

Reserves News April to December 2010

It's December and we seem to be ending the year much as we started it with heavy snow & hard frosts! But looking back to the Summer - at all three reserves butterflies were reported to be having a good year and a lot has been happening on the reserves.

Work Parties

A number of work parties have taken place during October, November and December & these have been well supported. We valued the help given by Blackwater Conservation volunteers at BSM and by the Wednesday Conservation Volunteers at MHD.

We had to cancel the Yew Hill one on 3rd December due to heavy snow fall.

Here is a summary of the work party dates for 2011– look forward to seeing you.

Meet as follows. Wear suitable clothes and footwear. Bring gloves and food. Contact Lynn if it is your first time for additional information.

Magdalen Hill Down. Park at top of track by Magdalen Hill cemetery and Blackwell & Moody Stonemasons on Alresford Rd (B3404) Winchester. SU512 295

Yew Hill. Park at roadside in Old Kennels Lane near junction of Port Lane & Millers Lane SU451 269.

Bentley Station Meadow. Find us in the meadow after using **very** limited spaces in Station Road SU792 432.(or desirably contact Lynn re alternative parking.

Friday 7th January Magdalen Hill Down 10am to 4pm

Wednesday 12th January Bentley Station Meadow 10am to 2.30pm

Friday 21st January Yew Hill 10am to 4pm

Friday 28th Magdalen Hill Down 10am to 4pm

Friday February 4th Magdalen Hill Down 10am to 4pm

Friday February 11th Magdalen Hill Down 10am to 4pm

Other dates will be fixed by email so please contact Lynn to sign up to the Conservation Work Party email group.

Mugwort

Plants of mugwort *Artemisia vulgaris* are numerous at MHD and at about five feet high & silvery in appearance are striking & give rise to enquiries from visitors. One recent one prompted me to “mug up” (pardon the pun!) on the plant, as all I could remember that in some book it was alleged to have got its name because it had been used to flavour beer before hops were used. Another suggestion is that the name is derived from its use to deter midges.



There are two books I turn to if I want to find out about plants - Richard Mabey's *Flora Britannica* & Geoffrey Grigson's *The Englishmans Flora*. The latter tells that a local name in Hampshire for the plant was Smotherwood and he describes at length its herbal & magical properties, being a herb that was burnt on St John's Eve. It is less aromatic than wormwood *Artemesia absinthium* but its attractive leaves led to it often being included in carvings in churches. A bit more down to earth, Richard Mabey passes on stories of it being used by village boys for making cigarettes.

Although the plant is not at all interesting to butterflies it is the larval food plant of the following moths :-

Mouse moth *
Northern Drab
Lime-speck Pug*
V-pug*
Grey Pug*
Mullein Wave
Peppered moth*
Wormwood
Bordered Pug*
Wormwood Pug
Common Emerald*

* Indicates all those that are found a MHD

Magdalen Hill Down – history

We know various bits of MHD history. Extensive information & photographs of the WW1 army camp can be found at

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~cjmorton/service/whatsnew/sept00/6.htm>

From an old map that I have we know that the army camp covered much of MHD N, the NE corner of the original reserve & the extension was designated as the Officers golf links.

Recently I was searching the internet for information about the agricultural use of the area we call MHD North before it was an army camp. I found nothing to help in that direction but did come across an interesting story on a family history web site (<http://www.titheradge.fsworld.co.uk/Notable%20individuals.htm>) of a Richard Titheridge, who gained the nickname DICKEY DUNG PRONG when he sought to evade capture after deserting from the army. His other exploits were set down & he

sounded a thoroughly bad lot. At Winchester he was found guilty of stealing cheese from a wagon at Magdalen Hill fair, near Winchester. He was sentenced to seven years transportation, of which he served five and was forgiven the remaining two. We have found the record to this "Richard Titheridge aged 33 committed August 3 1819 on suspicion of felony in stealing at New Alresford on the 2nd day of August instant two cheeses of the value of ten shillings, the property of William Winter Yeoman." Still unchanged in ways, five years after his transportation on 7th April 1825 aged 38 he was committed at Winchester for two months imprisonment to hard labour for a misdemeanour.

An account from <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=41981> records more illustrious visitors... Twice in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Magdalen Hill was the scene of historic incident. Henry de Blois, bishop of Winchester, went out to meet Empress Maud on Magdalen Hill 2 March, 1141, and from thence conducted her into the city in solemn procession. (fn. 7) In 1214 the downs of Magdalen Hill were the meeting place of Archbishop Langton and other of the bishops and clergy with King John, who 'at the sight of them fell on his knees and shed many tears.' From thence the king was conducted to the cathedral, though he could not enter there until he had been absolved.

From: 'Parishes: Chilcomb', A History of the County of Hampshire: Volume 3 (1908), From http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/text/chap_page.jsp?t_id=Cobbett&c_id=13 I gleaned that William Cobbett visited MHD too! The time was 5th-10th August 1823.

“From the top of this high land called Morning Hill , and the real name of which is Magdalen Hill , from a chapel which once stood there dedicated to Mary Magdalen, from the top of this land you have a view of a circle which is upon an average about seventy miles in diameter; and I believe in no one place so little as fifty miles in diameter. You see the Isle of Wight in one direction, and in the opposite direction you see the high lands in Berkshire. It is not a pleasant view, however. The fertile spots are all too far from you.”

And his description of nearby downland is also interesting.

“From Whiteflood you come over a series of hills, part of which form a rabbit-warren called Longwood warren, on the borders of which is the house and estate of Lord Northesk. These hills are amongst the most barren of the downs of England; yet a part of them was broken up during the rage for improvements; during the rage for what empty men think was an augmenting of the capital of the country. On about twenty acres of this land, sown with wheat, I should not suppose that there would be twice twenty bushels of grain! A man must be mad, or nearly mad, to sow wheat upon such a spot. However, a large part of what was enclosed has been thrown out again already, and the rest will be thrown out in a very few years. The down itself was poor; what then must it be as corn-land! Think of the destruction which has here taken place. The herbage was not good, but it was something: it was something for every year, and without trouble. Instead of grass it will now, for twenty years to come, bear nothing but that species of weeds which is hardy enough to grow where the grass will not grow.”

Anyway I hope one of you reading this might be interested in doing some research for us . We would particularly like to know how the land at MHD has been used in the last 100 years. It would be useful to know when the original downland of the extension & North were initially ploughed & any subsequent use.

MHD Bees

I had a nice letter in the middle of July from Nick Owens in Norfolk who described the surprise of finding our reserve when staying at the nearby touring caravan site. His particular interest was bumble bees & he listed the ones he had found. Adding “This is a good list for just one day & shows how valuable your reserve is for a variety of insects.”

Bombus terrestris - buff tailed

Bombus lucorum - white tailed

Bombus hortorum - garden

Bombus ruderatus –large garden (BAP species) *

Bombus pascuorum – common carder

Bombus pratorum – early

Bombus lapidarius – red tailed

Bombus vestalis – vestal cuckoo (parasite of B. terrestris)

Bombus rupestris – hill cuckoo (parasite of B. lapidarius) {local}

Bombus sylvestris –four coloured cuckoo - (parasite of B.pratorum)

Nick sent the B.ruderatus photo to Ted Benton (who wrote New Naturalist book on b'bees) and he has confirmed the i/d.

In addition Bombus hypnorum – tree (new arrival in UK) was seen on the Arqiva grassland near Holiday Inn.



Nick also sent me some splendid photos of MHD flowers with the comment “*We went to Chelsea Flower Show this year but reckon MHD is better!*”

In a later email he then went on to tell us that MHD had inspired him to join BC.

Given Nick's great interest in bees it was pleasing I was able to tell him Patrick Fleet has found a colony of Ivy Mining Bee *Colletes hederæ*. The ID was confirmed by Phil Budd.

April to December What's been happening?

Bentley Station Meadow

Not many butterflies were recorded on transect in the first half of May due to poor conditions, but Ken Bailey was surprised to find two Common Blues on 19th May. Little did he know that these were the first of many with a total of 111 being seen in 2010 – the most ever!!!

In mid-June Orchids were particularly splendid. (The meadow is wonderfully flowery from early Spring right through to the Devil'sbit Scabious in Autumn. The four transect recorders often mention the plants in bloom but the delights of the flowers are just too numerous to mention!) On 5th June Sue Clark spotted *Micropterix calthella*. (ID Mike Wall) Here is the description from Hants Moths Common, in damp woodland, woodland rides and woodland clearings, throughout Britain and Ireland, often swarming on flowers of a wide range of herbaceous plants, such as buttercup, sedges and dog's mercury, feeding on the pollen. Well distributed and fairly common, sometimes abundant, in Hampshire and on the Isle of Wight. Wingspan 7-10mm. Adults have metallic bronze forewings with purple blotch at base, and orange head tufts. Larva feeds on plant detritus and also, perhaps, various liverworts. The many that Sue spotted were on buttercups. Ken Bailey saw 17 Burnett Companions when walking the transect a week later.



This is the meadow in mid July showing the short area we create by mowing to encourage the Common Blues. It worked! Note all the knapweed in flower too.

17/7 Sue Clarke found *Nowickia ferox* a parasitoid fly whose host is Dark Arches moth *Apamea monoglypha* according to www.tachinidae.org.uk. On the same day Sue was lucky enough to see the courtship flight of two Silver-washed Fritillaries. Also many bumblebees including *Bombus pascuorum* and lapidaries.

On 21/7 Patrick saw a Comma egg laying southern meadow. Also 4-6 Purple Hairstreaks around 9am in trees nr Southern meadow plus at least 3 Brown Argus in S Meadow. But the highlight of the day was two Purple Emperors – one egg laying nr Main path. Add to this 2 White Admirals, Common Blues in double figs and Silver-washed Fritillaries everywhere to give a just perfect day.

24th July Peak count of SWF on transect 27 by Thelma Smalley

31st July David Walton saw a tatty PHS on transect near top of reserve
 15th Aug Lynn was attending a Reserve inspection with John Davis, Marjorie Taylor and Paul Toynton. They saw one PHS on low spray of oak in S meadow, just 3 SWF. One Small Copper and getting on for 10 CBs. 22nd Aug was the last date a SWF was seen on transect but SCs continued to be seen through September. Lynn reports seeing a late one on 19th October on a work party day.



Numerous reserve visits took place including a monthly walk with Alton Walk2Health group. (Pic 7th Sept). Butterfly Transect Training was provided on two occasions and also habitat management for butterflies.

Five Friesian cattle grazed the reserve during October/November.

Magdalen Hill Down

In the first half of May Phil Budd undertook the important job of botanical monitoring on the extension to check how the sward is developing in 45 quadrats. MHD 10th May Patrick Fleet saw 32 Green Hairstreaks on the hedge on the extension and on 24th May 40 were seen!!!! It was great being able to have GHS reliably in a place to show visitors. (However I will not be able to ever see this species again without recalling Matthew Oates description from Patrick Barkham's The Butterfly Isles – a must have book!

“ That is a vicious little thing and their sexual morals are terrible. They are a disgrace.” Adding that their caterpillars are cannibalistic and their pupae squeak if disturbed.)

Patrick saw two Small Blues, (2nd June) this was to be followed by many more sightings of this species, pleasingly in many areas of the reserve, including at the western end of North opposite St Swithun's.



It is part of the regular work at MHD that we have a number of pathways cut. This cutting has usually happened in late April with a second cut in late May. However the dry Spring meant growth of vegetation was less & we just had a single cut on 3rd June. Cutting of paths in Spring is important in creating both easy walking routes for butterfly transect and other visitors.

But it creates good habitat for butterflies too. The shorter areas are good places to bask & the plants grow & flower a bit later adding to diversity and providing suitable fresh plants for egg laying.

On 20th July on Ext a Turtle Dove was spotted by a member of a visiting RSPB group.

On 10th August an early morning search by Phil Budd turned up 58 living adult and sub-adult *Colichella.acuta*. He mentioned that *Arion ater*, *Cerutuella virgata*, *Cepaea hortensis*, *Cornu aspersa* and abundant *Monacha cantiana* were also found. Re *C. acuta* Phil added that it used to be only found around coasts around the country but that it seems that it now occurs inland at Pewsey Down, Wiltshire and on the North Downs near Guildford as well as MHD.

On the 11th August an educational event was laid on for Alresford Young Farmers Club which included seed gathering. The highlight of the evening was finding many, many wasp spiders in the long vegetation on North.

On 14th August Phil Budd on the visit by Southampton Natural History Society found 31 Striped Lychnis larva. This was most pleasing as over the years we have been increasing the number of Dark Mullein plants mainly by setting plants provided by Brian Fletcher.

During the season we had a couple of events and several visits of people coming to learn about restoring down land, growing wild flowers and recreating good habitat on ex arable. These included a Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) event – aimed at farmers with Charles Flower as the main tutor, a training day for Hampshire Wildlife Trust staff led by Sue Everett, visits by RSPB staff, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBONT) and also groups from Basingstoke. It is great that our schemes can be a source of information and inspiration for others. It was also pleasing that on 1st September we welcomed a visit by Steve Brine the new MP for Winchester.

Four cattle arrived in late September and have grazed area 3 of the original reserve really well. They were joined by a further 4 in late November and have just about finished grazing Area 1&2 and the tumuli area.

24 cattle arrive on the extension at the end of October and moved to North on 14th December.

Yew Hill

17th May Ivan Arnold saw a stoat and it was seen again on 21st by Colin Beyer.

During May Green Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper, Brown Argus & Dingy Skipper were all seen. The latter is fascinating! BF saw 2 DS which were the first seen on transect since 1993, with the species last being seen in 1995 by Phil Budd so its reappearance is good news.



During May there was a fine amount of Jack-by-the-hedge for Orange Tips. The picture also shows one of the disease resistant elms.

During July two other butterflies only recorded in low numbers were seen Dark Green Fritillary and Small Blue. On 29th July 21 species of butterfly were seen – a public walk led by Ivan Arnold and on the same day Brian Fletcher was doing the transect too and recorded over 700 Chalkhill Blues.

During the summer Chris Pines made his usual visits to enjoy the orchids. In mid June he found 9 Greater Butterfly Orchids 13 frog orchids, many common spotted and fragrant & some pyramidal starting to flower, along with 50+ Knapweed Broomrape. In mid July he found 5 frog orchids and on 3rd August a further 8, commenting at that time the many other orchids well over. For many years Jean Kington counted the orchids & it is nice that Chris is now doing it. The picture below (taken in April) shows how grazing maintains short turf needed by many of the flowers and butterflies and ants. Ant hills abound!



On several occasions during July and early August Lynn pulled ragwort from Hilltop. Many CHBs were seen in there, especially still roosting in the early morning. A wasp spider was also found on 2nd August. That day many CHBs were nectaring, often on fleabane.

15th August Reserve inspection with John Davis, Marjorie Taylor and Paul Toynton.. Lynn reports the CHBs gave a wonderful spectacle.

31st August Lynn sowed sanfoin, yellow rattle, Kidney vetch field scabious & Greatrr knapweed in Hilltop to help it become more flowery.

24th September Patrick found 7 Fox moth caterpillars.

Four cattle arrived in November and are still grazing (now on HillTop).

Common Bird Census

Dave Shute made 10 visits to conduct a Common Bird census.

Here is a summary of his results:-

A total of 26 bird species were recorded as holding territory on the reserve. The commonest resident species are Robin and Chaffinch with both holding 30 territories. Wren with 24 is next which is a good number considering the harsh winter of 2009/10. Of the summer migrants, the Blackcap (23) and Chiffchaff (20) are the commonest. The Skylark (10) is doing well on the tall grassy areas. Disappointingly low numbers were recorded for Song Thrush (4) and Yellowhammer (2). The tree-planting on the Northern Section should increase the diversity of species holding territory as the trees mature.

The situation in the three sections of the reserve are as follows:

ORIGINAL RESERVE

This section maintains both the highest number and diversity of territory holding birds. This is due to the old established boundary hedges and particularly the blocks of scrub and the diagonal hedge-bordered path. This offers “pathways” of cover throughout the section and the scrub blocks offer excellent breeding habitat. Summer migrant warblers are far more numerous in this section than on the rest of the reserve.

THE EXTENSION

This section has much less diversity than the Original as it consists mainly of open grassland with a bordering hedge. The tall grass in compartments A and B are attractive to ground-nesters such as Skylark and Meadow Pipit but the lack of scrub restricts habitat for other species. This lack of cover also seems to reduce the attractiveness of the bordering hedge which held far fewer territories than the equivalent in the Original Reserve. The hedge along the northern edge of compartment B which borders the cemetery is more productive as no doubt some territory holding species will nest in the taller trees of the cemetery.

THE NORTHERN SECTION

This is the newest section and is, at present, predominately given over to tall herb-rich grassland. This makes it excellent territory for the ground-nesting Skylark and Meadow Pipit. The tree plantations in the West and East Clumps are, as yet, too young to be occupied by nesting birds but in future will provide suitable habitat for a variety of species.

We are very grateful to Dave for providing these records.

It's Christmas

Want to know more about mistletoe?

<http://www.mistletoe.org.uk/home/mtoebuyngrw5.htm>

A rare moth that breeds on mistletoe even gets a mention.

I think that real Christmas trees probably help butterflies. We know that the decline in coppicing woods especially hazel & sweet chestnut is a major factor in the decline of woodland butterflies. Well, I have seen at first hand how the harvesting of Christmas

trees opens up areas in woodland so that wild flowers and butterflies can thrive again. So buying a real tree is a good thing to do.

Much of the information in this newsletter is passed on from those of you close to the reserves. The transect walkers help us collect very important information on how butterflies are doing. Each year we need between one and three new transect walkers so if you can help please contact me.

Whatever your link with our reserves thank you for your interest & support in 2010. All good wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Lynn Fomison.

Reserves Who's Who

Reserves sub-committee Chairman and Transect co-ordinator MHD

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Transect Co-ordinator Bentley Thelma Smalley 01962 734328

web site www.hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk

National web site www.butterfly-conservation.org

Hantsmoths www.Hantsmoths.org.uk

As a reminder that Summer is just around the corner here is ideal Small Blue habitat -the chalk corner on MHD North, which is beautifully maintained by volunteers.

