

ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY

FOOD FROM THE WILD by Tricia Moxey

It is customary at OWLS meetings, to have a handout booklet to go with a visiting speaker's talk. This time, there was a twist, in that the speaker was one of the OWLS members (Tricia Moxey) and inspiration and publication of the booklet*, the work predominately, of the Chairman, Alan Brett. The subject of the talk - 'Food from the Wild' or 'Foraging for wild food' was all about how over the years, our ancestors and animals survived, by hunting, foraging, scrimping - taking advantage of 'free food' and left overs, when food was in short supply - helping themselves when opportunities arose. Deposits of food can be found from fossilised teeth which tell us what people were eating years ago. Some birds for example, like today, take eggs from nests and titbits from the seashore and rockpools etc. However, with more pollution around, seafood is not as hygienic as it used to be. There is also the attraction of animals to food and to certain plants when they change colour in development and from their smell and scent given off. This gives the predatory animal the signal that food is available and is the difference between it starving or surviving.

The talk was very interesting in that it highlighted the qualities of things healthy and cheap to eat and explaining the use a plant could/can provide in either medicinal or therapeutic use and where its constituents provide ingredients for food in everyday living. For example, we were told that stinging nettles are rich in iron, various herbs which have lots of culinary uses such as fennel and flowers such as foxglove/digitalis - which soothe indigestion. Pond life features 'free and healthy plants' and various flowers can be used in wine making and for ingredients in recipes. We are all familiar with 'picking your own fruit' in the Summer, and there are so many to choose from, although it has to be said that a lot of fruit trees and orchards have disappeared. In Ongar, we have hedgerows with wild plum, and many other fruits available, such as blackberry and elderberry etc which can make an excellent cordial and whose properties are used in cough mixture. Also, there are apples - crab apples which have 'unhairy' leaves and cultivated apples which have 'hairy' leaves. Rose hips produce syrup which is good for vitamin C - the list just goes on. Needless to say, there are many books available on modern foraging, but it is important to stick to tried and tested plants and their theories.

*The excellent 'Food from the Woodland' booklet is available free from the OWLS Committee, with a requested donation towards production costs.

Bob Jenkins

+ The next meeting of OWLS is:

-Monday 21 March - Story of Abberton reservoir (Jo Wray)