

Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund final project report, October 2017 – March 2018

Name of project: Making a Stand for the Wood White in Shropshire

Applicant: Butterfly Conservation

Project Reference: CF/1718/19

The grant was offered for the completion of the following work with associated costs:

Completion of the work will be judged against the following outputs, as outlined in your application form:

- Using the SHDC as a focus for interpretation and public awareness, promote these facilities through events and public engagement.
- Introduce an innovative way of managing the Wood White in Shropshire by creating refuge scallops at Bury Ditches
- Further conservation management work by running three winter work parties at Purslow, Blakeridge Wood and Bury Ditches
- Encourage local community participation by working with project partners on an event schedule for 2017, including holding a Big Butterfly Count walk
- Carry out habitat assessments on a further three potential Wood White sites across the AONB and provide management advice
- Support and maximise the long-term success of the reintroduction work at Blakeridge Wood by training volunteers to identify and monitor the reintroduced population

- **Using the SHDC as a focus for interpretation and public awareness, promote these facilities through events and public engagement**

Butterfly Conservation staff and volunteers have supported events at SHDC this winter, including Flight and Feathers Day on the 27th January. A very well attended event. Butterfly Conservation had a stand to promote the project along with a number of stalls from local groups including South Shropshire RSPB group and British Dragonfly Society.

Interpretation boards have been at SHDC throughout the year.

Butterfly garden maintained by West Midlands Butterfly conservation branch volunteers. On average 3 volunteers spend a few hours a month managing the butterfly garden i.e. securing fencing, mulching, weeding planting bulbs/seeds.

In December, Butterfly Conservation and the Habitat Helpers (new SHDC based volunteer group) held a joint practical work party in Onny Meadows. As part of the day, four volunteers spent a couple of hours managing the butterfly garden. The garden is a great opportunity to promote the importance of wildlife gardens for both butterflies and moths.

A number of SHDC events this summer will be supported by Butterfly Conservation and our volunteers. A second joint event with the Habitat Helpers is planned for August as part of our Big Butterfly Count survey season

- **Introduce an innovative way of managing the Wood White in Shropshire by creating refuge scallops at Bury Ditches**

Site visit with contractors to finalise location of two woodland scallops at Bury Ditches. Site visit with Forestry Commission staff to organise volunteer work parties at Blakeridge Wood (December 17th) and Bury Ditches (February 18th).

Two woodland scallops were created at Bury Ditches in early February. Volunteer work party was held at Bury Ditches on the 18th February, 13 volunteers attended along with Alan Reid (FC Wildlife Ranger). The volunteers raked off the mulch left on the scallops following contractor works. I'm hopeful that these two scallops will respond well to this management and will support good areas of Wood White habitat. In fact where the mulch was raked in 2017,

these areas supported courting pairs of Wood White, egg-laying females and a Wood White caterpillar, all in just one scallop.

- **Further conservation management work by running three winter work parties at Purslow, Blakeridge Wood and Bury Ditches**

Joint winter work party with SHDC volunteer group, Habitat Helpers on December 3rd, 11 volunteers attended. Two volunteers from this group also help with the butterfly garden at the centre.

Winter work party held at Blakeridge Wood (Wood White reintroduction site) on 17th December. Three very dedicated and hardy volunteers attended the work party even though Blakeridge Wood was still covered in thick snow!

A third work party was held at Bury Ditches 18th February, 13 volunteers attended (details above)

All these volunteer work parties were advertised in Comma (regional magazine of West Midlands Butterfly Conservation branch), were put on both the national Butterfly Conservation website and local West Midlands Branch website, posters were displayed in the Discovery Centre and sent to a number of contacts including Shropshire Wildlife Trust and AONB (thank you). All work parties on Forestry Commission sites were advertised on their Facebook page too.

A fourth work party was planned for 10th March at Bury Ditches as part of Butterfly Conservation 50th anniversary celebrations. Although this day was advertised in a number of locations, no one attended.

- **Encourage local community participation by working with project partners on an event schedule for 2017, including holding a Big Butterfly Count walk**

During the summer months a number of training events and guided walks took place (not all funded by AONB).

During 2017 (in addition to transect records for Bury Ditches) Wood White sightings were received from volunteers for a number of sites including Purslow Wood, Radnor Wood and Mortimer Forest

Supported Wildlife Fair event in Bishops Castle (part of British Science Week) on the 10th March. Butterfly Conservation had a display at the event and staff and volunteers attended the day. The organiser estimated that 100 people attended the fair. I recruited two volunteers who are keen to help monitor the reintroduced Wood White population at Blakeridge Wood, both volunteers have already been in contact, training day planned for late April.

Articles have been written regularly for Comma (West Midlands Butterfly Conservation Branch magazine). I wrote an article on the Wood White reintroduction for Butterfly Conservation members' magazine 50th anniversary edition and hopefully an article will be in the summer edition of What's What! magazine (Bridgnorth and Much Wenlock area edition), focussing on Bury Ditches and Blakeridge Wood.

- **Carry out habitat assessments on a further three potential Wood White sites across the AONB and provide management advice**

All habitat assessments were carried out during the summer months, reports written/advice given.

During the winter months a number of site visits with Forestry Commission to discuss and limit impact of their forestry works on areas of Wood White habitat

- **Support and maximise the long-term success of the reintroduction work at Blakeridge Wood by training volunteers to identify and monitor the reintroduced population**

A butterfly transect was established at Blakeridge Wood last year. The butterfly transect will be walked this season, however although the survey season officially starts on the 1st April, current conditions are unsuitable for any species of butterfly. An informal transect training day for volunteers is planned for mid/late April, when I hope the weather will have improved.

I will be leading a guided walk at Blakeridge Wood on 31st May to recruit more volunteers to help monitor the reintroduced population. Alan Reid (Wildlife Ranger, Forestry Commission) is also supporting the event.

I am also giving a butterfly talk at Bishop's Castle Town Hall on 8th May, leading a Wood White walk at Bury Ditches for Butterfly Conservation members and the South Shropshire RSPB bird group on the 12th August.

Dave Green (Butterfly Ecologist) and I have submitted an abstract for Butterfly Conservation's eighth International Symposium in Southampton April 2018 entitled "Restoring and strengthening populations of the Wood White butterfly *Leptidea sinapis* (Linnaeus, 1758) within Worcestershire & Shropshire, UK, written by R. Goddard, D. Green and J. Joy 2018 . Attending and presenting at symposium April 2018

Appendix – photographs

Events and publicity at Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre



Habitat Helpers work party at SHDC in Dec 2017. Flight and Feathers display at SHDC Jan 2018. Photos. R. Goddard

Practical management works at Bury Ditches



Volunteer work party at Bury Ditches Feb 2018. Woodland scallop at Bury Ditches Feb 2018. Photos M. Williams and R. Goddard

Practical management works at Blakeridge Wood and event at Bishop's Castle



Volunteer work party at Blakeridge Wood December 2017. Wildlife Fair event at Bishop's Castle. Photos. M. Williams and R. Goddard

Project publicity, winter work parties and a pop-up display



Article in Butterfly, Butterfly Conservation national members' magazine. West Midlands Butterfly Conservation Branch twitter feed



Pop-up display, poster to advertise winter work parties and most recent Wood White project article in Comma (West Midlands Butterfly Conservation Branch magazine).