

*Southern Reserves Officer for Worcestershire Wildlife Trust*

*Rob Allen*

*Visit to Beckford Nature Reserve*

*20<sup>th</sup> June 2012*

I was impressed with the improvements you've made at the reserve since the last time you invited me over. You asked my opinion on the management of the site, and to be honest I think you are doing a good job, but I'm happy to pass on my thoughts.

The show of bee orchids was impressive for a site that is hand mowed with no follow up grazing, and a sign that the hard work you've put in maintaining and improving the condition of the grassy banks is really starting to bear fruit. Bee orchids are an uncommon flower in the county and a good indicator of unimproved grassland which will be valuable for an increasing number of wildflower species, so it's fair to say the grassland is an important feature of your site. Where there is the option to expand around the existing grassy areas and to let in enough light for them to flower I would say it is right to do so. The range of botanic species is already valuable in its own right, but the open grassy areas will also support and increase the diversity of insects on the reserve, which in turn increases the food supply for mammals, birds and other insects.

We discussed the difficulty in letting scrub get away from you if you miss a year, but it is worth reiterating that it's easier to keep the scrub regularly controlled than to do remedial work after it has got established, and despite the value of young scrub it would be a shame to risk losing some of the valuable grassland to encroachment when you have plenty of young and mature scrub on other parts of the site.

It was good to see the sand martins were back, and I think that confirms the importance of maintaining the open aspect of the gravel exposure. As I understand it that is a legal duty for the SSSI anyway, but it is beneficial to do so for the wildlife on the reserve.

In my opinion, one of the values of the site is the range of habitats present, and given the moderate size of the reserve I think you should continue to maintain a mix where possible. The more habitats are present, the wider the range of niches available to species that might use the site and the more diverse and interesting the site becomes to wildlife and visitors. Therefore the grassland, secondary woodland and areas of scrub are all valuable habitats and if I were managing the site I would wish to maintain some of each of these areas where environmental conditions are best.

So on the southern banks that are the most sunny I would continue to maintain and expand the grassy areas with small pockets of scrub. Where the slope of the bank is shaded by the steep aspect then mainly leaving it to bramble scrub or the areas of secondary woodland is fine, although preventing the scrubby areas from succeeding to woodland by occasional partial clearance would be something I would look at. Likewise occasional thinning of the woodland to let a bit more light in and promote some trees to develop into good well-shaped and veteran trees would be a possibility, although of secondary importance to the grassland management and scrub control.

I would also consider seeing if it were possible to maintain some open space on the edge of the island as loafing spaces for wildfowl and waders within the available time your volunteers have available.

Finally, it is always good to do some monitoring of key indicators on the reserve. I know you keep an eye on the wildflowers and birds, but I don't know how you record that information for future comparison. I'd also suggest (if you don't already), if you can find an interested local to monitor butterflies as an indicator of the invertebrate population you might find that really helpful information in seeing the value of the grassland management.

This is largely what you are doing anyway, so generally speaking I would just say keep up the good work!

All the best.

Rob

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