

Rugby Area Conservation Report - 2013

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, 8-2-2014

Hours Worked by volunteers

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

Hours worked 2013 – Total 3873 931 volunteer visits

This comprises 3128.5 hours by 616 Volunteers for The Rugby Local Group, WWT Nature Force teams and Swift & Cock Robin Wood groups, Plus 744.5 hours by 315 youngsters from Rugby School directed by Warden Cyril Cleaver & Diana Forbes-Powney.

A tremendous effort, Many thanks to everyone involved.

Previous years: - 2012 – 2868 Hours 934 volunteer visits, 2011 – Total 2795 Hours 842 volunteer visits
2010 – 1755 Hours 688 volunteer visits, 2009 - Total 1818 Hours 879 volunteer visits

Website www.rugbywildlife.info

Jan Elliot our Website Manager continues to do a brilliant job and it now features scrolling pictures of our events and sightings in the blog. The site is now becoming quite well known and shows the dates of planned walks and workparties so people can join us.

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

Reserves

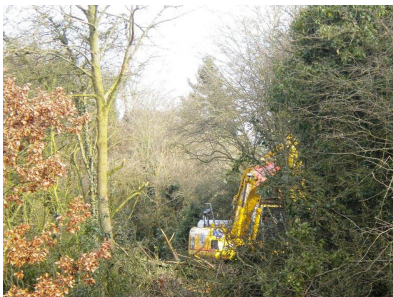
Ashlawn

January

13th - Healthy Living Walk (HLW): Steve, Cyril, and Phil marked out the route for the path to take. (Snow fell over the next 10 days)

February

4th - Healthy Living Walk: Contractor, Dave Whitlock, due to start clearing the corridor. The planned chainsaw and chipping proved not practical in the timescale because of entangled branches so tractor JCB unit with flail was brought in. The ground was now much more water logged than we had expected and the tractor dug itself in, getting stuck. A huge tracked JCB flail which had a much lighter footprint was then brought in. This created the open corridor but still struggled with the very muddy conditions – as we all did. We were grateful that Dave persevered to clear the route by the 17th Feb.



Cutting out the HLW corridor 15th Feb.



Very muddy conditions encountered 15th Feb.



Steve clearing drain 21st Feb and Phil trying to get about



18th - New scrapes: with the support of RBC and Dave's machine on site we took the opportunity to create shallow scrapes for frog breeding habitat at the head of Pytchley Marsh and also near Station Marsh on the edge of the grassland. This helped drain some of the water from the grassland and also helped to drain the path a bit.



Nature Force helps spread chippings on 1st May & after a while a well-deserved tea break.



Scrapes dug 18th Feb. while machine on site

21st - HLW: Dave brought in a chipper to dispose of some of the brash and the wood chippings were spread out as a start to the path surface.



Pytchley Marsh 21st January



Clearing rest of Pytchley Marsh 19th March



Pytchley Marsh head scrape greens up 6th May

24th - Habitat Management: The group was continuing management south of Ashlawn bridge with scrub clearance and creation of hedges on the east bank below the ancient oak.

March

9th - Frogs spawning: The frogs had laid spawn in the usual places.



Muntjac under Pytchley Bridge 21st Aug



Pytchley Marsh 4th Dec.



H & S briefing before Station Grasslands cut 16th Oct

19th to 22nd - Pytchley Marsh: Contractor Heartwood Tree Services cleared the remaining half of the marsh with chainsaws and chipper. We are very pleased with the result and the tidy and efficient way they worked. The first half cleared last year has restored some excellent habitats.

21st - HLW: We were still trying to improve the path drainage by digging in the French drains cross pipes. We now have more wood chippings heaped up at the north end of the Healthy Living Walk and Nature Force came to help spread chippings along the path route to reinforce that laid by Dave.

24th - HLW: We started to create a chicane entrance to the walk, building a dead hedge using willow trunks from the marsh for posts and infill of brash. This is to deter motorcyclists from using it as a race track.

April

14th - The first Spring like day. at last spring flowers – Coltsfoot, violets, primrose etc. are appearing.

May

1st - HLW: The route is at last drying out and Nature Force helped again with the path and also on 8th to complete spreading the wood chippings.

5th - HLW: Community Planting Day to plant up wild flower plugs and seeds ordered for us by the Trust from 'Nature Scape – British Wild Flowers'. We were heartened by the number of local councillors that came to help.

June

The reserves grasslands have produced an amazing display of wildflowers this year.

July

The month was very hot. We were pleased to see numbers of Small Tortoiseshell butterflies are at last picking up after years of poor showings.

August

Surveying: The regular surveying of flora, birds and Lepidoptera continues.

September

September saw the start of the huge task to cut and rake off the grasslands to be cut this year. Nature Force helped us on 25th September and 17th October at Station Grasslands D1442 43 and on 4th September cutting north part of Section F3, south of Ashlawn Bridge. All the rest of the work was done by the Rugby Group – with Steve Batt doing nearly all of the cutting. The job was virtually completed by Christmas.



October 6th - Guided Walk and litter pick with a group from Hill Street Community Centre for SEWA Day led by Steve (Picture left)

Ashlawn: Species of note spotted in 2013

The frog numbers seen were down but the amount of spawn laid was greater than in 2012.

Kingfisher on the marsh (D1440) photographed by Steve Batt. 24th March

Tree Creeper and **Nuthatch** – increased occasional sightings of this uncommon species towards the end of the year. Steve Batt has done monthly surveys of birds along the whole length of the cutting, the results also going to WWT.

Linnet and **Redpoll** HLW (D1442) and elsewhere, **Grey Wagtail** by Pytchley Bridge and Marsh (D1440 & D1442)

Willow Tit Triangle scallop (F1628) **Yellowhammer** and **Skylark** (South end of F), **Grey Heron** on the Marsh (D1441)

Garden Warbler seen between Pytchley and Ashlawn Bridge (section E), **Siskin** (HLW D1442)

Water Rail by Ashlawn Bridge (8th April, Biddy Allen E1533), **Osprey** and **Red Kite** seen flying over

Hedgehog footprints noted in mud (5th May, Gina Rowe HLW nr Reservoir Pond D1442)

Roe Deer 2 have been seen on several occasions in late summer drinking in the stream south of Ashlawn Bridge (F4)

Muntjac Deer have been reported on a number of occasions and 2 deer walking nonchalantly along the path below Pytchley Bridge were photographed by Phil on 21st August.

Silver Washed Fritillary This year saw a fantastic expansion of this species from the local stronghold of Ryton Wood and two were seen on Ashlawn. One by Max Amos on 1st August on Section F just south of the Ashlawn Bridge and one rather tatty one photographed by Phil Parr on 27th August (E9E).

White-letter Hairstreak was photographed by Max Amos in Section E on 1st August. It is an uncommon species in Rugby. The last record in the cutting was 15 July 1997.



Kingfisher on the Marsh 24th Mar. S. Batt. White-letter Hairstreak 21st Aug, M Amos. Silver-washed Fritillary, P Parr. Fungi *Macrotypophula fistulosa*,

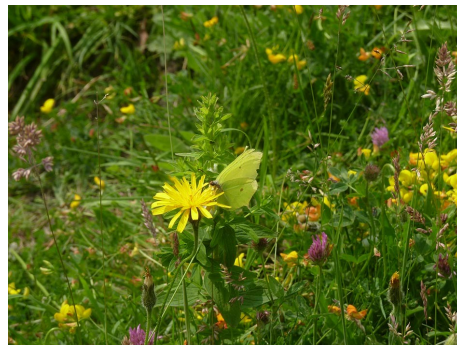
Fungi – a few interesting species showed in early November and of particular note was a number **Macrotypophula fistulosa** a tall 'pen like' fungi, spotted by David Champion and Phil Parr on 11th November growing on twigs.

Spiny Restharrow - We were pleased to see 2 of these in flower near the north end of the Healthy Living Walk (D1443) and presume they are from plugs we planted. This species, scarce in Warwickshire, used to occur on the Humpty Dumpty fields at Brownsover.

Purple Loosestrife introduced into some of the French drains in the HLW has taken well and setting new seed.



Ashlawn Grasslands F5E 27th Aug.



July wildflowers and Brimstone butterfly 26th Jun.



Ken, Cyril & Margaret grassland management 22nd Sept

Rugby in Bloom - Ashlawn

The reserve was once again entered into the Rugby in Bloom competition and we are pleased that we once again got a Gold Award in the Environmental Category – 'well done' to everybody, especially Steve who produced a document to present to the judges showing picture of the various groups doing the conservation work .

The Rugby School group under the direction of Warden Cyril Cleaver, and Diana and Colin continues to do sterling work on the reserve on Thursday afternoons. Thanks to them all.

Ashlawn - Crematorium The building of this is now nearing completion

Ashlawn - Jubilee Wood This has been planted up by the Woodland Trust and other volunteers.

Cock Robin Wood

The group led by Derek Lill meets on Mondays throughout most of the year and carries out various management tasks. The magnificent hedge facing onto Dunchurch Road laid by them earlier this year gives testament to their many skills. See separate report.

Newbold Quarry - Local Nature Reserve

Work has continued mainly by WWT's Nature Force teams with input from our local volunteers. A local resident records butterflies here and these are fed to Butterfly Conservation for the county database.

Swift Valley- Local Nature Reserve

The volunteer group led by Chris Godding & Neil Weston continue to help with management. Areas of the reserve continue to be grazed with Highland Cattle. See separate report.

Malpass Site

The flat area where the Climafuel plant is to be built has been fenced off from the spoil banks and cleared of scrub. No further work has yet taken place. We held a work party to manage grassland habitats on section 'e' on 17th March and a guided walk on 15th June. Despite poor weather we found the key species, Grizzled Skipper, Green Hairstreak and Small Heath.

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)

Unfortunately Rugby Borough Council are currently not contributing to the Habitat Biodiversity Audit which undertakes Phase 1 habitat surveying in the borough. The survey highlights areas of high ecological importance or the need for management on existing designated sites as recommended in government guidelines. Surveys are only undertaken if a planning application demands it

Allen's Wet Meadow (LWS)

There has been some occasional light grazing by a pony or two but this is hardly enough for this most interesting site.

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 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 mitigation is agreed and funds raised.

Proposals for a green roof on the building which was an important factor in its gaining planning permission has been abandoned. Proposals for other areas on the site to be prepared and managed in mitigation for the loss of LWS grassland are still being considered.

RBC didn't manage to cut any of this field in 2012 as the ground was too wet and soft to take the weight of the machine. No habitat management has taken place since 2011. Brambles and scrub will be choking the grassland making surveying very difficult, but I understand that some money will be available to do something later this year (2014).

Leicester Road Viaduct & cycle route (LWS)

This includes Hunters Lane Embankment, and Consul Road cutting to the Oxford Canal

We have been working to get this site recognised as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) as its verges and nearby land have areas with locally uncommon plants and the elms support White-letter Hairstreak.

We liaised with the contractor creating this new route, RBC and Butterfly Conservation – Warwickshire who have good contacts with Sustrans, and we carried out species surveys to help with an application for the LWS. Jon Bowley of WCC's Biodiversity Habitat Unit made the case and we were very pleased the whole length is now LWS.

Future management will have to be by RBC and Sustrans, maybe with a little input from BC and us. It is crucial to retaining the wildlife interest that the site receives appropriate management.

In April Malcolm and Phil seeded and planted Birds Foot Trefoil, Knapweed and other wild flowers in the newly created Consul Road cutting which RBC left without topsoil for this purpose. By the end of June the wild flowers were looking a treat and people who have started to use the new walk regularly were stopping to say how much they were enjoying them. The cycle route was officially opened by the Mayor on 17th July 2013. Unfortunately the wild flowers had all been cut off shortly before due to lack of directions given to the mowing contractor and this had caused local public outrage. Hopefully lessons have now been learnt.

Hillmorton Ballast Pits (LWS)

This Ecosite (since 1982) which has records going back as far as 1889 (Bagnal). Unfortunately successive owners have not recognised this special value for wildlife and now despite opposition much of the site is to be developed for houses despite its LWS status.

We are 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.

http://www.rugby.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=67&categoryID=200443

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