

**Visit by Southern Reserves Officer Rob Allen for Worcestershire Wildlife Trust
and Harry Green from the Worcestershire Recorders
2nd December 2010**

Purpose

We are soon to come to the end of our published three year maintenance plan. Up until now we have had a close relationship with the Kemerton Conservation Trust and in particular John Clarke who is our advisor and mentor; John has a few health issues at this time and is for the moment unable to visit the reserve in person. In view of this, an invitation was extended by the trustees to the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust to visit the nature reserve with a view to forming a loose affiliation with their organization. They could give support and advice, lending authority to past and future work. Their consultancy was carried out the original survey for Huntsmans in 1995.

Rob and Harry met with myself and Trevor McGill (Parish Tree Warden) at 1pm and explored the nature reserve in some detail for two hours. Results were as follows:-

On what we have achieved already

Rob and Harry were very enthusiastic about the improvements we have made to the site. Harry was very pleased with the felling of the enormous leylandii on the south side, and also the removal of the white poplar suckers on the north side, allowing more sunlight to get to the south facing bank.

Harry was also pleased with the clearance of brambles on the west end of the reserve, again to allow more sunlight into a sunny bank for his beloved solitary bees and bee flies.

They generally thought that the site was being well maintained, and was home to some very important species of wildlife.

What they would like to happen

SSSI

Rob and Harry suggested that we contact Helen Trapp from Natural England with a view to getting a one off permission to cut down and poison the stumps of the Lombardy Poplar seedlings at the bottom of the cliff face; also to cut back some of the brambles in the same area. They thought this may encourage the return of the Sand Martins in the spring because the birds like a clear run into their nests.

Trees and Coppicing

It was thought that the alders on the north side of the lake and on the island should continue to be coppiced on a short cycle. They were very keen that we should reduce the amount of sycamore saplings all around the reserve. These could be cut down and the stumps treated. The hawthorn saplings on the western bank could also be reduced in number, although they are a good food source for birds and insects in the spring and late summer.

The large Turkey Oak at the bottom of the steps on the north west corner and the Ash tree on the opposite side of the path should be felled as these will be out of scale in coming years.

Brambles

Harry Green was very keen that we should continue to clear the brambles on the western end. Although this was done last winter and treated with herbicide, there has been a certain amount of re-growth, but he suggested that the area should be strimmed again in late February and again in July. This should leave the area ready for us to reseed as necessary and also any residual wildflowers to regenerate. He was very enthusiastic about the uneven area of ground at the side of the footpath on the west end; it being a good habitat for ants which are a staple food for some birds. Another suggestion was to clear areas of brambles and small trees on the lake side of the western end; stretches of five to ten metres giving better viewing over the lake; Harry then would also like to see more areas of the American bramble taken out around the site.

Viewing from the present hide

Viewing of the lake is becoming obscured by the re-growth of the trees that were cut down two years ago, so perhaps we could make that our next task.

Conclusion

The above list was regarded as the more important work that we should concentrate on. Rob Allen advised us to draw up a strategy of our more important ecological features e.g. habitats, maintaining open water, encouraging the formation of wildflower rich grassland, and maintain as far as we are allowed the SSSI site.

This would encourage the interesting species, especially solitary bees, dotted bee flies, and invertebrates which are at the bottom of the food chain; also wetland bird assemblages and grass snakes.

Most of this can be achieved by the following:-

- Annual cutting and clearing in July/August to remove nutrients
- Cut back bramble to protect and expand wildflower area including orchids etc.
- Possibly exclude Canada Geese from wildflower area to reduce nutrients enrichment.”

However a parting shot from Harry Green was ***“don’t on any account have the reserve looking like a park and completely sanitized; it looks very good as it is, but make haste slowly!”***

Rob advised us to purchase more machinery e.g. brushwood cutter and a good strimmer which would make our tasks a lot easier; however only a trained volunteer in the use of these tools should be used.

John Clifford

Conservation Warden