

Conservation management report for Inkberrow Millennium Green AGM March 2020

**This section covers the period from April to September 2019
covering the summer work programme**

At the first work party on 14th April we removed the quite well built '**bridge**' across the stream and moved all the remaining poles and planks from around the site to the far SW corner. Here we found the **fence had been cut** and this was repaired at the next work party.

We then started our campaign on the various invasive species (nettles, docks, thistles ragwort, burdocks and hogweed). **Ragwort** is well under control with just a few plants found and removed from both fields. Cyril Johnson cut the **docks** in field 1 near the entrance and they have greatly decreased; the sheep eat the docks in field 2 where Cyril cut the large **burdocks** to prevent further spread by seed heads on the sheep. **Hogweed** has become a much greater problem (true elsewhere as well) and we tried to cut as much as possible in the grassland before it seeded. We cut and pulled lots of **nettles** early in the summer and in July and August removed (mainly by pulling) what seemed like tons of **thistles** to prevent seeding – the wet weather has helped here.

We also removed some **willowherb** and Tim Patrickson has made great inroads into the lower end of the **wet flush** in field 2 producing a more varied and interesting habitat. He has also done a lot of **strimming** including around seats and picnic tables in the first field and keeping paths well cut in both fields. **Chris Bonehill** has cut the main paths round the first field 5 times to the middle of September with a final cut later.

Also the **notice boards** were cleaned, **litter** removed as needed and **access points to the ponds** made for the school visits. **Wire netting** was fixed on the boards leading to the NE corner as they were rather slippery when wet – thanks to Roger Winn for his help. The paths on each side of the small valley are now quite well established and are still a favourite route with children. The improvement along the little stream valley down from 'Gores' to the drain hole continues with hemp agrimony, flag iris and meadow sweet doing really well though there was again rather too much willowherb.

The **wildflower grassland in field 1** was rather dominated by long grass although all our usual flowering plants were present in good numbers and Gill Chiverrell found **betony** on the steep slope where the knapweed was very good in late summer. The **wildflower grassland in the second field** looked better than in the first field because the grass was less dominant thanks to the Winter/ early Spring sheep grazing. The field scabious continues to increase, with a good sized clump by the seat, and the orchid had 5 spikes again this year.

However there is a **tangle of nettles and bindweed** particularly on the flat area around the fruit trees which we have not managed to cut – growth this year has been prolific everywhere!

Many **butterflies** have had a good year with brimstones, orange tips, holly blues and peacocks in April; good numbers of orange tips in May and excellent numbers of marbled whites in late June and July – see '**Big Butterfly Count**' reported earlier with record numbers partly due to the very hot weather. The amazing numbers of gate keepers has carried on well into August.

A **branch** was **broken** off one of the perry pear trees in one of the August gales – this was cut up and piled between the tree and the fence.

Owing to the change in the weather towards the end of July **Tieren Price** had not had a run of three dry days to make the **hay** by mid Aug nor was he able to do it in the short hot dry spell over the bank holiday weekend owing to a backlog of baling as his baler broke down. He would still have liked the hay but realistically there was no chance to get it dry. Instead he cut **the lower amenity areas** which we raked up and dumped. The rest of the grass was left standing which had the advantages that late flowering plants like knapweed could set seed and many more insects in the grass will survive.

Alan and Luke Farnsworth strimmed the upper anthill grass during the dry spell just before the bank holiday weekend in late August. Much of this was raked into rows at the next work party though Tim had already done some and it was finished the next day. We had hoped Tieren would be able to bale some of this but after the heavy rain on the Wednesday we decided to dump it all before it got too wet and this was done over the next few days – thanks to Tim, Cyril, Dinah Griffin and Gill.

At the first work party in September we cut the grass on the **west moat bank**. The grass cut by Tieren was raked up at the second work party and completed during the week .

There were **five school visits** over the summer, studying ponds and habitats, being 'nature detectives' and exploring the Millennium Green. All went well and we stayed dry despite some very unsettles weather when the later visits took place. Thanks to Gill, Mark Robbins, Tim and Dinah who helped with school visits.

Numbers at **regular work parties** have fluctuated with around 6 regular volunteers. Our **D of E volunteer** from Alcester Grammar School Aidan Budd completed his silver award and is now more than half way through his gold.

Regular work parties have contributed over **140** man hours and about **60** man hours of **extra time** have been put in particularly by Tim, and Cyril and with contributions from most volunteers at various times.

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

This section covers the period from October 2019 to March 2020 covering the winter work programme.

From October to December we concentrated on field 1 as usual.

The fist work party was postponed for a week because of the weather. We began by cutting the **grass on the north side of the moat bank**; this was later raked up and nettles, brambles etc were removed from the S and E sides of the moat bank at other work parties and with Tim's help during the week.

Up to the end of December we carried out the following tasks:

- pulled up most of the **willow herb** in the little stream valley and took out some roots to allow other plants to flourish
- cleared round the **ponds**, coppiced some more of the willows and removed some pond vegetation to keep a good area of open water
- trimmed the **roadside hedge**

- cut back **brambles** round field 1 – a priority here is to pull out the ones rooting into the grass
- trimmed the laid the hedge by the picnic tables
- cut back the hedge and removed suckering growth along the western boundary

Up to then things went more or less to plan.

Although we ended up with only **4 sheep** (large Suffolk ewes) they have again done an good job of keeping the grass short over the winter and since they are not in lamb they can stay a bit later than usual.

The Duckworth Worcestershire Trust (DWT) came on 11th November.

They repaired the barrier between the copse and pond 1. Coppiced some hazel and willow, and cut down an old partly dead hawthorn in the copse. Our volunteers helped as well with each groups contributing about 18 man hours.

In the new year we cleared brambles from the **copse** - a never ending task but we we were more effective than sometimes. Dinah later cleared the '**exclusion area**' behind the barriers between pond 1 and the stream.

At the second work party in January we began the ongoing task of uprooting or cutting **brambles** in the **second field** and made a thorough job of clearing the area on the left beyond the boardwalks between the steep bank and the wet flush. The new **gravel** was spread on the entrance path mainly by Tim. Roger fixed a **wobbly post** holding the rails of the little bridge just through the upper gate into Field 2; unfortunately the one at the other end is now loose.

February has been so wet and windy that progress in field two with brambles, fruit trees etc has been slow and the planned work will run on into April. The first work party in February was cancelled due to storm Ciara and the plan to have it the next week was scuppered by storm Dennis! Also the weather has been so bad that we have not done any catching up on weekdays. At the second work party in February some progress was made with **brambles** which have all grown a lot more than usual but Tim and our 2 D of E volunteers spent the time trying to **improve drainage** and remove slippery **mud** from both upper and lower swing gates – all three took quite a bit of the mud home!! **Improving access** here might be a project for the next Duckworth Worcestershire trust visit. I have the made fairly detailed lists of what still remains to be done and rearranged the work plan.

Thanks to James Booton who cleaned out the **nest boxes** using Roger's ladder in a dry, if still windy, slot on Saturday 22nd February.

D of E volunteers - Aidan Budd completed the volunteering section of his Gold award. We now have his brother Arran about half way through his bronze and Alex Dalton joined us in January also doing bronze.

Over the winter we have done about 120 man hours at work parties so far and around 70 at other times including the DWT visit where their volunteers contributed 18. In total this will amount to around **200 man hours** by the end of March. **An annual total of about 400 man hours. And then came the corona virus and work parties were cancelled from mid March.**

WEJ Mar 2020

