

# Conservation management report on Inkberrow Millennium Green for AGM March 2016

## Summer 2015 - this covers the period from April to September 2015

Much of the earlier part of the summer was as usual spent cutting / pulling brambles, nettles, and thistles and generally maintaining the site. This included repairs to the main steps and replacing fencing posts organised by Rod Talboys; and clearing the back steps and boardwalks. In May we removed nettles etc from the south and east sides of the moat bank and copse, and made access points to the ponds for the school. Tim Patrickson strimmed round the north and west sides of the moat in July and the grass was raked up and removed. He has also kept the areas round the seats and notice boards strimmed. Chris Bonehill has cut the paths round the first field a number of times keeping the site easily accessible and looking very attractive with plenty of colour in the wildflower grassland. The ***Flower-rich Grassland*** information board was finally installed in May by Chris Bonehill and is appreciated by visitors – we have had a number of positive comments. The new leaflets have also been a success.

By August we were mainly removing thistles to prevent seeding. We have continued to improve the little stream valley down from 'Gores' to the drain hole. Cyril Johnson has installed a little bridge at the top and cut the path up both sides with the scythe; Tim and Dinah have also strimmed this path. The water plants are doing quite well though we seem to have lost the watercress and brooklime due to some scouring of the stream bed (cause unknown) which partly dried out the wetland on either side. We are attempting to rectify this by reducing the flow and re-widening the channel. Two ash saplings with dead tops were removed from the copse and burned though it is unlikely to have been due to Chalara. I did the 15 minute **Big Butterfly Count** again – see table below. The numbers of marbled whites in both fields were very good and they were about for longer than in previous years.

The hay was cut, tedded, rowed up and baled in the second week in August by Anthony Steele - the first opportunity after unsettled weather. He has cut a slightly bigger area this year and agreed to 'top' the awkward areas either side of the track up to the gate into Carmichael's field for a small charge - this was done in the late summer. Tim and Dinah strimmed the smaller areas left near the ponds and moat. Cyril has cut the nettles etc along the small dry valley leading down from the vicarage and these were raked down into the valley to be burned. By the end of the summer we met most of the **HLS** requirements with all the grass cut and remaining quite short - though it grew long again later in the mild Autumn/winter.

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.

The areas in the second field where we have cleared scrub continue to be a problem owing to regrowth of nettles and brambles, seeded thistles and burdocks. These have required repeated cutting but in most areas we are slowly winning. The silt heap which also has a lot of nettles was again cut by Cyril early in the summer. Chris Bonehill topped it in the autumn. This area continues to improve with lots of cranesbill flowers and more grass. I have not found any more Himalayan balsam this year in either of the small stream valleys.

Nine of Nick Langdon's sheep and lambs returned to the second field in July and he brought the Ram down later in the summer. The grass in field 2 was long but it has been grazed down over the winter. The wildflower grassland in this field has markedly improved with more yellow rattle, Lady's bedstraw, meadow vetchling, agrimony and knapweed. There were two common spotted orchids by the boardwalk this year.

In June a large sycamore trunk fell across the moat towards the copse damaging the boardwalk fence. Cyril and I cleared all the brash and made it safe but as we could not move the trunk it was decided at the trustees site visit to ask Neil McLean to remove it as he was coming to cut back the holm oak on Church Hill. He brought a boat and crossed to the island to inspect the base of the other three sycamore trunks coming from the same base. They were also part rotten and unsafe so were felled onto the island (one twisting off quite dangerously as it was being cut). These trunks and the brash need further attention when we go onto the island but are no danger.

There were four **school visits** again over the summer studying ponds and habitats and being 'nature detectives'. The two in May enabled us to meet the minimum of four visits for the 2014 -15 HLS year. So we already have two for the 2015-16 HLS year. We also had a visit from Camarardery Camera Club arranged through a contact of Jenny Powis but the Horticultural society visit was cancelled due to heavy rain early in the day.

In August Neil McLean came to have a look at the trees by the road on Church Hill. He recommended cutting the ivy as there was a lot of weight at the top of a number of the trees which could fall onto the road; he will also monitor the limes – one of which looked 'unwell' - we later found the pale leaves were mistletoe.

Altogether about 180 man hours of volunteer time will have gone into maintaining the site this summer – this is more than usual due to the fallen tree and extra strimming by Tim.

### **Winter 2015/16 - this covers the period from October 2015 to March 2016**

After finishing clearing up cut grass at the beginning of October we began the winter work programme by cutting the roadside hedge and cutting ivy on the trees along Church Hill (as advised by Neil McLean).

In early November Tim donned the waders and with the help of people with rakes on the bank he cleared a lot of excess vegetation from both ponds. We also cut back vegetation on the banks of both ponds and the moat. Later in November we tackled brambles in the second field and since then various people have cut brambles in both fields from time to time. Most notably Mark Robbins has cleared a lot of brambles from the fence by 'Gore's' wood which has revealed just how far these brambles have extended out into the grassland. (see below).

The Duckworth Worcestershire Trust (DWT) came on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December and since we were not able to get onto the island they cut both sides and the top of the hege between us and 'Gores' field which had been laid a few years ago. We arranged for the gate between the fields to be opened – it is normally padlocked. Most of the brash was burned on a site near the gate on our side. There were about 10 volunteers with the DWT and in the afternoon they also cut the hedge near the picnic tables and cleared dead willow herb from the small stream valley. This valley has more or less recovered from the scouring earlier in the year and water cress has reappeared.

At the first work party in January we cut brambles and a few sapling in the copse and strengthened the barriers to the 'excursion zones' with new stakes where needed. Early in January we had a visit from our Natural England (NE) adviser Rob Havard who was very positive about the site and our chances of getting a further agreement when the present one runs out. (A separate report was provided). Partly on his advice we have cut back quite a large patch of bramble at the top of the slope near Gore's wood because it had extended into the good grassland. We will do other areas in future years so leaving plenty to provide blackberries in the autumn. Brambles and fallen branches were also cleared all along the fence on the western side of field one.

Also in February the fruit trees and two oaks were checked and some branches removed where they were rubbing on the cages – we also tried to make the cages sheep/deer proof again. Rod brought his ladder down and he and Gareth cleared and checked 13 nest boxes; all except those on the island. (see Bird report below). More work has been done on the tall hedge between the two fields cutting back dead and straggly branches, and removing some ivy which has got too thick and heavy high up in two of the hawthorn trees. The ivy was much enjoyed by the sheep!

The 10 sheep remained in the second field throughout the winter and were removed in early March when the ewes were close to lambing. They have done an excellent job of eating down the grass including a good deal of the coarser varieties. Hopefully this will increase both the proportion of finer grasses and other characteristic flowering plants such as knapweed and bedstraw. Nick has agreed to bring a similar number of sheep back in August.

About 120 man hours have been put in over the winter half year at regular work parties and another 50+ at various times during the week doing a variety of tasks including strimming, repairs to the board walk and when the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust came. The DWT volunteers provided another 60 or so man hours. In all for the year this makes a total of **over 400 volunteer man hours** actually maintaining the IMG plus time doing school visits, accounts and other paperwork etc. We still have no DofE volunteers and we still need to recruit new volunteers from the village.

However overall I think we can say that we are seeing both an improvement in the quality and biodiversity of the site, and in the appreciation of visitors, both regulars and individuals and groups from further away. We always try to speak to visitors and get a lot of positive feedback. The leaflets at the gate are very popular.

Wendy Johnson  
March 2016

## **Inkberrow Millennium Green Bird Report for AGM March 2016**

The Millennium Green as a mainly flower-rich grassland reserve has relatively little habitat for nesting birds. The thirteen nest boxes (excluding those on the island) provide breeding opportunities for several small bird species including Blue and Great Tits and the occasional Coal Tit. The last breeding season (2015) was successful with 9 of the 13 boxes showing good signs of successful breeding with only 2 boxes not used. The older wooden boxes are still usable and there is some research that suggests that the newer woodcrete boxes are colder and less cosy.

Two of the boxes were used as regular wood mouse winter homes with three mice 'floating' down to earth on the recent inspection in February 2016.

Mid April will bring our regular summer visitors back but only Chiff-chaff and Blackcap remain on site into the summer. Robins, Blackbirds and Woodpigeons are regularly seen on the ground and in the scrub. Buzzards, Crows, Rooks and Ravens fly overhead and both Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers are heard more often than seen. There are still many Mallards and a few Moorhens attracted partly by the food provided by visitors but also by the safety of the island for nesting.

The wooded island remains a very regular spot to hear and see Nuthatches throughout the year. There has been no damage to our wooden bird boxes over the last few years suggesting a change in behaviour of woodpeckers or a reduction in numbers.

With access to the island with waders it might be worth establishing a permanent or winter feeding station on the island which would improve bird watching opportunities for visitors especially in winter.

The site remains a valuable habitat for summer and winter visitors and residents as hedge rows mature and provide food and shelter and some breeding opportunities.

Thanks to Rod Talboys for bringing a ladder and cleaning out the nest boxes.

Gareth Thomas  
Feb 2016

## July 31<sup>st</sup> 2015 – Big Butterfly Survey

15 min walk from entrance to Millennium Seat plus what seen on return route.  
(15 minute records submitted to Butterfly Conservation records)

Butterfly	Entrance to seat upper path	Return by lower route	Total
Green veined white	2	1	3
Gatekeeper	15	6	21
Large skipper	1	5	6
Large white	4	3	7
Meadow brown	19	11	30
Ringlet	5	3	8
Small skipper	5	1	6
Small tortoiseshell	1	0	1
Small white	7	5	12
Marbled white	4	0	4
Comma	1		1
Total	64	35	99

This survey was about a week later than in 2014 and butterfly numbers are only about half those recorded last year. However marbled whites have done really well this year – widespread in both fields during July. There is still the problem that by the time our knapweed comes out the marbled whites are almost over!

There were good numbers of peacocks, brimstones and tortoiseshells earlier in the year and red admirals seen occasionally from January onwards. The small stream valley in field one again had good numbers of a variety of butterflies feeding on flowering plants such as water mint.

**WJ 20/09/2015**