

31st December 2006

It is the end of 2006 - generally a good butterfly year on the reserves thanks to good summer weather.

Autumn and early winter weather has been reasonably kind to work parties and we are getting through our various programmes of work quite well.

This photo taken by visitor Viv Brett shows ivy at Magdalen Hill Down in an icy grip on 22nd December.



A few days of freezing fog had resulted in a heavy coating of rime on all the vegetation thus transforming our reserve into a truly fantastic winter wonderland. The sheep had left Magdalen Hill Down North the previous day & the grazing of the two areas of land had been successfully accomplished. Cattle are still grazing the original reserve, the extension & Yew Hill - Hilltop. In icy weather we have to make sure the water troughs have holes in the ice so the animals can get a drink ok. I was glad the freezing spell did not last long. Today I was at Bentley Station Meadow making sure the forest ditch on the boundary with Alice Holt was not blocked - this easily occurs & causes our reserve to be wetter than it need be. I was also making sure that the high winds of the last few days had not brought down branches onto fence lines. All was well. It is worth noting that in the winter months the several streams flow quite strongly through the meadow. It is a shame we do not have their murmuring and tinkling on hot summer days!

- Lynn Fomison Reserves Officer

P.S. We have 4 work parties in January - new faces always welcome

20th November 2006

Here are the cattle enjoying the November sunshine on Saturday 18th at Magdalen Hill Down Extension. This area which was sown with a mixture of 42 wild flowers and native grasses provides a rich mix of herbage that keeps the cattle happy and healthy. They are not rare breeds - just normal farm stock with a high percentage of Charolais. The cows are described as suckler cows - cows whose calves stay with them for about 6 months enjoying Mum's milk & growing well.



Grazing achieves good conservation results. It stops the grass from becoming too dominant, many insects depend on their cow pats including the red data book species Hornet Robber Fly. The trampling helps create ground where vegetation is sparser & we believe this is helping species like Small Copper. And of course cattle are well know for their beneficial effects on cowslips so do come & see ours next Spring!

More of Sarah's cows are grazing the original reserve - and year on year their grazing seems to be improving aspects of the habitat. We are particularly pleased about the increase in Grizzled Skippers. This butterfly had scarcely been recorded until 2005 when 17 were on transect - this year the number was up to 24. We are also hoping to encourage the foodplant they use - agrimony - seed has been sown in suitable areas across MHD N this autumn.

Saturday was an exciting day! Sheep were put on the top section of Magdalen Hill Down North for the first

time. This area is part of the joint scheme with Hampshire County Council & was sown with native grasses and wild flowers in 2004. Butterfly numbers had increased greatly from 2005 to 2006. From 20 species seen to 25 species seen and from a total of 236 butterflies seen on transect to a wonderful 1051 this year. It is particularly pleasing to see that Small Coppers are well established with 15 seen and over a hundred seen of both Common Blues and Chalkhill Blues. All of these species will be helped by the sheep grazing now and when it is repeated again in Spring. The sheep are Poll Dorset on loan from a farmer in East Hampshire.



5th November 2006

Four Simmental bullocks have been grazing the Yew Hill Reserve for a few weeks. This picture was taken on 1st November - the day of our work party. Both of those activities - the cattle grazing & the conservation work we did that day - cutting small scrub from the grassland are just so vital in keeping our reserve full of flowers and full of butterflies.



4th November 2006

Report from Mervyn Grist who was helping at our first work party of the season at Yew Hill - wonderful day!:

"The 1st November work party was blessed with glorious autumn sunshine on a cloudless day. During a well earned rest for lunch we saw a flock of 60 Lapwings fly from the Itchen valley across the field on the north side of the reserve. About 10 minutes later 90+ Fieldfares flew over some stopping to feed on berries on the northern boundary hedge. For most of us these were the first Fieldfares seen this autumn. Lynn adds we did see a Red Admiral too."

25th September 2006

Saturday 23rd September saw the start of the last transect week of 2006. Bit sad really. Summer nearly gone, butterflies have been tailing off for weeks. Anyway the exciting bit will happen soon as the figures are collated & we can see how 2006 compares with previous years. Not just interesting but very important and useful information in helping us to make decisions in how we manage the reserves.

So it is an opportune time to say a big thank you to the 20plus members who walk the 5 transects on our reserves & to the four members who collate the results. Andy Barker gets two thank you's in those categories but also is enormously helpful in giving information on how the trends on our reserves compare with other sites around the county.

As members will know the annual report includes a section on each reserve each year & these make more interesting reading if we can include observations from people of anything out of the ordinary so please contact me if you have anything to contribute.

5th September 2006

Lynn Fomison reports: "One of the ways we seek to promote our reserves with local people is by having the reserve display board at local events. To this end we had the Bentley Station Meadow display and Gardening for butterflies at Bird World at the bank holiday weekend and we will be doing the same at Forest Lodge Garden Centre on the weekend of 16th/17th September.

Last Sunday we welcomed Oliver's Battery Countryside Group to Yew Hill. They had just had the official opening of their conservation area & as part of the celebration of nature then came to Yew Hill for an extensive visit & to gather some seed.

This coming Saturday 9th September Oliver's Battery Parish Council is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary & there is a fete at St Mark's Church on Saturday from 12pm to 4pm. We shall have a BC display there & we will be pleased to meet any members who come along.

Another display is being put on by Jan Lloyd based on her photographs of a year at Yew Hill. as well as displaying her images in the hall she will be selling photos, cards, postcards, calendars, mugs & bags with images of Yew Hill & its surroundings".

12th August 2006

Lynn Fomison says "Meridian TV filmed a short news item at Magdalen Hill Down on 9th August to be broadcast on the 6pm news programme on 10th August (transmitted from Newbury) & to be shown sometime over the weekend on Meridian News broadcast from Southampton.

The item to mention was how the fine summer weather has been beneficial to butterflies, but that this does not alter an underlying trend with 7 out of 10 species in decline. Hopefully the item will show that Butterfly Conservation does make a difference. Magdalen Hill Down with its carpets of wild flowers & hundreds of Chalkhill Blues being a wonderful example of Butterfly Conservation in action. And if the item broadcast covers it I did make an appeal for new volunteers too.

I think this photograph of Pete the camera man is a good illustration of the flower rich hillside - such a contrast to the recently harvested cornfields below. He got some really good footage of clusters of Chalkhill Blues.

PS I realise the item might get 2 minutes on the news if we are lucky - about 2 hours was spent with Caroline Asker, the reporter. But I hope publicity is valuable in bringing the joy of butterflies to more people, of recruiting new members, or new volunteers or generating more requests for group visits under our educational programme. Any one with enquiries can ring me (01962 772251) or email me via the contact form on this web site."



20th July 2006

Open Country features Butterflies

Saturday 22nd July sees the start of butterfly week, Tune in to Open Country Radio 4 at 6am on Saturday - & if that sounds a bit early its repeated 1.30pm on Thursday. Helen Mark - on the photo (left) walked & talked on Magdalen Hill Down with me after she had been Purple Emperor hunting at Bentley Wood with Martin Warren She had also joined in with the viewing of moths attracted to a lamp overnight at Bentley Wood.



Lynn writes "I asked to Helen for almost an hour as we toured MHD - so lots of what we said won't be included. But I hope I succeeded in getting the message across that MHD is a great place for butterflies and that it really shows that Butterfly Conservation does work. In 1990 the annual index for Chalkhill Blues on the original reserve was 437 and they had risen to a high of 2654 in 2004. On the extension - an ex arable field Common Blues expanded tenfold in three years and continue to hold good levels thanks to an abundance of birdsfoot trefoil. Also on the extension Meadow Browns shot up from 189 in 1996 to an all-time high of 2615 in 2004. And that call real success stories!

I also wanted to convey what a super place MHD is for people. As we walked along the hardened path which gives easy access to wheelchairs I talked about the wonderful view from Magdalen Hill Down North - the scheme just finished in 2004. I described the view - a distant vista right to beacon Hill near Newbury with a patchwork of golden cornfields, hedges woods and green fields in between. See photo.



More news from Magdalen Hill Down North

First of all the bad news. Despite our success last year in pulling all the ragwort on Magdalen Hill Down North it grew with a vengeance this year, also despite rosettes being dug out in the winter. Four work parties since the end of June had put in stalwart efforts but it was really looking like we would not get the ragwort cleared before it seeded.

The good news. Serco responded to an urgent plea from me & yesterday & today the ragwort has been cut collected & removed from within the grazing paddocks.



The hardened path runs through this area & to maintain people's enjoyment of the wild flowers and butterflies that abound we have kept some uncut strips by the path.



The ragwort still needs pulling on some of these so if you can join us on Friday 28th, Sunday 30th, or Friday 4th August please, Patrick Fleet & I would be grateful. The compensation is the butterflies up there are fantastic loads of Painted Ladies and quite a few Chalkhill Blues".

10th June 2006

Lynn Fomison reports from Bentley Station Meadow: "These photos were taken at Bentley Station Meadow earlier this week by reserve volunteer Mike Young, and are lovely illustrations of the fact that our sites are nature reserves and that all wildlife is treasured and admired!



27th May 2006

Lynn Fomison reports from Magdalen Hill Down: "I enlisted help from the pupils at Leigh House Hospital to tackle the problem of dog poo both as a hazard on paths or just as bad bagged up stuff hanging on bushes or fences! They have produced a number of cartoon type posters and affixed them to notice boards and gate posts. Here is a sample. Others feature Wallace & Grommit! Our strong links with the pupils at Leigh House Hospital & their tutors is part of our educational access in Defra's countryside stewardship scheme.



I hope a humourous approach might strike a chord with people. We don't regard dog walkers as a problem - most are friends of the reserve & keep an eye on things on their regular walks. But dog poo is a problem - not pleasant for other dog walker & other visitors and a real problem on the hard track that wheelchairs use.

15th May 2006

Lynn Fomison reports that cowslips at Magdalen Hill Down continue to look really good as this photo from Stephen Harvey shows.



20th April 2006

Lynn Fomison has sent in some photos of the Yew Hill and Magdalen Hill Down reserves, as follows. "This photo was taken at Yew Hill on 15th April - shows the anthills and one of the ancient hollow ways quite nicely. You can't see the many violets & the very diminutive cowslips just coming through.



This photo was taken on 17th April - the cowslips are starting to look good at the extension at Magadalen Hill Down - if you have not seen them do come on the walk on Saturday 22nd April.



This photo wastaken on 17th April & shows just some of the 149 sheep currently grazing North Down. It is also possible to see cowslips coming through. This is the area sown with native grasses and wild flowers in Autumn 2004."



10th April 2006

Yew Hill

Signs of spring! The first event of the year took place at Yew Hill on Saturday - a walk for parents and children to spot signs of Spring. Whilst walking up the bridlepath we heard a skylark singing, together with Chiffchaff and Blackcap, saw House Martins, and were able to see all the plants starting to poke their new green leaves at the bottom of the hedgerow. We were looking for plants with animals & birds in their names. Obliging hogweed, cow parsley, cuckoo pint and dandelion were on show. The reserve yielded cowslip (not quite in flower), common dog violet and dog wood. A Small Tortoiseshell was seen (but not by me) close to violets which are one of the few nectar sources at the moment. Pleasingly on the walk back down the bridlepath we were all able to have a good view of a Red Admiral.

The new Butterflies of the month poster which is now in colour got admiring glances. One of these is now displayed on each notice board at the reserves. They are being produced for the Spring & summer months by a volunteer - just another example of how people's efforts can help enhances our reserves.

Bentley Station Meadow

I visited BSM on Friday putting up the said poster of April butterflies. Unfortunately it was cool & not much sun so no butterflies seen but I did see these primroses:



Gorse was in flower and of course the gorgeous golden catkins of goat willow but precious little else so good job no butterflies around as they would have gone hungry! The reserve was looking as dry as I ever seen it at this time of year. Seeing a great tit exploring our leaflet box as a potential nesting site in February prompted me to ask for a volunteer to make boxes - Ken Jones made six beauties with holes of differing sizes to cater for the range of species we have in the meadow. Sue & Barry Clark helped me fix them up - more examples of how volunteers can help our nature reserves and their wildlife. It was so rewarding on Friday to see birds taking an interest in these already.

Magdalen Hill Down

All is well at Magdalen Hill, the original reserve, the extension and the new area North down. The first walk of the season is on Saturday April 22nd & so if you do not know MHD it's a good opportunity to visit. We hope the cowslips will be looking good on the extension despite this cold spring.

Sheep are arriving to graze part of North Down this week. On another part of North Down Charles Flower was busily setting rock rose, horseshoe vetch & thyme plants last week. It is great to see what was an arable field being turned into a haven for butterflies.

And talking of that an updated version of our colour leaflet Haven for Butterflies is being prepared by Sally Tiller, myself and with lots of help from others too. There will be some new illustrations by Jeannie Brown. We aim to have it available for our stand at summer events and for save our Butterflies Week (21st -31st July)

We feel that publicising our reserves is a good way to encourage new people to join Butterfly Conservation. Membership fees are an important source of funding. By joining BC you will be taking an active step in helping to save butterflies. Over a year the cost is just 50p per week. If members want to take that extra step & provide help as a volunteer then so much the better. It'll be rewarding for you and it will help us help butterflies and moths.

- Lynn Fomison Reserves Officer

I can be contacted by email via the web master of this site and I am always pleased to hear from people who wish to become more involved with our nature reserves

31st January 2006

Winter Work Parties

We have had a successful work party at each reserve in January. On the 15th we cleared storm damaged trees at Bentley Station Meadow. 12 of us were present including Dan Hoare BC's Regional Officer for the SE. A large bonfire brightened up what was a slightly damp day. A photographer from the Alton Herald came along and our work party featured in the paper the following week. I used it as an opportunity to seek new volunteers and to advertise our next work party.

Not so many people came along to Magdalen Hill Down on 20th January, but those who did helped Patrick Fleet (Warden) and achieved good work to enhance Duke of Burgundy habitat. Jenny Mallett & I planted 3 disease resistant elm trees and also met HCC contractors who set 20 on North Down. All we need now are the White-Letter Hairstreaks! Actually one was seen at MHD extension in 1998 so my desire is not that far fetched.

Yew Hill benefited from our attentions on 25th January with Colin Matthews (Voluntary Reserve Manager) being joined by Patrick, Jenny myself and 4 volunteers. One of these was completely new to Yew Hill so that was great. Jenny & I planted 3 more elm trees to help the White-letter hairstreaks. The main work was to clear the regrowth of scrub out of the flower rich grassland and also to cut back the hedgerow where it was growing through the stock fencing.

Pleasingly at both Yew Hill and MHD several people took up the suggestion of coming along for an odd hour - on my theme of every hour helps! Hope YOU might join us too.

Next Work Parties

- Bentley Station Meadow **Friday 3rd February** 10am We are continuing a programme of taking down larger trees to let more sunlight in . The felling is being done by a contractor but we have to clear up the twigs and branches and burn them & stack the logs.
- Magdalen Hill Down **Friday 10th February** Helping Patrick Fleet to maintain the southern hedgerow in a sensitive way for wildlife. Also tackling the wild clematis problem. There will be probably be a bonfire.
- Yew Hill **Friday 17th February**. Not sure what we will be doing but it is our last work party of the season so all help welcomed!

Lynn Fomison
Branch Reserves Officer