

Rugby Group, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust report for Swift Valley Nature Reserve 2020.

Our Fiends group at Swift is now into it's 12th year, and volunteer numbers have increased again over the past year, lost a few and picked up several more, all-be-it the main stay and reliable's also work on the other Rugby reserves.

The reserve covers a large area so it's been a huge undertaking bringing (what I would call bringing it under control). In the Woodlands still removing plastic protection, thinning out dead and damaged trees, most planted 20 plus years ago. Laying and improving the old hedges as we work our way from the car park northwards through the reserve.

Our Focus during last winters work 2018/19 was continuing to maintain the hedges worked on over the last three winters. Also during this period we've continue to thin out the woodland edge between Field 3 (our meadow project) and the Marsh area. Some of this work required chainsaw activity on the large overhanging willows, a 2nd winter on that woodland, our group clearing and processing a lot of brash supported by Brandon and nature force. Two small sections of Hedge been worked on at present. Two large woodlands to look at next Winter in Field 4.

Mentioning our wildflower Meadow project, The plug plants introduced into the meadow section of Field 3 has not been that successful in so far as diversity of species. I would like to investigate funding for seed which I think would be more productive. A survey of flowering plants and grasses is required so planning a Survey Force visit.

Following a cut in the Meadow area, the considerable amount of grass removed by Nat.Force and dumped over the fence leaving unsightly piles of rotting vegetation just where wildflowers had emerged through the summer after opening up the previously mentioned woodland edge. The SV group then moved the piles again, so some thought required before next autumn how to deal with this problem.

Through Spring and Summer we Strim and Mow path edges and occasionally cutting back foliage. Mid to late summer it's the unpopular job of controlling invasive weeds Ragwort and Dock. The hard work is now paying off with a significant reduction of Ragwort meant the group were able to control all four fields last year. Dock plants however are becoming numerous, so this will be the main focus.

A full breeding bird survey program carried out in the Spring of 19 but results were pretty average (loosing adjacent crop fields where previously flocks of winter Thrushs, Linnets, Yellowhammers etc could be found hasn't helped) Survey reports went to Brandon. We still provide bird food throughout the winter months.

A program of weekly transect surveys for Butterfly's species on the reserve throughout the Summer, 23 species in total and nice to see the gradual improvement reported last year in the Small Butterfly's, Blue's, coppers, etc was back to normal numbers, with B.Argus seen for the first time in 3 years. A good year for R.Ad, a bumper year for P.Lady and a couple of siting of fly through Marbled White.. Survey reports to Butterfly Conservation.

Given the really Wet Winter we've endured our reserve footpaths are in a poor state and a sizeable effort (together with finance) will be required to bring them back to an acceptable condition. I recently met with RBC & WWT at swift to discussed a plan forward and can only hope the favourable comments regarding the requirements for this project bear fruit in the summer when the ground has dried out sufficiently.

Two Owl Box's + a couple of Kestrel Box's to erect soon too complement the number of small bird box's around the res.

"Friends group" again won a Gold award through Rugby in Bloom, so thanks again to all our volunteers including Nature Force for their continued support and hard work throughout the year.

I also must thank Chris Worman & Steve Cook at Rugby Borough Council for their continued support whenever I call on them.