

Swineholes Wood team meeting national targets

Back in 2003 Natural England (then English Nature) undertook a review of the conservation status of the Country's finest wildlife sites – those which are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's). At that time over 42% were identified as needing improvement. Swineholes Wood was one of those sites identified. As a result of the report the Government made a commitment to the public to ensure 95% of all SSSIs are in favourable condition by 2010.

Since this time the Trust and Swineholes Wood management team have been working with support from Natural England to manage the site and bring it back into good condition. We are now well on the way to fulfilling our commitment and to achieving a mix of open moorland, for which the site is designated, and woodland. Getting the balance right is vital in order to benefit the moorland vegetation and associated species like woodcock, common cow-wheat (anything but common in Staffordshire) dragonflies and the beautiful green hairstreak butterfly.

The works have involved felling trees to open up the moorland and thinning the tree canopy. A dense canopy shades out the ground vegetation and also makes it difficult for young trees to become established in areas where we wish to retain woodland. The areas that have been thinned will be managed as more open woodland and we have aimed to leave a cross section of species and ages of trees for maximum diversity. All this work has been carried out with the full support of and in consultation with Natural England and the Forestry Commission.

If anyone has any queries regarding the management of this reserve, or nearby Casey Bank or Blackheath, please don't hesitate to contact Helen Gee our Reserves Manager on 01889 880100 or locally myself as Voluntary Reserve Warden on 01538 300264. Why not visit the reserve (Swineholes Wood is on Ipstones Edge) and look at the regenerating heather both here and at Blackheath where a quick surface burn was carried out earlier this year over a small area of the site, a well established, traditional technique for moorland management. If you would prefer a guided tour just turn up one first Sunday in the month and a member of the management team will be pleased to show you the completed work

There may well be much moorland in the north of our county but few areas have the distinction of being particularly fine examples of a moorland mosaic as does Swineholes Wood. As well as having heather and bilberry this site has cross-leaved heath, cowberry, crowberry and the rare hybrid bilberry all of which support a good variety of bumblebees, vital components of the ecological chain. In order for this area of moorland to thrive, careful management is required. It is the Trust's intention to continue to nurture this very special site.

Val Riley

N.B. We respectfully request that any dogs visiting the site are kept under close control, untold damage to wildlife can be caused by dogs allowed to run amok.

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JUST A PHASE.....

It would be simple, they said. Dead easy. One day's training and we'd all be ready to whip round our local patch to classify every square metre in the terms of a Phase I Habitat Survey, using the classification system of the Joint Nature Conservancy Committee. So off I went one summer's day to Thorswood to be instructed. We were first given an in-depth tour of the reserve. I thought I knew Thorswood. I thought again! It seems to contain an example of every UK habitat bar the coast. There is woodland (semi-natural or plantation), grassland (acid, neutral, calcareous or improved), water (eutrophic, mesotrophic oligotrophic) ----- do you begin to see the difficulty?

With head spinning I sat on my straw bale in the open-air classroom to learn how to fill in the map. There is a choice of codes to use. In the numerical one, semi-natural broad-leaved woodland is A.1.1.1. A bit dull, that seemed. But in the special colours it becomes Green (as distinct from True Green, or Green *and* True Green, or even Green *over* True Green for other kinds of woodland). This was going to bring out the artist in me!

I spent 2 or 3 full days in my area of Stanley. I pondered over the nature of the grassland, wondered how boring a hedge had to be before counting as species-poor, and puzzled on how to mark boundaries that were mixtures of wall and someone's back garden. I made fascinating discoveries: footpaths unknown to me before and a wonderful piece of access land – a former quarry, glowing with many varieties of heather. In fact, it was really enjoyable. I duly sent in my map to the Wolseley Centre in September, a patchwork of orange and green that any 5 year old would have been proud of. All our efforts will help the Trust to build up a picture of the nature of our local countryside, so as to be in a position to know where effort must be concentrated in the conservation of our wildlife.

Liz Simcock

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