

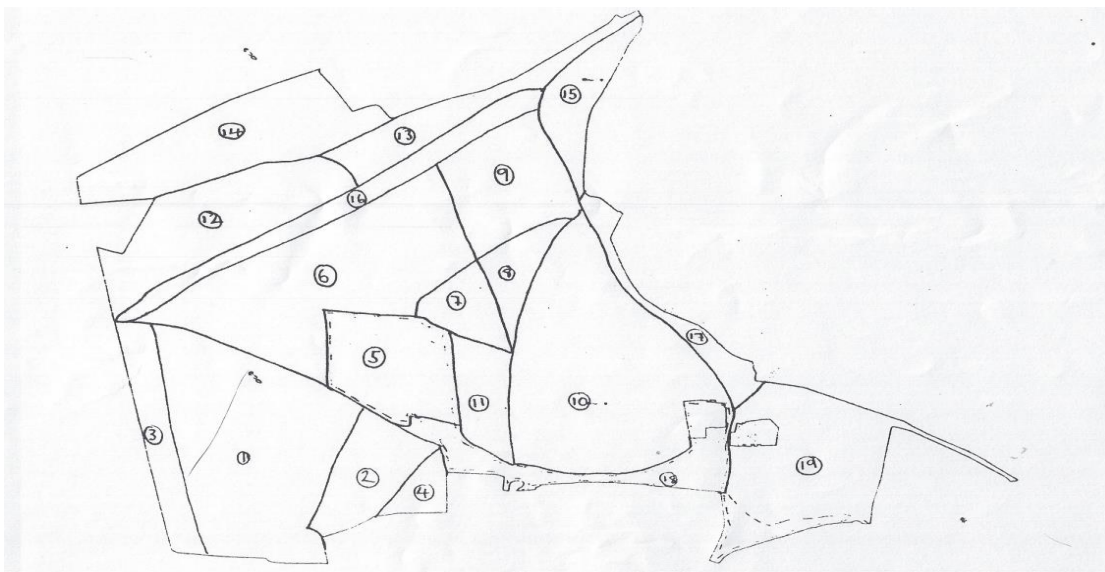
WCLC: 2021 Current Environmental Work 2021

In 2020, The Charity extended its work to include Sandy Lane, Bennett's Copse (approached by the track opposite old Fisher's Garage) and Bennett's Drift (by the new bird hide off Leverett's Lane). To make way for new planting, we cleared piles of old brushings as well as collapsed elms shrouded in ivy. We have tried to do this sensitively, by only clearing patches rather than great swathes. In addition, several self-sown sycamores were felled in Bennett's Copse, as shown below:



The new planting includes some 800 hedge whips as well as oak, wild plum, crab apple, rowan, field maple beech and Scots pine, some of which were transplanted from the Common. Although the new trees will take some years to mature, they are a key part of the long-term management of the landscape for future generations.

This map shows the Common and its 19 compartments, numbered according to vegetation type to assist management under the CSA.



The extracts below for the years 2017-19 are closely based on the summaries in the Charity's annual reports:

2019 Annual Report

The current Countryside Stewardship agreement (CSA) with Natural England commenced in 2019.

The 2019/20 winter work programme on the Common mainly involved clearing old gorse. Some 1.12 hectares (2.77 acres) of gorse was cleared overall.

Work started on the Fen by clearing a block of encroaching scrub. A large birch, which gave off a lot of seed, was felled and a Whitebeam was discovered nearby. The cleared area acts as good transient habitat and reeds have already regenerated on the margin of the Fen.

A stand of old gorse was also cleared by the pavilion and heather seeds sown in its place.



More gorse was cleared to enlarge the firebreak near Gorse Cottage, by the Brick Path in compartment 10, on the south-west corner by the bench as well as between the playing field and the end of Adam's Lane.



The path below was becoming very crowded by tall gorse, so it was cleared as shown.



One of the objectives of our work on the Common is to maintain and enhance diversity of wildlife. In May 2020 there continued to be a good number of Dartford warblers (around 5 to 10 pairs); and we believe the number of breeding woodlark has increased from 1 to 2 pairs. There was also at least one nightingale on the Common, possibly slightly fewer in number than previous years. This reduction appears to be because adjoining habitat has been impacted by housing development and a footpath. On a more positive note, there were more nightjars in 2019 with at least 5 calling males. To have woodlark, nightjar and Dartford warbler in the same place is quite exceptional.

As well as these more notable species, yellowhammer, linnet, blackcap, whitethroat, chiff chaff, mistle thrush, woodpeckers and various other small birds have been spotted on the Common. Adders are also present in good numbers, as are lizards and slow worms. Part of the sandy bank on

the old railway track was cleared and is now home to thread-waisted wasps, a glossy black predator of caterpillars and other insects.

In October 2019, drainage works were carried out on the grazing marshes on the North side of the village, adjacent to the River Blyth. Two dykes were cleared, and shallow channels reinstated in the field. Good conservation practice involves only a limited amount of dyke clearance at any time, so that displaced wildlife can re-locate to undisturbed habitat. Our plan is progressively to clear the dykes on the grazing marshes each autumn.

The total bird species seen from the bird hide off Leverett's Lane has now reached 116 including mandarin duck (both male and female), spoonbill, water rail; and for at least a month in March/April 2019 a glossy ibis which took up residence, departing only for a weekend break to Minsmere at the end of March. Due to Covid-19, the hide has been closed to the public since March 2020. We are monitoring the situation with the RPSB and Suffolk Wildlife Trust and will re-open as soon as it is safe to do so.

2018 Annual Report

The environmental stewardship work undertaken by the Charity was previously governed by an Environmental Stewardship Agreement (ESA) with Natural England which expired in 2018. Natural England undertook an inspection of the Charity's land at the end of that agreement and the Trustees were delighted with the positive feedback they received. This resulted in the Charity agreeing a new Countryside Stewardship agreement (CSA) with Natural England that commenced in January 2019.

Over recent years, the Trustees have taken a bolder approach to the work on Walberswick Common. In the first instance it was very much a leap of faith because the initial clearance of gorse and birch was such a stark contrast to what had been before. However, their faith has been rewarded by re-growth of heather, increased diversity of habitat and the wonderful views across the Common and over to Southwold. Trustees aim to provide a mosaic of vegetation which allows all heathland features to flourish, including pioneer heath and bare ground which benefits rarer invertebrates, birds, reptiles and plants. In 2018 nightjars and nightingales returned to the Common.

In managing this habitat, the aim is to maintain a full range of age classes of European and Western gorse by rotationally cutting the older gorse and treating the stumps. Old woody gorse has little nesting value and can overhang the footpaths. The birch trees are also kept under control as they seed prolifically and would otherwise quickly overwhelm the areas of heather and bare patches.

The fringe of the Fen on Walberswick Common and the slope above it was cleared of old gorse and young birch in 2018. This increased the area of open reed bed on the fen which is an important habitat for a variety of birds. The cleared areas give the chance for interesting plants to grow such as Cambridge Milk Parsley with its characteristic flat umbels of tiny, cream-white flowers.

While the majority of the Charity's environmental stewardship work is focused on the Common, we are also required to manage the grazing marshes adjoining the River Blyth. This area is kept clear by grazing cattle.

In 2018 it was decided no longer to permit wildfowling on the Charity's marshes. This decision was reluctantly made, principally on public safety grounds, after taking account of submissions from wildfowling and community members.

In July 2018, a new bird hide was built in Bennett's Drift. It was dedicated to the memory of local birder Tony Lancaster. This project was part funded by generous donations collected by Pat Lancaster with the Charity making up the balance. As at the end of 2018, a total of 94 species had been seen from the hide including mandarin duck (both male and female), spoonbill and water rail.

2017 Annual Report

The Charity continues to work on the transformation of Walberswick Common. At the end of 2017 we were inspected by Natural England, who provide us with funding under a stewardship agreement. They gave very positive feedback on what has been achieved. The Trustees would like to acknowledge the excellent contribution made by our two principal contractors, Paul Denny and Robert Mortley.