

Conservation management report for Inkberrow Millennium Green for AGM March 2022

This section covers the period from April to September 2021 covering the summer work programme

With Covid restrictions easing we resumed more or less normal work parties in April though still being aware of the dangers of working too close and sharing tools. Communal coffee at the end of work parties has not yet resumed as most volunteers preferred to go home.

We started our usual campaign on the various invasive species (nettles, docks, thistles ragwort, burdocks and hogweed) in field 1. **Ragwort** is well under control with just a few plants found and removed. Cyril Johnson again cut the **docks** in field 1 near the entrance where they have greatly decreased and we all cut lots of **large hogweeds** to prevent further spread. We then cut and pulled **nettles** and **thistles** in the grassland in the first field.

The **wildflower grassland in both fields** was rather dominated by long grass (Partly a result of the weather conditions) although all our usual flowering plants were present in good numbers. Thistles, nettles, brambles and bindweed have rather taken over the second field despite all the pulling of thistles and nettles last year and the sheep grazing which left the grass short at the start of the season. We have also cut the grass on the **north and west moat banks**

Tim Patrickson 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. The **hay was eventually cut by Anthony Steel** in August who did a good job but because of his large machinery cannot cut all the usual areas e.g. either side of the track up to the gate into 'Gores' field.

As **Alan Farnsworth** was not able to trim **the upper anthill grassland** this year (recovering from a recent operation) we had to do as much as possible ourselves which involved a test run by Edd Manns at the last work party in August; four volunteers brought trimmers (our thanks to Gordon Allison, Phil Skinner, Edd and Tim) to the **first work party in September** when just over half the area was trimmed and mostly raked up. Tim finished the raking up and did a little more strimming. At the **second September work party** the strimming was finished and almost all the grass raked up. We had three new volunteers - Jane Richardson, Richard Sheppard and my son Martin Johnson who along with Dinah Griffin did virtually all the work – an amazing outcome! However this involved about 17 man hours of strimming alone so I think we should pay for strimming again next year as volunteer time can be better used elsewhere. (Alan and his son did it all in 10 man hours).

Access points to the ponds **and paths** on each side of the small valley were cut for the **6 school visits** which took place in May (Y5 and Y6 which were new activities planned with the teachers) and June (Y1 to Y4 – the usual activities based on the grassland, copse, ponds and wetland). As well as the educational aspect the children and staff were so pleased with the freedom and taste of normality – for all it was their first school trip since Covid.

Notice boards have been cleaned and **litter** removed as needed. **The little stream valley** down from 'Gores' to the drain hole was scoured by a large flow of water from the building operations upstream which also resulted in a lot of silt being deposited in the moat. Attempts

to reduce the flow by building little 'dams' along the stream in order to cause silt deposits there and to keep the wetland either side damp failed because people kept removing the 'dams' ! However some plants like water mint are beginning to grow in the stream and the hemp agrimony, flag iris, teasels and meadow sweet are doing well in the wetland either side.

In field 2 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! Unfortunately **Neil McLean** has not so far been able to do the **spraying of thistles in Field 2** (originally due partly to the weather conditions and then his mother's illness) – there is still a slight window for Autumn spraying which can be effective but this could interfere with **the sheep** returning in October.

The **seat by the second pond** was broken in the summer and a splendid new one was organized and replaced by Roger Winn – many thanks. He also donated two of the **nest boxes** he makes which were put on the fruit trees near the northern boundary and more have been ordered for early next year to replace some existing boxes.

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.

Numbers at **regular work parties** have fluctuated with around 6 regular volunteers. Our **D of E volunteer Alex** completed his Silver volunteering section and he continued to come to work parties until well into the summer. New volunteers have come and gone but we are always glad of any help, particularly from younger fitter members of the community!

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

This section covers the period from October 2021 to March 2022 covering the winter work programme.

The planned spraying of thistles did not take place and thistles and nettles continue to be a problem in parts of field 2. Due to the huge amount of vegetation growth in the summer and because field 1 was reasonably well under control after late hay making and strimming we concentrated our efforts in October and early November on **clearing brambles** (and any bindweed, nettles, thistles and hogweed we came across) **in the second field**. Lots were removed or cut back to prevent encroachment into the wildflower grassland in various parts of the site but it is a never ending task!

Later in November the **roadside hedge** was cut - mainly on the road side, and the top growth was cut to try to encourage thickening. In December the **hedge behind the picnic tables** was cut and outgrowth from the **hedge between the IMG and Carmichael's field** was cut back. The value of hedges for wildlife, reducing CO2 and as corridors linking good habitats is increasingly being recognised - the bigger and wilder they are left the better. Brambles around field 1 were cut or pulled where they were extending into the grassland.

Looking at the various areas of **suckering blackthorn** Jane Richardson suggested that we should manage them for the rare **brown hairstreak butterfly** which has spread out from Grafton Wood and is colonising the areas around. Eggs have been found in Inkberrow parish and into Warwickshire. Jane has produced a **plan to cut the patches of blackthorn in rotation** so there is always some blackthorn of the right height for eggs to be laid (it is a fussy butterfly!). It also needs ash trees which we have nearby.

There was a work party on 29th December replacing the normal 2nd Sunday which was Boxing Day where more brambles were cut back in various places. At the January work parties we removed **bramble and briar from the copse** by uprooting it as far as possible. . Richard Shepherd finished his battle with a **large patch of brambles in field 2** early in January.

Over the Christmas period a **large tree fell across the first pond** - not directly as a result of the gales although it may have been loosened by the strong east winds. The IMG had no major gale damage. The fallen tree (one of a double trunked lime) was infected by fungus at the base. We asked **Neil Mclean** to remove the tree and advise on others nearby. He advised that the other trunk should be cut down as it was also infected by fungus and would fall across the path. Also that an adjacent 4 stemmed tree should be coppiced. This work was done in the middle of January The **brash was chipped** and left in a pile and the **larger material cut into long lengths and made into habitat piles nearby**. An advantage of the tree removal is that it will let more light into the pond which had got too overshadowed as the trees had all grown over the years. The cut trees have in effect been coppiced and will shoot again and could be **managed as coppice** in future.

At the following (postponed) work party we sorted out the ivy and the end of the exclusion zone barrier where the tree was winched out – probably the muddiest job we have ever done and at least it has helped to remove some of the very deep mud from the pond! We also started to use some of the chippings on the muddy paths which continued at the next work party when they were also used to make up the back steps.

Also at the postponed work party **Edd Manns and James Booton cleaned out the nest boxes** and replaced some damaged ones with new ones made by Roger Winn. Our two DofE volunteers **Alex Dalton and Arran Budd (both returning to do their Gold awards) completed their 'water engineering' along the small stream** which had suffered again from scouring from heavy water flows due to the building works higher up (which also has resulted in more silt being washed into the moat). They have created **small dams** which have slowed the flow reducing erosion and trapping silt. The small pools behind the barriers also allow water to seep back into the **wetland** (once described by someone from the Wildlife Trust as the best habitat on the site!) on either side of the stream.

Three sheep returned in the autumn and although we would like more they have had a marked affect in eating down the grass; they have stayed longer as they were not in lamb.

Work party numbers have varied and we are pleased to welcome Richard Shepherd and Jane Richardson who along with our two DofE volunteers have made a great contribution to the amount of work that gets done. I estimate that well over 100 man hours have again been clocked up plus all the extra time contributed at other times and in other ways.