

Halsey Field Chairman's report March 2021

Although activities on Halsey Field have been somewhat curtailed over the past year, mainly due to Covid 19, we have had somewhat of a roller coaster ride of fortunes for the site.

In April, after a very quiet two months on the field due to lockdown, we decided to apply for the CPRE (the Countryside Charity) Hertfordshire Awards. In early July the site was visited by a CPRE representative to see for herself the results of the work we do and in September the Friends were delighted to learn that we had won the environment award. Under normal circumstances we would have been invited to attend an award ceremony in October 2020, but Covid 19 made this impossible, so instead, a short film was made of all the winners in the various categories (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4X4drwgdbDo>). When the present lockdown rules have eased, we will be presented with a certificate.

The Friends held two work parties in July and August, during which the bench was reinstated, vital grass cutting and raking was completed, Dogwood was cut back, and seeds of native chalk-loving plants were planted. However, in September we were informed by Herts County Council that they were no longer insuring people who work on their land, so we would have to find someone else to insure our work parties, or pay for our own insurance. We were advised to contact Countryside Management Services (CMS) to see if they could offer us insurance, and eventually after a few nail-biting months, during which we had an hour long 'Teams' meeting with the head of CMS, then wrote a number of what we hoped would be convincingly persuasive emails, we were informed that CMS was prepared to insure our work parties once one of our members had attended a leadership course and as long as a qualified first aider was present at each work party. When Ciaran, who works for CMS, or CROWS (Countryside and Rights of Way Services) as it is now called, came to look at the site, he was impressed with its varied flora and fauna as well as the standard of our paperwork.

Being a member of the CROWS group will be very advantageous for the Friends of Halsey Field, as we will be able to get up to date advice about the management of the site, and CROWS will be a useful liaison platform between ourselves and HCC. Solicitors at Carter Jonas are now working with HCC to produce a long-term licence, to negate the need for a day letter licence every time we arrange a work party on Halsey Field.

Meantime, we attempted to solve the work party problem by asking the North Chilterns Conservation Volunteers, who have helped us before on Halsey Field, to hold one of their work parties on the site. The Chilterns group has its own insurance, so a day licence for a work party on 25th November was issued by HCC in NCCV's name, but unfortunately this event has had to be postponed due to the second lockdown. We are still hoping that this can take place, once Covid restrictions are eased later this spring.

In spite of Covid 19, a butterfly transect was walked and recorded throughout the spring and summer months. Butterfly numbers were good in the spring with record numbers of Peacock butterflies and good numbers of Brimstone and Orange Tip. During the summer, Small White butterflies did exceptionally well, and Gatekeeper, Small Skipper and Small Copper were numerous, but the Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Common Blue and Brown Argus were significantly down in numbers compared to previous years. Unfortunately, there were no

sightings of Green Hairstreaks this year, but a Purple Hairstreak was seen on the large Bramble Patch on the mown top field, so this species is probably breeding on some of the many Oak trees in the area. The butterfly numbers on Halsey Field in the main reflected the general trend of butterfly numbers throughout Hertfordshire during this year.

In July we held a Moth survey evening on the field, thanks to the Box Moor Trust who kindly lent us a generator and a moth trap, on the understanding that we should restrict the number of people attending the event to six. 58 different species of moth were caught that evening, including 21 new species for the field and some quite rare moths, including a Kentish Black Arches, a Coronet moth and a micro moth *Coleophora conspicuella*, which was the first record of this moth for south-west Hertfordshire. All the moths were released back onto the field at the end of our session.

All ten bird boxes that the scout group kindly made for us last February have now been put up, with the help of one of the scout group leaders and his daughter who is a scout herself and with advice from Steve Lings and Matt Moreton as to where best to site them. Birds have already been seen inspecting the boxes, so we expect the take up will be quite high this spring.

We are currently negotiating moving the barn owl box, as the Oak tree where it is presently sited is a very popular meeting place for the residents of Gadebridge, and this is causing too much disturbance for the owls to nest. We are being advised by John Fisher and Peter Wilkinson about a possible new site and they will help us erect the box once John has recovered from his recent knee operation.

Last month, Fiona Guest our Herts County Councillor suggested that we should bid for a grant this year out of her locality budget. Our bid was approved, and we have already been given £500 to spend on tools and safety equipment for our work parties. We intend to buy another tree popper to help us prevent saplings taking over our meadow areas, and some warning signs and hi-vis jackets. We were also thinking of buying a camera for the site, but last month one of our Facebook followers very kindly offered to donate a trail camera, so that we can set it overnight and try to capture images of creatures we rarely see in the day.

During the next few months, we intend to design a leaflet about Halsey Field to inform visitors about the ecology of the site and explain what the management plan is hoping to achieve.

We are looking forward to a more normal summer on Halsey Field in 2021, with luck!

Thank you for all your support.

Christine Ridley (7.03.2021)