

Inkberrow Millennium Green Conservation Management report for the AGM for the year ended March 2006

Once again much of the work carried out on the Millennium Green has been ongoing management in line with the management plan and our agreements with English Heritage and Worcester County Council. Over the summer management was mainly concerned with grassland and control of thistles, 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 and repairs made as necessary; particularly to the boardwalk rails, posts and netting. All the paths in the second field were muddy again this winter and this was made slightly worse by the sheep. They will need some attention in the Spring when the sheep have gone. The fences in the second field were checked and made sheep proof last March, as were the gates between the two fields.

Grassland, thistles, docks and nettles (Summer work – April to September)

The highlight of this year has been the introduction in the second field of the sheep, a rare breed called Castlemilk Moorits,. Before they came the nettles and docks around the fruit trees and on the slope below the Millennium Seat were sprayed by a contractor with a selective weed killer (Grazon 90). The combination of weed killer and grazing has at present completely removed the docks and greatly reduced the nettles. The sheep are very partial to the docks. The remaining nettles in this area were cut a number of times over the summer to keep them in check and the sheep have eaten them over the winter as they died down. These nettles will be re-sprayed this Spring after the sheep have been removed. The overall condition of the grassland in this field has been improved considerably as a result of grazing which has kept the grass short and reduced the coarse grass. Although the sheep grazed the field from April 2005 in future there will be no grazing (apart from rabbits !) between March and June or July. This will allow the desirable flowering plants such as cowslips and ladies bedstraw to set seed and thus increase the area, and improve the quality, of MG5 type grassland. Thistles were more widespread this summer and a lot were pulled or cut where they were invading the grassland. The docks near the entrance were cut weekly over the Spring and Summer to see if this would control them but apart from preventing them from flowering and seeding it had little affect on their vigorous growth. Nettles around the moat were cut or pulled at least twice (some areas three times) over the summer which seems to have reduced them slightly. An additional advantage of the sheep has been that they have prevented the spread of brambles by eating the new shoots coming out into the grassland thus removing one task. The sheep have of course also removed the need for grass cutting in the second field although the nettles and docks by the dividing hedge line were cut once by Chris Bonehill in July.

The cutting regime in the first field was much the same as in previous years, the flat amenity areas being cut first at the end of May. This year the small bank by the boardwalk and first amenity area was left uncut for about a month to allow some plants to flower and seed. The rest of the less good grassland on the slopes was cut once over the summer as deemed ready for cutting and subject to Chris Bonehill being available. He went over some nettle and dock infested areas near the entrance and near the main gate into the second field a second time while he was on site. The amenity areas were cut again in late summer. The best of the MG5 grassland nearer the top of the bank and on the steeper slope was strimmed by Alan Farnsworth in late summer and some of this was spread on the slopes in the second field in the hope of increasing the wild flower seed bank. All this grass cutting once again resulted in a lot of man hours being spent by a very few people, during the week as well as at regular work parties, raking up and dumping the cut grass. We really need more help with this ongoing task over the summer.

The Grassland Forum in May was attended by Mark Robbins, and Wendy and Cyril Johnson. As a result of information from this meeting it was agreed to apply for Environmental Stewardship. Before we can do this we have to register the land with the rural land registry which has required us to get SBI, vendor and CPH (holding) numbers – this took 5 months. Then to apply for field numbers and areas (still awaited after 2 months). Entry Level Stewardship would provide about

£100/year and Higher Level will provide a larger annual income plus the possibility of capital grants for specific projects. Our status as a Special Wildlife Site in Worcestershire should help us to obtain HLS.

Ponds and moat

Pond 1 has no major problems though it got very shallow over the summer due to evaporation. Once again some of the excess hornwort was removed to the moat (but as before there is very little sign of it surviving there).

The invasive plant in **Pond 2** has now been identified as *Acorus* (sweet flag) which explains why it is so much more invasive than the yellow flag iris in pond 1. Valiant efforts have once more been made by some volunteers (especially by Tim Patrickson) to remove this but large patches still remain. The low level of the pond in the summer gave access but seems to encourage the growth. A shallow scrape of silt with *Acorus* roots (6 inches - as agreed with English Heritage) was removed near the edge of the pond. Disposing of this by the barrow load turned out to be very heavy work indeed and took a lot of extra man hours (about 20 in all) from a very few people. The overall verdict was that digging the *Acorus* out by hand was preferable!! If / when we do get the whole pond dug out and deepened we must be sure that the material is removed to its final resting place by machine. The vegetation around the edge of both ponds was cut back in the autumn and the barriers to the exclusion areas by both ponds were refurbished.

The moat is still leaking in the south east corner – in fact it seems to be getting worse. The leak was traced by blue dye in the Spring. The resulting low water level causes problems - allowing access to the island (which English Heritage does not want) and the deep mud is a possible hazard. Nettles were cut round the outer bank in summer and all the vegetation there was cut back in the autumn.

Copse, island, hedges and scrub (Winter work - October to March)

Copse

Bramble and small sycamore, ash and hawthorn seedlings have been cut back leaving just a few good specimens to form future trees. More hazel has been coppiced along the stream bank and some tangled areas there have been cleared. This will allow more light in to improve the ground flora. There was a good variety of fungi in the copse, and elsewhere, during the late autumn both on the decaying wood and on the ground. As the ivy on the ground in the copse is getting rather thick some patches were removed to see what affect this will have on the ground flora next summer. In general the stream is flowing well after a number of branches and other obstructions were removed by the copse.

Island

A lot of work was done on the island in January when a group from the Worcester branch of British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) came to work for us for a day. Including a small work experience group from NEW college Redditch there were about 24 people in total. The cost will be about £200 but without this help our regular work parties could not get this done. We 'built' the 'bridge' across to the island the morning before and removed it after the BTCV had left. A number of trustees were also on site during the BTCV visit and also did a lot of work both on the island and in the surrounding area. In all about 135 man hours work were done in the one day. Most of the brambles on the island were cut and burned. Other scrub, unwanted young sycamore, ash and hawthorn seedlings were cleared and hazel coppiced. A number of small trees and branches around the edge of the island overhanging the moat were removed which has opened it up. This will let more light onto the island to encourage the primroses, bluebells etc. and may help to improve the water quality in the moat as it will reduce leaf fall and the extra light may enable some oxygenating plants to grow.

Scrub

Little work has been done on scrub areas which are in the main left to look after themselves and form shelter for wildlife. Some brambles etc were cut back round the edges in field one to prevent spread into the grassland. The sheep have made slight inroads into the scrub in the second field which in general is good.

Hedges

The 'new' hedge by Gore's field continues to do well and needs little attention now. It has been checked and trimmed as necessary. The best management for this hedge will probably be to let it grow for a few more years then have it laid. The various trees along the hedge (black poplar, black pear, wild service, oak, field maple) are all doing well.

The original blackthorn in the new hedge behind the Millennium seat is doing well but the hawthorn is weaker. The newly planted blackthorn which replaced the vandalised plants are surviving and hopefully will 'take off' this Spring.

The lower part of the hedge between the two fields has grown well this year so that there will be less need to clear vegetation around it in future. Some of the more tangled growth in the hedge line above the gate was cut out early last Spring. The best hawthorns are being kept for their appearance, flowers and berries but some more tangled bits may be removed in the next few weeks. The hedge by the road was cut quite hard back in the winter; this should encourage it to bush out in the Spring.

Wet Flush

In February the remains of last year's greater willowherb were pulled out or cut, ash and any other tree seedlings dug out, and the figwort and rushes in the lower area cut down. All this material was burned nearby. The course of the little stream from the spring was cleared a little to give it a definite course but still leaving the rest of the area wet. We plan to extend the area of the small pond slightly and to remove the typha (bull rush) before it becomes too invasive. The boardwalks were also cleared.

Butterflies

Full records of butterflies were not kept this year but all the species seen in earlier years (apart from Painted Ladies) were present. Marbled Whites appeared in good numbers again indicating that the grassland management regime is suiting them. Orange tips were plentiful in April / May and there were lots of meadow browns in June / July. Our impression was that there were fewer Vanessaids (Peacocks, Tortoise Shells, Red Admirals) this year probably due to weather conditions rather than our management as we are leaving plenty of nettles ! Burnet moths did well again.

Nest boxes and birds

The nest boxes on the island were cleaned out when we had the bridge across in January along with those in the copse. Almost all had been used. A few remain to be cleaned out. Some nest boxes will need to be replaced as they have suffered from enlargement of the hole, even around the metal plates, probably by woodpeckers.

The mallards raised a good number of ducklings again 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. Winter visitors have included bramblings, long tailed tits, siskins and a party of over 20 redpoll.

Lichens, mosses and liverworts

Joy Rickets, a local expert, visited the Millennium Green with Dinah Griffin during the autumn and has listed the lichens, mosses and liverworts she found on site. These have also been sent to the Worcestershire biological records.

Wendy Johnson
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Work party organisers