

The volunteers have been busy in the meadow continuing a programme of targeted management to meet the requirements of the options under our current Higher Level Stewardship scheme which include Restoration towards species-rich semi-natural grassland, and Maintenance of successional areas and scrub. We aim for a mosaic of habitats and different age structures, with open rides and sunny glades. So how do butterflies respond to all this hard graft?

Generally, the numbers followed the national downward trend, yet despite the number of Comma falling from 29 in 2015 to 19 in 2016, Bentley Station Meadow was still ranked 14th out of 84 Hampshire transects that had data for both years. As a smaller site with a shorter transect, it is very positive news that it is in the top 20 rankings. The Comma requires woodland rides and edges, with willow being one of the favoured caterpillar food-plants, so it looks like we got the seal of approval from this butterfly.

BSM was also ranked 15th out of the 62 sites with Silver-washed fritillary data for both years. The main foodplant is Common Dog-violet growing in shady or semi-shady positions on the woodland floor, in Broadleaved and Oak woodlands with sunny rides and glades. Another success.

On the 23rd July, Sue Clarke saw a White Admiral nectaring on bramble near the footbridge where light had been let in by a work-party. Sightings of this butterfly are patchy, with the highest ever count on transect of just 3 in 1997, even so, to see a single specimen is still good news and gives us hope that our management will eventually benefit all the woodland and meadow species.

Speckled Wood had its 4th best year with 51 seen. Another species of Woodland rides and glades it requires certain grasses, such as False Brome; Cock's-foot; Yorkshire-fog as larval foodplants. Orange Tip decreased once again from 17, to 13, but eggs were seen on the 13th May on the food-plant Lady's smock in the North Meadow.

It's lovely to receive records of other species that frequent the meadow. Here is a brief list from the transect year, Bullfinch, Goldfinch, Chiffchaff, Wren, Jay, Chaffinch, Nuthatch, Blackcap, Goldcrest; Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth on Bugle – a plant that did very well at BSM in 2016 - and an early sighting of female Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly; Common Mouse-ear; Common Sorrel; Greater stitchwort; Tormentil; Adders-tongue fern; Lesser celandine; Wood Speedwell; Thyme-leaved Speedwell; Herb Paris (40 individual plants were counted in flower in one of the wooded areas); Agrimony; Common knapweed; Greater Birds-foot trefoil; Tufted vetch; Betony; Angelica; Red clover; Upright Hedge-parsley; Meadowsweet; Enchanters nightshade; Hedge bedstraw; Brooklime; Water Mint; and many orchids.

A meeting in the meadow in August with a new BC member – Jane Stone, led to a discussion about grazing with her hardy breed of Icelandic Horses. Jane agreed to loan them to us for the winter grazing period. They have certainly made an impact on the excessive grass growth and the brambles.