

The Hurst Conservation Fund Report March 2016

Project Aims

We wanted to be able to restore and increase the biodiversity of this species rich unimproved meadow and a traditional orchard alongside a stream flowing to the Clun. The richness of the meadow flora had only just been discovered in a field that was gradually being allowed to scrub over with blackthorn and alder. The site adjoins a rich network of woods, tracks and footpaths and has an old dovecot in it which on a 1750's map is shown as a chapel. This too was in a great state of dereliction but fortuitously was re-roofed and stabilised with an Arts Council Grant this year. We also wanted to produce an interpretative map of the key features of the Hurst's landscape and showing its relationship with the immediate countryside.

The Dovecot Meadow

Stock fencing was put in to enable traditional meadow management practices.

The species rich unimproved meadow was surveyed in the summer by Rob Rowe (Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group). He later organised a very successful Fungi Foray led by the Herefordshire County Recorder here. The group discovered a very rare fungi, *Phellodon confluens* which was last recorded in the 1880's. Rob will return over the coming years to re survey and measure it against his baseline survey of the meadow and also to lead more fungi forays.

The meadow and orchard grass were cut but unfortunately the machine broke and by the time it was mended it was too late for hay baling. However it had its first uniform cut (which was raked off) in many many years.

The stock fencing was started with Herefordshire chestnut posts going in in the late summer undertaken by local contractors from Clunton. Blackthorn was cut down and the Wyre Community Land Trust put up the stock fencing and as soon as it was complete we were able to get a flock of rare breeds. A small grazier in Clunbury brought 3 Kerry's and 5 Black Faced Welsh Mountain Sheep who have been there since January and have just gone. Their grazing has transformed the meadow. The stock fencing of the fields has enabled this vital management with grazing to happen.

The plan is that now we will let the meadow flower and set seed and try to tackle the dock plants and keep on top of the blackthorn. In late July after the orchids have flowered the meadow will be cut and baled.

After this we will get some sheep for a short period and then again through the winter/early spring. Hopefully with this traditional management we will see an increase in the

flora especially the orchids. The meadows are a rich habitat for invertebrates as well as other wild flowers.

Associated with this is the Wood White Project (Butterfly Conservation) which is beginning in April when the Wood White Officer takes up her post. David Greene (Butterfly Conservation) will be coming to see if he can find any initially. The meadow has some of its food plants such as *Lathyrus pratensis* and *Lotus corniculatus* and is very close to Radnor Wood where they have been found.

The Orchard

The orchard needed gapping up, management of the meadow grass and also the removal of some of the stream side alder to create more light.

The Severn Tree Trust (John Tuer) came and planted several trees including local apples, Onibury Pippin, Bringewood Pippin and Downton Pippin. Four Shropshire Prunes (damsons) and other apple varieties which had been grafted by Tom Adams from our orchard were planted.

This planting led to The Severn Tree Trust giving us and planting a great stretch of hedge with 11 volunteers along the old disused road into Clun and the promise of more next year.

We also plan to start beekeeping here this year so that we can have Hurst honey.

Alder Coppicing

This was done to open up the view across the orchard to the dovecot, to increase light levels for the new orchard trees and as part of alder management. Mike Kelly advised us on this. The coppiced alders line the stream side which is now much more of an element as it can be seen and its edge walked along. The alder was coppiced along the stream so that the restored meadow and dovecote can now be seen clearly.

New Walks

A further walk was created in a lost mysterious corner along the stream side higher up which can now be accessed by two gates from the dovecot meadow. It is filled with snowdrops and the sound of running water.

Interpretive Map

Local Presteigne based artist Alice Perceval drew a map of the key elements of the Hurst. This shows enables our writers to orientate themselves, draw on the heritage of the Hurst and to inspire them in this richly unique landscape of the Shropshire Hills.

We are very excited about all these changes and look forward to this years new visitors coming to see what they think. We are also so excited that having been given the opportunity to make these changes , we will be able to protect our heritage, increase conservation and enrich our environment the conservation goals, to enrich the habitats with sympathetic land management

The Hurst will be opening to visitors as part of the John Osborne Festival based in Clun this May.