

Barlow Common LNR report 1st April 2014 – 21st January 2015

Staff changes:

Claire Burton went on maternity cover in the lead up to the birth of her baby girl. We then recruited Catherine Walker to work as a Community Engagement Officer to provide maternity cover for Claire and Brian Lavelle our Living Landscape Manager, who manages Catherine and Barlow as part of his job. In the interim and while Catherine has taken over, John Wollaston has led task days with volunteers and carried out safety tasks such as the tree safety survey.

Re questions asked by the Chair:

1. When was the Visitor Centre last opened and staffed?

The visitor centre was last opened and staffed in late June for a Wild Flower and Bug Hunt day, but the public who came either went for the event and a walk round or to walk round the site separately and did not use the centre.

Generally it is not opened and staffed as when there our staff are primarily out doing work parties and events on site. It is used when events and weather make sense to use the centre such as the bird box making event in February.

2. On average how many hours do staff work or visit the site per week or month?

On a monthly average across the year, a staff member visits the site weekly for about a day. This is made up of a mixture of staff led work days (20), and events (12) and 2-3 days a month visiting to deal with issues such as health and safety, minor vandalism, to plan and monitor the years' work programme, fundraising bid planning, meeting & supervising contractors, and tree safety survey among others.

3. Do Yorkshire Wildlife Trust believe improvements have been made to the site?

YWT has spent the period to date restoring the site back to the level when it was being fully managed. It is in better condition than it was prior to taking over with a lot of the successional growth of trees and scrub now under control.

It has been really satisfying to have so many people provide their time and effort to help look after the reserve, over 429 recorded hours so far this year which has led to us being able to clear back a lot of the scrub and tree regeneration (and bring the meadows back into full management).

The changes in the management regime to prioritise nature conservation and try to bring the reserve more into line as a nature reserve rather than parkland is a slow process but is showing some results.

There is an increase in rough grassland due to reduced mowing of some areas which we expect to increase small mammal numbers which will benefit birds of prey and other predators as well as increase invertebrate numbers. We will be doing a small mammal trapping day as part of our events which will help with looking at whether they have repopulated the rough grassland.

We have put up a number of bird boxes and are planning more including an event in February. Our officer has been approached by a licensed volunteer who will be able to do some monitoring on the site from next year.

It is anticipated that the grassland areas will improve in variety and diversity as they expand and the scrub areas are reduced leading to an overall improvement in the range of grassland on the site and the associated species. Invasive non-native plant species on the site have also been reduced.

1. Biodiversity & Landscape

a. Woodland & Scrub

Tree safety survey took place in January 2015 to assess the trees for damage/health and if they are deemed dangerous (likely to fall/shed limbs.) This survey takes priority as the risk to visitor health and safety must come first. There has been work to manage trees and overhanging limbs on some of the paths. In addition 2 trees have been identified as at risk over the scout area but due to risk of damage to the scout facilities we have contracted a tree surgeon to carry out the work.

Major areas (7600m²) of woodland regeneration adjoining the best meadow enclosures have been cleared using staff led volunteer work days throughout the winter with most stumps being chemically treated to stop regrowth.

More scrub and bramble has been cleared where it is encroaching onto the pathways. This has also been spot treated with herbicide to prevent re-growth. Interestingly this summer we found bee and other orchids growing in the newly cleared areas during a guided botanical walk.

b. Grassland

All three of the enclosed grassland areas were cut in summer of 2014 by our staff and volunteers then helped to rake up the cut grass into piles around some of the trees. Plant species within these areas are diverse and continuing with a late summer cut this will help to improve diversity and knock back some of the weeds which have started to appear within the enclosures. One of the main highlights are the amount of orchids growing within the enclosures, and this year there were great displays for people who came on the flower walk in June.

There were also excellent displays of butterflies through the summer and we want to look at training up volunteers to start monitoring and recording the butterflies on the site.

Regarding the fenced compartments and rabbit grazing, we are considering removing some of the fencing that has rotted through on one of the compartments and monitor the impact. There is an issue regarding the fencing both in terms of maintenance, public usage of the site and the potential to unearth asbestos in replacing the fencing.

We continued to manage some of the areas of teasel (*Dipsacus*) to avoid it dominating the site, while retaining key areas for goldfinches and other birds for which it is an important winter food source.

There were also work days again this year to control Himalayan Balsam and ragwort on site which will need ongoing monitoring and management.

c. Wetland

No works have been required on the wetlands north west of the reserve as yet although reed management will be required in certain areas within the next 5 years. The new manager will be reviewing the access and management of the wetlands as part of his job.

d. Other

We are planning to develop monitoring on the site including butterfly monitoring on the grassland. A volunteer is also carrying out monitoring on the bird nest boxes and we held a training day for Breeding Bird surveying for northern Yorkshire at Barlow last spring.

2. Cultural Environment

YWT practically manage most of our nature reserves with the help of volunteers. This year to date volunteers have provided 429 hours of work in managing the reserve, with 2 months and 4 more work days figures to come this year. We are looking to recruit more volunteers to help both with practical tasks and to start with monitoring on the reserve.

Information & Access

a. Maintain access routes and infrastructure

The pathways leading from the disabled car park onto the reserve was repaired in May 2014 by a staff led volunteer day. The disabled access gates are opened & closed at dawn and dusk as part of the fishing licence.

300m of pathways have been cut back and overhanging branches removed to ensure the paths are accessible for visitors. We are looking into applying for funding to put in improved interpretation around the access including potentially a wildlife sculpture trail.

b. Manage visitor facilities

Public toilets are open between dawn and dusk & are maintained by the fishing licensee as part of the contract. We are sharing access to the tool store with Pete Taun for carrying out works and maintenance in his lease area..

c. Interpretation and branding

YWT has a page dedicated to Barlow on the website <http://www.ywt.org.uk/reserves/barlow-common-nature-reserve> and there are regular updates of progress and events in the YWT magazine & e-news which goes out to all our members (38,013 people) plus volunteers.

We are looking at overhauling it to add more pictures and info and downloads such as the newsletters.

The manager is looking into applying for funding to put in improved interpretation around the access including potentially a wildlife sculpture trail, possibly by a Hull based sculptor <http://stichler.co.uk>.

d. Events & practical work day

This year we have had 17 practical work days on the site so far this year totalling 429 volunteer hours but the true total will be higher for the year as we have another 3 from February till the end of March. Also there is unrecorded volunteer time by Pete Taun the angling license holder who does extra work separate to the staff led days.

Events carried out in 2014/15 included:

- 'Wake up to Spring' joint event with Selby Wildlife
- A 'wild food day' with Chris & Rose Bax from Taste the Wild
- Pond Dipping
- Guided wild flower walk & bug hunt
- Wildlife photography event with Paul Hobson
- Moth trapping
- Bat Night with NY bat group
- Mammal trapping
- Birds of prey spectacular with York birds of prey centre (unfortunately cancelled due to lack of numbers to cover costs)
- Finding Fungus event
- Bird box building
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e. Scout group

We are still dealing with some legal issues regarding certain clauses as part of the lease but are happy for them to use the site in the meantime and in fact that is why we are needing to employ a tree surgeon to sort out the leaning trees rather than fell them ourselves as it would impact on their use of the area.

5. Partnerships

Obviously SDC remain YWT's main partner on this project and we continue to report back and consult the council on various work taking place on site. The site officer attended a Building Supportive Communities in Selby meeting organised by the NHS Foundation Trust in December and will be attending the Selby consortium group in February and using Selby District AVS to explore the opportunities & possibilities of working with other groups in the area.

The fishery manager is working to the contract and has been offered first refusal on renewal of the angling agreement as he has been extremely helpful both in presence and dealing with the safety issues of the Mere, which is why we are providing him with additional signage to manage the risk with the general public.

3. Health and Safety

The YWT site and task risk assessments have had their annual reviews and the annual dangerous tree assessment was carried out on 12th of January.

We are waiting for a date from a tree surgeon for the 2 trees that our staff are unable to manage and we will then oversee the tree works. Our field officer has been dealing with other less dangerous trees during the winter with his trainee.

The fire risk assessment has been reviewed and we have had a contractor test and service the fire extinguishers and smoke alarms in September. This is in line with YWT's H&S policies and procedures which is overseen by our Support Services Manager.

The Living Landscape Manager has met with the fishing rights tenant Pete Taun about the need to close the path temporarily due to people trying to get on the ice on the Mere and then the discovered the steps have been vandalised and rendered unsafe. We have bought extra safety signs for the lake and others to use when temporary path closures are needed for safety reasons.

Brian Lavelle

Living Landscape Manager (East)