

Conservation management report and Higher Level Stewardship on Inkberrow Millennium Green for 2013 - 14

Summer

this covers the period from April to September 2013

As it was a cold spring the grass was late growing and everything was about 3 weeks behind. There was then a hot dry period but the weather became unsettled again by the time the hay was cut in August. Chris Bonehill kept the paths cut regularly as needed during the summer but neither of the amenity areas was cut early as the grass was then still short.

April was spent doing jobs such as clearing debris from the moat and ponds, removing litter and cleaning site furniture. Also tidying round the boardwalks, clearing both sets of steps and beginning to cut docks, thistles and nettles. In **May, June and July** we cleared nettles etc from the S and E sides of the moat, cut along the small stream valley sides in the first field and continued to cut and pull nettles, thistles and docks within the grassland in both fields. Alan Farnsworth strimmed round the N and W sides of the moat at the beginning of July and we raked up and removed the grass. Tim Patrickson and Dinah Griffin have used the IMG Trust **trimmer** to tidy round the boardwalk edge and round the picnic table and other small areas. They hope to extend their strimming skills! We collected grass and flower seed for later spreading in bare areas from the drain repairs (where we spread some newly cut grass as well). We also spread flower seed to try to increase the extent of plants such as knapweed, yellow rattle and bedstraw in various parts of the grassland.

The areas where we have **cleared scrub** continue to be a particular problem owing to regrowth of nettles and brambles, and seeded thistles. Neil McLean sprayed the nettles and brambles on the last scrub cleared site above the spring in Field 2. In September this bare area was sown with MG5 grass mix from Emorsgate seeds; our own wild flower seed was added. The silt heap which also has a lot of nettles was cut at least twice by Cyril Johnson and then by Chris Bonehill in late September / early October when he did the last cut of the paths

We had a number of **fallen trees and branches** to deal with over the summer. A fallen dead elm on N side was dealt with by Cyril. Later in the summer we had four instances of 'summer branch drop' thought to be due to the extremes of wet and dry weather. The first 2 were from Ash trees - one by pond 2 and the other from a large ash in the second field. (In the Autumn a large branch on the ash by the gate into the second field suffered the same fate though it was held up by other trees and has since been cut off and made safe). The third was from one of the planted pear trees - a problem with this was noted years ago but it had seemed to be OK. The wound on this was cleaned up and treated with Arbrex. On the way back from dealing with the pear tree wound a large branch of field maple was spotted in the copse near the road hedge - it had fallen from high up. All 4 branches were made safe and cut up enough to allow the branches and brash to be moved and stacked near where they fell - mostly by Cyril. The sheep had a bonanza with the pears, leaves and ash keys!

CB cut the **amenity areas** with his topper in mid July. This produced too much grass to be raked up comfortably by the few volunteers available. We had decided to leave the grassland for hay to flower and set seed before cutting in August. Mark also pointed out the value of later cutting for the invertebrate life cycle; we only saw the first marbled white and the first burnet moth in the second week in July. Clayton Bonehill cut and organised the baling of the **main area of grass for hay** in mid August. Two bales were left for John Hopkins and another because it did not bale properly! Although in the past we have had the 2 amenity areas cut before the school holidays begin this has always involved raking up and dumping the hay. I don't think this is sustainable in the future for 3 reasons:

- 1 manpower to do the raking
- 2 it is such a waste of hay even if it is not top quality
- 3 we are running out of places to dump it

Had we left it another 3 weeks it would have been cut and baled as part of the main hay cut but the amenity areas might be seen as less 'user friendly' for visitors with children wanting to play games. *The grass cutting regime is under consideration but has to meet the HLS requirements.*

Alan Farnsworth strimmed the good wildflower grassland on the upper slopes in mid September. And this was raked up and dumped in a variety of places mainly along the hedges and fences at the edge of the field. Again it fell mainly to a very few volunteers but I don't see any alternative to this.

Sheep returned to the second field in late July but they were 8 Suffolks belonging to Nick Langdon – arranged by John Hopkins as he could not bring his own sheep. These large sheep have made a marked impact on the grass by the amount they eat and their droppings! They were also extremely keen on the fruit and did some minor damage to the fruit cage wire. There was a major incident of sheep worrying on Gabby Allison's land next door and, after two episodes of dogs chasing the sheep on our land, we put up notices requiring people to keep their dogs on leads in the second field.

By the end of the summer we had met all the **HLS** requirements except that some of the grass had grown more than usual after cutting.

As usual we had put in well over 200 man hours of voluntary conservation work during the summer half of the year.

There were three **school visits** in May studying ponds and habitats and being 'nature detectives'. This brought the total number of visits, including one adult group, in the HLS year (ending 31/05/2013) to eight. I claimed for 6 and held two over towards this HLS year (2013/14) as some school groups have usually come in June. The brownies visit was cancelled at the last minute due to the weather.

Butterflies and other invertebrates

The cold late spring meant that there were fewer butterflies about than usual. Although the hot dry period gave some insects chance to recover the early butterflies did badly and the school children found very little in their sweep nets when they came in May. *See report of the 'big butterfly count' carried out in early August*

Winter

This covers the period from October 2013 to March 2014

After finishing a bit of final grass cutting and clearing we began the winter work programme as usual by cutting brambles etc round the south and east banks of the moat and around the ponds, and cutting back the scrub by the steep dangerous part of pond 2 to let more light in.

The roadside hedge and the hedge on the west of field 1 were cut back to encourage them to thicken up (the hedge near the picnic tables had been done in late summer).

In early November we built the oil drum float bridge to the island in readiness for scrub clearing, hazel coppicing and some tree removal. Thanks to Clayton Bonehill for the loan of the scaffolding board. We then worked alongside the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust Conservation Wardens and Volunteers for 2 days which resulted in the opening up of the island with a few new habitat piles while much of the brash was removed and burned. Four new woodcrete nest boxes were put up and the old ones which had been attacked by woodpeckers and squirrels were removed. We are very

grateful for the help from the DWT and hope a visit to the IMG will be a regular part of their program. Carrying out this island scrub clearance was the main HLS commitment for this winter.

Up to the end of 2013 we kept up with the work plan clearing bramble in both fields, removing some willow herb from the stream valleys and beginning work in the copse. With an extra work party between Christmas and New Year and the first work party in January we got two scraggy hawthorns cut down and a branch removed from a field maple; much of the bramble and long grass was strimmed or cut and the stream bank partly cleared – all as planned. An overhanging branch near pond 2 was also removed.

After being rained off in late January the rest of the copse ground cover was cleared in early February. The first log blocking the road bridge was removed in January by Cyril Johnson. Another very large log washed down by the floods was moved from the stream by Rod Talboys and helpers at the work party and finally cut in half and completely removed by Cyril a few days later when he noted yet another log blocking the bridge which was finally removed by Cyril and Rod. The second part of ash tree on the western boundary of field 2 near the Millennium Seat came down in the gales; fortunately mostly on Sadlers side of the fence. This was made safe and overhanging branches cut back and stacked over the fence at the same February work party. The fence still needs some attention. All this rather set back the planned work! We have not coppiced any hazel or the willow by pond 2 which may now be done if the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust come next autumn.

At the second work party in February we made a start on the tall hedge between the two fields. One of the hawthorns by the upper gate bridge has been pollarded and another dangerously leaning one cut down. This will leave space and light for the two rowans and a smaller hawthorn to grow up and also should help the mud by the upper gate bridge to dry out. *A plan for the next 2 or 3 years has been made for managing this hedge while retaining some of the tall hawthorns for their flowers and berries.* We will finish cutting up and stacking these cut trees and also do some more bramble cutting, checking the fruit trees and the whole site in general by the end of March.

The sheep were removed from field 2 at the end of January leaving the grass well grazed down. Nick Langdon would like to bring his sheep back next summer.

Over this year we have had the help of Connie Grant from Kings School who is doing the volunteering section of the DofE Gold award with us – this is still to be completed.

We will have put in about 150 volunteer man hours over the winter.

On the morning January 29th Year 1 from Inkberrow First School visited the IMG as part of their study of plants. They were extremely lucky to have chosen a dry morning and their visit was very successful – thanks to Dinah Griffin, Gareth Thomas and Cill Chiverrell.

Big Butterfly Count

August 7th 2013

The table below shows the result of a 15 minute survey as part of the simple national survey run by Butterfly Conservation - results submitted. This is past the best time for butterflies as the marbled whites, ringlets and tortoiseshells seem to be over. Numbers of marbled whites were lower this year and they were only about for a short time. We have also seen holly blues, small and large skippers, red admirals

Butterfly	Number
Small white	40
Meadow brown	21
Gate keeper	12
Large white	1
Brimstone	4
Peacock	5
Green veined white	4
Common blue	2
Brown argus	1

All the peacocks and blues including the brown argus (a first for the IMG I think) were seen in the wetland in field one on the teasles, watermint and watercress where some small whites, gatekeepers and meadow browns were also recorded.

This shows another aspect of the value of this small wetland area.

Wendy Johnson

Millennium Green Bird Report

24 February 2014

The cold late spring and adverse northerly winds meant that our summer visitor birds were delayed. Our first visitors, chaffinch and black caps, arrived in early May. These are the only warblers that stay on the Green throughout the Summer. Our whitethroats that like scrub conditions did not nest in field 2 with little scrub left. Willow warblers pass through very quickly as they are rare nesters in the county these days.

Our nest boxes were well used by tits with only two of our fourteen boxes totally empty. New woodcrete boxes were put up on the island when the two day clearing took place. There was little sign of woodpecker damage to our remaining wooden boxes.

Nuthatches are present throughout the year, while treecreepers are occasionally seen. Green woodpeckers seem less common. Overhead sightings included regular buzzards, herons, ravens, kites and four cranes! Mallards and moorhens breed but the young disappear quickly. Most of our winter birds end up in Inkberrow gardens rather than down the Green and a feeding station might provide greater bird interest.

W. Gareth Thomas