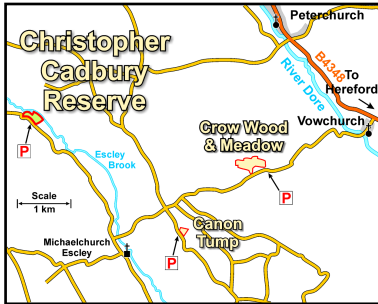


Christopher Cadbury Reserve

Michaelchurch Escley SO299367 (Explorer OL13)

Unimproved meadows



Visitor Guidelines

While the *hay* crop is growing in June and July, please keep to the edge of the *meadows* and also keep dogs under control.

Description

This reserve lies in the lee of the Black Mountains on neutral soils derived from the underlying Old Red Sandstone rocks. It consists of two *unimproved hay meadows*, both of which are north-east facing, and slope sharply down towards the Esley Brook in the valley floor. The two *meadows* were formerly part of Lower House Farm, and are believed to have been farmed continuously for over 400 years, without the aid of artificial fertilisers or pesticides. Indeed, the site has some antiquarian interest, as it contains the remains of two regularly spaced 'leats' or ditches, which follow the contours of the slope across both fields. These ditches may have been part of a water meadow irrigation system, used centuries earlier to conduct water from the boundary streams across the sloping fields. Sluices at intervals along the leats would have allowed water to flow down the slope to the Brook, irrigating and depositing fertilising minerals and silt as it went.

The reserve has a very rich flora (160 species recorded) and is typical of ancient, *unimproved grassland* on neutral soils. The grassland has a good mix of species, including Bistort, Eyebright, Yellow Rattle, Pignut and Knapweed, Lady's Mantle, Common Spotted Orchid, Green Winged Orchid and a variety of grasses. Around the old leats there is a richer diversity, with Devil's-bit Scabious and Lousewort. The grassland along the wooded banks of the Esley Brook hosts something of a woodland relict community, with Sanicle, Wood Anemone, Bluebells and the stately Giant Bellflower. At the far western edge of the reserve, there is a patch of grassland cut off by the stream which is too steep to mow. Anthills are numerous here, but the plant diversity is much lower than elsewhere, perhaps indicating a difference in land-use in earlier times. In mid-summer, the meadows are alive with insects, particularly hover-flies, grass-hoppers, bees and butterflies. One of the most interesting insects present in small numbers is the Chimney Sweeper, a small jet-black moth on the wing in June-July.

The unpolluted waters of the Esley Brook support a range of invertebrates like stonefly, caddis and mayfly larvae, which prefer well-oxygenated conditions. White-clawed Crayfish may be found, hiding under flat slabs of sandstone in the streambed. Herons, Grey Wagtails, Dippers and Kingfishers, hunt for prey along the Brook.

Present Management

The reserve is managed as a traditional *hay meadow*, with an annual *hay* crop being cut and removed around 15th July to allow many meadow plants to set seed, followed by controlled grazing by sheep/cattle until the end of November.

Acquisition Details

Freehold purchased in 1993 with generous assistance from Mr. J.C. Cadbury, and Herefordshire Conservation Development Trust (HCDT) and the Four Winds Trust.

General Information:

Best time to visit: Spring to late summer.

Habitat: Ancient *unimproved* neutral grassland; unpolluted freshwater stream.

Size: 5 hectares (12.3 acres).

Specialities: Pignut (5-7), Bistort (6-10), Yellow Rattle (5-9), Betony (6-9), Meadow Saxifrage (4-6), Giant Bellflower (7-9), Common Spotted Orchid (6-8), Lousewort (4-7), Crosswort (4-6). White-clawed Crayfish. Chimney Sweeper moth (6-7), Rush Veneer moth (6-7), meadow butterflies. Grey Wagtail, Dipper. Otter.

Parking: Limited parking at entrance to reserve.

Nearby HNT reserves: Canon Tump Common, Crow Wood & Meadow.

