

**HIWWT Winnall Moors, Winchester
Scrub Clearance
Sunday 21st January 2007**



A group of 12 willing volunteers met on a chilly but bright afternoon at 1.30pm at Durgate car park near to the entrance of Winnall Moors wildlife sanctuary. Our task leader for the day was Mark Langford, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT) Reserves Officer for Winnall Moors.

A brief talk was given by Mark on the history of Winnall Moors as a water meadow, the current management programme and the plans for the future (see below). The group, led by Mark, then headed deep into the moors, over very boggy terrain, to the selected site. (It was just as well that children were not permitted this afternoon as the conditions were somewhat hazardous!)

A safety talk was given, and then we split into two teams – Bruce, Martin (no Rosie the springer spaniel this time!), Jeremy, Lizzie and new-comers Mike and Kate, and David G, David F, Nick, Margaret and Clare – working on separate tree clumps (thought to be ash or elder).



Before: site area to be cleared of trees and scrub



Swamp conditions!



... making an impact

Well used to cutting down trees and clearing scrub, the teams set about with vigour and enthusiasm, achieving a great deal by the end of the afternoon. A stop for tea and biscuits ensured we were able to keep going. Tree trunks were stacked in to wood piles later to be used as wildlife habitats.



Round up!



After: one of the sites almost cleared

This was the group's first task at Winnall Moors, for which there was a good turnout. Thanks to all volunteers for their efforts.

There is clearly a great deal of work to be carried out, and arrangements should be made with HIWWT for future tasks, in the spring and on an ongoing basis - a significant opportunity for Worthys Conservation Volunteers.

Bruce Graham

A Brief History of Winnall Moors

Winnall Moors, following the course of the River Itchen, stretches from the heart of Winchester to Headbourne Worthy. It is formally designated an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and cSAC (candidate Special Area of Conservation, under the EU Habitats Directive). Its history as a hydrological, economic and cultural site goes back hundreds of years to the monks of Hyde Abbey, who are thought to have been the first to have farmed the land – and further back to the Romans, who were the first to tame the fast-flowing waters.

In the mid 1600s a new water management system, known as the 'water meadow' system, was introduced to the area, yielding increased productivity and hence prosperity to the area. This extensive development and management, or 'floating', of the floodplain delivered improved vegetation, and subsequent early spring growth of grass for grazing and an early crop of hay.

The extent of the water meadows, together with the long tradition of water mills, continued to characterise the landscape of the floodplain for the next 300 years; the labour-intensive water meadow system only ceasing as an effective agricultural method as recently as the 1930s, notably as a result of the 'mechanical' revolution and intensive use of fertilizers, as is typical of modern farming techniques.

Since the 1930s, the River Itchen continued to flow through the water meadows unabated, and almost untouched, and many of the original structures (sluices, hatches, carriers, channels and drains) are still evident today, albeit in neglected disrepair.

Winnall Moors today, comprising around 42 hectares, does not amount to a functioning water meadow system in any practical sense, but rather has been adopted as a conservation area having significant biodiversity importance. In the 1980s Winnall Moors was designated as a nature reserve, the southern part of which was (and still is) owned by the Winchester City Council and managed by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT). The northern section was farmed as low-intensity grazing by Iris Whitfield and family, and has recently being purchased by HIWWT. The site falls within the Countryside Agency's plan for a South Downs National Park, extending from Winchester to Eastbourne.

As a result of the differing management schemes used over the last 70 years, the Moors have become characterised by rich waters with quite unique habitats for plants and wildlife (see below). It is an important stronghold for otters the return of which in recent years indicates just how special the area is.

It is believed that Winnall Moors will continue to be managed and developed as a sensitive conservation area, whilst also providing benefit to the local community. It is hoped that Worthys Conservation Volunteers as a local conservation group can assist in many different ways.

Bruce Graham

Further reading:

Everard, Mark. 2005. *Water Meadows*.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork/A12506861>

<http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/index.php?section=news:archive&id=1597>



Plant species in Winnall Moors include:

water crowfoot (*Ranunculus spp.*)
lesser water-parsnip (*Berula erecta*)
purple loosestrife (*Lythrum solicaria*)
orange balsam (*Impatiens capensis*)
gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*)
southern marsh orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*)
marsh valerian (*Valeriana dioica*)
bogdean (*Menyanthes trifolium*)
ragged robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*)
marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*)
reed (*Phragmites australis*)
fleapane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*)
meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*)
fen bedstraw (*Galium uliginosum*)
skullcap (*Scutellaria galericulata*)
helleborine (*Epicactis phyllanthus*)

Wildlife species in Winnall Moors include:

tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*)
mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
gadwall (*Anas strepera*)
wigeon (*Anas penelope*)
broad-bodied chaser (*Libellula depressa*)
common darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*)
reed warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)
sedge warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)
redshank (*Tringa tetanus*)
lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)
common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)
roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*)
grass snake (*Natrix natrix*)
common frog (*Rana temporaria*)
common toad (*Bufo bufo*)
otter (*Lutra lutra*)

Source: **Everard**, Mark. 2005. *Water Meadows*