

28 READING PRACTICE

You are going to read an extract from an article where two books are reviewed. For questions **31 - 36**, choose the answer (**A, B, C or D**) which you think fits best according to the text.

- 31)** How does the writer react to the church at Aberdaron?
- A He finds consolation in the barren appearance of its surroundings.
 - B He is embarrassed that he knows so few of the names of the flowers.
 - C He is cheered by the abundance of flowers in such a windswept place.
 - D He takes pleasure from the care that has been lavished on the flowers.
- 32)** What point is the writer making about wild flower names in the second paragraph?
- A They are more evocative than the correct botanical names.
 - B They can differ from one period of time to another.
 - C There are a few which keep the same name throughout the UK.
 - D There are still many that haven't yet been recorded.
- 33)** What is the writer's attitude to wild flower habitat destruction?
- A He is pleased that Raven has made a very clear case for calling a halt to it.
 - B He is saddened that wild flowers have to work so hard to survive nowadays.
 - C He is concerned that the threat to Fynbos is inevitable, given the circumstances.
 - D He is enthusiastic about the possibility of there being another viewpoint.
- 34)** What does the writer say about the contents of Mabey's book?
- A It contains a number of anecdotes about the introduction of new new species.
 - B It is groundbreaking in its attempt to put a name to unusual species.
 - C It includes plants which are unintentional immigrants to the UK.
 - D It charts the evolution of a number of plants of foreign origin.
- 35)** What does the writer suggest about wild flowers in the fifth paragraph?
- A They are only to be found nowadays in rural areas.
 - B They are treasured but weeds are vilified.
 - C They are easier to protect than other typed of plant.
 - D They are too expensive to preserve.
- 36)** What point is the writer making in the final paragraph?
- A More money is needed to stem the tide of seriously destructive weeds.
 - B People should be encouraged to sow seeds in unlikely places.
 - C It is hard not to respect the tenaciousness of some plants.
 - D The authorities have a contradictory attitude towards weeds.



Wild flowers

The journalist Simon Jenkins considers two books on wild flowers.

We all find solace in flowers. I go when times are hard to the wild dune church of Aberdaron in north Wales, where is pinned up (or was) a list of flowers that battle against the wind in the graveyard outside. Here is an uplifting array of thrift, vetch, yarrow and dozens more that toss and chatter, apparently immune to the salty south-westerlies. I hardly know these flowers, yet alone would recognise them. Nature's wilderness is a foreign land, yet its tongue is strangely comforting. It is a realm of unrivalled colour and richness, defying time and order.

Hence when Sarah Raven's colossal new compendium, *Wild Flowers*, thudded into my lap, it was not to the pictures that I turned but to the index. The names are, in truth, the pictures, recording how country people down the ages have seen in nature a mirror of their lives. Here are adder's tongue, autumn lady's-tresses and betty-go-to-bed-at-noon. Flower names can be peculiar down to individual parish, corrupted by geographical accent and dialect. They can be vulgar, poignant and romantic. What pain yielded traveller's foot? What anguish went into heartsease, love-in-a-mist and love-lies-bleeding? The poet and botanist Geoffrey Grigson traced more than 6,000 English common names for plants. There are 50 for dandelion alone and 90 for lords-and-ladies: starchwort, cuckoo pint and jack in the pulpit. Only the dreariest Linnean sergeant-major could want to dragoon all these into *arum maculatum*.

Raven cries for us to save the homesteads of her beloved friends. Ninety-seven percent of England's lowland wilderness has gone in the last sixty years. A quarter of all hedgerows have been destroyed since 1980 alone. Marshes are drained, woods conifered, meadows concreted. In South Africa an appeal is being launched this week to save the world capital of wild flowers, the Cape's unique Fynbos landscape, threatened with mass development spreading out from Cape Town. Fynbos is the most florally diverse ecology on earth. Yet wild flowers are wild. They are nature's flotsam, survivors, anarchists, freelancers, defying the horrors of modern life. I am drawn to a different botanical lifestyle, that of the weed-seekers. While Raven wanders her moors, urban geeks are scrambling over rubbish tips and railway sidings in search of vagabond exotics. Their champion is the naturalist Richard Mabey, whose *Defence of Weeds* must be the most eye opening book I have read. De-industrialisation has led to a new, mostly urban British landscape which is fertile ground for the invaders.

Mabey tears back the city's familiar curtain to reveal a jungle of migrant species beneath. They bear with pride the seedsman's definition of weeds as 'plants in the wrong place'. They are tramps, rebels, defying the laws of municipal authority. Moving in among the empty factories and canal banks are giant hogweeds, buddleias and rosebay willow herbs. They come with sinister names such as winy Jack and stinker Bob. Exotics arrive from round the globe, spilling from cargos on to roads and railway lines. Mabey finds specimens from Africa dropped from the hems of Commonwealth conference visitors in Buckingham Palace gardens.

Wild flowers have evolved a class system of their own: effete respect is shown to Raven's country cousins while wart is declared on Mabey's 'vegetable guerrillas that have overcome the dereliction of the Industrial Age'. Many wild flowers are protected so that roads and footpaths must be diverted round them. Biodiversity grants are awarded for endangered species such as corn buttercup and pheasant's eye.

Despite the damage they do to other flora, that splendid weed, the daffodil, is planted out 'wild' by councils to give 'a splash of spring colour' to verges. Yet even weeds must confirm, when a friend of mine drove round the M40-M25 interchange after it was built, hurling poppy seeds from his car and delighting in the subsequent harvest of red, he found a year later that it had fallen foul of ministry herbicide. Mabey even admires those mighty bolsheviks who are determined to defy humankind's occupation of the earth. Buffel grass, tumbleweed, hogweed, Indian balsam, Japanese knotweed and kudzu grow a metre or more overnight. They can upheave motorways and tear down houses in days. Acts of parliament have been passed against Japweed, the cost of clearing it now exceeding £150m a year. 'Weeds are the tithe we get for breaking the earth,' cries Mabey. They are feral biology.