

Inkberrow Millennium Green Conservation Management report for the AGM for the year ending March 2005

Much of the work on the Millennium Green is now ongoing maintenance following the guidelines in the Management Plan. Over the summer management is mainly concerned with grassland and control of docks and nettles. Winter work is mainly related to hedges, scrub, coppicing and trees. Throughout the year the site is checked regularly for damage and obstructions. Extra bark was laid in the muddiest areas between the boardwalks in the second field and gravel on the steps was topped up. After the recent wet weather these may need more attention. The path between the fruit trees has now become the established one at the top of the second field. A new zig zag path (Tim's path) up the steep bank opposite the upper gate into field 2 is being developed and improved. All the paths were muddy this winter as it was so wet. The upper path in field 2 through the brambles (Gill's path) will need some attention in the Spring.

Grassland, docks and nettles

Summer work was almost entirely concerned with the management of the grassland areas. Detailed reports were given at the site meeting in June and at the September Trustees meetings. The main points, relating particularly to the control of the docks and nettles, are summarised here. The outcome has been a decision to spray the two main problem areas in field 2 in spring 2005. After this we should have some sheep to graze this field which will help with the grassland management.

Nettle and dock growth had become prolific by June and the task of keeping them in check was getting harder. There were certainly more nettles around the moat and by the new hedge next to Gore's land in field 1 and we continued to manage these by cutting and pulling. In the second field all the nettle patches were spreading on the slopes below the Millennium Seat. This slope had not been cut for many years but during the summer we managed to cut it all with a brush hook, rake up all the old dead nettle stalks etc, and burn them – 14 man hours of hard work. This area will now be more susceptible to spraying.

The dock problem was particularly bad round the fruit trees, where some reached 6ft, and near the entrance in field one. Both these areas were cut numerous times with little impact on re-growth.

There were also more thistles appearing within the grassland particularly in field two but pulling when small and cutting seems to be keeping these in check as it prevents seeding.

We do not want to eliminate any of these weed species totally as they all have their own value for wildlife

Volunteer time

The bulk of the non-contractor work over the summer was carried out by a very small group of half a dozen trustees and volunteers with occasional help from others as available. A lot of the work was done outside official Sunday work party time in order to get the jobs done. Although we do not now have new major projects we need more volunteer time just to keep up with the regular maintenance of the site. Total grass raking time was over 50 man-hours. Controlling nettles and docks etc over 40 man-hours

Grassland cutting by contractors

The amenity area, the docks near the entrance, nettles near the path to Gores, a loop path and around the tables in the picnic area, nettles and docks just through the gate into field 2 were all cut in late May by Chris Bonehill. In June all the grass, nettles and docks on the slope above the moat, up to the new hedge and to the foot of the steep bank were cut along with main paths in field 1. Docks and nettles were re-cut when the picnic table area and the lower grass slopes around the bank in field 1 were cut in August.

The best MG5 grassland was strimmed by Alan Farnsworth and two helpers in mid September and the grass raked up and some spread on poorer grass to disperse flower seeds. The MG5 grassland flowers such as lady's bedstraw and Knapweed are doing very well and attract many

butterflies. The marbled white colony, though only around for a short time, were at least as numerous as in previous years. Other butterfly species recorded this year are shown in the table:

butterfly	when	comments
Brimstone	March, April	A few
Speckled Wood	April / May	few;
Gatekeeper	June / July / Aug	Some in 2 nd half of June, lots mid July to mid Aug
Large White	June	some
Small White	May / June	few
Marbled White	June	First in mid June a good number by end
Meadow Brown	June	A few by mid June lots at end
Skipper (Small?)	June	few
Blue (Holly)	April	A few
Orange Tip	April / May	some
Small Tortoiseshell	April	A few
Ringlet	June / July	First in mid June lots by end & July
Green Veined White	May to August	A few
Peacock	March, April	A few
Blue (Common)	June to August	A few early, on good numbers late August

There was also a good number of Burnet Moths in June – the management of the good quality grassland continues to suit both these moths and the marbled whites.

In the summer the site was designated a **Special Wildlife Site** on the basis of the quality of its grassland – one of about 250 grassland SWS in Worcestershire. They are considered to be the best places for biodiversity / wildlife in the county outside legally protected areas such as nature reserves and SSSI (Sites of Special Scientific Interest).

The grassland survey of the MG5 grassland on the slopes in both fields was completed by mid August. Report by Gareth Thomas.

Moat

The vegetation on the bank around the moat has been cut back hard again this autumn / winter (2004) including saplings and brambles; this is in accordance with the agreement with English Heritage. Grass and nettles were also cut (and some nettles pulled up by the roots to reduce re-growth) during the summer – some parts four times. The wasps nests in the bank and under the board walk were a concern for a time but went away as the weather cooled down. The moat still appears to be leaking and partly dried up for a time. This causes two problems - firstly it allows access to the island, which English Heritage does not want, and secondly the mud in the bottom is much deeper than it looks and thus a possible hazard.

Ponds

The water in both ponds is clear and the variety of pond life is good. Pond 1 has no major problems; some of the excess hornwort was removed to the moat (but as before there is very little sign of it surviving there). Pond 2 is suffering from invasion by flag iris. Valiant efforts have been made by some volunteers (especially by Tim Patrickson) to remove these both last year and this winter but it is a losing battle unless the pond water stays at a high level all year. Iris thrive in the shallow water and, to prevent them totally taking over the pond, it needs to be deepened. The vegetation around the edge of the ponds was cut back in the autumn.

Copse

A few more 'scraggy' trees and stumps have been removed from the copse and more hazel coppiced. This has allowed more light in to improve the ground flora. The best young trees are being retained alongside the mature ones. There was a good variety of fungi in the copse during the autumn both on the decaying wood and on the ground.

Scrub

No work has been done on scrub areas other than keeping brambles in check where they are growing out into the grassland (except where Chris Bonehill cut some bramble along with the grass in field 2 near the bottom of Gill's path.)

Hedges

The newly planted hedge by Gore's field and the native trees planted in it continue to do well and need little attention at present. Nettles and goose grass were removed in the summer and it will be checked and trimmed as necessary in March.

The new hedge behind the Millennium seat which was left to become a tangled barrier to discourage trespassers will also need attention as some plants, particularly hawthorn, are not doing well and there seems to be some damage and loss.

The lower part of the hedge between the two fields continues to make slow progress due to shading by the large ash. We will be cutting out or pollarding some of the more tangled growth in the hedge line above the gate but nothing was done to it over the summer except cutting up a fallen tree. The best hawthorns are being kept for their appearance, flowers and berries. Other features such as the upstanding dead trunk with a nest hole will also be preserved.

Wet Flush

Tree seedlings have been removed and the area by the board walks tidied up after part was cut and disturbed when Chris Bonehill crossed it to cut the grass on the far side.

Stream

In general the stream is flowing well and very little clearance has been needed. By field 2 Glen Allison has worked on the stream from his side and created a small pond.

Nest boxes and birds

All the boxes except those on the island were cleaned out in February and a metal plate put on one where the hole had been pecked and enlarged – probably by the green woodpeckers. These woodpeckers continue to breed and feed on the ant hills. Most of the nest boxes had been used by great or blue tits. The mallards raised a good number of ducklings and the moorhens at least one chick. The range of other birds seen and heard on the Millennium Green has been much the same as in previous years.

Wendy Johnson
Gareth Thomas
Work party organisers