

Reserves News

The old adage 'you can't please all of the people all of the time' is as true for butterflies and moths as it is people, although we seem to be doing a pretty good job of it! We do our utmost best to provide the different habitat requirements for the varied species of lepidoptera that are recorded on our Hampshire reserves, but even with the best will in the world, the weather and other external factors can still greatly affect butterfly numbers. Having said that, we have not seen any declines as yet, but the problem with 'leps' is that they just don't decline in a season. Habitat change and loss can impact on colonies over a period of time. Grazing is crucial, as is scrub control, and this winter has seen an incredible, and increased, volunteer effort on the reserves to combat scrub encroachment. The data for the monitoring that takes place during the active season, isn't analysed until the end of the season, by which time the practical winter tasks are well under way. Recording, collecting and understanding the data is crucial to keeping an eye on how the different species are faring, and is very much a case of always trying to be one step ahead. We carefully plan our tasks ahead, taking into consideration any informal observations over the summer and including the transect counts where we know what butterflies to expect to see on different parts of the reserves.



Magdalen Hill Down – chalk downland at its best. Jayne Chapman

MAGDALEN HILL DOWN

In the autumn newsletter I ended by saying “now that Adonis appear to have colonised Magdalen Hill Down, I will be setting my sights on the Duke of Burgundy butterfly over the coming months...”

Well, I am delighted to say that Magdalen has an area that is very well suited to this particular butterfly, which, like many other species, is in serious decline. There is a small colony that exists just over the other side of the valley, a mere flap of the wings away. However, in the world of butterfly dispersal, it just isn't that simple for them to pop over and set up home. This then raises the issue of possibly introducing the species to the reserve. After all, we have a suitable area, and the caterpillar foodplant – cowslip, grows in abundance among long, lush grass, with a good amount of scattered scrub habitat to provide the right conditions.



*Cowslip (Primula veris), Duke of Burgundy caterpillar foodplant. Jayne Chapman
Small Blue. Martin Warren*

However, there are strict guidelines on the release/introductions of butterflies, and I am often asked the question ‘why can't you just let some go?’ For anyone that is really keen to find out the answers, it can all be found on Butterfly Conservation's website, and is well worth a read:

http://butterfly-conservation.org/files/bc-policy_introductions--re-introductions_2010.pdf

We do very much hope to be able to introduce this beautiful little butterfly to Magdalen in the near future.

The Small Blue has been a huge conservation success, particularly so on reseeded grassland sites. Magdalen was the second best site for this butterfly last year (beating many of the top sites), and in a fleeting visit, Martin Warren, photographed this very late Small Blue on the Extension on the 19th October 2014. Third brood perhaps, or late second generation? As there are no records of a third generation in this species, it is worth keeping an eye out for them later in the season.

We had a very successful grazing season across all three reserves, with the weather being kinder than in previous years. I am delighted to report that ‘Superman’, our 2014 resident summer bull, behaved impeccably and fulfilled his obligations to his nine ‘wives’. All are expected to calve in May – photos to follow in the next edition.

BENTLEY STATION MEADOW

The Reserve is finally taking shape after many hours of concerted efforts from the volunteers. Our last work-party was in March this year, and we wait once again for those exciting sightings – last year Thelma Smalley saw a Pearl-bordered Fritillary feeding on bugle. We have no way of knowing yet if this is as a direct result of our active management for the species – creating newly coppiced glades and rides – or if it is just another release? Time and transect records will tell.

A volunteer kindly gave up his weekends, and with his mini digger, the blocked ditches that surround the reserve and cut through it, were cleared. Wet pasture is a habitat in its own right, but the meadow at Bentley was simply water-logged due to silted up ditches. The increased drainage meant that we could significantly graze for longer. The three cattle below spent three months in the meadow.

YEW HILL

I thought I would provide you with a little visual medley of life at Yew Hill.



1 2014 was a great year for the orchids. **2** The Hampshire Conservation Volunteers cutting and 'gently' raking the Reservoir front, so as not to disturb any larvae overwintering in the thatch. **3** 'Posh' now in her 9th year, still working to keep the grasslands in good condition. **4** Everyone loves a bonfire. All photos Jayne Chapman

I am very much looking forward to meeting new members this year on the reserves. My contact details are on page 32: if you would like any information at all on the work that we do, or if you would like to learn how you could help us, do please contact me.



I hope to see you on our walk on the 6th May at Magdalen Hill Down to see the spectacular show of cowslips. Here we are about to set off last year.

Jayne Chapman, Reserves Officer