



Butterfly Conservation Dorset Branch

Conservation Management and other activities on our Butterfly Reserves 2015/16

Alners Gorse

Maintenance and improvements to the reserve have continued to be carried out by volunteer work parties – approx. monthly between September and March – and by teams of contractors from EuCAN CIC often working alongside volunteers. 55 mandays have been contributed on conservation workparties and 50 contractor days in addition to these.

The major work of clearing a swathe through the plantation to make a habitat corridor with Rooksmoor SSSI and removing all the logs produced has now been completed and apart from some stacks of logs and brash left as habitat piles, the former woodland floor is now largely clear and is being grazed by our ponies and brushcut regularly to reduce the scrub regrowth. In addition to this, rotational brushcutting of the scrub regrowth on the rest of the reserve gives us a varied mosaic of scrub of different ages and grassland. Two small teams of ASDAN pupils from the Gryphon School in Sherborne opened up a sizeable clearing in the overstood blackthorn in the NW of the reserve, helped with the ponies and cleared out and inspected some of the nestboxes in the wood. This was part of a project established with the Rendezvous centre in Sherborne.

The 5 ponies moved to the drier ground of Lankham Bottom from early February until late April when they came back to Alners Gorse. They spent much of the summer grazing the eastern side of the reserve partly because they were escaping into the neighbour's land through the western fenceline (belonging to our neighbour). That boundary was re-fenced in the autumn with sweet chestnut posts and high tensile barbless wire; this turned out to be quite an operation as a new route for the fence had to be cut through the back edge of the bramble and elm hedge. Comments about the effects of the grazing on that one side of the reserve were very complementary.

The ponies spent from Aug 5th until the end of September grazing the SSSI at Rooksmoor and made a very impressive impact on the site. The owners of Rooksmoor covered our costs for the work of preparing the fencelines, moving the ponies and checking them. We are very grateful to our team of five pony lookers and to Kathy Henderson for overseeing the enterprise. She keeps an eye on their health, providing winter food and worming them as required. We have not had to call on the vet this year but a local farrier used to dealing with ponies without shoes has visited on a regular basis to do the foot trimming.

We have had seven educational visits to the reserve this year – 3 from the Gryphon School, 2 from Sherborne County Primary, one from William Barnes Primary in Sturminster Newton and one from the Community Resource team in Shaftesbury and Blandford. We are hoping these will earn the branch £700 through Defra's Educational Access Scheme, though the payments system has been altered.

The reserve has remained very popular with the public – 34 people attended the very successful Moth and Butterfly event on August 5th and 6th (110 moth species were identified) and 11 attended the National Moth Night event in September (when a Red Underwing and the first Clifden Non-pareil for the reserve was

trapped). As well as the organised events and educational visits, large numbers of people visited the reserve in July and August to see the White Admirals, Silver-washed Fritillaries and three species of Hairstreaks. The Brown Hairstreaks performed particularly well for the photographers and one group in August counted 11 different individuals. Our Nightingales seemed to maintain their numbers (at least judging from the singing males) with 4 territories being established in May. A new bird species for the reserve was an Osprey flying over during migration time on September 30th.

One of the highlights of the year was the discovery of two Marsh Fritillary larval webs in section 4 of the transect walk in September. Adults had been seen on at least three occasions in May and June, but none of these was seen on a transect walk. We are very pleased to welcome this species back – after all, a tremendous amount of work has gone into improving the habitat for it!

Of the other species of butterflies, increases were recorded through the UKBMS for Holly Blue, White-letter, Purple and Brown Hairstreaks, Dingy Skipper, White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary and Meadow Brown.

Bryan Edwards, senior surveyor for the Dorset Environmental Records Centre, carried out vegetation surveys on Alners Gorse and Lankham Bottom for Butterfly Conservation Head Office.

Lankham Bottom

The management work on Lankham Bottom during the past year has consisted both of maintenance of the existing habitats and of major scrub clearance to create more open grassland. This has been carried out by regular BC workparties (65 mandays) and contractors from EuCAN CIC with and without help from volunteers (total 31 contractor days).]

Two large areas of scrub were cleared in the gorse on the north side of the reserve, and a clearing running into the sheltered wooded area was cleared on the southern side of the reserve. At the beginning of 2016, a large block of mainly thorn and bramble will be removed from the eastern end of the scrub at the top of the southern slope. A start was made on the long-overstood hedge along the southern border of the reserve: about 100m of hawthorn, elder and ash trees were cut, logged and chipped to be allowed to regrow and then subsequently laid. In future this work will have to be instigated by the neighbour on the south side of the reserve.

As in previous years, the contractor Mark Paull spent a day on the reserve cutting the scrub regrowth with his 3m wide frontloaded flail and as usual did a very thorough job. The roadside hedge was side-trimmed by Colin Bowditch in the autumn, but the top was not cut.

We continued with the ragwort cutting as in previous years, groups of contractors and volunteers cutting the plants with brushcutters, to be collected up and dumped in our storage area by the corral by a gang of volunteers. For the second year running, the ragwort problem was less than previously and almost every plant on the reserve was removed. Subsequent inspection suggested there had been very little perennation and reflowering. Efforts will be made to put a flock of sheep onto the western area of the reserve in the early spring to eat down the ragwort rosettes.

The site is grazed by Paul Atwell's cattle between May and February and by the 5 Alners ponies for two months between February and April. Our landlords on the site, Wessex Water, spent part of the summer repairing one of the boreholes, an undertaking which caused a considerable degree of disturbance. Probably as a consequence of the collapse of the borehole, the water is now contaminated by Cryptosporidium and has not been used for drinking since. WW now plan to build a new construction at the back of the pumping station to house a u/v filter system. Once the plans have been drawn up and the consents obtained, it is likely to be later summer/autumn before this works starts.

We have replaced the pedestrian gate onto the reserve with a disabled gate suitable for all-terrain buggies, and the gate in the western boundary has been replaced with a new one. Unauthorised access by horseriders has forced us to padlock all the gates onto the reserve except the hunting gate on the bridleway. On one occasion the main gate was left open to the road – luckily the cattle turned left towards Cattistock village rather than towards the A37. On another occasion later in the year, the padlocked pedestrian gate on the south side of the reserve was opened by being lifted off its hinges and was then left open. This now has two padlocks on it.

The annual moth and butterfly event July 21st/22nd was not blessed by warm weather but attracted 15 people. 100 species of moths were identified.

The transect results showed encouraging increases in Small Skipper, Brimstone, Green Hairstreak and Dark Green Fritillary, but disappointing totals for Small Copper, Brown Argus and Common Blue with no Chalkhill Blues at all.

Perryfields Quarry, Portland

This is our smallest Dorset reserve – we make an annual visit there to control the bramble, privet and other scrub and to collect up litter. It is becoming increasingly encroached on by Tesco's in Easton, the quarrying operations in the adjacent quarry, the new housing development. There were reasonable numbers of large and Dingy Skippers, Small Blues, Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers and large numbers of Marbled Whites. The numbers of Common and Chalkhill Blues counted compared well with previous years, but no Brown Argus or Adonis were recorded.

Two contractors spent a day there brushcutting and six volunteers attended the work party in March when a lot of privet and Viburnum and a large amount of previously sprayed Cotoneaster were cut and burnt at the western edge of the reserve.

Broadcroft Quarry Reserve, Portland

25 man days of volunteer time were spent at Broadcroft SSSI over the last year, supplemented by 11 mandays of contractor time working with a group of EuCAN 14 volunteers to cut and clear the rank grass and bramble. The main tasks on the reserve as always have been cutting the grassy areas (as we do not have any grazing animals here other than bunnies), cutting back the bramble and clematis scrub that threatens the scrapes created to encourage the Silver-studded blues, and brushcutting the scrub regrowth as widely as possible.

On June 26th/27th, 26 people attended the camp, barbecue, moth trapping and the open event the following day (curtailed by the rain). A phenomenal total of 147 species of moths were identified; we even saw a few Silver-studded Blues on the wing before the rain set in.

From the transect results, the species which showed reasonably encouraging increases were Lulworth Skipper (though in small numbers), Chalkhill Blue, Marbled White and Gatekeeper. Only 11 Silver-studded Blues turned up on the transects – a very disappointing total. This winter with the help of the Dorset Wildlife Trust with their HLF grant money, we have had a number of new scrapes created on the reserve and several previously scraped areas have been re-scraped. We are very grateful to the DWT for their support and look forward to an explosion in numbers of Silver-studded blues....

Many thanks to Ian Laing for coordinating the UKBMS transect on the Portland sites.

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