

What to look for outdoors

March - May

Larch flowers



Have a magnifying glass in your pocket.

There are two kinds of larch flower: pollen-bearing flowers (male flowers) and cone-forming flowers (female flowers).

Each larch tree has both kinds of flower.

Looking at a larch tree in spring, you will see fresh green spiky leaves and lots of cones formed last autumn.

But it is not until you look closely that you find the new flowers.



A larch tree



Spring foliage of a larch tree



A female larch flower and a male larch flower

The female flowers are about the same height as a whorl of leaves.

They are pink and green with soft outward-curving scales.

The male flowers are much smaller: tiny yellow-topped knobs. Pollen is in the yellow knobs.

Questions



How do you think the pollen gets from the male to the female flower for seeds to be formed?



Clue: The flowers are dull in colour and have no fragrance so insects would have difficulty in finding them.

Yes, larch flowers are wind pollinated: they have to rely on the wind to take pollen from the male to the female flowers.

Pollen is released into the air and some of it, carried by the wind, falls on to the outward-curving scales on the female flowers and slides down inside. There the seeds will be formed.

The outer part of the flower will turn green and then brown and become a cone.

Do



While you have your magnifying glass in your hand, look on the bark of the larch tree and see if you can see any little creatures on it.

They will be a similar colour to the bark so you have to look closely. Being the same colour, hides them from birds that might want to eat them.

The other way to think of it is that larch bark is a larder for hungry birds with chicks to feed!



It is fun to make a note of what you saw and did today.



For more about larch trees, what came before and what comes next, see Hello Trees book 'Larry Larch'.

<http://hellotrees.co.uk/>