

Millennium Green conservation management report March 2012

Spring / Summer 2011

As usual the summer work was mainly concerned with the grassland and keeping thistles, nettles and docks under control. Volunteers have put in about 140 man hours (down on last year) but about three quarters of the volunteer work has been done by just 4 people and it is really only because we did not have any grass cut on the amenity areas until later in the summer because of the dry weather that we have managed. We need to find more regular volunteers. There was also the work by contractors in cutting and strimming grass in the first field and spraying and cutting the silt heap in the second field.

We had a visit from Danny Newman, our HLS contact, in the summer to check up on our grassland management. This involved a check list on the variety of grassland species but she also looked round the whole site and was very pleased with our progress.

Field 1

Chris Bonehill cut and baled the grass for hay in late July. Apart from missing a bit up towards the upper gate the grass was very well cut although because of the nature of the site some hay was not picked up very well. Two bales were given to John Hopkins and CB took the rest. Very little early cutting was needed as it was so dry and the amenity areas were both cut later in the summer and the grass raked up by hand. The area by the picnic tables did not cut very well and this was re-cut along with some 'tidying up' cutting of the paths in early autumn. In early September Alan Farnsworth strimmed the best MG5 grassland slope above the upper path and the part of the area with anthills below it which was first cut two years ago. This grass was raked up by volunteers which is a manageable task. Some of the seeds from the best wild flower grassland were spread on the scrub cleared slopes in the second field. An area of grass was left uncut as marbled white butterflies thrive best in long grass. Good numbers of marbled whites were seen and grassland butterflies did well during the earlier part of the year. All the recorded species were seen, except painted ladies, and the burnet moths had another good year.

Cyril Johnson continued his campaign against the docks and nettles in the area in ELS and elsewhere. Graham has strimmed round 2 sides of the moat and round the seats etc. and removed any remaining Acorus in pond 2. He also planted the replacement oak which suffered from the lack of rain but looks as if it will survive. Nettles etc. were pulled from the other 2 sides of the moat by hand.

We have complied with the HLS requirements in terms of cutting and more of the grassland was of the required length this year at the end of the summer. Also the extent of the knapweed, bedstraw, birdsfoot trefoil and other flowers typical of MG5 grassland in the ELS area above the moat has increased.

Field 2

Neil Mclean sprayed the nettles on the area by the back steps where we had cleared the scrub in November 2010 – very successful. He also did some thistles on the first two slopes. We are left with a continuing thistle problem at the foot of the 'ski slope' where we continued to cut and pull thistles throughout the summer but may have to

resort to spraying these as well next year. Elsewhere we kept thistles, nettles and docks in check in the grassland by cutting and pulling. We also cleared the laid hedge between the two fields of goose grass and nettles – this hedge has also been trimmed. The area in the NE corner (Tim's area) where we cleared some scrub early in the year has required cutting regularly to prevent regrowth. The nettles on the silt heap were rampant – they were cut in June by Cyril and by Chris Bonehill in late summer and although the amount of grass is increasing and there are some interesting wild flowers there is still a big nettle problem. Tim Patrickson worked hard at keeping all the board walks clear over the summer. The fruit trees were pruned at the appropriate times in order to keep them clear of the path and to prevent rubbing and disease – they are not pruned for fruiting.

John Hopkins put his sheep in field 2 at the start of July – up to 13 over the summer. Once again we managed to meet the HLS requirements except that some of the grass was a bit long in September however 8 sheep have remained there over the winter eating some of the less palatable grass and getting it down to the levels required.

Autumn / Winter 2011-12

Between October and March around 100 man hours have been put in by volunteers at the regular Sunday work parties working mainly on the copse, round the ponds and moat, on hedges and cutting back and clearing bramble and scrub throughout the site. An extra 60 or so man hours were put in at the two scrub clearing and hedge brash burning days and along with other extras we will once again have put in around 200 volunteer man hours in all over the winter. We welcome John Sibbit who has recently joined our volunteer group.

Field 1

Alongside the usual cutting back of brambles, maintaining hedges and clearing round and removing debris from the ponds and moat we have also coppiced the sycamore by the NW corner of the board walk and cut back some hawthorn, elder and bramble from the outside of the 'dumping ground' where it had encroached onto the grassland. Brambles and unwanted saplings have been cleared from the copse along with two more scraggy hawthorns. We have agreed to leave the other hawthorns until the selected ash saplings have grown bigger. The alder whips planted by the stream last year were vandalised and lost.

The hedge between the Millennium Green and Carmichael's land, which we originally planted about ten years ago, has been laid by John Kirk over the winter leaving 6 specimen trees. He has done an excellent job for a very reasonable price. This hedge laying met part of our HLS agreement and the capital grant will cover a good deal of the cost. A successful volunteer morning to burn up the brash was attended by a record number of 13 volunteers. Two hazel stools in the copse by the stream and some of the willow by pond 2 were coppiced for use as binders.

Field 2

Sheep grazing over the autumn and winter has removed excess grass and prevented too much further spread of bramble and scrub. Ash and other saplings were removed from the wet flush along with some of the willow herb which very much dominated it this year. There was a scrub clearing day in November when the second area

designated in the HLS scrub clearance plan (on the left just beyond the board walks) was cleared and the brash burned. Since then we have cleared some further scrub which was encroaching onto the steep grass bank nearby. We are on course to complete all the scrub clearance in the plan over next winter as required by the HLS agreement. Other winter work in this field is ongoing cutting back of brambles and scrub where they continually encroach into the grassland. The fruit trees will be checked in the next couple of weeks – the Purple Pershore by the stream collapsed while in full fruit in the summer and when removed in October it appeared to have no roots – the cause of its demise could not be established.

School etc. visits

We had 3 school classes (doing activities related to their national curriculum targets), brownies (pond dipping and other activities), guides (who carried out a pond survey which was part of a national survey scheme) and a garden club visit the site in May, June and July. This meant we could claim for 5 visits up to the end of May (the end of the HLS year) and have 2 'in hand' for the next HLS year. These 5 visits bring in £500 and ensure that we meet the Educational Access part of our HLS agreement. No progress has been made on access from the School via Martin Sadler's land.

Maintenance and repairs

Rod Talboys has done a survey of the whole site recording what repairs are needed and is now IC maintenance. Minor repairs have been carried out to the boardwalks and fences and more gravel will shortly be put on the main steps in the second field. Rod and Shirley cleaned the red spray paint off the back of the seat by the moat. Graham is making a new notice board to go at the entrance for our notices.

Wendy Johnson

Nestbox Report

22 February 2012

There are 14 functional nest boxes on the Millennium Green of which 8 are in Field 1 & 6 in Field 2.

The 2011 season was reasonably successful with 12 boxes occupied by Blue Tits and Great Tits although in two cases the young did not all fledge. Considering the dryness of late Spring with fewer insects available the results show the value of nest boxes on a site which does not offer an abundance of natural nesting sites.

Interestingly little or no damage due to Woodpeckers was noted. Our aim should be to replace the old damaged boxes on the island with long lasting "woodcrete" boxes at the next available opportunity.

The Millennium Green is an useful staging point during Spring & Autumn migration with regular Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs & occasional Willow Warblers, Whitethroats, Spotted Flycatchers and Cuckoo passing through. Autumn brings occasional Grey & Pied wagtails, while Kingfishers, Nuthatch & Tree creepers are seen or heard throughout the year.

Gareth Thomas