

Roundton Hill, Old Churchstoke 26/4/24

Organisers: Fran Holland, Jane Hudson, Jane Phillips

Our day began with a short talk from Clive Faulkner, CEO of Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust which has owned and managed the site since 1985. He explained that the ecology of Roundton Hill was determined by its geology and that the thin, volcanic soil is perfect for the spring ephemerals, the promise of which had enticed us to visit at this time of year. Once an iron age hillfort, Roundton has also been mined and quarried for lead and barites and the resultant caves provide perfect roosts for Lesser Horseshoe and Daubenton bats. The site is a National Nature Reserve as well as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and must be managed for all the different elements that make it so special, which is a delicate balancing act involving cattle and sheep grazing. In recent years it has been necessary to pollard or fell many Ash trees for safety reasons, stacks of which provided some with handy seating from which to enjoy Clive's talk and a picnic lunch!

After this introduction we set off to explore the site, with many heading straight for the treeless, south facing slope which Clive had identified as the place to look for spring ephemerals. Some of us were amazed to see the sheer abundance of these tiny plants, which could so easily be overlooked by walkers hurrying to get to the top of the hill. Ruth Dawes, who had set off early and with some determination, reports finding:

“Exquisite little plants of Shepherd's Cress *Teesdalia nudicaulis*, looking like miniature Candytuft, growing with grey Small Cudweed *Logfia minima* in steep rocky knee-numbing slopes. Both plants are scarce so it was heart-warming to see them doing nicely. Frequent patches of blue, pink and yellow croziers of Changing Forget-me-not *Myosotis discolor*. (Picture 1)

Many people made their way up the hill to the top, from where they could enjoy the spectacular 360° views of the surrounding area and beyond. Back down from the top, we heard Willow Warbler and Blackcap singing as we made our way through the wonderfully scented gorse bushes towards the highest of the three flower meadows. A pair of Redstarts flew into a small Hawthorn tree just below us as we approached the stile into the top meadow. We made our way down, particularly enjoying patches of cowslips and violets under the trees down one side, and a good smattering of Early Purple Orchids at the top of the third meadow. As we were enjoying these and listening

appreciatively to the call of a Green Woodpecker in the trees below, we became aware of some excitement at the bottom of the field. We made our way down to find a small group admiring a patch of Adders Tongue, which was quite easily visible this early in the year. (Picture 2)

Some of us then wandered down the lane to Upper Hurdley and back along the footpath into the bottom flower meadow, enjoying along the way views of the Hurdley Hall meadows with their beautifully mown paths. On our return to the car park we found all but a couple of hardened botanists assembled and ready for tea, so we were soon making our way to Mid Wales Airport and the Fuel Stop Café. Unfortunately, it was a little too cold for us to enjoy our tea al fresco, but we all just fitted in to the café where we enjoyed a very good tea indeed. As we chatted over tea, birds reported as seen by our table included Stonechat, Wheatear and Linnet. (See centre pages of 2025 Annual report for full species list)

We all agreed that it was disappointing not to have seen any aircraft taking off or landing, but after only a couple of members had left for home, we realised that the Air Ambulance was about to take off. Several of us moved outside for a fabulous view of take-off, followed shortly by return and re-landing, which all made for a perfect ending to a lovely day.

Report by Jane Phillips