

Five Flowers for Fownhope

January - February

The greatest variety and number of wild plants in Fownhope grow in the woodland and grassland on the Silurian limestone ridges. Many wild plants also grow along the river bank, roadside verges, hedgerows and in old orchards.



Snowdrops – verges and hedgebanks near present or former dwellings. ‘Fair Maids of February’, probably not native but certainly naturalised. Pleasingly surprising to find them persisting and flowering in clusters where people used to live. When it’s cold the flowers remain half closed. In late winter sunshine the outer three white petals open to reveal the three small green-spotted inner petals. Bees extract the pollen by vibrating the flowers.



Spurge Laurel – woodlands. A Daphne with evergreen, laurel-like leaves growing particularly in woodland on the limestone ridges. The yellow-green, elongated and slightly scented flowers are often completely hidden below the leaves. They are joyfully one of the first flowers of the year and are an important source of pollen and nectar for early bumble bees and moths.



Ivy – woodland and unflailed hedgerows. The autumn flowering ivy produces clusters of black ripe seeds in late winter. Not readily eaten by birds but an immensely important food source for resident and winter visiting thrushes, blackbirds, fieldfares and redwings when February weather turns bleak and cold and all the other hedgerow fruits and most of the apples have gone.



Hazel – woodland and unflailed hedgerows. Hazel catkins are the male flowers. They develop from early autumn and are compactly present throughout the winter opening rapidly as hanging, pale yellow catkins on warmer days. Pollen from these abundant male flowers is carried on the wind to fertilise the small hidden bud-like female flowers that have tiny bright red styles.



Stinking Hellibore – woodland and grassy roadside verges. This strongly scented member of the buttercup family has evergreen leaves and stems. The first warm days cause the flowering stems to elongate and the clusters of green bell-shaped flowers to open revealing a purple border and the many bunches of stamens within. An important source of nectar and pollen for early bees.