red, green or yellow and the male cones producing it give the effect of the tree being sprinkled with small drops of colour. The Lawson cypress, growing near the entrance to Breachfield Road, as well as the shower of red male cones, has female cones which have developed over the last 2 years and now opened to release the seed.

Conifers include the **oldest, tallest and largest trees**.

Did you know?

- ❖ The *Methuselah*, a bristlecone pine, was thought to be the oldest living thing on Earth. It is at least 4,851 years old. However, it has been challenged by a Patagonian cypress growing in Chile which is purported to be 500 years older!
- ❖ A redwood named *Hyperion* is the tallest living tree, measuring a whopping 115.85m. For protection, its exact Californian location is kept secret. As a comparison, the tallest tree in Britain is a douglas fir in Scotland measuring 68.4m and most UK trees are a lot shorter than that.
- ❖ *General Sherman* is the world's largest tree measured by volume. It is a giant sequoia and can also be found growing in California. It is truly a giant standing at 83m tall and over 11m in diameter at the base, placing it amongst the tallest, widest and longest-lived of all trees on the planet.

WWW

Read on, this is not a high tech paragraph but one that is in fact hundreds of millions of years old. Yes, nature got there rather earlier than we did. I am talking about the Wood Wide Web which has revolutionised our understanding of trees. Back in the late 1990s, Susan Simard, now a professor, found that trees are connected through a fungal network, enabling them to form societies and look after each other. It really is mind-blowing stuff!

Fine root hairs of trees join with tiny filaments of fungus to form a mycorrhizal network. This wood wide web has allowed forest trees to evolve a cooperative interdependent relationship and a collective intelligence similar to an insect colony.



*Who is this tree, outside Humphrey Perkins, talking to and nurturing?*

Young saplings, that in the middle of a forest would otherwise struggle to survive in the low light conditions, are nurtured by their parents. Mother trees (not necessarily female) are the biggest, oldest trees with the most fungal connections. They respond to other distressed trees in the neighbourhood by increasing the flow of water or nutrients to them.

Trees also communicate dangers to each other and are able to send distress signals about drought and disease or insect attacks. Other trees alter their behaviour when they receive these messages. An example given by Peter Wohlleben in his book 'The Hidden Life of Trees' is when elms and pines are attacked by leaf-eating caterpillars. The trees release pheromones in response to the caterpillars' saliva which then attracts parasitic wasps ... These wasps lay their eggs in the caterpillars and eat them from the inside out. Another response to alarm messages through the WWW is for trees to pump tannins into leaves rendering them unpalatable to the grazers.

What's in it for the fungi? Well, quite a lot. They consume about 30 percent of the sugar that trees photosynthesize from sunlight. The fungi for their part scavenge the soil for nitrogen, phosphorus and other mineral nutrients, which are then absorbed and consumed by the trees. So, both partners benefit in this symbiotic relationship.

Scientists do not understand a lot about how trees communicate but they do know that it allows trees to live a much healthier, productive life. Perhaps the Japanese idea of forest bathing allows us to absorb some of the harmonious life trees live and benefit from their millennia of wisdom.

## What to See

1. Enjoy looking at all our 28 British native trees growing in the collection at Beacon Hill near the lower entrance
2. Look out for catkins adorning many trees around the village including alder, hazel, silver birch, white willow and English oak (the latter two in Apr – May)

## What to do

### 1. There are two important international days to mark this month:

21<sup>st</sup> March - International Day of Forests

25<sup>th</sup> March - Earth Hour, 8.30 – 9.30 p.m.

- Enjoy a day out in the National Forest at Conkers Visitor Centre, DE12 6GA to celebrate the International Day of Forests on 21<sup>st</sup> March. There's something for everyone there.
  - Show you care about the future of our planet on 25<sup>th</sup> March and switch off for an hour along with millions of others across the globe. Check out WWF for some great ideas and information about this at : <https://www.wwf.org.uk/earth-hour> and/or: <https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2022/>
2. **Buy native British wildflower seeds.** Resist the temptation to buy the many cheaper seeds for sale as these include European seeds, not our own varieties.

We have lost 97% of our wildflower meadows. Don't let's replace them with non-native plants. Barrow in Bloom buys seeds from Landlife Wildflowers at: <https://www.wildflower.co.uk/>

*Alison Rushton*

*Think global: Act local*

*All photographs by A. Rushton*