

Inkberrow Millennium Green Conservation management report for AGM March 2017

The first part of this report covers the period from April to September 2016

Throughout the summer cutting / pulling brambles, nettles, and thistles and generally maintaining the site including clearing the back steps and boardwalks and removing litter (including very many cans this year!). We have had a number of goes at the area where brambles were cleared at the top of field 1 near 'Gores' wood and hope we are slowly winning. In May we removed nettles etc. from the south and east sides of the moat bank and made access points to the ponds for the school - cleared again for later visits. Tim has strimmed the moat boardwalk edges both sides and has kept the areas round the seats, picnic tables and notice boards strimmed.

Chris Bonehill has **cut the paths** round the first field about once a month keeping the first field easily accessible and looking very attractive with plenty of colour in the wildflower grassland. This year we found a good number of plants of Grass Vetchling which looks like a grass but has purple-ish red pea like flowers. However Anthony Steel did not **cut the hay** until mid-August (he made a very good job of the cutting going into more awkward areas) but the cut grass was then left for almost a week when it got soaked. It was then teded but again got wet and was eventually baled on 1st September.

We have continued to improve the **little stream valley** down from 'Gores' to the drain hole. This has recovered from the erosion and drying out last year and the watercress has returned in profusion. Hemp agrimony, meadowsweet and fleabane have been planted in the damp land between the stream and the paths; these local native plants are very attractive to butterflies and other insects. We re-cut and strimmed the paths on either side and marked them with stakes. A trip up one side across the little bridge and down the other was much enjoyed by the school children – most went round twice! It also proved a great learning resource particularly when it was too wet to do 'bug' hunting with nets.

I did the 15 minute **Big Butterfly Count** again – see table below. Although total numbers were lower the small stream valley was again where I saw most butterflies. The numbers of marbled whites in both fields were good – in the second field one sunny day I saw about 50 - but they were over quite quickly.

In June and July the **wildflower grassland in the second field** was exceptionally attractive with a strong smell of lady's bedstraw on sunny days. The key flowers such as meadow vetchling, birds foot trefoil, agrimony, bedstraw, yellow rattle and knapweed, which define our grassland, are spreading and there was more field scabious though this is slow to spread in either field. Cyril has used the scythe to try to keep on top of nettles, thistles, brambles etc. in field 2, particularly on the areas where we have cleared scrub over the past few years. Owing to building the bridge and its abutments he has not done as much as usual so by August we were busy trying to remove thistles to prevent seeding.

The **silt heap** which still has a lot of nettles near the big ash tree was again cut by Cyril early in the summer and some parts again in August. This area continues to improve with lots of cranesbill flowers and more grass.

Nine of Nick Langdon's **sheep** and lambs returned to the second field in July. The long grass in field 2 soon showed signs of being grazed down. It is the grazing regime over the last couple of years that is so markedly improving the wildflower grassland in this field.

Unfortunately Nick's plans for sheep management were disrupted by an outbreak of **Orf** in September. This is a viral infection which causes blisters and bleeding mainly around the mouth and nose. The sheep on site were treated by Nick but the infection had to 'run its course' and took a few weeks to clear. The lambs were then removed and the ram introduced to the remaining 5 ewes. These 6 sheep have remained over the winter.

Although Orf is mainly a disease of sheep and goats it is contagious and could possibly infect humans, dogs or other animals so we had to put up notices warning people of the risks. At the same time we had a number of **wasps' nests** near the paths which also required warning notices!

Alan Farnsworth and his son strimmed the good wildflower grassland on the upper slopes in mid-September (11th Sept) where the latter encountered one of the wasps nests! The cut grass was raked up and dumped in a variety of places mainly along the hedges and fences at the edge of the field or under the trees.

By the end of the summer we met most of the **HLS requirements** with all the grass cut and remaining quite short.

It was decided at the Spring 2016 trustees meeting that we should go for a more stable **bridge**, rather than the floats and planks used in the past, and also that it should be a temporary bridge just installed when we needed to cross to the island. Progress became possible when Tim discovered that he could get 6 m beams which would span the narrowest part of the moat. Cyril then designed and built the parts for the bridge and abutments with David acting as consultant engineer. The whole structure was tried out successfully in August and the dismantled bridge is now stored on the island until the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust (DWT) come in the late autumn. (unfortunately this was postponed until February 2017 due to extremely wet and windy weather on the day).

In April 2016 the DWT came to repair (almost rebuild) the **main steps**. This turned out to be a bigger job than anticipated and James and a couple of volunteers came the week before the planned volunteer day to prepare the site and start the step building. After nearly completing the steps on their main visit two of the DWT staff returned the next day to complete the work with help from us. We contributed about 40 man hours and the DWT over 60.

There were **four school visits** again over the summer studying ponds and habitats and being 'nature detectives'. The two visits before the end of May enabled us to meet the minimum of four visits for the 2015 -16 HLS year. The two in June/July will count towards the 2016-17 HLS year. The possible visit from the Churchyard volunteers did not materialise but we should attempt to arrange it formally for next summer.

Numbers at **regular work parties** are declining but with the help of our 'new recruit' – Jenny Powis we managed to get a lot of regular maintenance work done over the summer. About **100** man hours in all. Also about **200** man hours of extra **volunteer time** went into maintaining the site, helping with the new steps, building and trying out the bridge on site, raking up cut grass and supporting the school visits.

The winter work plan runs from October 2016 to March 2017.

The **general maintenance work** over the winter went quite well to plan. **Before Christmas** we finished cutting round the moat banks, cut the roadside hedge and opened up the area between the hedge and the board walk a bit by cutting some ivy and low branches. Some vegetation was removed from the ponds, some willow was cut around the edges and one large hazel stool coppiced between pond 2 and the stream. Brambles were cut around field 1 to prevent further spread and the mixed hedges next to 'Gores' land and by the picnic tables were trimmed. However the visit of the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust (DWT) planned for November 21st had to be cancelled because of bad weather so we did not get onto the island.

In **January** we cleared brambles and some saplings from the copse; checked the barriers and Tim cleared some vegetation from the stream. During late January and early February brambles in the second field were cut back to prevent further encroachment into the wildflower grassland.

At the work party **on February 12th** Cyril and Johns Sibbit **built the bridge** across the moat in very cold conditions – it snowed at the end! **The DWT** then came on Monday 13th (which was a mild sunny day) with two staff and 4 volunteers. With some help from Cyril, John S, Jenny, Mark and I we were amazed that between us all the bramble was cut over the whole island and the sycamores cut down by Neil McLean nearly two years ago were tidied up along with another fallen tree. Some brash was brought off and burned along with the bramble but the rest was stacked to make habitat piles - rather more than ideal but the result of the equivalent of 4 quite large trees having come down on the island. We didn't coppice any hazel stools as they had not regrown enough to need it yet. Cyril, John and Mark dismantled the bridge and the parts are again stored on the island for safety. Cyril suggests we cover them with camouflage tarpaulin to protect the wood.

The **fruit trees and oaks** in field 2 needed very little pruning this year although some of the cages need the wire netting replacing.

The two new nest boxes were put up with the help of my son while the grandchildren fed the sheep on ivy! One box is on the lime tree between the two ponds and the other replacing the old box on the large ash by the picnic tables.

In late February, we removed saplings and willow herb from the wetlands in both fields. After storm 'Doris' some small fallen branches were removed, including one suspended over pond two, which required the coppicing of one of the willows – a bonus.

In March we spent a work party cutting back the tall hedge on the Field boundary, and part of the encroaching vegetation on the steep slope opposite.

Tim has produced a list of maintenance tasks; The DWT have offered to come on Monday 22nd May to do most of these repairs, mostly fence posts etc. and the back steps - (not the entrance gate) which were listed at the last trustees meeting. They would appreciate a donation for this work but did not want anything for the work done on the moat island.

We had two more **school visits** in the autumn; both to 'Explore the Millennium Green'. The reception class came in October and Year 1 in November. It was the first school visit for all the children although a good number already knew the site.

By the end of March over **100 man hours** will have been contributed at **regular work parties** and at least **80 man hours of extra volunteer time**. This means that **over the year** various volunteers will have contributed around **500 man hours** to the running of the Millennium Green.

In September we still had no **D of E volunteers** but an advert in What's On brought Ryan Griffiths who is doing his bronze award at Pershore High School. However we still need to recruit **new volunteers from the village** to help with work parties and general maintenance.

WJ Mar 2017

6th August 2016 – big butterfly survey

15 min walk from entrance to Millennium Seat plus what seen on return route.

Butterfly	Entrance to seat upper path	Return by lower route	Total
Green veined white	7	4	11
Gatekeeper	11	1	12
Large white	2	7	9
Meadow brown	12	2	14
Ringlet	1	0	1
Small white	7	5	12
Brimstone	1	2	3
Total	41	21	62

I did this survey a week later than last year and two weeks later than in 2014. This partly accounts for the lower numbers and fewer species and is comparable with 2013 when I did the survey on 7th August. The survey can be done between 15th July and 7th August so in future I will try to do it in the third week of July.

Whites seem to have had a good year – particularly on my cabbages! My impression is that there were fewer ringlets and meadow browns than last year and I would have expected more gatekeepers than I recorded.

At the beginning of July the Marbled whites were very numerous in the second field – I saw around 50 one day. In the first field the numbers were much as usual in a good year.

Peacocks and tortoiseshells were seen earlier in the year but numbers seem to be down in August. I have only seen a few blues.

It is worth noting that the greatest numbers of butterflies were again seen along the small wetland coming down from 'Gores' field.

WJ Aug 2016