



Dates for your diary

Walks

Magdalen Hill Down

Join us each month to learn about the reserve and its butterflies.

1st Wednesday every month Wednesday Wander.

Leader: Lynn Fomison . 10.30am. Meet in gravel car park opposite the cemetery on Alresford Rd B3404, Winchester.

There are walks at Bentley Station meadow and Yew Hill to look forward to as well as others at MHD. For a full list of walks at the reserves see the web site Events tab. Do tell your friends about these and most important tell groups you know of that a special guided walk can be arranged for them at any of our reserves and that it will earn us £100 in grant but is FREE to the group.

Work Parties

During the spring and summer our work parties tend to be rather impromptu. Please contact Lynn via web site About us tab or phone to ask to be placed on the email circulation list

New to Conservation work?

We would like some new participants at work parties. There is no commitment. Work parties are free to attend and enjoyable. New comers are assured a warm welcome. Wear strong clothes and footwear, bring gloves, food and drink. Training will be given but it's just like gardening really & immensely helpful to our butterflies, moths and other wildlife. The more people who come the better we can make the habitat. Be a part of something good! **Remember helpers for part of day most welcome.** If you have never done conservation work & are looking for a hobby that involves being out of doors, gentle exercise, friendly company & usually cake please come along or have an informal chat with me beforehand. Lynn Fomison 01962 772251

Work parties - what's being planned

At Bentley Station Meadow one Friday in April Patrick Fleet & Colin Beyer will be coming to do some cutting. This is to control bramble in the grassland and also to create some areas of shorter grass that some species favour. We can help by being present to rake up cut material and also to do some general tidying up. We will need to make an early start at BSM in autumn to finish the job of clearing up the damage from last winter.

At Magdalen Hill Down we have several special areas of wildflowers to look after and from June onwards we meet regularly to clear ragwort. On Fridays Patrick

welcomes help from a couple of people – not a work party as such – but going around the reserve to do specific jobs. Contact Lynn if you are interested in finding out more about this.

At Yew Hill there will be some ragwort to be cleared, July time.



Be assured all of the work we do is carefully targeted at creating not just good habitat for butterflies and moths but for all wild life and that the help you give us **will make a difference**. One recent example of this – in December 2008 students from Sparsholt cleared a large area of scrub in area 4 on MHD Original. On our walk on 7th April we saw that part of the area is being well colonised by violets – an important early nectar source for butterflies like Small Tortoiseshell.

At our special BC 40th Celebrations work party at MHD primroses were planted in the car park and these are flowering beautifully at the moment and will be much visited by Brimstones.

In the next couple of weeks the cowslips will be at their best particularly on the extension. Thanks to stalwart efforts of volunteers good progress has been made in clearing young scrub of the extension so maintaining an open sward that enable the cowslips to be seen in their full glory. In other places we maintain cowslips in scrub & in the sort of long grassy habitat that Duke of Burgundy favours in the hope of establishing this species at the reserve.

Conservation Principles

Our management work at the reserves is structured around the sound advice from Matthew Oates of “ Never do the same thing to the whole of the site at the same time”. And we are also mindful of that easy to remember recipe of the Five S’s. Sun, shelter, sustenance, structure and sympathy – the last one meaning caring enough about butterflies and moths to both take the trouble to find out and provide what they need.

At one of the work parties Mervyn Grist and I had an interesting chat about various good practice in conservation work. Conservation management for wildlife is a complex and fascinating subject and there are always new things to learn. For instance at the Branch Moth conference I had a conversation with a man who was very interested in bees and he was telling me how certain bees use the cut ends of bramble as nesting places.

Any way back to Mervyn – we were speaking about hawthorn berries - being careful not to spread them around if cutting scrub still carrying berries. At both Magdalen &

BSM where we have significant patches of scrub and bramble we edge round these established areas to prevent them spreading uncontrollably. We talked about work priorities - if there is more work than time – usually the case! – then the principle of looking after best grassland first and then rescuing sward in sun rather than shade is very applicable. Another strategy is eradicating weed sources to the south west to avoid invasion of good grassland. A good idea but one we can not have in place at MHD where the steep banks down to the A31 harbour both sycamore and wild clematis.

Further tips on good conservation management are welcomed.

Reserves update

Remember Reserves Update will be on the web site too, with some photos.

Looking back to the winter

The winter of 2009/2010 was certainly one of the worst Hampshire winters I can remember. It started in December with a series of hard frosts & these were followed by quite heavy snowfalls in both December & January.

At Bentley Station meadow the snow was about 10/12” deep and was so heavy it broke major limbs of oak trees, uprooted several large blackthorn ‘trees’ that were old & about 15’ high and flattened many of the blackthorn bushes. We employed a contractor to cut the bushes down and we had three work parties in March clearing up but were not able to do it all. Anyway the meadow is looking ok and it will be interesting to see how everything does this coming season.

At Magdalen Hill Down and Yew Hill our problems there were with the cattle. The worst problem was water troughs freezing and this necessitated daily attention. The cattle were quite happy out the cold & snow did not bother them. They were given supplementary food, but once the roads were clear enough on 5th January the MHD ones went back to the farm. The ones remained at Yew Hill until 6th March.

Another aspect of the winter that caused difficulties was that we had to cancel a few work parties but thanks to an efficient email system & the positive response of those who support work parties we were able to arrange impromptu work parties and make up for lost time.



Yew Hill was also affected by adverse weather in November when a length of fencing was demolished by the tornado that wreaked havoc across Hampshire on 3rd November

The snow was too bad for me to venture out from Ropley but others were kind enough to visit the reserves and provide these photos



BSM Robert Burton www.cliffordmilburn.co.uk - a photography web site for amateurs - well worth a visit.



MHD Penny Jeffries



YH Celia Cox

Other News



In March three new chalk scrapes were created on the extension at MHD and we are looking forward to seeing how these develop. We will be putting horse shoe vetch pot grown plants in there in the autumn and sowing some kidney vetch seed.

Dave Shute has volunteered to undertake a common bird census at MHD. This is great as it will update the earlier surveys done by Ron Cooke.

BSM has been very wet again this winter as it gets waterlogged because a ditch on the Forestry Commission boundary is blocked. FC are reluctant to clear the ditch but are going to tackle the problem of excessive water draining of their land by creating ponds. **Note** new double lines in Station Road means it is less easy to park there.

At Yew Hill Tim & I hope to run a moth lamp to search for moths carrying pollinia. We heard a fascinating talk at the National Moth recorders conference in January about how Darwin studied the pollination of orchids by moths and Dr Roy Sexton explained how moths may be found with pollinia stuck on their heads. He was keen to hear from moth recorders what species they were finding with these. (For more details of this see Lynn's report of Moth Recorders conference on branch web site.)

If you have never visited Yew Hill at orchid time do come on the walk on 9th June to be led by Colin Matthews. Incidentally Colin is no longer voluntary reserve manager at Yew Hill but continues to serve on Reserves sub committee and be involved with our reserves in all kinds of ways

Sightings

Please send Lynn an email record of your wildlife sightings at the reserves particularly creatures like weasels and stoats. I was thrilled to see a weasel at BSM in the winter.

Grazing

As mentioned earlier cattle grazed MHD & YH during autumn/ winter and BSM too for six weeks in October/November. At Bentley a rota of four local people check the cattle everyday which is very helpful and at Yew Hill they are checked daily by one person. Sarah does the MHD ones herself. The onset on snowy weather for a second time in the winter meant we did not graze all of MHD as much as we would have liked. However only one portion of the original reserve was not grazed at all & once in a while this is no bad thing. One of the great strengths of MHD is its size & the variety of habitats it provides.



Sheep have been grazing MHD North since the end of February and have been making a wonderful job of it. They grazed the roadside area for about 18 days and the mitigation land for 24 days, leaving the reserve on 7th April. We do not aim to graze the sward closely all over but like to leave plenty of grass tufts as shelter for the skylarks. The sheep are provided and tended by John Britton of Colemore.

The grazing of our reserves is an important part of our management in ensuring that the vegetation is just right for butterflies and moths and we are grateful to both the farmers who provide the stock & the volunteers who regularly check them.

How we run the reserves

If you have been reading this and wondering how we decide when & how to do things at the reserves and how we keep track of the progress we are making with reserves management, well here is a bit about how it all happens.

Each reserve has a management group comprising 3-5 volunteers, all with special skills or interest in the reserves such as botany, monitoring, conservation work and importantly knowledge or reserve over many years, etc.. The MHD group meets twice a year and BSM & YH once a year and each meeting is attended by Patrick as Reserves Warden and contractor undertaking much of the necessary work and Lynn as Reserves Officer. Lynn records the matters discussed and decision reached and these are then converted into yearly or in the case of MHD six monthly work plans.

What & when we have done it is then recorded on an updated work plan.

Butterfly Transects

As I write this the second week of Butterfly Transect is just starting and it reminds me to make a regular request. We are always pleased to hear from people who would like to join our rota of transect walkers – we generally have 4 or 5 people on each rota meaning that each individual has about 5 or 6 transects to do during the period April to end September. With 5 transects at the three reserves to cover we therefore need about 25-30 volunteers. If anyone's interested now is a good time to say so as then training can start this year with an existing transect walkers.

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.

Reserves Who's Who

Reserves sub-committee Chairman and Transect co-ordinator MHD

Jenny Mallett Great Fontley Farm Fareham PO15 6EA 01329 832177

Warden: Patrick Fleet, Tel: (01256 465140)

Reserves Officer: Lynn Fomison Mount Pleasant Parkstone Road Ropley. SO24 OEW Tel: (01962 772251).

Transect Co-ordinator Yew Hill Brian Fletcher 01962 882746

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
--