

Millbrook Mead Report, 2017 – 2018

This small area, managed by Benson Nature Group (formerly Benson Ecological Study Team), is located alongside Ewelme Brook south west of the A4074. Part of the site continues to be leased to Mr Ian Burles and his gravel garden, with the remainder divided between a marshy nature reserve, a wildflower meadow and an Hazel Coppice. A clump of giant hogweed was discovered in the marshy area last year and the Parish Council have contracted a company to remove the danger.

The Hazel trees, which were planted in the winter of 2006/7, continue to do well and, this year, a further sixth of them were coppiced and selected poles offered and used for various uses. Last year the Hazel plantation was extended by planting a further 60 trees and a path formed through the Hazels to supplement the existing paths through the wildflower area.

The boardwalk built in 2007 continues to be well used by Benson and Preston Crowmarsh residents but parts continue to show signs of age. A further 5m length was refurbished and the supporting structure was replaced with recycled plastic which should last considerably longer. More of this work remains to be done. WGG again helped with the construction and whilst part of the team was engaged in this, others helped with the hazel coppicing. The pond is badly in need of a thorough clean out, but it is difficult to find a convenient time when the invertebrate and amphibian population will not be damaged.

The large willow tree overhanging the boardwalk remains in a dangerous condition but it is not on Parish land and, although many attempts have been made to contact the owner this has not been successful. Users of the boardwalk should be aware of this and be cautious during high winds.

General maintenance work during the year has included the regular cutting of the paths through the flower meadow. The two allotment areas that were vacated due to a rat problem and incorporated into the wildflower meadow area show signs of improvement but will need attention for some years before they become a fully integrated. The picnic table has been well used during the year and makes an ideal location to sit and enjoy the flowers, wildlife and your sandwiches.

BNG held another “moth breakfast” during the year when numerous moths were caught, identified and released. We plan to repeat this during 2018 so keep your eyes on the Benson Bulletin for details. Marc Botham, a butterfly ecologist with Centre of Ecology and Hydrology, continues to provide great support. Also, in 2017, Millbrook Mead was part of the open garden scheme when many visitors were made aware of this jewel of Benson’s greenspaces.

The area is a real sun trap and as well as a wide variety of native wild flowers it attracts some fairly unusual insects. If you have an interest in our native flora and fauna it is well worth a visit for the flowers, butterflies, dragonflies and other insects.

If anyone is interested or would like to help with the maintenance contact BNG.

Tom Stevenson

Chairman Benson Nature Group, 30 April 2018