

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Malvern Local Group meeting. 3rd February

How Things Have Changed on The Hills

An element of friction between users of the Malvern Hills is nothing new. Now there are issues between cyclists and walkers, but in the late 19th Century, donkeys sometimes made passing on narrow paths difficult, and there were complaints of donkey boys racing their charges down sloping paths, much to the consternation of walkers. We learnt, however, that much else has changed when Duncan Bridges, the CEO of the Malvern Hills Trust, addressed a meeting of the Malvern Group of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust on 3rd February. Victorian photographs show the Hills almost bare of trees through intensive grazing, with quarrying changing their shape. Since 1884, the Hills have been managed by The Conservators, now the Malvern Hills Trust, and woodland flourishes, and quarrying is long since ended. The Hills and Commons represent an incredibly varied landscape and ecology, and we learnt much of the complexities of managing that treasured asset. Of particular value is the naturally occurring acid grassland, home to many species of flowers, birds, snakes and lizards. A national survey in the 1980's showed that 97% of England's natural grassland had been lost in the previous 50 years and the decline continues. The grassland on the Hills and Commons is managed by The Trust through a mixture of judicious scrub clearance and tree felling and grazing with sheep and cattle. The livestock is looked after by local farmers, but we were reminded that Commoner's Rights still exist, allowing certain local residents to turn their livestock onto the Commons. A much-valued help with the household budget a hundred years ago!



Donkeys and children in Happy Valley