



Reserves Updates

What a fantastic summer. A year stuffed full of butterflies and reminiscent of my childhood days, spent outdoors, chasing butterflies up and down the front gardens of the street in which we lived. It never fails to amuse me to see grown-ups doing exactly the same thing when a butterfly they are watching intently, suddenly takes flight! I can only imagine the excitement when on the 14th April, Mike Gibbons and Mike and Janet Pearson, who were visiting Magdalen Hill Down, saw a Swallowtail. Janet commented that it was ‘racing up and down and being chased by Peacock butterflies’, but it obviously settled long enough for them to take this excellent picture.



Swallowtail at MHD

Mike and Janet Pearson

Following on from one of our ever-popular ‘Transect Training Days’, yet another ‘exciting sighting’ was seen by an attendee, Chris Cobb. After the event, Chris went to have a bite to eat in chalk-corner, where he happened upon a male Adonis Blue. I commented in the Spring Newsletter that it would be great to see Adonis on the reserves. The habitat they require – short turf, grazed by sheep, is certainly in evidence, and now too it seems are the butterflies, with second generation being spotted during the summer, including females, and culminating in 3 male Adonis Blues being recorded on transect by Andy Barker on the 28th August. Andy also recorded an aberration, more from him on that in due course I’m sure... all good stuff indeed.

MAGDALEN HILL DOWN

So just exactly what have we been up to since I last wrote the reserves updates? I often think that there might be a break from the endless work involved in managing the reserves – especially as the winter-work parties have come to an end, and summer is just around the corner. But no, there is no let-up. The summer walks programme merges seamlessly with the last work party, and with on average 30 walks and events across our reserves from May to September, we are kept pretty busy all year round. The walks, in general, have been well attended and we welcome anyone who has an interest in butterflies and the great outdoors to join us on our regular ‘Wednesday Wander’. Details will be posted on the website in spring 2015.



Loading cattle

Jayne Chapman

This year we introduced light summer grazing with cattle to small areas of the reserve, which was so successful that the management team has agreed to continue this regime in the future. We will be holding back 9 steers from the winter grazing herd, to remain at Magdalen until they are ready to go to market. The steers are a part of Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust’s breeding programme, and it makes sense to leave them with us rather than having to constantly move cattle and go through the added expense of TB testing. Another win-win situation for both BC and HIWWT. Oh and the butterflies of course.

A further addition to this year’s herd has been the inclusion of a bull. This came not without a few headaches, as first of all a risk assessment had to be prepared to say that to the best of my knowledge the bull had previously shown no signs of aggression towards his handlers, and was of even temperament. This is to satisfy our insurers should there ever be an ‘incident’, but as with all livestock, caution around them remains a priority. Extra signs had to go up informing visitors of a bull in the field. Using the words ‘dangerous’ or ‘beware’, goes against advice, so I was very pleased to find a superb laminated sign of a red image of a bull, on Amazon. It looks like a

Spanish bullfight is about to be held, but it does get the message across, and also gives walkers the opportunity to seek an alternative route should they wish to avoid the livestock. Since his arrival on the 4th August, 'Superman', as he is called, has been on his best behaviour – and likes nothing more than a scratch on the head and a pat on the back. He holds the impressive title of 'National British White Champion', and is quite spectacular – so do pay him a visit if you are at Magdalen this winter.

Those who know me are aware that I could talk about livestock all day long, but no update is complete without mentioning the sheep. Our 'permanent' flock has been an absolute boon, and in light of reduced rabbit numbers, they continue to maintain areas of short turf across the reserve. Sheep need certain care at different times of the year – their feet have to be trimmed annually, sometimes more frequently, and in the month of May they require shearing. With a small flock, this is manageable, and is achieved through using the skills of a professional shearer, the sheep owner himself, myself, and our volunteers. It's all back-breaking work, but if you're fortunate, the owner might see a return of £4 for a fleece at today's market prices.

Keep a look out for the following, all of which have been spotted on Magdalen Hill Down: Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn Beetle *Agapanthia villosoviridescens*; Hornet Robberfly *Asilus crabroniformis* which is nationally scarce and a Biodiversity Action Plan species (although it is being seen more frequently at Magdalen – Rob West spotted two on the Old Allotments on the 28th August); and Cricket-bat spider *Mangora acalypha* which is quite rare on downland, preferring open woodland, and seen by Mike Wall on the 28 May.



Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn Beetle

Graeme Davis

If you spot anything unusual and have a photo to back up your sighting, please email it to me at: jchapman@butterfly-conservation.org

BENTLEY STATION MEADOW

There isn't much to report here during the summer months, but David Walton and Arthur Greenwood did lead a walk each to see the orchids and butterflies of the season. However as access to this reserve is not the easiest (unless you take the train), the walks are quite often, not very well attended, especially when the weather can be the deciding factor on whether or not to turn out on the day. It is however the most beautiful place to be on a sunny day, so if you have some time to spare, and the sun is shining, simply jump on the train to Bentley station, and take a short walk across the track into the meadow. You won't be disappointed.

The reserve is situated along the Shipwrights Way. This is a new 50-mile long-distance route in East Hampshire, the result of a partnership between East Hampshire District Council, Hampshire County Council, South Downs National Park Authority and the Forestry Commission, who pooled their resources and expertise to bring about the route. It links villages and towns through some beautiful countryside. The name reflects the use of oak grown at Alice Holt Forest for Tudor shipbuilding, linking this site with Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, home of the *Mary Rose* and HMS *Victory*. Starting from Alice Holt Forest, the route passes through Bordon, Liphook, Liss, Petersfield, Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Staunton Country Park, Havant, Hayling Island and continues to Portsmouth via the ferry, finishing at the Historic Dockyard, and including seven rail stations. See <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/shipwrightsway.htm>

There are twenty stone sculptures along the way, beautifully carved from Portland stone by artist Richard Perry to show the history, or wildlife, of each place – Bentley Station Meadow has a Silver-washed Fritillary – very apt given the recent increase in numbers of this butterfly to the Reserve. I observed around 30 individuals of this fast-flying butterfly in mid-July. They were swooping through the open meadow and sunny rides, and feeding on bramble as Ron Hills and I spent an enjoyable couple of hours scything the over-grown transect paths.



*Shipwrights Way sculpture at BSM
Jayne Chapman*

YEW HILL

The meadow had a good summer, and on a hot sunny day at the end of July, Ivan Arnold led a walk for the public, where there were 'Chalkhill Blues by the dozen'. Phil Budd encountered a Silver-washed fritillary patrolling along the hedge line, and I was delighted to find Greater Butterfly orchid, flourishing alongside Common-spotted, Fragrant and Bee orchids, all on the reserve.

Following a hard winter graze, Hilltop (9 acres) has surprised us all by the abundance of flowers compared to previous years. This part of the reserve has no public access, but is still an important meadow area providing nectar sources for butterflies. It does however have a major ragwort problem, and many hours have been spent over the years pulling the ragwort during the summer months – all to no avail. The majority of ragwort on this site is Hoary ragwort, which has a different root system to Common ragwort. Generally, the root does not pull cleanly out of the ground, resulting in a snapping action, where bits of root remain in the ground to continue growing. This year, I decided to top the ragwort using a tractor mounted flail mower. The benefits of this are that it can be done in a fraction of the time that it takes for the volunteers to pull the plant, but the key is to get the timing right – just after flowering and before the plant has set seed.

There is a great deal of misconception and myth surrounding Ragwort. If you would like to find out more, this is an informative site: <http://www.ragwort.org.uk/>

OTHER NEWS

Current and on-going volunteer opportunities:

At least two more people are needed for the rota to check the livestock at Yew Hill up until December. If you, or anyone you know might like to help out, please give me a call (details below). Training will be given.

Once again, as ever, I shall look forward to seeing many of you on our conservation work-party dates (details in the inside cover of this newsletter and on our website). Please feel free to contact me on 01962 808400 if you would like to discuss what we do and how you can become involved, or email (address below) if you would like to be added to our volunteer email list.

How you can get involved

As well as the dates listed on the inside front cover, I also send out an email for extra work-parties when we have one-off jobs to tackle, or if the weather has forced us to cancel any of the pre-planned dates. If you would like to be added to this list, please email your contact details to: jchapman@butterfly-conservation.org

The work we do is fun and varied, and benefits butterflies, moths, birds and other wildlife. All you need is enthusiasm, stout footwear, gloves and a packed lunch. We provide all the necessary tools and training, and teach you a little bit about habitat



Lambs

Jayne Chapman

management along the way. Volunteers are crucial to tackling the practical management work that is necessary during the winter months. It is a great reason to get outside and get fit.

This winter's tasks on our reserves

Magdalen Hill Down: We will be carrying out our usual scrub-block coppicing programme – lots of bonfires – plus extra work to reduce the scrub encroachment on the Original reserve, and a nice, easy task to clear the fence lines this winter.

Yew Hill: Clearing fence lines from clematis and tackling thorn and dogwood encroachment in the grassland.

Bentley Station Meadow: The meadow has suffered a fair amount of wind blow during the 2013/14 storms – there is plenty of clearing up to do! So... get your boots on and bring a friend!!

AND FINALLY...

I would like to end this update by saying that now Adonis Blues appear to have colonised Magdalen Hill Down, I will be setting my sights on the Duke of Burgundy Fritillary over the coming months – more to follow on that in the next Newsletter.

Jayne Chapman, Reserves Officer