

# **Rugby Area Conservation Report –for year 2014**

## **A report of some of the work done by volunteers of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust – Rugby and Butterfly Conservation – Warwickshire**

Phil Parr, WWT - Rugby Conservation Officer, & Butterfly Conservation Rugby Area Liaison Officer, 22-2-2015

[phil.parr@warwickshire-butterflies.org.uk](mailto:phil.parr@warwickshire-butterflies.org.uk)

### **Hours Worked by volunteers**

Rugby Groups – Ashlawn, Swift Valley, Cock Robin Wood, Newbold, Malpass, & Nature Force.

Hours worked 2014 – Total **4564.5**                      **1191** volunteer visits

This comprises ..... 4228.5 hours by 1051 Volunteers for The Rugby Local Group, WWT Nature Force teams and Swift & Cock Robin Wood groups, plus 336 hours by 140 youngsters from Rugby School directed by Warden Cyril Cleaver & Diana Forbes-Powney.

**A tremendous effort**, many thanks to everyone involved.

<u>Previous years: -</u>	2013 - 3873 Hours, 931 volunteer visits,	2012 – 2868 Hours, 934 volunteer visits,
	2011 - 2795 Hours, 842 volunteer visits,	2010 – 1755 Hours, 688 volunteer visits,

**Website** [www.rugbywildlife.info](http://www.rugbywildlife.info)

Jan Elliot our Website Manager continues to do a brilliant job. The website shows the dates of planned walks and workparties so people can join us as well as reports from Rugby wildlife sites. It currently receives over 4000 hits per month.

Jan welcomes sightings, reports, and photos that may be used on the website.

### **The Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves in Rugby**

#### **Ashlawn Cutting - Local Nature Reserve**

Another very busy year where our small team with the help of 5 visits from the Trusts Nature-Force groups just about managed to keep on top of the grassland management and glade clearance work.

We were able with the help of Rugby Borough Council (RBC) to get the Station Pools dredged and a Nature Improvement Area grant via (WWT) enabled us to employ Steve Boswell to lay part of Jolly's Hedge.

We held a Guided Walk in June and everybody agreed the reserve looked better than ever.

We are very pleased that we once again got a Gold Award in the Environmental Category of the Rugby in Bloom competition, and especially so when we were awarded a one off Discretionary Environmental Award in the prestigious Heart of England in Bloom competition.

The Rugby School group under the direction of Warden Cyril Cleaver, Diana and Colin continued to do sterling work on the reserve on Thursday afternoons in the spring, but staffing problems have meant they couldn't continue later in the year. We thank them for the work done to date and we hope to see them again in the future. See separate report for full activities on this reserve.



Ashlawn F, May blossom, south 16-5-14



Ashlawn F5w, Masses of St. John's Wort this year, 6-7-14.



Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh HSS - Rugby branch members join us to help grassland management on SEWA Day

#### **Cock Robin Wood- Local Nature Reserve**



Part of Cock Robin hedge facing onto Dunchurch Road

The group led by Derek Lill meets on Mondays throughout most of the year and carries out various management tasks including wildflower seeding, and tree work such as coppicing and scalloping edges to let more light into the wood.

They have laid further lengths of the hedge facing onto Dunchurch Road and it looks magnificent.

Classes from Bilton First School visit the reserve and Warden Derek was very pleased to be able to explain to them about the site, its management and its wildlife. See separate report for full activities on this reserve.



### **Newbold Quarry - Local Nature Reserve**

Work has continued mainly by WWT's Nature Force teams with input from our local volunteers. They have carried out grassland management & scrub clearing to open up more areas below Gun Hill.

Warden Richard Wright reports much better numbers of orchids on the SE facing grasslands above South Inlet

A local resident records butterflies here and Butterfly Conservation adds them to the county database.

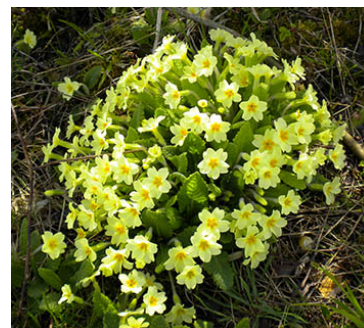
It was pleasing to see that Small Heath are still present (3 on 27-7-14) but the species seems vulnerable as they now occur on only two sites in Rugby. Common Blue (2 on 8-4 & 3-7) also seem to be struggling and worryingly all the records were from the west end of the site, presumably the north facing bank at the corner.



The deep quarry pool attracts water birds. and in spring is an important Toad breeding site



The Plateau, October grass cut



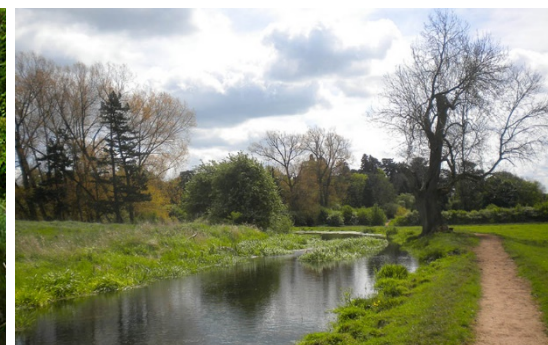
The Plateau grasslands have many Primroses.

### **Swift Valley- Local Nature Reserve**

The efforts of the Friends of Swift Valley volunteers were rewarded by Swift Valley attaining its 1<sup>st</sup> Environmental Gold Award in the Rugby in Bloom competition. Chris & Neville continue to run the volunteer work parties and laying the entrance hedge was one of the many tasks achieved. Four Nature-Force groups visited to help during the year to assist with the woodland work, stock fencing and control of invasive plants. A butterfly transect recording scheme was set up by Neville. This involves walking a set route on a weekly basis, the results of which go to Butterfly Conservation - Warwickshire who manage the county database used for planning purposes, monitoring trends, and on the reserve - deciding best management. Neville also continued with the bird surveys. Leakage from the canal is still a big problem. See separate report for full activities on this reserve.



Swift Valley NR, 5-5-14



Swift Valley NR, The old Oxford canal arm 14-5-14



Swift Valley NR north end 5-5-14

**Habitat Biodiversity Audit** RBC have restarted contributing to the costs of this.

The Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) was established in October 1995 through a funding partnership of all the local authorities in the area, English Nature, the Environment Agency and the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, who act as project managers. The project is housed at the Warwickshire Museum Field Services within Warwickshire County Council and makes use of the Authority's geographic information system (GIS).

They can now return to undertake habitat surveying in the borough. This highlights areas of high ecological importance that should be taken into account when planning applications are made as recommended in government guidelines, or the need for management on existing designated sites. Surveys are due to restart in the Borough during 2015.

### **Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)**

These sites have been assessed by the HBA as having significant wildlife interest that deserve special attention especially in planning matters. Some are in private hands and not open to the public.

#### **Allan's Wet Meadow (LWS)**

One or two ponies graze this site which is noted for its Marsh Orchids and other wetland plants, and they are just about enough to keep it in good shape.

We are keeping an eye on the huge housing developments taking place on the Mast Site which is upstream, as changes in the water flow and quality are likely to be detrimental.

**Kilsby Lane Meadow (LWS)** The site was recently designated LWS but this didn't prevent part of the site being lost for development of an indoor sports facility.

This RBC owned site is below the Rugby Junior Football Club (RJFC) in the Rainsbrook Valley and slopes gradually south down to the Rains Brook. There is no public access at the moment.

I understand work on the new sports hall is on hold while funds are raised and appropriate mitigation is agreed.

I am not aware of any habitat management having been done since 2011. Brambles and scrub will be choking the grassland making surveying very difficult, but I understand that some money was likely to be available to do something in the autumn of 2014, presume this will be as some previous years, a flail cut of some areas and forage harvester used to lift off loose arisings. I have not been able to check if this happened.

### **Leicester Road Viaduct & cycle route 53 (LWS)**



Consul Rd cutting cycle route Wych Elm in flower 30 April, Common Mallow 14-6-14, masses of wild flowers 29 June, rare Ivy Bee 10-9-14, P. Parr.

This site has now been designated Local Wildlife Site (LWS) from Hunters Lane to the Oxford Canal (including Consul Road open space and the viaduct). The verges of the route, the remaining Hunters Lane embankment and nearby land have areas with locally uncommon plants and the elms support White-letter Hairstreak.

RBC, Butterfly Conservation – Warwickshire and our Rugby Group have all helped with this project.

Wildflower seeds we sowed in 2013 have taken well but areas were becoming inundated with Docks.

Rugby Borough Council Parks and Open Spaces Department came to the rescue and topped the docks before they seeded but they will grow again next year unless spot herbicide treatment is carried out on them. Carefully done this should not affect nearby plants.

Bird's-foot Trefoil has taken very well and this brought back the Common Blue butterfly to the site in good numbers.

Mallows, Yellow Rattle, the uncommon Blue Fleabane, and Ploughman's Spikenard were amongst the many species now there.

BC with Sustrans are hoping to organise a workparty of volunteers in the Hunters Lane area during 2015 to rescue the key grassland areas from bramble invasion. We will support this. They are both also looking for possible grant funding for contractor help. Watch our website for news.

Sustrans are to produce a management plan for the route during 2015. See also their Greener Greenways project newsletter. [www.sustrans.org.uk/.../sustrans-greener-greenways](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/.../sustrans-greener-greenways)

I was relieved to find that the locally scarce White-letter Hairstreak was still on site this year – just 4 seen on the remaining Wych Elm – see pic of the trees flowers. This tree may be threatened by the proposed new road.

Common Blue, Small Copper, Large Skipper, Speckled Wood, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Meadow Brown, Ringlet and day flying moths were recorded this year.

A big surprise was finding a colony of the Ivy Bee at Consul Road cutting. This ground nesting bee is only seen flying when Ivy is in flower as it is dependent on its nectar and pollen. These are the first noted in the Rugby area, as the species spreads north.

Calamint propagated from Hunters Lane seeds were planted in in various parts of the route but survival rate seemed low. I think they may be being eaten by rabbits.

We seeded areas along the route with Poppy provided by RBC to commemorate WW1, but they did not germinate as expected. Maybe next year.

### **Hillmorton Ballast Pits (LWS)**

This was designated an Ecosite in 1982 and has records going back as far as 1889 (Bagnal). Unfortunately despite more recent designation of LWS this site is now in the hands of the developers and it remains to be seen if anything of value remains after houses are built.



## Other Projects



**Ashlawn – Crematorium.**

This has now been opened. Karl Curtis joined us on 16<sup>th</sup> May to meet their management team to advise management of the deep clay pit pool. This work to be carried out by their contractors. This is the main breeding pool for toads in the area. It had recently been used by a small fishing club. Toads are thought not to breed in the shallower pools on the Ashlawn reserve, they seem to prefer the deeper water. We are very pleased they would like to see a laid hedge along the boundary between the cutting and crematorium.

## **Newton Picnic Site and Great Central Walk north to the M6.**



Looking south from the picnic site to Newton Bridge, 13-11-14.

We used to manage this area 20 years ago but lack of local support meant we had to concentrate on Ashlawn. Now many more people live in the area (Newton, Brownsover & Coton) so we hope for more support. Some residents in the village are keen and RBC support this and we will do all we can but the project depends on finding a person keen to lead.

We have been working with Butterfly Conservation – Warwickshire & RBC to advise Newton Parish Council on this project. The Wildlife Trust are looking at possibilities of getting some funding from a Nature Improvement Area (NIA) fund to help start things off. NIA is government funding aimed to enable different organizations all working together with a common purpose - to safeguard our wildlife at a landscape scale for generations to come

## **Parkfield Road Allotment Site & Coton Power Line.**

The WWT and we have met with RBC to advise on these projects. A big opportunity to provide habitats suitable to provide corridors to other sites and allow species from the rich CEMEX quarry areas to spread, regaining lost ground.

**Ashlawn - Jubilee Wood.** This was planted up by the Woodland Trust and other volunteers in 2013. I am not aware of any other management having taken place there since. The mix of tree species planted are perhaps not what we would have chosen. Thinning will need to be carried out before too long.

## **FM Pride of Rugby Awards**



Alison Orr, Training Manager WCAVA presented Phil with the award

Awards evening at Dunchurch Park Hotel. I found I was shortlisted for the Long Service Volunteer of the Year Award for my work with others improving environments around Rugby, then even more amazed when my name was called out to receive the award. This was sponsored by Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action (WCAVA). I am very grateful indeed and pleased that the role of voluntary organisations are being recognised amongst the many business awards.

I was more than a little surprised to receive an invitation to attend the prestigious Rugby FM - Pride of Rugby

**Rugby Wildlife Group is very grateful for the support of RBC Parks and Open Spaces Department lead by Chris Worman for help received during the year. We would have struggled with some of the large projects without this support.**

**I take this opportunity to thank all the work party volunteers for their sterling efforts.**