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Montgomeryshire
Wildlife Trust

Montgomeryshire

Wildlife News

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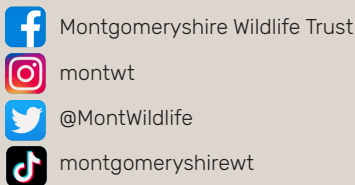


About us:

Since 1982, **Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust (MWT)** has been working to conserve and protect wildlife in our special corner of Wales. We manage 18 nature reserves covering more than 510 hectares, we have close to 2,000 members and around 300 individuals volunteer with us. To find out more about us, our projects, local wildlife, becoming a member or volunteering, visit: www.montwt.co.uk

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Montgomeryshire Wildlife News is the membership magazine for Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust, produced and edited by the MWT team and designed by Mid Wales Sign & Print Ltd. Pages 9-12 are edited by Tom Hibbert and designed by Ben Cook of the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts.

On the cover:

Curlew by Terry Whittaker/2020 VISION

Its evocative call is, for many, the herald of spring, but the beautiful Curlew needs our help – to find out more, turn to p. 7.

Chair's overview

Our countryside, as it is today, is largely the result of human effort. Our fields, meadows, woods and rivers have all been altered and constrained by the work of the people who live there. You can see this even where we feel nature to be at its wildest.

In recent years, the focus has rightly been on the negative impacts humankind has had – so deleterious to biodiversity and the environment. Over the course of my own lifetime, for instance, iconic wading bird, the Curlew (pictured below), has sadly become a rare sight and desperately needs intervention to survive and thrive again in Montgomeryshire. Something which Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust is hoping to address as part of its new Curlew conservation project (p. 7).

Contrary to the rule, we have also – albeit unintentionally – provided some valuable, attractive habitats which we also need to maintain. Take National Nature Reserve Roundton Hill. Its beauty was shaped by Iron Age man's hillfort and the mining that took place at its sides. Now it's a peaceful paradise for wildlife (see more on p. 5).

Similarly, the Montgomery Canal, the focus of new project 'Canals, Communities and Wellbeing' (see p. 6), was built as a commercial route, but now serves as a natural corridor. Its still waters, filtered through the hills and woods above, relatively unpolluted, are havens for unique populations of flora and fauna which have lost their original homes – we need to value and protect these 'manmade' wildlife havens as much as any mountain tarn or ancient woodland.

Tim McVey

MWT Chair

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Swift action

Spring signals the return of one of our most iconic and best-loved birds, the Swift. However, this fast-flying avian is in trouble – with populations plummeting around 60% since the mid-90s – and they need your help urgently.

As part of our Green Connections Powys project, we're working with local communities to help this Red Listed species, by building special nest-boxes and giving training in identification and surveying. We'll also be hosting Swift Walks this spring and summer, giving people the chance to watch these elegant birds whirling through the skies.

Swifts (along with Swallows and House Martins) are also the theme of this year's Wild About Gardens campaign, which aims to make our green spaces wildlife-friendly.

Just launched, the campaign – a collaboration between The Wildlife Trusts and the Royal Horticultural Society – will have plenty of inspiration for transforming your garden into a veritable Swift oasis (wildaboutgardens.org.uk).

■ If you'd like more information on how you can get involved, email lottie@montwt.co.uk or visit our website.

Youth power

Do you know a budding young environmental activist (aged 9-24) who wants to stop climate change in its tracks? If so, they might like to join our Stand for Nature Wales Climate Action Group.

Meeting at Severn Farm Pond in Welshpool twice a month on Monday evenings (4.20pm–5.20pm), with a minibus picking up participants from Newtown, Kerry and Llanidloes, the sessions will include activities such as creative writing, acting and graffiti – all with a nature and climate theme.

This will be building up to two big events this summer: a Climate Youth Summit, which will bring together action groups from all over Wales with activities and guest speakers; and a creative day-camp where young people will perform a dramatisation to convey their climate message to a special audience!

■ For further details, email dan@montwt.co.uk or visit www.montwt.co.uk/stand4nature

SPECIES SPOT



In the pink

MWT member Nick Randall-Smith saw a strange bird in his Llandyssil garden last July and didn't recognise it, so he took this picture and sent it to Iolo Williams. Iolo, who was guiding up in Scotland, tweeted the image and that he was disappointed he'd missed it on his home patch. A NEW SPECIES for the county, it's an adult Rose-coloured Starling in superb plumage. These pink-hued birds nest in large colonies in Western Asian, and a few visit the UK in late summer, but sightings in Wales are rare.

■ If you see any unusual birds in the county, please email the Montgomeryshire County Bird Recorder, Simon Boyes, at: montbird@gmail.com and don't forget to complete the Summer Bird Survey included with this magazine to help build up a picture of our local bird species.



Photography Competition 2022

Calling all shutterbugs. Photography is a unique way of connecting with nature and inspiring others to feel a connection with it too. To celebrate this special relationship between the camera (or camera phone!) and the natural world, MWT are holding a Photography Competition to encourage all our members to get out and about and engage with the wilder side of Montgomeryshire.

We've got some fantastic prizes – including a pair of Opticron binoculars worth £120, a £50 voucher from Derwen Garden Centre near Welshpool, a £15 voucher from the Cultivate Deli in Newtown – not to mention the kudos of seeing your winning image in print on these pages.

■ *To find out what the categories are, and how you can enter, visit www.montwt.co.uk/photography-competition*



Wanted: New Chair

Are you an MWT member who's bonkers about birds? The Montgomeryshire Bird Group are on the look-out for a new Chair.

The ideal candidate would have a passion for avians, but wouldn't need to be an expert. They'd just have to be available on the third Wednesday of the month from September to March to chair a meeting and attend a talk at Welshpool Methodist Church. There's also scope to develop the group and make it more active in the community.

■ *If you're interested and would like to find out more, email: clive@montwt.co.uk*

BUILD YOUR OWN

Bug hotel

This is just one of the wildlife projects our Wild Skills Wild Spaces team do with their ecotherapy participants; why not have a go at home?



You'll need:

- Two or three wooden pallets of the same size (ask a local builders' merchants)
- Bricks ■ Sticks, twigs, bamboo canes
- Stones, pebbles, concrete tiles
- Old terracotta plant pots (or plastic bottles)

Instructions:

1. Think carefully about where in your garden to build your bug hotel – where might insects go?
2. Place pallet in your chosen location and lay a line of bricks through the middle and along each corner. Continue to layer pallets in this way until you have a sturdy structure.
3. Fill pots with canes, twigs, leaves or bark, and place inside the hotel, trying to fill each space with the rest of your materials until complete.
4. Keep an eye on your bug hotel through the seasons and note down what you see, remembering to repair it as needed to keep your insect guests coming back!

■ *For more information about Wild Skills Wild Spaces or to sign up to the newsletter, visit www.montwt.co.uk/WSWS*



© Tamásine Stretton

RESERVE IN FOCUS

Roundton Hill

Once the site of an Iron Age fort, this steep, rounded, craggy hill is now a haven for unusual plants and threatened birds

On a bright spring day you'd be hard-pressed to rival the far-reaching countryside views from the top of Roundton Hill near Churchstoke. A patchwork quilt of fields stretch out seemingly without end across Montgomeryshire and Shropshire, with vistas as far as Cader Idris when conditions are clear. Breathtaking as the panoramas are, however, this site has so much more going for it.

Managed by MWT since 1985, this former Iron Age hillfort is not just one of our oldest reserves, it's also one of the most important from a biodiversity perspective. Designated as both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a National Nature Reserve (NNR), Roundton Hill and its surrounding woodland and hayfields are simply teeming with rare or special wild wonders – in fact a whopping 300 nationally or locally significant species have been recorded here!

Reserves Officer Rob Haigh has been caring for the site with our army of awe-inspiring volunteers since 2003, but also likes to spend time here outside of work. "I love to take my little girl, Arianna, up to the summit to watch sunrises and sunsets," says Rob. "It's also a good place to see or hear nocturnal creatures, such as badgers, foxes and Tawny Owls."

Such is the wealth of wildlife, it's hard to believe Roundton was once mined for lead and barites. Today these old mines are perfect roosting sites for bats, while



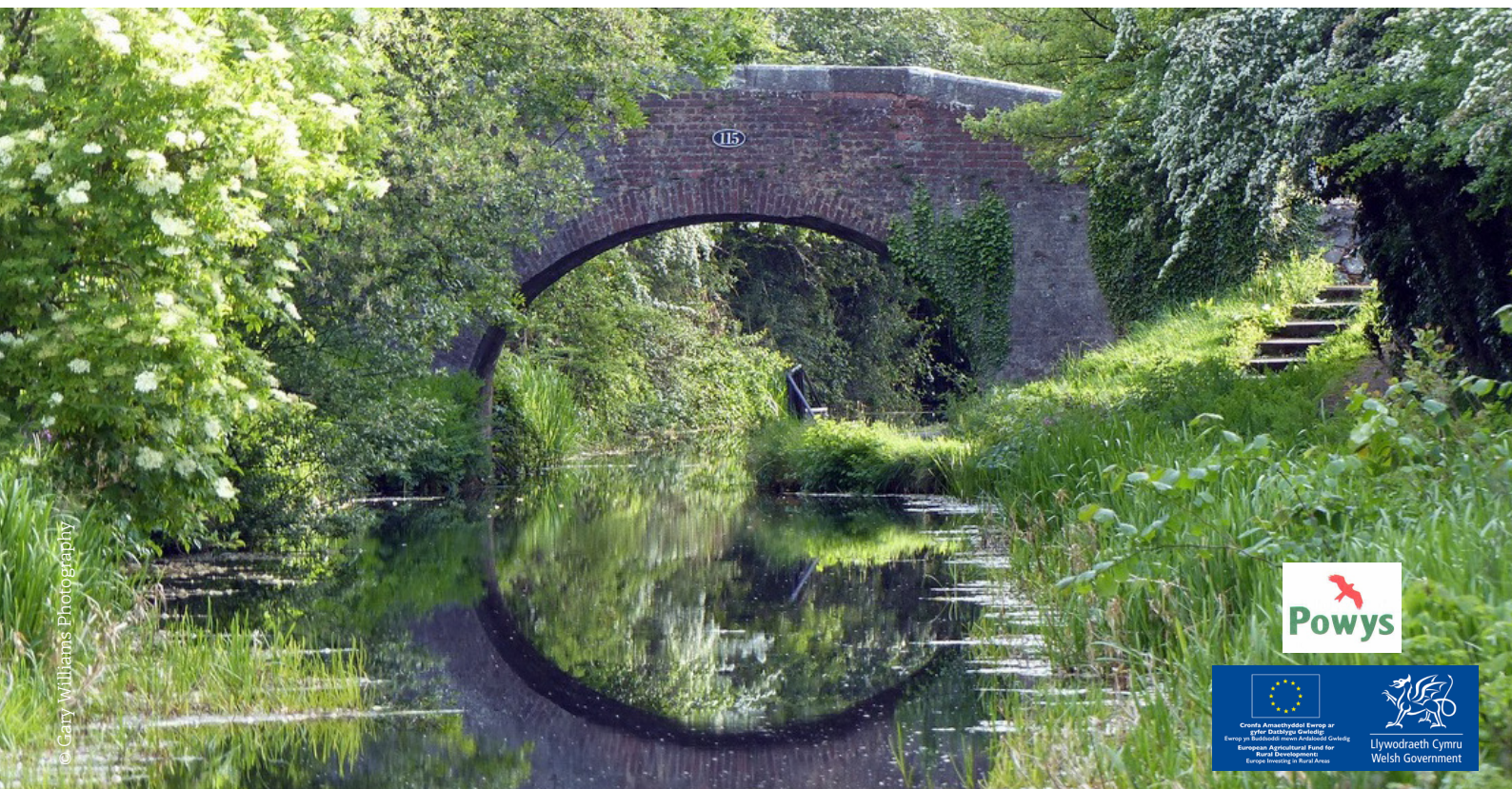
© Mark Hamblin/2020VISION

its industrial landscape has created the ideal conditions for a plethora of different plants. These include the spring ephemerals – tiny ground-hugging flora which flower early and only for a very brief time.

Spring's also when this hill is alive with the sound of birdsong, as threatened avians such as Pied Flycatcher (pictured), Yellowhammer and Redstart, along with iconic birds like the Green Woodpecker, are breeding and raising their young.

Roundton Hill is a great place to visit, too, as it boasts an easy-to-navigate and short circular walk, starting and finishing at the reserve carpark. With a steep climb and uneven paths, it's not suitable for all, but for those who can, the views from the vantage point at the summit make it well worth the exertion.

■ Follow this reserve on social media at #RoundtonHill. For further details, including directions, or to find out what our wonderful volunteers have been working on at our other reserves, visit www.montwt.co.uk/nature-reserves



© Gary Williams Photography



Water world

The importance of canals for wildlife and people's wellbeing is at the heart of one of MWT's new projects. A partnership with several other local organisations, 'Canals, Communities and Wellbeing' will be promoting the role these manmade waterways now play as nature corridors, havens for species like Otters and Kingfishers, and places where people can relax and unwind, whether with a spot of bird-watching, walking their dog or even kayaking.

As part of the Powys County Council-led, Welsh Government-funded project, we're going to be installing new interpretation boards along the Welsh stretch of the Montgomery Canal (pictured), which runs 24 miles from Llanymynech to Newtown and is a Special Area of

Conservation (SAC). We're also going to be launching a free wildlife spotting smartphone app, hosting a series of guided nature walks along the waterway and producing a film of amazing aerial footage.

Children's wellbeing will be catered for, too, with a new 'Nature Play' area at Llyn Coed y Dinas, one of five of our nature reserves located within easy walking distance of the Montgomery Canal.

■ For more on this project, app and walks, follow us on social media and check the Projects page of our website: www.montwt.co.uk/what-we-do/projects

This project has received funding through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.

Claws for thought

At the end of last year, we carried out some vital research in rivers across the county to shine a light on a special clawed creature which needs our help.

The White-clawed Crayfish (pictured) is our only native freshwater crustacean – but it's under threat from the invasive Signal Crayfish, which was introduced from North America, and a disease it carries.

To uncover the extent of the threat and inform future conservation work, we collected water samples from the Banwy, Rhiw, Tanat and Vyrnwy and analysed them for environmental DNA (or eDNA) for the native

White-clawed Crayfish, the Signal Crayfish and Crayfish Plague.

The results present a very mixed picture. While our native crayfish is still clinging on in certain areas, there's much that needs to be done to tackle invasive species and their impact.

■ To find out more about the White-clawed Crayfish, and how you can help protect it, such as with safe water use, visit www.montwt.co.uk/wildlife-explorer and search for 'crayfish'



© Tamasine Stratton

Wildlife & Project News



Call of the Curlew

As we mark World Curlew Day on 21st April, this wonderful wader's future hangs in the balance – unless we act now

The haunting and unmistakeable 'cur-lee' call of the Curlew was once a familiar sound over Wales' uplands and lowlands, heralding the start of spring. Yet this long-billed wader is fast disappearing from our countryside and coast, and its iconic call might be no more than a distant memory if we don't take immediate action.

The Eurasian (or Common) Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) is a very large, tall wading bird about the size of a female pheasant, with mottled brown and grey plumage, bluish legs and a long, downcurved bill. It usually arrives at its breeding grounds – inland on wet grassland, heath and moorland – from late February before moving towards the coast from July onwards, with numbers there peaking in January.

In Wales, this once widespread bird is now Red Listed, its population plummeting at a rate of around 6% per year; if this decline continues apace, Curlews could be extinct as a breeding species in this country by 2030.

It's not too late, though. Montgomeryshire still boasts a good number of breeding pairs and is designated an 'Important Curlew Area' within the 'Wales Action Plan for Recovery of Curlew'. Because of this, MWT are working with two experienced and renowned ornithologists, Mick Green and Tony Cross, to colour ring and fit satellite tags to several birds this spring. This vital monitoring will help us find out how many there are, where they are an

how they use their habitat, with the aim to improve this beautiful creature's chances.

We also need your help! Recording Curlews is incredibly important, but we can't do it alone. When you're out walking in your local area, on lanes and public footpaths, please record any Curlew you see (either on a map or with an accurate grid reference). If you can record the number of birds you see and their behaviour, such as if they're calling, alarming, flying over (in which direction?) or sitting in a field, this is really useful, too.

"We also need your help! Recording Curlews is incredibly important, but we can't do it alone..."

What's more, we need funding to carry out fieldwork, co-ordinate records, protect nests, liaise with landowners and do habitat management. Any donations or support with our appeals for funding, are gratefully received.

"Please write to your Member of the Senedd asking them to make funding available to ensure Curlew do not go extinct in Wales," says MWT Head of Living Landscapes, Ceri Jones, who's leading our Curlew project. "The Welsh Government cannot achieve the aspirations of their environmental legislation if they allow us to lose such an iconic species."

■ If you have any Curlew records, or would like to volunteer to collate information, please get in touch by emailing us at curlew@montwt.co.uk or for more information, including for a 'survey toolkit', visit www.curlewwales.org



Butterfly girl Tammy Stretton with a tiny Green Hairstreak (left);
a precious Pearl-bordered Fritillary (below)

My wild life

Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly survey season might be the most stressful time of the year for Conservation Officer Tammy Stretton, but it's also a privilege to help protect these precious pearls

Q: When did you start surveying the Pearl-bordered Fritillary (PBF)?

A: Back in 2007. I've done it every year, between 12th April and 1st June, since then, in the same way – with the exception of 2020 when we were in lockdown and I was not allowed out!

Q: Why is this particular butterfly so precious?

A: It's very rare and at risk of extinction. Once widespread across the UK, it declined when we stopped managing woodland and they were hit by the usual trifecta of habitat loss, change and fragmentation. They favour very specific habitat – they're very picky! – so if sites aren't managed to their liking, you lose them quickly.

Q: Why is the PBF special to MWT?

A: Because here in Montgomeryshire we have the best population left in Wales – 8 of 11 known sites – we feel we have a duty to help them survive.

Q: Why is surveying so important?

A: We can't take action for any species if we don't know where it is, and we need to know how the population is doing so we know if our habitat management is working for them.

Q: What do people think surveying butterflies involves?

A: Obviously I'm not inside people's heads, but when you tell someone you're doing a butterfly survey, they get all misty eyed and say 'how lovely'. I think they probably imagine a flat, open meadow teeming with butterflies that you're gaily skipping through, net in hand.

Q: What does it really involve?

A: The conditions have to be just so – above 12°C, sunny, not too windy and not raining – but spring in Wales is so variable, snowing one day and hot another, so I watch the weather forecast obsessively and get very stressed about it! The sites are on slopes, steep and bramble-covered, and you walk up and down them many times. It's very physically demanding – I have to get in training before the season starts – and if you're surveying and it clouds over you have to stop and wait until the sun comes out again. That could be half an hour, it could be longer; I've even had to abandon surveys altogether.

Q: Why do you do it?

A: I find it the most stressful time of year, but individual surveys can be really enjoyable. You're out in lovely weather, looking at a really rare species that very few people get to see. When you have one in your net and get it out, they often sit on your hand for a moment before flying off. I feel very privileged. I've been looking after this butterfly for 15 years and I'm determined they won't be lost on my watch!

■ For further details about our ambitious new PBF project, Pathways for Pearls, visit: www.montwt.co.uk/P4P

