

Inkberrow Millennium Green Conservation Management Report for the AGM for the year ended March 2009

General overview

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 under Entry Level Stewardship, with English Heritage and Worcester County Council. Summer management, from April to October, involved raking up grass, cutting and pulling thistles particularly in field 2, cutting docks in field 1 and nettles mainly on the 'amphitheatre' in field 2. The wet summer weather meant that all this work was not done as planned but mostly finished in the end. Winter work from October to March has included cutting back the hedge between the moat and road, clearing scrub and saplings from the copse and round the moat and ponds, and keeping scrub and brambles in check throughout the site.

This year we have had three fallen trees - a field maple in the roadside hedge which had been showing signs of die back, the big ash in the western boundary of field 2 in Martin Sadler's hedge line (both these during various summer gales) and in the autumn a tree (sycamore?) from the 'copse' on Church Hill. The latter was cut up and taken away by a local man who paid for the timber. The dead field maple was moved to the hedge at the side of the road by someone unknown and all we had to do was tidy it up. The large ash was left over the summer / autumn period while we decided what to do about it. Since Christmas enough was cut back to allow the fence to be repaired slightly forward of the true line whilst leaving the large branch supporting the fallen tree in place. The rest of this fallen tree will now be left in situ and monitored to ensure that it is safe.

The sheep grazing in field two has overall been beneficial though at one point in the summer there was a danger of overgrazing as numbers increased from about 7 to over 20 plus a cow! The return of a small number of sheep (5-7) over the winter has been good; not only have they grazed the grass down to a suitable length but they seem to have reduced the spread of brambles. Poaching (trampling of soil) has not been a significant problem – people's feet and sledging had more of an impact.

An application for **Higher Level Stewardship** has been made and the feedback so far is positive. If we get HLS it will make some minor differences to our management of the site but will be very much in line with our management plan. The maintenance and restoration of the wildflower grassland is the main target and future management agreements for the archaeology would come under HLS. Scrub management would have to be more pro-active but could be done by contractors. There is also the possibility of educational visits. Altogether HLS would more or less cover the yearly cost of running the site.

Once again the **winter work parties** will have put in about 150 man hours by the end of March. From time to time we have had the help of Duncan who started as a D. of E. student. Over the **summer** from April to September we did almost 200 man hours. This includes the work done when the large oak tree by the stream in the copse was cut back to balance it so that it is less likely to be blown over. The tree looks good and seems quite stable. A lot of effort went into successfully planting the four oak trees and putting up the guards bought with the money from the PC for the Calor village environment award.

Grassland

FIELD 1

Our agreed management treatment continued with a single cut of the poorer area near the gate without removal. This will have to be removed under HLS. The amenity area was cut twice in May and September and the grass removed. The main un-improved MG5 area was strimmed in early September and the vegetation removed or spread when dry.

The removal of cut vegetation became an increased problem last year due to the very wet weather and fewer volunteers. It would be useful if mechanisation could be used to remove the machine cut vegetation. Last year's second successive wet Summer stimulated the growth of stronger more invasive coarse grasses to the detriment of the more floristically valued species. Another wet Summer this year could devastate our butterfly population as very few Marbled Whites were seen last year.

FIELD 2.

This benefited initially from sheep grazing but as this was prolonged and much too intensive some damage was done. Hopefully this Spring will remove our concerns. Controlled grazing is important but it should be restricted to Autumn-early Spring. We need to consider the amount of grazing done by rabbits in this field – it is said that about 5 rabbits can eat as much as one sheep! An HLS agreement would dictate stocking densities.

Conclusions

With Higher Level Stewardship likely we are going to have to re-examine our management of the valuable MG5 area with more strimming in the ant hill areas below the seat to encourage Meadow Vetchling which should be the sub-dominant species in Field 1.

We will also need to consider activities which have or could damage the MG5 areas e.g. sledging when there is only a little snow cover.

Ponds

These are in now good condition and not surprisingly remained full all summer. We now seem to have got control of the Acorus (sweet flag), thanks to Graham, although it still appears in small amounts from time to time.

The Moat is still leaking in the south east corner although the water level has remained high all year due to the wet weather and increased flow into the moat from Gore's land probably due to the new housing estate to the north west.

Copse

Bramble and small sycamore, ash and hawthorn seedlings have been removed again this winter. Wade Muggleton from the Worcestershire Countryside Service is coming later this month to coppice one or two more hazel stools.

Island

The island it has not been touched this year.

Scrub

Little work is done on scrub areas at present; in the main they are left to look after themselves with brambles being kept in check – which is a big enough job in itself!

Hedges

The 'new' hedge by Gore's field continues to do well and needs little attention although it will need to be laid in a few years. It has been checked and trimmed as necessary.

The original blackthorn in the new hedge behind the Millennium seat continues to do well and is suckering producing new young growth suitable for brown hairstreak butterflies.

The lower part of the hedge between the two fields needs little attention but this will also have to be laid in a few years. The hedge line above the gate has had no further work done on it. As reported last year the best hawthorns are being kept for their appearance, flowers and berries but some more tangled bits may be removed.

The roadside hedge was cut shorter to encourage it to thicken on the advice of the HLS advisor although it is supposed to be allowed to grow to 2m under our present ELS agreement.

Wet Flush

Tree seedlings have been removed but otherwise the wet flush area has been left alone apart from the area just by the board walks which has been cut back. The boardwalks were also cleared.

Fruit Trees

These are all now well established and many produced bumper crops of fruit again this year. Over the winter some of the unprotected trunks suffered from severe gnawing over a very short period. Chicken wire was put round all the trees to prevent further damage which was almost certainly due to rabbits. One or two trees were barked right round so they may not survive.

Butterflies

2008 was not a good year for butterflies. Only a few marbled whites were seen. We said last year '*it will be interesting to see if the severe rain in July has damaged the population*'. Two wet summers in a row has been bad for butterflies throughout the country.

Nest boxes and birds

Many of the nest boxes were badly pecked by woodpeckers during the year though mostly after the first broods had fledged. Some have been removed for repair or disposal and three new woodcrete ones have been put up – said to be woodpecker and squirrel proof.

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