



# End of Year Report

## November 2000

Over the last twelve months members of the group have carried out a number of practical work sessions on the site. The purpose of this report is to review the various tasks undertaken and outline their outcome, both in the short and long term. To make it easier to see the effect throughout the site, I feel it is best to review our efforts by habitat/area rather than in chronological order.

### Grassland

As with our initial session in 1999, there was another fantastic turnout for the mowing weekend (September 23rd & 24th) with the task being completed within the time (and weather) constraints. However, this year's effort was even more impressive for several reasons: -

A much larger area was mown - both on the 'top' and on the lower section at above Brookside.

Because of last year's efforts, I believe that the top section had been more 'productive' and so, there was a greater volume of cut vegetation to remove.

The wet weather proceeding the weekend made the cuttings harder to rake up. The higher water content made the grass a lot heavier and thus difficult to move to the skip; as well as increasing the amount of trips needed.

Changes in nature occur slowly and so it is best to look to the long-term effect that this annual weekend of hard graft will bring about. Continual removal of cut vegetation will slowly reduce the nutrient levels of the area, thus allowing more typical acid grassland species to colonise. This is already starting to happen - some flowers that were already present are slowly beginning to get established over slightly larger areas.

Although the removal of vegetation from the mowing immediately springs to mind, several other work sessions have also had an influence on the grassland areas of the site.

Continuing on from our work in 1999, we again spent two sessions (June 18th & August 13th) concentrating on the open area between the two rock outcrops, in our effort to reduce the dominance of Bracken in several areas on the site.

All those who attended the first session will have noticed that it was much more difficult to 'wreak havoc' amongst the ferns. This was not because the Bracken was any denser than previously, but due to other vegetation now being given a chance to compete; this is proof that the treatment is working! However, the negative effect of this is that the work

was slow going and we were not able to cover as great an area as in 1999.

The second session had a relatively low turnout (in comparison to our usual numbers), however we were still able to give the whole area between the two rock outcrops a thorough bashing. Although we were not able to clear as great an area as in 1999, the main area is looking a lot better, with other more varied vegetation starting to develop as the Bracken is becoming less dominant. Hopefully next year the weather will be less 'Bracken friendly' and growth in this area will be less vigorous. We will then be able to widen our attack to the other areas that we were not able to do this year.

For our July (30th) session, we focused on two species of plant that are efficient colonisers of 'unmanaged land'. When left to their own devices, both are capable of spreading quickly and forming dense stands that can restrict the growth of other less competitive (and more desirable) species.

Both these species are of conservation value and only control, not eradication, is desired. In order to prevent both plants from dispersing their seed, the Rosebay was pulled up and the Nettles bashed down with our trusty sticks. By the end of the session virtually all of the Rosebay had been attended to, along with numerous areas of dense Nettle: some were deliberately left to limit access.

Continual annual management in the future will hopefully prevent further colonisation of new areas, and slowly reduce the extent of these to desired levels. This was the first time the group had turned its attention to these plants and so it is difficult, at present, to ascertain the effectiveness of the session.

### Woodland

Our efforts over the last year have been concentrated in the wooded area above Thoresby Road. This area was chosen as it suffers from less disturbance than other sections of woodland and can be considered as being in better condition. Two projects over the year have been undertaken with a view to enhancing the 'structure' of this area.

The first session (15th December) involved repositioning some of the self-set seedlings that were growing near the bases of larger trees. Approximately 40 assorted Rowan, Holly and Wild Cherry were relocated to more favourable sites (increased light and space). To date I have only found two that did not survive transplanting, although their demise is most likely not the direct result of our work.

Also, during this session, we were able to tidy up some of the older Oaks by removing some damaged branches. The cut limbs were cut up and used to make habitat stacks. Dead wood is very important to numerous species of invertebrates and fungi, which in turn provide food for other animal species. Surprisingly, these piles of cut limbs have remained relatively immobile and the majority are still where they were left almost 12 months ago.

During the second session (21st May), we assisted the relocated seedlings to survive in their new sites. Many had the lower side branches pruned in order to promote strong straight growth. Also, other vegetation around the bases was removed so that competition from fast growing grasses was reduced. Dead leaves (freely available on site) were then used as a mulch to stop the grasses re-colonising, as well as providing essential nutrients for the young trees.

The March (26th) session saw us clearing several sizeable patches of Bramble within the same area of woodland. The rationale being to increase the age structure of the Bramble throughout the site by removing individual patches each year in rotation, preferably over a 7-10 year cycle. The intention is not to eradicate the plant, but to encourage regrowth as it is of high conservation value, providing nectar and berries for food as well as shelter and habitat within the thickets. The cuttings were then used to block several feint paths leading into Broom scrub in the centre of the site thus limiting access.

### Footpaths

In February (13th) members of the group undertook an experiment on the narrow path running across the grassland at the top of the site. Two sections were widened to approximately one metre (39 inches) for a distance of 10 yards each. This was undertaken to ascertain valuable information on ground conditions in preparation for the installation of the proposed surfaced wheelchair path.

Within a few days the surface on the widened sections had compacted and stabilised, despite prolonged wet weather immediately after the session. Many positive comments have been received from other site users, and it is intended to continue widening the path along its entire length over the coming months. This will serve to both enhance access for present users and as preliminary work to the installation of a proper surfaced path in the future.

More recently members have been successful in restoring the short section of path leading from the bottom of the main outcrop to the top of Brookside. Due to the size of the task it was completed in two parts.

The first day (October 22nd) was used to remove all the large amount of washed down sand that had accumulated over the entire length, along with the encroached vegetation in order to return the path to its original width of four feet. The cut turfs were then used to repair a small area of grass that was lost due to the wet weather delaying the removal of the cut grass from September's mowing session. The temporary surface was stamped down in order to leave a safe surface until the second and final session.

The top dressing of crushed limestone dust was installed and compacted on the second session (November 5th). The other paths running across this area will be improved in a similar fashion over the next few winters.

## General

For our initial session of 2000 (January 16th), the group undertook a litter-pick on the site. Due to the (usual) excellent turnout, we were able to remove a surprisingly large amount of non-degradable rubbish from a much greater area than normal, as we were able to turn our attention to the whole ridge.

Throughout the year the amounts of rubbish have been generally low, mostly due to individual group members (and others) removing litter as it occurs. Also, the incidence of dumped garden refuse has been lower this year than of late, especially in the Thoresby, Burnside and Cranston area. However, there are still some small piles occurring in the Maidstone and Brookside area, but as few residences have direct access to the site these are few and far between.

The prolonged wet weather, immediately after the mowing session, made it impossible to remove the skip for a considerable length of time. Unfortunately, this attracted the attention of fly tippers, however the majority of rubbish was placed in the skip, and only a small amount was left on site. This area is to be restored by the Council and sown with an 'acid grassland mix' in keeping with site.

In the summer, two stolen cars and a moped were dumped and burned at the foot of the outcrop adjacent to the Sandy Lane bridleway. The site is now secure from further repetition with bollards now placed at all entrances to the site. Our thanks to Broxtowe Council for their speedy clean-up, and the removal of the burnt/damaged trees - the cut branches have been used to fill gaps in the hedge at the top of Maidstone Drive to prevent further dumping of garden rubbish.

All the work undertaken has gone to plan and been completed to a high standard: in the short term the results appear very promising - only time, and further surveying and monitoring, will tell. The general feedback I have received from other site users, during my wanderings 'up the top,' is always positive, and I truly believe that the work undertaken to date is well received and appreciated by the local community. I would personally like to thank all members of the group for their efforts in the variety of tasks that I have organised to date, and look forward to working with everyone in the future.