

Common Heritage



The newsletter of the Community Commons Project No 6, spring 2008

Welcome to the sixth issue of *Common Heritage*, the newsletter of the Community Commons Project. This project aims to help local communities increase their understanding and appreciation of Herefordshire's commons, and plan and take practical action to protect, conserve and celebrate the wildlife associated with them.

The Community Commons Project is now in its fourth year and is well into its implementation phase. This newsletter gives a flavour of some of the many aspects of the project's work – all part of the 12 management plans written for the commons during the initial 18-month planning phase. After this first phase, Tim Breakwell stayed on with the project as Project Manager, and Judy Hart joined as Project Officer in July 2007.

Bracken and gorse clearance

One of the core aims of the project is to reduce the amount of bracken and gorse that has increased so dramatically in recent years on many of the commons. To this end the project has purchased three bracken rollers, one cut-and-collect bracken harvester and two heavy-duty scrub-cutters for gorse. During 2007, these were put to good use on Cefn Hill, Vagar Hill, Hergest Ridge and Merbach Hill. On other commons, including Garway Hill, Ewyas Harold, Climbing Jack and Badley Wood, toppers have been used to clear the bracken. Where bracken has



Bracken rolling on Cefn Hill Common

been rolled or topped, the grass and herb cover beneath is improving, producing extra grazing for livestock. The cleared areas will be monitored during 2008 to check whether the range of acid grassland wildflowers is increasing.

Archaeological surveys

Herefordshire Council archaeologists have produced reports on the fascinating use of the



The 12 commons in the project

commons in the past. In December, they led a guided walk on Badley Wood Common to show local people the historical highlights, and will lead further walks on other commons in 2008.

Coppicing and pollarding

Large areas of willow have been pollarded on Badley Wood Common, and on Brimfield Common some of the alder trees that were shading the pond have been coppiced.

Biological surveys

During 2007, volunteers on Merbach Hill, Ewyas Harold and Garway Hill carried out monthly butterfly transects in spring and summer. Even though the weather was not the best for butterflies and moths, they collected valuable data to assist conservation planning.

Higher Level Stewardship

Another key objective of the project is to secure Higher Level Stewardship grants for some of the commons. These grants give payments to farmers and commoners for work that enhances the value of the common for wildlife, access and education. In November 2007, Garway Hill Common and Hergest Ridge Common were accepted into the

HLS scheme and during 2008 it is hoped that applications will be submitted for Cefn Hill Common and Vagar Hill Common.

Path clearance

Volunteers on Merbach Hill turn out every month in all types of weather to wield slashers and loppers and clear the network of footpaths on the common. So far they have cleared a section of the Wye Valley Walk and opened up paths that have been impassable for years.

Training

The project has trained eight hardy volunteers in the use and maintenance of chainsaws. This winter they have cleared a large area on the edge of Ewyas Harold Common to improve conditions for pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies. Four people have been trained in the use of brushcutters and their skills have been put to good use on Yatton Hill Common, clearing areas of bracken for reptiles, especially adders.



Volunteers with a certificate to operate a chainsaw!

Training for volunteers interested in carrying out dormouse surveys took place on Badley Wood Common last autumn, and on Ewyas Harold and Merbach Hill this spring.

Educational links

Links are being forged between the commons in the project and local schools. In February, children from the Waldorf School and Pontrilas Young Farmers worked hard to protect the banks of the Black Pool on Garway Hill from erosion by livestock, and improve conditions for the pool's population of great-crested newts. They planted a



Conservation work on Garway Hill Common

new hedge, protected by a dead hedge, and built a hibernaculum for over-wintering newts. Children from Whitbourne Primary School made an excellent job of planting 35 orchard trees on Badley Wood Common, including old Herefordshire varieties of apples and pears.



Muddy children from Whitbourne Primary School!

Pond restoration

In 2007, the pond at White Rocks on Garway Hill was desilted and overhanging trees were cut back. Plans have been made to work on the ponds on Brimfield Common in 2008 and carry out an ecological survey of the pond on Merbach Hill.

Guided walks in 2008

The Community Commons Project is organising botanical guided walks on four commons this summer: Merbach Hill, Garway Hill, Ewyas Harold and Cefn Hill. Also, guided walks to describe the archaeology of the commons, starting with Vagar Hill and Merbach Hill, will be led by Herefordshire Council archaeologists. And in October, fungus forays will be held on Yatton Hill and Merbach Hill. Please contact Judy Hart for further details.

Thank you!

The Community Commons Project would like to say a big thank you to everyone who has helped and given their time towards the success of the project so far.

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Useful contacts

Natural England

Natural England is the Government's statutory adviser on nature conservation. Julie Button (☎ 01905 363426)

Herefordshire Nature Trust

Herefordshire Nature Trust can provide practical conservation advice and further information about the Community Commons Project.

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