

Work Parties and other visits



The visit by Blackwater Conservation Volunteers on 1st February to BSM went exceedingly well, again as a group we looked at the issues of managing habitats for butterflies.* The photo shows members of the team with their super mowing machine that they used to cut down unwanted blackthorn regrowth and brambles in the grassland.



We had a work party of BC members at Bentley on 9th February to carry on with the clearing of felled or fallen scrub. so the reserve is looking in pretty good shape now.

We had another flurry of activity to get a few jobs finished before the end of March to finish clearing up felled and fallen branches & overgrown blackthorn. Patrick & Colin Beyer also did some cutting there in early March and afterwards volunteers cleared up the cut stuff.

Work parties at Magdalen Hill Down on 4th & 11th February had the main task of severing ivy on trees. * Also on the 11th Serco tractor & flail cutter trimmed a third of the bottom hedge on the extension & a third of the top hedge.* On 16th February we had help from Wednesday Conservation Volunteers who finished work on coppicing the scrub block due in the 18 year rotational cutting plan. They also coppiced several hazels at the bottom of area 3. We take these down periodically in order to let light in & reduce leaf litter as the southern edge of the reserve is sheltered habitat for butterflies. Other major work in February included thinning out scrub on Area E – about 100 bushes were cut down & stump treated with Round-up to prevent regrowth.

At Magdalen Hill Down extensive growth of ivy on one of the large ash trees between the Extension and then Original Reserve was severed. Main work parties have now finished (until the ragwort ones start in July!) so its an appropriate time to thank everyone for supporting many many work parties through the winter months. I am sure what we do does make a difference.

(* See item later in this news letter on conservation considerations of habitat management).

In the middle of March Violets were flowering well at all three reserves and Primroses also made a good showing. It was pleasing that the ones planted at MHD for Butterfly Conservation's 40th Anniversary were thriving.

On 7th April Chris Packham came to MHD to film a bit about monitoring butterflies for a programme on farming and wildlife. A number of the MHD volunteers, mainly transect walkers



came along as can be seen from the photo. However I have just heard from the producer that it will be broadcast on Monday 30th May BBC1 7.30pm. But Jenny adds “The bad news is I'm afraid you and your lovely volunteers ended up on the cutting room floor. The good news we've kept in the bit where Chris says that Magdalen Hill is now so good because of the hard work of Butterfly Conservation.” The BBC has also offered us a payment of £100 because we were so helpful.

Magdalen Hill Down Sheep Grazing and other news



208 sheep grazed the roadside field on North from the 19th to 30th March. The aim was to graze areas short but still leave some height and rougher areas both for insects and skylarks.



By the time of the first public walk at Magdalen Hill Down – the 20th April - the cowslips were at their peak and have been appreciated by many many visitors. During April both Green Hairstreaks and Grizzled Skippers have been a big attraction too.



On 17th April Dave Shute found and photographed a rare shield bug that feeds on Bastard Toadflax called The Down *Sehirus impressus* and I saw a Common Lizard whilst leading a walk for parents and children from Intech on 19th April at main gate into Extension.



Wild Angelica

When visiting Bentley Station Meadow last summer Tony Anderson of the Blackwater Partnership noticed how attractive to hoverflies were the many plants of wild angelica.

This is a tall foliage plant with magnificent flowerheads. The channelled leaf stalks of wild angelica swell to an inflated sheath where they meet the round hollow stem. The white or pale pink flowers are found in compact round heads at the top of densely hairy leaf stalks. This

is a plant of damp grassland, marshes and wet open woods. In the garden, it is an excellent addition to the back of a border or by a pond or stream. Angelica is unusual for its special aroma which is quite unlike that of other umbellifers like fennel, parsley, anise, caraway or chervil. Some garden writers liken it to musk, others to juniper. The seeds of angelica, which are bitter to taste, are used to produce a distillate employed in the flavouring of alcoholic beverages such as Vermouth, and of liqueurs, like Chartreuse.

We value the Wild Angelica in the reserve as it helps to support the populations of rare hoverflies there. Phil Budd will be conducting a survey of hoverflies this summer.

Conservation management Issues

Some of the matters above were marked with an asterisk so for those interested here are some notes on the various issues we consider when doing conservation management work for butterflies and moths – which incidentally benefit other insects and other wildlife greatly.

At the work party at Bentley on 1st February we considered where butterfly species were over wintering at different stages of their life cycle and how planning work at the best time to avoid disturbance was important. Work we did on 1st February that fell into this category was mowing & strimming vegetation in the oak copse by the railway line so that the violets there were not overwhelmed by brambles etc. At that time the larva of Silver-washed Fritillary would have been safely anchored on tree trunks. The work is impossible to do once they have descended in Spring to feed on the violets.

Regarding hedge cutting at Magdalen Hill Down

It is our hedgerow management plan to top the hedge at 2 metres & trim the sides one year in three – a third of the length each time. The mature hedge at the side & top behind the cemetery get a lighter trim again on a cyclical basis. The hedge on North was cut at fence top height to preserve the view and to make it grow really thick. Some suitable species are being left to grow as bigger trees.

Regarding Ivy cutting at MHD - We DO value the ivy – it is very good both as shelter and a nectar source for butterflies and of course a larval food plant for Holly Blue, but when growth on trees becomes excessive it could result in branches or the while tree

being damaged by wind. Our aim is to sever some each year so as to develop an uneven age structure.

At the time of finishing this newsletter – 10th May – news from the reserves is that species are present in good numbers. Pleasingly Dingy Skippers are being seen at both MHD and Yew Hill. Full news in the May Newsletter. In the meantime I hope you are out and about enjoying the butterflies and moths and all the other wild things.

PS....

The Butterfly Year a DVD set

It is just the time of year when we want to brush up on our butterfly id skills.

Paul Wettons dvds are highly recommended with super video footage and id tips.

They cost £16.95 incl. p&p and are available from www.ibirdz.co.uk or by post - cheque made payable to Paul Wetton, 9 Aldwych Close, Nuthall, Nottingham. NG16 1QH