



## Small Blue Action Group Newsletter

The Small Blue Project was launched in March 2009. Already, it has had several successes with habitats being restored and the Small Blue and other key butterflies and moths returning to sites that had lost them. The Small Blue Action Group will hold its first meeting at the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust headquarters at Brandon Marsh on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> October. This newsletter details what is happening generally or what is planned site by site.

### **Bishops Bowl Sports Area**

This area contains one of the 3 remaining Small Blue colonies. In addition it has colonies of Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak and Grizzled Skipper. Much of the area is being effected by encroaching scrub and is also subject to a planning application. Mike Slater (Small Blue Project Officer), Steve Falk (Warwick Museum) and Anton Irving (Natural England) are actively working to ensure these rare butterflies do not suffer as a result of any changes.

### **Bishops Bowl Fishing Area**

There is an outstanding planning application to build fishing lodges on this area that has colonies of Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper and until recently a colony of Small Blue. Mike Slater, Steven Falk and Anton Irving are also actively working to ensure these rare butterflies do not suffer as a result of any changes to this site.

### **Bishops Bowl Private Field**

Mike Slater has made contact with a private landowner next to Bishops Bowl who is turning a small paddock into a wildflower meadow. The Project is exploring the creation of a habitat bund with the landowner and planting it with Kidney Vetch to facilitate colonisation by the Small Blue.

### **Bishops Hill Main Area**

This area contains one of the 3 remaining Small Blue colonies. The site also has colonies of Chalk Carpet Moth, Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak and Grizzled Skipper. Part of the site is under the threat of development. Once again Mike Slater, Steven Falk and Anton Irving are working to ensure that these rare butterflies do not suffer as a result of any changes to the site.

### **Bishops Hill Yellow Land**

The Yellow Land is owned by Bishops Itchington Parish Council. Exciting news is that thanks to the Parish Council, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and others a Project Officer, Chris Redstall, has been employed to conserve this important part of Bishops Hill. The area has suffered very badly from scrub encroachment. Thanks to local volunteers encouraged by Pam Reason the local butterfly monitor a small area of scrub was removed this year. Fantastic news is that not only did Kidney Vetch naturally colonise but Pam found several Small Blue eggs.

### **Draycote Country Park**

Discussions are taking place to create a habitat bund as a result of improvement works in the park. If successful the bund will be planted with Kidney Vetch.

### **Draycote to Offchurch Railway Draycote**

A successful meeting has taken place with Sustrans and conservation improvements have been agreed. Mike Slater is currently arranging a joint work party with Small Blue and Sustrans volunteers to carry out scrub

clearance. Discussions are also taking place to mow the track to remove Bramble and to create a habitat bund. If successful the bund will be planted with Kidney Vetch.

### **Draycote to Offchurch Railway Marton**

A successful meeting has taken place with Sustrans and planned work has been agreed. Arrangements to remove the encroached scrub are well advanced. A bonus is that a local farmer and very keen naturalist and excellent wildlife photographer has agreed to mow the track to remove encroaching Bramble. Once the legal niceties are confirmed this will be arranged in coordination with the scrub removal. Discussions are also taking place with this wildlife enthusiast to create extra wildlife habitat on his farm.

### **Draycote Water**

This site contains a colony of Grizzled Skipper. Discussions are taking place with Severn Trent Water to create a habitat bund as a result of improvement works in one of the reservoirs car parks. If successful the bund will be planted with Kidney Vetch and Creeping Cinqufoil (Grizzled Skipper caterpillar foodplant).

### **Gaydon Landfill (Kingston Grange Farm)**

Thanks to the support of another wildlife enthusiastic farmer, trials took place last year to establish the Small Blues caterpillar foodplant on the old landfill area. The Probation Service Community Payback team were vital in ensuring trial plots were sown and planted with Kidney Vetch. These plots were surveyed in September and have been tremendously successful though taller weeds such as Creeping Thistle are shading these plants. The landowner has agreed to top the area to remove these shading weeds. Once done the area will be assessed to see if cuttings need to be removed and any spot treatment with weed killer is needed. There are also good areas of Birdsfoot Trefoil (Dingy Skipper Chalk Carpet and Green Hairstreak caterpillar foodplant) and Creeping Cinqufoil present. The local branch of Butterfly Conservation has agreed to carry out a butterfly survey next year to assess if further habitat improvements are feasible.

### **Harbury Spoilbank North**

Harbury North is a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI). The site has been visited and work has been agreed with Natural England. The site contains populations of Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak and Grizzled Skipper. Historically the site also had a population of the Small Blue. It is planned to plant a south facing bank with Kidney Vetch once scrub is removed and treated.

### **Harbury Spoilbank South**

Harbury South is also a Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) and contains populations of Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak and Grizzled Skipper. Historically the site also had a population of the Small Blue. The site, a Warwickshire Wildlife Trust reserve, has been visited and work has been agreed with Natural England and the Trust. Part of the western side of the site was cleared of scrub, planted with Kidney Vetch and also had Green Hay spread over cleared areas. Unfortunately this does not seem to have been as successful as hoped, however, it is early days and the area will continue to be monitored. Further Kidney Vetch plug plants and or seed will be planted if deemed necessary.

### **Leamington to Banbury Network Rail Line**

A meeting with Network Rail has been arranged in October to discuss conservation works.

### **Napton Reservoir**

Following a site meeting the design and location of habitat bunds was agreed. This work has been delayed while source material for the bunds and works at a nearby pond is completed.

### **Nelsons Quarry**

Nelsons Quarry is a SSSI and a former site for the Small Blue and Dingy Skipper. Colonies of the Grizzled Skipper and Green Hairstreak are still present. Extensive areas of scrub were cleared last year and habitat bunds were created. The bunds were planted by Small Blue volunteers. This planting has been extremely successful and when the site was inspected recently most of the plants had not only survived but were extremely healthy and are expected to be in a condition for the Small Blue to colonize next year. Following surveys by Butterfly Conservation volunteers it already appears that the key butterfly and moth species have responded to this work. The Dingy Skipper appears to have re-colonised and the Grizzled Skipper had its best ever year. More excitingly,

following a targeted moth trapping event, the even rarer Chalk Capet has been discovered. The 7 individuals found make this the third known colony in Warwickshire. Further work has been agreed for this winter to build on this success.

### **Southam Bypass North**

Thanks to the support of Warwickshire County Council and Barclays Bank the embankments were planted with Kidney Vetch a couple of years ago. This year the annual count of flowering Kidney Vetch plants achieved its highest ever count. It is believed that it is only a matter of time before the Small Blue colonizes. The Small Blue volunteers again have been very busy and in October the encroaching scrub was removed to allow further Kidney Vetch planting to take place this month.

### **Southam Quarry**

Southam Quarry is an active cement quarry and works owned by CEMEX. The site is very important and contains the largest colonies of Small Blue and Chalk Carpet Moth. It also has large populations of Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper and Green Hairstreak. Thanks to CEMEX's support, the Small Blue Project was launched officially at this site in spring this year. Those at the launch were able to see both the butterfly and its eggs. Last year large areas of scrub were cleared and experimental habitat bunds were created and seeded with Kidney Vetch. It was also planned to seed the bunds field with a wildflower seed mix. The area of cleared scrub has been a great success, during surveys this year large numbers of Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper and Green Hairstreak were seen in the cleared area. Butterfly Conservation volunteers confirmed, by finding the eggs, that the two skipper species are breeding in the area. Further work has been agreed for this winter. In both areas seeded with Kidney Vetch many young plants have become established. In the bund field the seed mix does not appear to contain any wildflowers but appears to be Wheat. CEMEX are following this up.

### **Southam Quarry Old Site**

This site owned by CEMEX contains a very small colony of Grizzled Skipper. The site is heavily scrubbed. Thanks to the support of CEMEX half the area was cleared of scrub during the removal of old cement mixing area. Thanks to the sensitive way this was done large areas of bare ground have been created. These areas will be assessed later to see if they would benefit from planting or seeding of Kidney Vetch. Again the Small Blue volunteers were busy in October and the other half of the site was cleared of scrub.

### **Stockton Cutting and Works Site**

Most of this site is owned by CEMEX and a small area of the cutting part is a SSSI and is owned by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. Thanks to CEMEX's support large areas of scrub from the works area were cleared in 2008. In 2009 the Trust cleared some scrub from the cutting and further scrub was removed from the works area. This area contains a small colony of Grizzled Skipper and it used to contain colonies of Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper and Small Blue. Following the clearance of the scrub in 2008, the Grizzled Skipper had its highest recorded numbers in recent years. Many of the Kidney Vetch plants planted last year not only survived but flowered. However, the planting was not as successful as other sites believed due to drought killing some, badgers digging up freshly planted plugs and rabbit browsing. It is planned to create more bare patches this winter and undertake more seeding.

### **Ufton Fields**

This site is a SSSI owned by Warwickshire County Council and managed by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. The site used to contain 2 separate colonies of Small Blue, Dingy Skipper and Green Hairstreak. The only species that currently survives is the Grizzled Skipper. The Warwickshire Wildlife Trust has cleared large areas of scrub from an area of this site called Snipe Meadow. The Grizzled Skipper had a better year this year as a result of this work and more encouraging it appears that the Dingy Skipper has recolonised. To build on the Trust's success, further work has been agreed to clear large areas of scrub this winter.

### **Ufton BIFFA Landfill Site**

This site which only has a short time left as a landfill site contains a small colony of Grizzled Skipper. The project is actively working with BIFFA and other partners to create wildlife habitat as the site is restored. In the short term it is planned certain areas with Kidney Vetch seed.

## Other News

### **Wildflower Plant Production**

The project is using two organizations to grow Kidney Vetch plants. From seed collected locally at Southam Quarry, British Wildflowers are in the process of growing 7000 plants. In addition a new partnership has been developed with Coventry MIND. MIND, as part of their help to people with mental illness, will grow Kidney Vetch plants for the project. This extra source of plants will allow extra sites to be planted with Kidney Vetch or where planting has been less successful further planting can occur.

### **Farming Project**

A successful meeting in October was held with Natural England (DEFRA) the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and County Council ecologists. The aim of the meeting was to co-ordinate work on a landscape scale to improve the fortunes of the Small Blue. In addition, planning has already started to continue the projects work after it comes to end. Working with Natural England (DEFRA), farmers in stewardship agreements in the core area will be contacted to explore if further butterfly habitat can be created with DEFRA's support. Several wildlife sites in the core area are also expected to be entered into Higher Level Stewardship (HLS). To this end the potential of a grazing project to continue wildlife management in a sustainable way is being actively pursued.

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This project has only been made possible thanks to the support of the following organizations:-



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