

Visit of our HLS adviser from Natural England on Monday 12th January 2016

Mark and I met Rob Havard on site - he had not been to the IMG before although he has been our adviser for nearly two years. He was impressed by the variety of habitats and appreciated the difficulties of managing a small site, mainly by volunteers with hand tools, on a small budget.

As he is also a farmer he takes a more practical down to earth view of management.

He made a few points about the **grassland management**:

In **field two** the grazing regime is working well although he thought it was time for the sheep to be removed as the grass is now grazed down (*from our point of view the sheep are now eating the rough grass clumps – they will be going in a couple of weeks anyway*). He spotted a **great crested newt** disappearing down a hole near the top of the steps.

In **field one** he looked closely at the plants in the grass sward on the slopes and could identify some even in January! He would like to see some grazing after the hay crop or even up to early spring to keep the grass shorter – early spring grazing is good at reducing the false oat grass which tends to dominate parts of the field. However he accepts that this is unlikely to happen because of dog walkers, electric fences and sheep stealing. In terms of management he would not be too worried if a few of the lower anthills were damaged in order to get the hay cut higher up the slope which would reduce the amount of strimming required.

He also suggested that we could try introducing some plants characteristic of MG4 grassland eg great burnet to the flat area near the picnic tables as it is relatively wet and is not developing as MG5 (*seed or hay could come from Mark's meadow*).

He did not think the grasses in the **copse** were a problem as they are typical woodland grasses.

On **the island** we are committed to some regular maintenance. We discussed various ways of getting across. He would not be too worried about the use of treated timber in the moat as there are no fish but favoured a complete span or a floating platform in the middle. We would need to consult EH direct to have a middle support or to dig into the banks. He suggested two tree trunks with planks nailed between them which NE had used somewhere!

In general we are seen as an exemplary site trying to do our best for the grassland and other habitats. He is very much in favour of our educational work and appreciates that we have to make compromises as there is open access. The status of the site as a charity managed for the village means that it's use is unlikely to change; it won't become horse paddock or building land. All this means that we should be able to get another agreement including educational payments (which have increased) when our present one runs out. But we must contact him in 2018 as we have to be put forward as a special case because we are a small site.

WEJ Jan 2016