



Reserves News

The weather outside my window today tells me that spring is most definitely on the way, a welcome sign indeed from the wet winter that befell us all. Once again, only time will tell just how this might impact on the butterflies. Last year we had some winners and losers, and this year I am personally hoping for a better year for the Chalkhill Blue, which didn't fare so well across Hampshire in 2015. There are contributing factors as to why this should be, but the weather is right up there as a prime culprit.

MAGDALEN HILL DOWN

We are pinning our hopes on 2016 being the year for the Dingy Skipper at MHD. This little butterfly has declined in recent years and is a Biodiversity Action Plan species. Keep an eye out for it basking on bare ground or perching on dead flower heads. More moth-like than butterfly, it can easily be confused with Grizzled Skipper, the Mother Shipton moth, and the Burnet Companion moth.

This spring we will finally complete the repair works to the disabled access path. This runs the entire length of the reserve and, at 1,355 metres or 0.8 of a mile, it required some considerable work to scrape the vegetation back a metre either side of the path to reclaim it from the encroaching grassland.



Path repairs at MHD. Jayne Chapman

I was very lucky (yet again) to have two superb Sparsholt students with me for three weeks on their work placement in January. During their time they completed a whole range of tasks, and generally shadowed me in the day-to-day running of the reserves from liaising with the public to TB testing the cattle. I like to give them a project to think about and focus on, so Jodie and Erin were given the task of updating the noticeboards with clear, easy to read information for the public. This covers everything from chalk grassland and how we manage it, to the health dangers associated with dog fouling, and the law regarding dogs off-lead. It is a constant part of my job trying to keep the dog walkers happy given that our management always includes grazing with livestock, and ground nesting birds such as Skylarks.

Most people are aware or have heard of TOXOCARIASIS – a potentially serious infection which can be transmitted from old dog faeces to humans, causing eye problems and other symptoms such as dizziness and headaches. Land becomes contaminated by dog faeces carrying eggs of this parasite. However, not so well known but equally as important are NEOSPOROSIS – a disease passed on to cattle through eggs deposited in dog faeces, which can cause abortion or still birth in cattle, and can be passed on from mother to calf – and SARCOCYSTOSI – a disease that can cause neurological disease and death in sheep. The parasite is passed on to sheep using dogs as an intermediate host and excreted in their faeces.



Jodie and Erin at MHD. Jayne Chapman

‘During our time at Butterfly Conservation on work placement, we have shadowed the Reserves Officer, Jayne Chapman, for 3 weeks to study, observe and aid in the day-to-day running of the various reserves under her management. We have helped with work parties, been given guidance of her role as a Reserves Officer, understood the need to liaise with the public visiting the Reserves and how best to monitor the reserve landscape to increase populations for declining species of butterflies and moths. As students, we have appreciated every second of time that Jayne has given to us in order to provide us with the unforgettable and rewarding experience of being part of Butterfly Conservation. We have met so many people who are part of this amazing charity as well as other organisations which run alongside in strong partnership, all working together for the great cause of conserving wildlife. We would like to thank Jayne Chapman and ‘Butterfly Conservation’ for this opportunity.’

Jodie and Erin, January 2016

BENTLEY STATION MEADOW

After many years in the pipeline, Bentley Station Meadow finally has a new sign – two in fact – one at each end of the reserve. These were erected by the ‘team’, seen here smiling after a job well done!

Visit the reserve in the summer to see Dark Green Fritillary (2015 was the first year since records began in 1993 that this butterfly has been recorded on transect). Silver-washed Fritillary is also on the increase, and it isn’t difficult to count 100+ flying on a sunny day.



*New sign at BSM.
Tree popping at Yew Hill.
Jayne Chapman*



YEW HILL

The Hampshire Conservation Volunteers once again carried out the majority of tasks over the winter at Yew Hill, which included clearing the fence lines from encroaching scrub and bramble, and keeping the bridleway and paths clear of over-hanging branches. Ben Wood, one of our regular volunteers, had a go with the ‘tree popper’, which is a marvellous gadget (made in Australia under licence, and not particularly cheap at £200!). It comes in three sizes with the largest tackling anything up to Ash and Birch of 60mm diameter. Historically, scrubby regrowth has been dealt with using a brush-cutter, which means that it inevitably grows back the following year on old rootstock (unless of course it is treated with chemicals, which is best avoided for obvious reasons). The tree popper is easy to use and very effective, pulling out the entire root of the plant in one hit.

The smaller size is ideal for ‘popping’ out ragwort which I am looking forward to trialling with a few volunteers this coming July. See you there!

Jayne Chapman, Reserves Officer