

Inkberrow Millennium Green Conservation Management report for the AGM for the year ended March 2008

As in the last few years much of the work carried out on the Millennium Green has been ongoing management in line with the management plan and our agreements under Entry Level Stewardship, with English Heritage and Worcester County Council. Over the summer management was mainly concerned with grassland and control of thistles, docks and nettles as and when the weather allowed. Winter work is mainly related to hedges, scrub, coppicing, trees and keeping brambles in check. The big leaning oak tree in the copse, which is very unbalanced and in danger of falling, will be professionally cut in a few weeks back leaving as much of the crown as possible. Throughout the year the site is checked regularly for damage and obstructions, and repairs are made as necessary, particularly to the boardwalk rails, posts and netting. A removable section and a small gate have been made in the rails of the boardwalk to improve access to the area round the moat and to the island as and when needed for maintenance.

Grassland

The area of quality grassland behind the seat on the slope in field 1 continues to flourish with a sequence of flowering from Birds Foot Trefoil and Cowslips in Spring right through to Knapweed and Scabious in high Summer. Our present management seems to be improving our grassland but unfortunately we were not able to find any sheep to graze the grassland in the second field this summer. Ideally it should be grazed from July onwards after the main flowering and seeding period. However the introduction of 10 (now 8) sheep by John Hopkins in February was a real fillip for the management of field 2. Lets hope long term arrangements can be made.

Some nettles in the first field were sprayed to reduce their extent and prevent further spread into the quality grassland. This along with hand cutting of nettles in the second field has kept nettles just about under control. The docks sprayed and eaten by the sheep in the second field in 2005 have still not reappeared in great numbers. The overall improvement of the grassland in this field was maintained, partly due to rabbit grazing, despite the lack of sheep until January 2008. John Hopkins sheep are now effectively grazing the second field. We have pulled and cut more thistles on the best grassland in both fields. The docks near the entrance in field 1 were again cut a number of times over the summer when the wet weather allowed and they do seem to be weakened. Nettles around the moat were cut or pulled and the grass around the moat strimmed twice over the summer which continues to improve the vegetation. The area where the small valley comes down from Gore's field has become much wetter, possibly due to the newly built up area of Barley Meadows, and it developed into a watercress bed in the summer. It has remained very wet over the winter. The Acorus which started to grow on the dumped silt was cut during the summer and the whole silt area was cut in October. It is developing a fairly coarse vegetation with a lot of rushes because it is not well drained and the summer was so wet.

The grass cutting regime was much the same as in previous year although the timing was different as the wet summer weather meant it had to be done when opportunity arose. The flat amenity areas were cut twice and the rest of the grassland on the slopes in field one was cut once either by Chris Bonehill or by Alan Farnsworth (who strimmed the best of the MG5 grassland nearer the top of the bank and on the steeper slope). Chris Bonehill also cut the area by the tall hedge just through the gate in the second field. Most of the cut grass was eventually raked up although some work parties were rained off. This cutting did not finish until late September. Overall the summer maintenance took around 130 man hours of volunteer time.

Pond 1 is in good condition and remained nearly full all summer. The vegetation round the edge was cut back where required in the Autumn.

In **Pond 2** ongoing removal of Acorus (sweet flag) was necessary as some reappeared after last year's de-silting. And our hopes that it does not thrive in deeper water were not entirely well founded but after Graham went chest deep in the pond to remove the bits growing in the deep part it appears to be under control! The water quality and natural aquatic flora and fauna in the much deepened pond is improving and some taller vegetation is developing round the edge. Some of the shrubs (hazel and dogwood) which were planted by the steepest part of the bank were interfered with, probably by children, and then eaten by animals but there are now enough growing to mark the pond edge. Some native aquatic plants were re-introduced from pond 1 and from the dumped silt where rushes and celery leaved buttercup continued to thrive. The barriers to the exclusion areas were refurbished in the Autumn when the rest of the willow was coppiced and in the spring when the hazel was coppiced.

The Moat is still leaking to some extent in the south east corner despite the re-puddling. However the water level has remained reasonable all year with no part of the moat drying out. Brambles and tree seedlings etc were cut round the outer bank in the autumn.

Copse

Bramble and small sycamore, ash and hawthorn seedlings have been removed again this winter leaving just a few good specimens to form future trees. This will allowed more light in to improve the ground flora. In general the stream is flowing well after a number of branches and other obstructions were again removed. Two more hazel stools have been coppiced – one in the exclusion zone behind pond one and the other by the stream near pond two. This latter large stool was done by Wade Muggleton from the Worcestershire Countryside Service who brought his chain saw (and his dog) and gave us almost a full a day of his time for free.

Island

The island it has not been touched this year. The primroses and bluebells were very good in Spring 2007.

Scrub

Little work is done on scrub areas which are in the main left to look after themselves and form shelter for wildlife. Brambles etc are being cut back round the edges in both fields to prevent spread into the grassland. Some of these were burned on the silt area.

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 various trees along the hedge (black pear, wild service, oak, field maple and black poplar) continue to thrive.

The original blackthorn in the new hedge behind the Millennium seat continues to do well but the hawthorn and newer blackthorn (which replaced the vandalised plants) is still growing only slowly.

The lower part of the hedge between the two fields needs little attention and is doing well. The hedge line above the gate has had no further work done on it. The best hawthorns are being kept for their appearance, flowers and berries but some more tangled bits may be removed. The sides of the hedge by the road were cut back in December – otherwise it will be left to grow to at least two meters as part of the Environmental Stewardship agreement.

Wet Flush

Tree seedlings have been removed but otherwise the wet flush area has been left alone apart from the part just by the board walks which have been cut back. There have been some further problems with vandalism on the small pond as the lining was cut; so at present nothing more will be done. The boardwalks were also cleared.

Fruit Trees

These are all now well established and many produced bumper crops of fruit this year.

The **winter work parties** will have put in about 150 man hours by the end of March. With an average work party of 6 volunteers we have managed to keep up with the planned work. Once again we have had the help of a D. of E. student from time to time.

Butterflies

Full records of butterflies were not kept this year but again all the species seen in earlier years (apart from Painted Ladies) were present. Their numbers were in keeping with those seen elsewhere in the area but during the wet part of the summer numbers were generally down. There were good numbers of marbled whites for a short period in both fields; it will be interesting to see if the severe rain in July has damaged the population.

Nest boxes and birds

Eight new boxes were erected in Spring 2007 thanks to the generosity of John Harris giving a total of sixteen boxes in the two fields. This is rather high density and we only expected two thirds of them to be used. Surprisingly all the new boxes had had good nests when the boxes were cleaned in January. A few of the most badly damaged old boxes were removed.

We have a relatively small number of breeding birds on site but these did include breeding chiffchaffs and lesser whitethroats and probably blackcaps. Nuthatches do not seem as common as they were in the early 2000s. Mallards and moorhens bred on the island as usual and the green woodpeckers are still present.

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Work party organisers