



BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION Dorset Branch

2018 Members Afternoon and AGM Saturday February 24th

Dorset Reserves Report 2017/18

Alners Gorse

One of our target species the Marsh Fritillary had its best year in 2017 since BC purchased the reserve in 2005, with 21 individuals being seen on one day in May and 28 larval webs being counted in the autumn. The Brown Hairstreak egg count held on Dec 9th revealed the second highest count since 2005. Nightingale numbers seemed to be down based on regular surveys of singing males (two, possibly three territories) but numbers of Garden Warblers were well up on previous years. We are also fairly certain that a pair of Willow Warblers and a pair of Spotted Flycatchers nested in the wood; sadly these are both now rare UK species.

Management work included the routine rotational recutting of scrub in the woodland area and the cutting of regrowth in the open areas. Blackthorn cutting takes place in July to avoid destroying the eggs or larvae of the Brown Hairstreak. This cutting combined with the grazing by our three Dartmoor ponies and Kathy's two rescue ponies from Bodmin have kept the grassland habitats in very good condition and the display of wildflowers this year was spectacular.

The main management event this year has been the removal of the spruce and cypress trees from sections C and D of the reserve and the great reduction in the numbers of oak and sallows in these scrub areas. This work has been carried out with a capital works grant from Natural England and will be completed in the autumn of 2018 with the extraction of the cordwood and if necessary the further reduction of scrub in these areas. The spruce extraction was carried out by Toby Hoad and his forestry horses in January 2018 and the further reduction of the oaks, willow and other scrub is being done under contract by the EuCAN CIC team. It remains to be seen this summer whether these changes will have affected the Nightingale population already severely reduced in the Blackmore Vale by the scrub removal works on Lydlinch Common and Rooksmoor.

Five educational visits took place on the reserve this year: three from Sherborne County Primary school, one from Motcombe Primary; a therapeutic group from Somerset and the Ringwood NHS. On the basis of these visits, the branch can claim £900 as the educational access element of the Higher Level Stewardship agreement with NE/DEFRA.

Lankham Bottom

Management continued as in previous years with routine cutting of scrub regrowth by volunteers and EuCAN CIC contractors, some further extension of the scrub clearing but less than in previous years, and a huge (but moderately futile) effort to control the ragwort which must have had one of its best years ever! The recent building work by the land owners Wessex Water has produced a massive increase in the amount of new ragwort plants and this is expected to be much worse next season following the completion of the new borehole and the re-seeding of two large areas of ground.

We have taken advantage of the Wessex Water groundworks at the entrance to the reserve to negotiate for an enlargement of the carparking area there; this is now completed and should make parking there much safer.

The volunteer workparties opened up a former chalkpit on the northern edge of the reserve, Wessex Water took away a large amount of agricultural and domestic rubbish extracted from it and paid for contractors to remove the scrub that has concealed it for decades. The face of the pit is now exposed and has been sown with locally sourced Kidney Vetch, Birdsfoot Trefoil and Horseshoe Vetch.

Paul Attwell's suckler cattle grazed the reserve from May until early January and have left it in a very good state. The rabbit numbers were greatly reduced this season by a return of myxomatosis; this has meant that the erosion of the south and west facing slopes has been less – and incidentally has attracted regular visits from at least one Red Kite feasting off the corpses.

Butterfly numbers were variable, with Common Blue making something of a comeback and good numbers of Brown Argus, Dingy Skipper and Marsh Fritillary; no Chalkhill Blue were seen on the transect, part of the crash in numbers and distribution of this species.

Broadcroft Quarry

The most important event of the year is probably the collapse of the bid by Jurassica to build a dinosaur theme park in the quarry adjacent to the BC reserve which means that we can now negotiate a lease with our landlords Stone Firms. For the last two years we have continued to manage and survey the reserve with permission of the owners but without a lease as they hoped to sell the whole site to Jurassica.

The routine grass, bramble and clematis cutting on the grassland areas and the control of scrub in the scrapes continued as in previous years, using volunteers and contractors from EuCAN CIC. At the moment we are just about keeping up with the scrub management.

The 2017 transect results showed reasonable numbers of Small Blues, disappointing numbers of Silver-studded Blues and bumper numbers of the long grass species.

There is still an on-going problem with cans and dog-poo bags littering the reserve.

Perryfields Reserve

The lease on our second Portland reserve comes up for renewal in summer 2018; discussions have taken place with the Dorset County Council ecologists and solicitors to determine whether Perryfields might become part of a larger wildlife conservation area managed by a syndicate of DCC, DWT and BC.

Good numbers of Chalkhill Blues were recorded on this reserve which is very gratifying, the long grass species also did well.

As in previous years, volunteers and contractors spent a day cutting the scrub regrowth and extending the cleared area on the slopes facing the Bottomcombe. Further work was done to cut encroaching bramble on the slopes above the railway line which is an extremely good Small Blue site, now further enhanced by the reseeded with Kidney Vetch that Phil Sterling and his team have carried out on the filled areas adjacent to Bottomcombe.

The Dorset Branch is responsible for the sycamore trees overhanging the adjacent gardens at the end of Wakeham and has so far spent over £750 paying a tree surgeon to remove broken or threatening branches when called in by the owners of the houses on three occasions. One of the owners has now offered to pay for the crown reduction of some of these trees but the question of our overall responsibility for the trees on Perryfields still remains.

Nigel Spring

Butterfly Conservation Dorset branch Reserves Manager