

# **Conservation management report and Higher Level Stewardship on Inkberrow Millennium Green for 2012 - 13**

## **Summer 2012**

This covers the part of the year from April to September.

The original work party plan for Sundays of cutting and pulling nettles, docks and thistles was reviewed in mid June as the wet weather had prevented some things being done and other aspects became more urgent owing to the prolific growth of nettles, thistles and cleavers in some parts. Fortunately there were not too many wet Sundays and by the end of August we had more or less got control in both fields as a result of repeated hand cutting and pulling. The areas where we have cleared scrub were a particular problem owing to regrowth of nettles, brambles and seeded thistles but thanks to the scythe donated by Mark Robbins and restored to working order by Cyril Johnson we (i.e. Cyril) were able to cut much larger areas in a given time. The grass in field 2 was left in the hands (or rather the mouths) of the sheep which returned in July and they had at last made some impression by late summer. The silt heap was cut by Cyril over the summer and then by Chris Bonehill (CB) in late September.

As reported earlier it was not possible to have either amenity area cut early but CB kept the paths cut regularly enabling visitors to walk on a variety of routes round the first field on relatively short grass. The wildflowers such as bedstraw, agrimony and meadow vetchling did very well in spite of the extra long grass – one group of children found 9 different yellow flowers in the area near the upper seat. Over the summer we have had visits from 3 school classes and the school is now including these as part of their curriculum. Also from Guides who attempted to date some of our largest trees, from Brownies, from the WI for a general tour of the site, from the Tea Club looking particularly at the history, and the Pershore U3A natural history group. All the children and some of the adults enjoyed splashing through the water and mud!

The cutting of the main areas of grassland in field 1 for hay which normally takes place fairly soon after 15 July was eventually done at the first opportunity at the beginning of September after the wettest summer for 100 years. The hay was baled and removed (3 trailer loads I understand) and 2 bales left for John Hopkins. Clayton Bonehill cut the hay using a different machine this year which did a very good job. Chris B re-cut paths and the areas which could not be done by the larger hay making machinery in late September. The hay missed by the baler - mainly in the furrows- was raked up. Alan Farnsworth and his two helpers were not able to strim the upper grassland with ant hills until early October though this is part of the summer work programme. The grass was very thick and fallen over and he did a larger area than the previous year so despite the increased price it was a very fair one. We also asked him to strim round the North and West sides of the moat bank; this was done once earlier in the season by Graham Mowbray who also did round the picnic tables etc – the latter done again in August by Tim Patrickson in his capacity as apprentice strimmer.

Other things done over the summer were removing lots of goose grass (cleavers) from hedges and in places the grasslands. We also cut along by the newly laid hedge where a lot of suckers have appeared, cleared round fruit and oak trees, pulled / cut nettles etc along the South and East sides of moat banks, cut and pulled lots of thistles in the grassland and kept

the board walks as clear as possible. Litter was regularly removed - it became quite a problem by the seat in field 2 at one time. Some unwelcome Himalayan balsam was found in the North east corner and removed but we need to look out for it next year. Rod Talboys has carried out various repairs including stabilising the main notice board and Graham has installed a second one for our own notices.

We have I think met all the requirements of the HLS agreement and may even achieve the grass length requirements owing to the late hay cut!

I estimate that about 130 man hours were clocked up on Sundays plus another 30 during the week (excluding the various archaeological investigations). Slightly down on last summer and mostly done by 5 or 6 regulars. As we are getting older this is going to be an increasing problem and we will probably need to make more use of contractors in the future.

### **Winter 2012 – 13**

This covers the year from October 2012 to March 2013

Although the summer work programme over ran into October due to the delays caused by the wet weather we have managed to keep up with the winter schedule. This is more or less the same each year and in the Autumn covers clearing (mainly cutting brambles) round the ponds and moat banks, and trimming the roadside hedge and the two recently laid hedges to encourage them to thicken up. This year we also removed a small dead elm tree by the entrance and planted some new hazel whips in the hedge by the gate.

In late November we had two Tuesday scrub clearing days when large areas of bramble along with some small elders and a couple of hawthorns were cleared and burned in the area above the spring in the central west part of field two. John Tilt (Grafton Wood warden) came on the first day and cleared much of the bramble with his powerful brush cutter. The bulk of the work was done over the two days but we finally finished off cutting stumps on 23<sup>rd</sup> December. A number of trustees and volunteers helped for at least part of one or other of the two days but half of the total of almost 50 man hours was done by just two of us. This was the final and by far the biggest area of scrub we have cleared and completes the three year scrub clearance programme under our HLS agreement. By doing all this scrub clearing ourselves we have been able to claim a capital works payment of £744.50 without paying out for contractors – just a small donation to Grafton Wood funds. This is the last of the large capital works payments from our HLS agreement.

At the regular work parties before Christmas we spent some time finishing bramble clearing around the area of cleared scrub, the steps and in the North East corner. We also removed saplings and some willow herb in the wet areas in field two and the bramble on the northern part of the first field.

In January we cut brambles, long grass and some saplings in the copse and along the stream bank and did some repairs to the barriers using some of the coppiced hazel and willow from by the second pond. The rest of the bramble growing out into the grassland has been cut back around the first field and almost all the second. A large hawthorn tree from the hedge between the two fields came down onto the ridge and furrow grassland towards the end of February. This has been cut up and the logs and brash stacked by the fence. It appears that the tree just fell over due to the weight of ivy and the very wet conditions – at least it provided an ivy feast for the sheep! Another tree along the stream in the NE corner has also

come down but has not caused much problem as it is mainly along the stream bank behind the fence.

Over the winter volunteers put in over 200 man hours – more than usual.

**The general consensus is that overall the Millennium Green is looking better than ever** despite the wet Summer and Autumn. The wildflower grassland is improving with more finer grasses in some parts and the characteristic flowers such as meadow vetchling, ladies bedstraw, birdsfoot trefoil and agrimony spreading in both fields. The knapweed is holding its own and there were a few new patches near pond 2. Scabious is still very limited in extent but there is more burnet saxifrage (carrot family). There was more ragged robin near the ponds and red campion is spreading in the longer grasses by the ponds and barriers – partly helped by the children who love the little 'pots' of seeds.

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

As mentioned above we have managed to meet almost all of the requirements of our HLS agreement so far as the conservation management of the site is concerned. Eight sheep have been present over the winter and they have eaten the grass right down as required for the wildflower grassland. We got permission for John Hopkins to feed them by the gate so that he could check on them. In the HLS year which runs from 1<sup>st</sup> June to 31<sup>st</sup> May we had six visiting groups for 2011-12 and already have 5 visits for the present HLS year which ends on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2013. The school visit by Year 1 Pupils on January 31<sup>st</sup>, luckily the best day in the month, was very successful despite (or possibly because of) the mud!

The nest boxes were cleaned out in February. Reports on the **nest boxes and breeding birds** (Gareth Thomas) **butterflies** (Wendy Johnson) and **fungi** (Dinah Griffin) will be presented separately.

Wendy Johnson  
06/03/2013