

Erica Trust update for Parish Council Meeting April 2024

Our ongoing management tasks are now following a fairly routine pattern. These include cutting and deer fencing another coup of hazel down in the woods and cutting another stretch of gorse along the top roadside. In both these cases the purpose is rejuvenation, not removal. Things that do need permanent removal however have been the exotic conifers seedlings. These are of course trying to make a comeback in the woods and on the heath. In the woods we mostly pull them up whilst carefully avoiding the many native tree seedlings which are also happily regenerating. On the heath we need to control both exotic and native seedlings as the heath needs to remain generally open habitat. Some of the gorse on the heath also has to be permanently removed as nice though it is, it does tend to over stay its welcome. The cattle are another ongoing management tool and fortunately last year they were able to stay for most of the summer using a natural water source. Hard to remember now just how dry it was in the summer of 2022 and the cattle had to leave so quickly for lack of water!

One off operations which have happened, or are about to happen, have been the sad need to fell several large roadside ash because of the worry of ash dieback. Another one off item still on the tick list is the taking down of a few more tall exotic conifers above Chapel Cottage – proving to be something of a challenge to achieve due to the restrictions of timing and access.

Quite a bit of my personal time has been spent on the challenging task of getting all our land into a new Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This has enabled us to get help with a second tranche of rake and burn on what we like to call Starmoor Heath (opposite Mr. Hogger's heath east of the top of The Hollow) as the volume of brash left by those big Monterey Pines was huge. Heathers will return more quickly now. Broadleaved trees are regenerating and being encouraged around the margins. The new Scheme is also going to help us do some work down in the meadow either side of where the footpath from the village crosses the valley. We believe that most of that meadow was treated with herbicide back in the 1980s so apart from in the dips nearer the river, its flora is a bit unexciting. In the late summer we will be creating some scrapes to extend the wet dips and some other scrapes on the higher drier bits, with those scrapes then being seeded with bespoke seed mixes to get back more wildflowers - which in turn will of course make the meadow more interesting for insects and birds. Although we are so lucky that the barn owls already use them so much! We will be careful to work with, and not against, the old water meadow channels.

We so are happy to see our permissive paths being used and enjoyed responsibly. The one going down from the heath into the mid point of the wood has been mown to make it more user friendly. Another operation helped by the new Stewardship Scheme as the mown ride has wildlife benefits too.

The help we get from our local community is always greatly welcomed. Reports of fallen trees, broken fences, sightings of the returning wildlife and so on are always much appreciated.

Lesley Haskins Managing Trustee.

