



**Butterfly Conservation  
Friends of Magdalen Hill  
Down Butterfly Reserve**

### Dates for your diary

#### **Winter work parties**

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> November Magdalen Hill Down Work Party. Use entrance opposite St Swithun's School to come in and park. 10am to 3.30pm SU498 295. Scrub coppicing on original reserve. (Near bottom of site)

The ones below all meet at top of track by cemetery. SU512 295. 10am to 3.30pm  
Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> November Magdalen Hill Down Work Party with Wednesday Conservation Volunteers.. – scrub coppicing on original reserve.

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> January

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> February

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> February

An odd hour helps so please come!

Magdalen Hill Down has grown in size. A 110 acres is a lot of land to care for. We do need more regular volunteers. It is not a big commitment. There is usually one work party each month.

There is no obligation to stay for the whole day or to come to every work party. We DO know that the work we do helps butterflies and moths. This is your chance to be part of something good. Hope you will join us! Lynn & Patrick

#### **Group visits**

As well as holding regular public walks we are able to take bookings for visits by private groups which we welcome under the educational access facility in our Higher Level Stewardship agreement. We had visits in the last year from a wide range of groups including Women's Institutes, groups of students or other young people. At MHD & Yew Hill we were able to claim for the maximum of 25 visits thus raising £2500 in income from Natural England. And, as importantly, introducing a whole load of new people to the reserve & to Butterfly Conservation. If you hear of a group that would like a visit please suggest they contact Lynn



## **Newsletter No 29 Autumn 2008**

### **Transect – Help needed in 2009**

At MHD we have three transects – Original Extension & North. Each transect is undertaken by a rota of 4 or 5 people. We shall have a couple of vacancies in 2009 as we bid farewell to Paul Guymer who is leaving the Winchester area to undertake further studies. Also Keith Palmer may be reducing his involvement or even retiring after eighteen years of doing the transect on the original reserve. Special thanks to Paul & Keith & indeed all who do the transects.

So can you help? The transect on the original reserve presents quite a hard walk involving a steep slope. Both the extension & North are easier. You need to walk the transect in the day time between 10.45am and 3.45pm and to have flexibility to do it any day of the week when the weather is fine. With five people on the rota it usually means each person does just five transects in the period April to September so it is not too onerous. It goes without saying that in order to help you need to be able to identify butterflies, but some training can be given.

### **2008 Butterfly Season**

The Annual report published by the branch in April each year & provided free to BC members in Hampshire & IoW will give full details of how all the species fared. Obviously the summer weather meant it was a poor year yet again. Some species survived the changeable weather better than others.

Patrick told me of his latest interesting sighting – a Painted Lady on the extension seen on 29<sup>th</sup> October - the morning after the night Hampshire had snow!

### **Moths**

Patrick was able to run moth lamps on a number of occasions and an interesting array of moths was attracted. Please contact Patrick if you would like to join him on moth nights next year. Newcomers to moths are most welcome.

The other fascinating aspect of moths relates to the various caterpillars that Patrick finds whilst working on the reserve. These include several in the Footman family who rather oddly feed off the lichen on fence posts! Several hundred lappet moth caterpillars have been relocated onto the reserve so look out for these!

## Why Magdalen Hill Down is special

I read something in the newsletter of a relatively new charity called The Grassland Trust that 97% of the country's natural grassland has been lost in the last 60 years. Quite a horrifying statistic and like all statistics could be disputed. Except..... except nature is telling us that sadly it is true. RSPB, British Trust for Ornithology and the Game and Wildlife Conservancy all highlight the decline of birds, whilst Butterfly Conservation has been telling us that seven out of ten species of butterfly in decline with some moths faring even worse.

There is no denying that most countryside birds need insects or seeds as their food & it is a rich abundance of wild plants that produce the best of both of these.

Butterflies need the very specific plants that their caterpillars feed on. A lot of species use native grasses like fescues, cock's foot and Yorkshire Fog. No butterflies breed on the rye grass that populates so many agricultural fields. And with other species needing a range of plants from sorrel to Cowslip, Hedge Garlic, kidney vetch, Horseshoe vetch, Black Medick and Bird's foot trefoil caterpillars can only thrive where these plants are present. And when we look at moths the requirements are for a far greater range of plants for breeding purposes. As adults most species feed on nectar from flowers using a large range of plants that bloom from early violets and primroses to Devil's bit scabious & Hemp Agrimony later in the year.

At Magdalen Hill Down the original reserve with its steep slope and poor soil supports plentiful rockrose & horseshoe vetch that is needed by the caterpillars of some of the reserve's special butterflies – Green hairstreak and Brown Argus with Chalkhill Blue needing the latter plant.

The extension and MHD North were arable fields which would have been chalk grassland in years gone by. The extension was the officers golf links in the First World War & North was the site of the St Mary Magdalen Fair many centuries ago. The seed mix for both was chosen very carefully to produce ( in time!) authentic chalk grassland but also to cater for as many species as possible.

The result in the short term is wonderful – over 80 acres of flower rich grassland teeming in butterflies moths & other wild life. What could be nicer than wandering through flowers, with moths and butterflies fluttering around & skylarks singing overhead.

And that's why Magdalen Hill Down is special!



## Where have all the flowers gone?

Is the title of a book by Charles Flower which has just been published. With its lavish illustrations of our beloved wild flowers, nostalgic photographs of an age of gentler farming & plenty of advice on how the countryside can be filled once again with flowers it will make the ideal Christmas present for any one who loves the countryside, flowers, butterflies and all the wild life that rich habitats support.

At BC we have strong links with Charles Flower – he was the consultant who helped us to ensure that the seeding schemes on the extension and North were a success. Charles is passionate about wild flowers and that passion comes through on every page of the book.

ISBN 978-1901092-82-0  
£25

## Grazing

Four cattle arrived on the original reserve on 28<sup>th</sup> September and they will be joined by two more to chomp their way through the hillside.

Fourteen cattle came onto MHD North on the same day. A little later they were joined by Sidney the Charolais bull. Very shortly they will be moved onto the area that the hardened path passes through.

Twenty one cows arrived on the extension on 25<sup>th</sup> October.

The plan is to start sheep grazing in March/April next year for a few weeks on each of the two areas of MHD N & the extension. The last two wet summers have led to a massive growth of grass & so it is important to start the summer with a relatively low sward.

It is also our plan to have a few cattle on area 4 of the original reserve through late Spring & summer in 2009 as short grass is really important here for species like Chalkhill Blue.

## Conservation work

The sheep and cattle grazing contributes significantly to the successful management of the reserve but a lot of other work has to be done by people!

The ragwort was not nearly so prolific in 2008 but a lot of volunteer effort still went into clearing it. We had a special September work party for a group of work colleagues from Ordnance Survey in Southampton at which people also had an extensive tour of the reserve and an explanation of

how the reserve is operated. We had a work party on MHD N on 1<sup>st</sup> October digging out buddleias. Patrick has been doing all the usual routine work which keeps the reserve in good order & has been regularly assisted by a student from Sparsholt who is interested in learning about conservation management. Two volunteers have given a lot of help in mowing certain paths and areas of weeds. Serco were contracted to cut the maze of paths through the tree & shrub areas & also down through MHD N. This created wonderful habitat particularly for Common Blue with the Bird'sfoot trefoil thus being encouraged to flower later. Interestingly almost double the number of Common Blues were seen on the N transect in comparison to 2007, but numbers were still around 40 less than 2005.

We have a lot of tasks planned for this winter & as ever help from volunteers will be most appreciated. More help = more habitat for butterflies moths and other wildlife.

### **MHD on TV**

The reserve was included in the feature about Andy Barker in Born to be Wild on BBC 4 back in July and again in October on Inside out when Chrid Packham chatted to Lynn & Patrick about the importance of the reserve for Chalkhill Blue butterflies. A video of this item can be see on [http://www.bbc.co.uk/hampshire/content/articles/2008/09/30/chalkhill\\_blues\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/hampshire/content/articles/2008/09/30/chalkhill_blues_feature.shtml)

### **All about butterflies**

Looking for a Christmas present for a child? A book by Matthew Oates has just been published & is recommended. It is well illustrated & with lots of "Did you know" questions posed makes interesting reading. Price £4.99. Published by New Holland ISBN 978-1-84773-050-3  
You can see a few pages on Amazon

### **Promoting butterflies - A nice Christmas present**

Sandy Harman has produced a new DVD entitled "The Best of Butterfly Days - PLUS" It is compiled from some of best clips of the past five versions of "Butterfly Days" and much fresh material. The PLUS refers to a new section, showing some of the rarer butterflies that visit this country and/or were once resident here - a further eleven species. This DVD can be likened to a field trip around Britain to see butterflies during the six months from April to September. 58 species (in addition to the 11 in the PLUS section) are identified by discreet captions, as are most of the other subjects. These include caterpillars, dragonflies, moths and wildflowers etc. There is no music, minimal voiceover, and only natural sounds of the countryside. Detailed

close-ups abound. The DVD costs £8.00, including p&p, and of this, at least £6.00 goes to our Branch funds (or more if you add something to cover the postage costs, as many members have). To buy, just send a cheque, payable to 'S Harman' to 31, Upper Manor Road, Milford, Godalming, GU8 5JW.- and why not get one for a friend as well - Christmas is coming! You can enjoy a beautiful view of our wonderful butterflies, and help support our Branch at the same time!

### **Newsletter**

This newsletter is produced on behalf of Butterfly Conservation Hampshire and Isle of Wight Branch & is provided free of charge to friends of the reserve. Lynn has written the majority of this newsletter - apologies for any errors/omissions. Items welcomed from you. Please send any items for the Spring Newsletter to Lynn by 15<sup>th</sup> March 2009. Let her know if you would like it by email to save us the cost of postage. Alternatively it can be accessed on our web site

### **Magdalen Hill Down Who's Who**

#### **Who's Who....**

**Friends Coordinator:** Sylvia Whalley, 77 Alresford Road Winchester.SO23 0LA Tel: 01962 890848

**Warden:** Patrick Fleet, Ivy Cottage, Dummer. Basingstoke. RG25 2AG. Tel: (01256 398471)

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#### **Reserves Officer and Editor of MHD News:**

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Mo 07850 256167

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mo 07889 750577 and 07738 420860

web site [www.hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk](http://www.hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk)  
National web site [www.butterfly-conservation.org](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org)

