

The Green Linnet

The Newsletter for owners of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest



Issue 15: November 2010

Busy Year for Wildlife Sites Project Officer



Scrub rolling



Machine tackles scrub on steep slope



Conifer removal from woodland/grassland site

It has been the busiest year for me that I can remember! The very day I left the National Trust to go self employed as a farmer in October 2009, I spotted this well timed part time job as Wildlife Sites Projects Officer with the AONB. It was a short contract which was ideal to buffer the shock of losing a regular salary. At the same time I also became a father just before Christmas in 2009, and my son still wakes up 3 times a night in need of a feed! So it has been a packed year all round. I spend my days driving around the county on either my own or AONB business, and my nights feeding and humouring an insomniac child. So I have been reliant on the strong coffee on offer at the AONB office to continue to function. (I am clutching one as I write)!

In spite of this, I seem to have made good progress for the AONB and DWT, delivering grant funding to benefit wildlife on many Sites of Nature Conservation Interest. The majority of the £100,000

budget has now been committed on over 45 separate projects since the start of the year. This averages roughly £2,000 per project.

Some examples of the projects we have funded include:

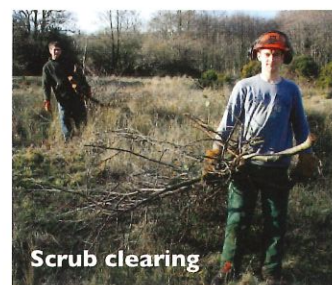
- Fencing in order to re-introduce cattle grazing to an acid grassland site in Owermoigne. We also cleared a large area of gorse on this site. North Devon cattle have been successfully grazing the site all summer.
- Scrub management on a large wet common near Sherborne, and fencing to maintain the grazing regime into the future.
- Removal of rhododendron from heath lands and ancient woodlands in the south east of the county.
- Lots of woodland management, coppicing and removal of alien invasive species such as cherry laurel.

- Removal of cotoneaster as well as native scrub species from limestone habitats on Portland.

I must say it has been a very enjoyable year so far, getting to know the most beautiful parts of the county even better, as well as meeting the landowners and managers involved in looking after these places. It has also been a rare privilege to be in a position to have the money to drive forward some positive changes. Given the current pressure on public finances, nature

conservation will no doubt take its share of the squeeze for the next year or two. Having said this, between now and January it is still very much worth contacting me if you have a deserving conservation project on your SNCI in need of funding.

Jake Hancock
AONB Wildlife Sites Projects Officer
j.hancock@dorsetcc.gov.uk
07770 794615



Scrub clearing



Part of a nationwide network of Wildlife Trusts

Focus on a Wild Flower

Of all the plants I encounter in the flower-rich pastures and meadows across Dorset, there can be few with a more evocative name than Corky-fruited Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe pimpinelloides*). Truly a southern plant, its national distribution is centred on Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset, becoming very rare away from the south of England. Unlike other Water-dropworts, it can be found on fairly dry soils, although it largely avoids the chalk. True to its name it bears intriguing tiny (3mm) cylindrical fruits that are four-pronged and have swollen corky bases. Its delicate white flowers are borne in groups which come together to form an umbrella-shaped head, their wine-like scent reflected in the generic name, from the Greek oinos for wine and anthos for flower. Its close relative Hemlock Water-dropwort is responsible for the majority of accidental deaths through plant poisoning in Britain, its toxic roots seemingly mistaken for parsnip and celery; it is also now believed to be the plant once used in the ritual poisoning of the elderly in Sardinia - the dying, twisted smile of its victims giving rise to the term sardonic grin. Opinions seem to differ as to the toxicity of the leaves, and likewise the toxicity of Corky-fruited Water-dropwort but I did notice that contributors to a site on the internet discussing the virtues of Lentil and Corky-fruited Water-dropwort soup appear to have lived to tell the tale.

Amanda Marler
SNCI Officer



Corky-fruited water dropwort



Successful Pond Project to continue



Pond restoration

In January 2009, the Dorset Wildlife Trust initiated the Purbeck Important Ponds Project to address the newly formed Habitat Action Plan for ponds in the biodiversity hotspot of Purbeck District. We are now at the end of this successful project which has exceeded our expectations so that;

1. an inventory of greater than 1000 ponds has been compiled.
2. 41 ponds have been surveyed to species level for plants and invertebrates and more than 20 surveyed for great crested newts. The survey work has yielded some extremely exciting finds, including new records of BAP species such as the rare aquatic fern pillwort *Pilularia globularia*, the liverwort pitted frillwort, *Fossombronia foveolata*, the notable small red damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum*, several rare water beetle species and the tiny hydroptilid caddis fly *Tricholeiochiton fagesii*, which has never been recorded in Dorset before.
3. £15,000 of capital funding and more than 200 man days worked to restore/create 40 ponds.
4. Advisory visits have been made to landowners of 50 more ponds.

We have worked with many SNCI landowners even where ponds lie outside the SNCI itself and discussed management and improvements of other habitats. It is for this aim of connecting landscape features such as hedgerow, ponds, road verges, meadows, rivers and woodland that we are fundraising to continue our Purbeck work and extend into our next target area, North Dorset. If you are in North Dorset and have a pond you are interested in restoring or creating and would like some advice then please get in touch with Rachel Janes on **01305 264620** or rjanes@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk



Small red damselflies

Photo © Mark Heighes

Photo © Tony Bates

Photo © Peter Wakeham



ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

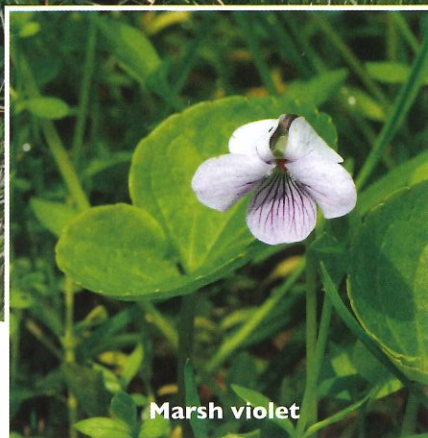


Dorset
Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

Carr Maintenance – the importance of Wet Woodland Habitat



Mitrula paludosa



Marsh violet



Handsome woollywort

Dorset is renowned for its complex mosaic of habitats, and wet woodland is one of the most threatened. In the last century there was a considerable loss of this habitat in Britain, mainly due to clearance, changes in land use or the lowering of water-tables through drainage or abstraction.

Wet woodlands form on seasonally or permanently water-logged soils, and are often dominated by alder, downy birch and willow. Associated plant species are variable and diverse, including specialist bryophytes (mosses) and fungi thriving in the high humidity. Many invertebrates are associated with wet woodland, including some rare or threatened ones. Even quite small wet woods can support certain crane fly species, which are seldom found elsewhere.

Surprisingly, there is limited knowledge of the current conservation status of wet woodlands on a landscape scale, although some of them are already recognised as SNCl in Dorset.



Dorset
Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

In August 2010 Dorset Wildlife Trust received financial support through the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership Sustainable Development Fund to start the "Wet Woodlink" project to:

- Create an inventory of areas of wet woodland along the Upper Hooke, Piddle and Frome catchments.
- Survey some of the key species associated with this habitat, including Bechstein's bat, invertebrates and botanical species, particularly fungi and mosses.
- Identify areas for creating, linking and buffering wet woodlands.
- Provide management advice and identify possible wet woodland subsidies.

How do I manage a wet woodland?

- Maintain a diverse structure - with a range of vegetation types and elevated levels, which are ideal for the retreat of species during high water levels.

- Maintain open areas - important for flowering plants, and edge habitat - important for species such as small mammals, spiders, butterflies and moths.
- Low level grazing can maintain open areas but intensive grazing can inhibit tree regeneration and trampling can damage the fragile soils and ground flora.
- Maintain water levels - a lowering of ground water level can result in an invasion of stinging nettles and bramble. Streams and leaks/seepages should not be channelled or piped and wet boggy areas should be maintained, with minimum disturbance.
- Retain deadwood - both fallen and standing deadwood are valuable for invertebrates.
- Retain mature and veteran trees with rot holes and cavities - these are important for an array of species such as birds, bats, fungi and invertebrates.
- Retain non-intervention areas - these areas are ideal for bat species which require closed canopies

If you would like to share information about a wet woodland or require further advice please contact Emma Brawn on

01305 264620.

Restoring West Dorset's meadows


The Dorset Wildlife Trust has been restoring wildflower-rich grasslands throughout West Dorset as part of our 'Pastures New' project. (See front page article of last year's Green Linnet). Wildflower meadows alive with butterflies and bugs were once a common sight across the county, however most of them have been lost over the past 50 years.

In our third year of the project, we have helped restore 15 sites across West Dorset. Some of these have been sown with local wildflower seed, which is collected with a brush harvester and then dried and cleaned. Other sites have been spread with green hay which has been cut from a nearby species-rich meadow. The 'donor' sites for this restoration work have, in many cases, been SNCIs. Careful site preparation and aftercare are key to the success of the restoration.

Creating new meadows is, of course, a long term endeavour, but the sites restored in the first two years of the project already look very promising, with species such as ox-eye daisy, knapweed and bird's foot trefoil thriving. These provide food and habitat for insects - for example Bird's foot trefoil, or 'bacon-and-eggs', has 93 species of insects associated with it. These insects are themselves then a food source for birds, bats and small mammals, helping biodiversity across the landscape. A varied sward can also be beneficial for meat production; studies have shown that meat from animals finished on diverse pastures has a higher vitamin E content, better colour and a longer shelf life than those finished on perennial ryegrass leys.

We are now planning our restoration programme for 2011 so if you have a site in West Dorset that you think is suitable for enhancement do get in touch - a suitable site will have low soil fertility, be relatively weed free, not be in HLS or CSS and will ideally link up other species-rich grassland. Due to funding constraints we can only help if you fall within our project area - phone up to see if you qualify. We are also always on the look out for sites where we can collect seed or hay, and as mentioned above, SNCI grasslands are often particularly suitable. Donor sites need to be at least an acre, with 1/3 or more wildflowers in the spring or summer, be free from invasive weeds and be accessible with machinery. All hay will be replaced, and we will pay for good quality seed.

Please contact Nick Gray of the Pastures New team for further information on **01300 321329** or email ngray@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk



Wildflower meadow at Providence Farm



Seed harvesting at Corfe Mullen Meadows nature reserve

CONTACTS

For further information on SNCI's:

Sharron Abbott 01305 264620

Dorset Wildlife Trust:

Pastures New Team 01300 321329

FWAG: Clare Buckerfield

01305 251742

Dorset Agricultural Advisory Service:

Katherine Sealy 01305 215167

Woodlink c/o Dorset AONB:

01305 228239

Environmental Stewardship:

Richard Belding 01305 257086

Forestry Authority:

Dick Preston 01626 892853

Wildlife Sites Project Officer:

07770 794615

Hedgerow Trees – the next generation!

Workshop 25th January 2011 - 10.30am - 3pm

Hartgrove Farm, nr Shaftesbury - SP7 0JY **FREE LUNCH & oak sapling**

Standard, full grown hedgerow trees are an important part of our Dorset landscape and are also very important for wildlife. Oak, ash and maple support a wide range of invertebrates and birds, providing natural food, shelter and nesting sites particularly for raptors, owls and also bats.

Come and learn how to assess your hedges and identify saplings to save from the flail. Also covered will be best practice coppicing, hedge laying and other hedge maintenance including a site visit.

Contact Joy Wallis, Community Conservation Officer,

01305 264620 jwallis@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

if you are interested – numbers limited.

SNCI Project
supported by

