

## **Millennium Green conservation management report March 2011**

### **Spring / Summer 2010**

As usual the summer work was mainly concerned with the grassland and keeping thistles, nettles and docks under control. Volunteers have put in about 170 man hours as well as the work by contractors. Over the summer we had the help of Mhari Leeson while completing part of her D of E award.

#### **Field 1**

Chris Bonehill once again did the cutting of the grass to help us meet the HLS requirements. The flat area by the ponds was cut in June. The amenity area by the picnic tables was cut in July and both were cut again later. Hay from these areas was raked up by volunteers. Chris Bonehill (contractor) cut and baled the grass on the slope above the moat and the lower slopes below the upper seat (the areas he usually cuts) in August. Chris is now cutting another path up to the left near the entrance and round behind the two oak trees (one of these has died and is to be replaced) – this will help to control the nettles round the edge of ELS grassland.

Nettles, thistles and docks were cut and pulled; overall they are not too much of a problem in this field. Cyril cut docks and nettles in the area in ELS above the moat a number of times and the discovery of dock beetles which attack the plants was welcomed. Graham Mowbray strimmed round the moat banks, and the boardwalk edges, picnic tables and seats more than once.

In late summer Alan Farnsworth (contractor) strimmed the best MG5 grassland above the upper path and the previously uncut area with anthills below it. This grass had to be raked up by volunteers but this task is manageable. Some of the best wildflower hay was spread lower down the slopes and seeds were collected and spread on the amphitheatre in Field 2. The small area of grass below the seat (strimmed for the first time last year) was left uncut for the marbled white butterflies. Some marbled whites were seen but in general it has again been a mixed year for butterflies due to the weather though all the recorded species were seen, except painted ladies.

We have complied with the HLS requirements in terms of cutting but with no follow up grazing some of the grass in ELS remained too long. However this area of grass above the moat is improving with more patches of wild flowers including bedstraw, birdsfoot trefoil and knapweed.

The wet area in the small valley coming down from Gores had a good variety of plants including water cress, water mint, yellow flag iris, figwort, willow herb and brooklime. This area is much favoured by the ducks (especially the ducklings) and moorhens as it provides a good food source.

#### **Field 2**

Neil McLean sprayed the nettles, mainly on the amphitheatre, area in field 2 with Grazon 90 at the optimal time with very good success. John Hopkins was then able to put his sheep in field 2 by the start of July - numbers have varied between 13 and 6 - and some have remained there over the winter eating some of the less palatable grass and getting it down to the levels required. Very many thistles and nettles were pulled or cut again but creeping thistle is becoming more of a problem particularly on and at the foot of the 'ski slope' area. We again managed to meet the HLS requirements except that some of the grass was a bit long in September although the winter grazing has reduced it. Chris Bonehill cut the silt heap with his grass 'topper' which has made an improvement.

## **Autumn / Winter 10 – 11**

Between October and March, although numbers at regular Sunday work parties have been down (around 80 man hours), altogether with the two scrub clearing weekday work parties volunteers have put in about 140 man hours over the winter. Winter work is mainly in the copse, round the ponds and moat, on hedges and cutting back and clearing bramble and scrub throughout the site. Repairs to the vandalised moat rails and posts, and dealing with the large branch which came off the old pear tree and resultant damage to the fence on the northern boundary both took time which would have been used for regular management tasks.

### **Fields 1 and 2**

Work has involved the usual cutting back of brambles, maintaining hedges and clearing round and removing debris from the ponds, moat and stream. The newly laid hedge near the picnic tables has done well. The existing alder and the two new ones along the stream bank have made some progress although the ones on the silt heap have died due to rabbit damage.

The scrub management plan for field 2 was completed by Caroline Course and Mike Liley of Worcestershire Wildlife Trust in the summer and it was very similar to our own ideas about what should be done. We began work clearing the area around the back steps in the SW of Field 2 in November; a very successful day. Tim Patrickson (and the sheep) continued to work on opening up the grassland in the NE corner of the site and we had a second day in February to clear the scrub and expose the well formed ridge and the small spring and stream. Tim has also overseen the building of a small bridge into this area.

Five new woodcrete bird boxes were put up in February.

### **Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)**

Our HLS year runs from June 1<sup>st</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup> so we are well through the second year of our agreement. So far we have met all the requirements and claimed the relevant payments. A separate report is appended.

**Educational Access** is a valuable part of our agreement and we had 5 groups visiting the site in the first year. We have a 'Farm Facts' leaflet for distribution to any interested group who might like to visit the site. A Teachers Information Pack is available on CD for schools and other youth groups. There is still a problem with access from the school as they have to come down the main road as no agreement has been reached about the use of the track on Martin Sadler's land. Unfortunately we have twice had to cancel a visit from the Holiday Club run by Zoe Collins owing to very wet weather.