

Inkberrow Millennium Green Conservation management report for AGM 2018-19

The first section covers the period from April to September 2018

At the first 'summer' work party in April, as well as finishing cutting back the **hawthorn** near the end of the boardwalks in field 2 we spent time trying to improve the **drainage** under the boardwalk and under the main entrance gate where the pipe was (and still is) blocked. Water was running over the surface – we forget how wet it was earlier in 2018!

Throughout the summer we have been cutting / pulling nettles, (especially in April and May), hogweed (June) and thistles (July and August). Also generally maintaining the site including cleaning the notice boards, removing litter and keeping paths and boardwalks in both fields clear. We made access points to the ponds for the school visits and cut the grass round the west and north sides of the moat banks. The paths on each side of the small valley have been kept cut and the circuit makes a favourite route with children.... *'please can we go round again?'*. Tim Patrickson, with a little help from other volunteers, has also kept the moat boardwalk edges and the areas round the seats, picnic tables and notice boards trimmed throughout the summer. **Chris Bonehill** has only needed cut the paths round the first field three times to the start of September and then a final cut in the autumn.

Once again the **wildflower grassland in field 1** was not as colourful, possibly due to the dry weather and the 'mulching' in the autumn last year, although all our usual flowering plants were present. The improvement along the little stream valley down from 'Gores' to the drain hole has continued with hemp agrimony, flag iris and meadow sweet well established though dominated by willowherb this year; it is still a good habitat for butterflies. The **wildflower grassland in the second field** was again noticeably better than in the first field probably because it starts off much shorter in the Spring. The field scabious continues to increase slowly and the orchid had 5 spikes this year.

On Monday April 23rd the **Duckworth Worcestershire Trust (DWT)** repaired the fence along the southern boundary parallel to Church Hill and also replaced a number of odd wobbly poles along the western and northern fences in field two. Cyril Johnson then tightened the straining wire in the NE corner so the field should be sheep proof.

Neil McLean (tree surgeon) and his team came on Tuesday 24th July to remove the unsafe tree on Church Hill and a low branch overhanging the road near the moat. All went well with Tim, Cyril and I controlling the traffic. They also completed all the planned work on the Green including the field maple in the copse.

In June there were again good numbers of marbled white butterflies in both fields and I did the 15 minute **Big Butterfly Count** again in mid July. (See separate report)

Tieren Price cut the hay on Sunday July 22nd and it was tedded, rowed up, baled and removed (about 170 small bales!!) by the end of the week. We will certainly ask Tieren to do the hay again next year. **Alan Farnsworth** and his son Luke trimmed the good wildflower grassland on the upper slopes in late August and this was eventually raked up and dumped though not completed as planned at the second work party in August which had to be cancelled because of the rain.

There were **four school visits** over the summer, studying ponds and habitats, being 'nature detectives' and exploring the Millennium Green. We also had an evening visit from **Inkberrow Family History Society** looking at and discussing the moated site and past land use with the ridge and furrow. As I only claimed for 4 (the minimum number) visits up to May 2018 we have already had enough visits to claim for the last HLS year which ends in May 2019.

In the middle of August the **upper seat in field one** collapsed /was broken where the verticals enter the ground. It had become 'rocky' due to shrinkage of the soil in the long dry spell and all the seats show some decay of the timber at ground level. Cyril managed to get some replacement wood from Ragley saw mill which he cut to shape; Tim and David removed the old wood from the ground and Cyril, Tim and David Willis, with a little unskilled help from me, spent a long afternoon repairing the seat and putting it back in place.

Numbers at **regular work parties** have fluctuated with around 5 regular volunteers. In the Spring and earlier in the Summer numbers were boosted by **three D of E volunteers** from Alcester Grammar School - Emma and Alice (bronze award) and Aidan (silver award). Emma's father John has also helped quite regularly and her sister on occasions. Aidan has returned to do the volunteering section of his Gold award.

Total man hours from **work parties** for the summer half of the year was over 100. A good deal of **extra time** was put in by Tim, Cyril and myself – amounting to over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total of around 175 man hours. Thanks also to Gill Chiverrell, David Willis, Mark Robbins, Jenny Powis and Dinah Griffin who variously helped with school visits, the DWT visit, hay raking and general maintenance. With the volunteer time from the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust over **300 man hours** went in to the site between April and September.

Overall we stuck fairly well to the Summer work plan and there were no major outstanding jobs.

This section covers the period from October 2018 to March 2019 when we began the winter work programme.

From October to December we concentrated on field 1 carrying out the following tasks:

- removed nettles, brambles etc from the S and E sides of the moat bank
- trimmed the roadside hedge and lowered it a bit to help it thicken up.
- Pulled all the willow herb in the little stream valley, cut all blackthorn at top of it and also cut suckering growth along the hedge line near there. The grass on either side was also cut.
- cleared round ponds, coppiced one of the willows and removed pond vegetation
- cut back brambles round field 1 – a priority here is to pull out the ones rooting into the grass.
- trimmed the laid hedge by picnic tables in the hope it will thicken up

The DWT visit in November went very much to plan – the bridge was erected on the Saturday by Cyril, David, John Sibbit and Tim and taken down when the DWT vols left on the Monday by nearly the same team- Mark replacing Tim.

The DWT brought 5 volunteers and 2 staff and along with some of our volunteers (Cyril,

JohnS, Jenny, David, Mark and myself) the bramble on the island was cut or strimmed and brought off the island to burn. A number of hazels were coppiced but others left as we try to establish a cycle leaving plenty of cover for nesting birds etc yet opening up areas for bluebells, primroses.

In the new year we cleared brambles from the **copse** - a never ending task but we only do one work party in January here which keeps it under control and avoids trampling bluebells in the spring, fungi in the autumn and hopefully less disturbance may reduce the spread of ash die back. We also repaired some **exclusion zone barriers** by the ponds; these will need more attention next year. We agreed that the '**exclusion area**' behind the barriers between pond 1 and the stream (including pond edge) should be managed by Dinah because it is so good for fungi.

Looking back on all the work done in the **first field** I do have some concerns that we may be in **danger of over managing the site** to the detriment of wildlife (plants, fungi and animals). We need to leave areas of long grass and other plants for overwintering insects and for cover for birds and mammals.

We have planted about 15 mainly hazel and dogwood plants on the **south side of the tall hedge** line between the two gates into field 2 to replace those lost in 2017 when A. Steele 'mulched' the grass. I also put in some plants to improve the strip of grassland between the hedge and the path such as knapweed and mullein – all local wild flowers – hopefully they will enrich the field edge grassland as discussed at site meeting in the summer.

The rest of the winter work concentrated on the **second field** where some of the willow herb and any tree saplings in the stream valley/wet flush were pulled or cut. Bramble growing out into the grassland in various areas was removed – some stems up to 20 ft long!! We should leave cutting any larger patches of bramble scrub until the early Spring as it provides cover for birds, mammals and insects. Once again I feel too much bramble may have been cut – but no doubt it will soon grow back!

We have checked the **fruit trees** and **oaks** and their **cages**, the **tall hedge** between the two fields and the **boundaries**. At the first work party in March we put in some new posts, straightened the wire fences and tightened the top wires where needed, particularly on the western boundary near the seat and on the south side of Field 2 under the big ash tree.

The sheep have again done an excellent job of keeping the grass short over the winter. By October there were 8 ewes in Field 2 and they were joined by a ram in November. Two sheep were removed early in the year because of health concerns and the remaining 7 were removed in March.

Rod Talboys kindly agreed to clean out the **nest boxes** at the work party on February 24th with the help of Gill. Just over half the boxes had been used and a report was circulated.

Over the winter we have done about 125 man hours at work parties and around 80 at other times including the DWT visit where their volunteers contributed another 35. In total this will amount to over **250 man hours** by the end of March. **An Annual total of over 550 man hours – is this a record?** And then there is all the work done by contractors. Once again we pretty well kept to work plan over the winter .

Wendy Johnson
March 2019