

## **URSWICK TARN ASSOCIATION**

### **Tarn Management Report 15/6/03 -20/4/04**

Although some management continued during the autumn regular work parties started in the first week of November.

It was agreed that initially work parties would be held every Sunday morning-weather permitting.

In the event a remarkable run of fine Sundays allowed some work to be done virtually every weekend up to present

As last year a considerable amount of work has been carried out in the main reed bed.

Felling-cutting to manageable sizes and removing the willows has taken a good deal of time and effort.

Larger branches have again been ferried out and sunk in the centre of the tarn adding 12 sq m to the deep water `reef` (fish refuge) of last year.

Bundles of medium size branches have been ferried to the bay in Postlethwaites meadow to form another `reef-refuge` in the edge of the reeds, smaller branches have been added to the `dead hedge` on the old tip edge.

As work of this nature in a reed bed inevitably results in much trampling of reeds etc the opportunity was taken to carry out other essential work.

A considerable area of invading blackcurrant bushes along with some bramble has been cleared-the resulting branches added to the willow branches on the tip edge to make a `dead hedge` some 40 m long.

At the same time a large quantity of `litter` i.e.-dead-rotting vegetation which if left gradually silts up and dries out the reed bed-was raked out of the cleared areas and the shallow ponds within it to maintain the diverse conditions a variety of flora and fauna requires, in all a surprising 30 barrow loads were removed from that one area.

Also in the main reed bed work began on rejuvenating the old silted up ditch system which is gradually losing its value to wildlife.

A section some 40m in length was cleared of reed roots-leaves and other debris which will improve conditions for toad-newts etc and hopefully allow fish to use the area as a `backwater` as thousands did in the not too distant past.

In the boathouse area it has gradually become clear that despite thinning of willows in previous years shade from the existing willows probably combined with drier conditions is still suppressing the growth of fen type vegetation.

In an effort to improve the situation more of the willows have been cut down and branches taken off others to allow more light in.

While some of the larger trunks still remain to be dealt with many of the branches were added to the existing `reef` in that area making another `refuge` area some 25 m long by 3-4 m wide.

Also in the boathouse area brambles encroaching from the banking into the fen areas have been cut back to the top of the bank allowing the banks ground flora-most obviously primroses-to flourish..

Few people will be unaware of the work carried out on the landing and main section of the Hag-if only because of the numerous bonfires in the area in recent weeks.

On the landing large `tangles` of bramble and felled trees have been cleared leaving islands of bramble as wildlife habitat.

As has already been pointed out by a passerby these `islands` will inevitably thin out losing any value to wildlife and eventually die off-hence the need to allow other `islands` to grow up to replace them.

In addition some 70m of bramble encroaching onto the roadside verge was cut back and the flooded area of road drained.

While retention of scrub-bramble is desirable on parts of the landing the opposite is true of the grassland on the Hag.

Here the wildlife value is in the grassland itself so encroaching brambles etc need to be cut back or eradicated if possible.

An added complication during the last year has been the large number of felled trees lying on the slopes which as they had to be left for so long had started to be colonized by more bramble.

These fallen trees have now been largely cleared-as on the landing the larger pieces have been stacked to one side for firewood the rest burnt, only the stumps and one or two damaged trees remain to be dealt with. Some concern has been expressed recently at the lack of management in this area which is some what disappointing as even before the recent tree clearance more bramble had been cleared and more grass cut-cleared of `thatch` than ever before.

On the higher section of the Hag-some areas of which support a good range of grassland flowers-brambles are slowly taking over much of the slope while the long dead trimmings from a boundary hedge cover some of the top edge, only minimal work has been carried out on this area.

In the Croft the bigger willows growing in the south of the reed bed were cleared and dragged out on to the outer edge of the reed bed where another `barrier-reef` was constructed. This `reef` extends along the whole of the reed edge in that area-is itself some 40m long by 2-3m wide and protects a considerable area of shallow water and reeds behind it.

As well as restricting the destructive feeding activities of geese on the reed beds by reducing access it also deters Cormorants and as such is at present the biggest of the refuge areas for fish large and small on the tarn.

Also in the Croft the line of the seasonal spring some 60m long was cleared of mud-vegetation

Since early November work parties have carried out an impressive 192 hrs or 24 man days of work on the various areas, clearly if the tarns existing diversity is to be maintained and areas where that diversity has declined are to be improved then such management work is essential and the effort put in during recent months is much appreciated

Although much work has been done much still remains in the form of general maintenance-major overhaul and possible projects.

In the main reed bed other sections will need to be cleared and `de littered`, another 160-170m of ditch requires attention-some requires a comprehensive clean out, which will entail a considerable amount of time and effort.

On the landing `rotation` of bramble needs to be continued-some judicious coppicing is needed in the main tree-scrub belt as well as the usual `maintenance` work

On the main Hag more areas of grass require cutting plus general cutting back of bramble. On the high section of the Hag it is clear that if the grassland is to be maintained then time will have to be found to do major clearance of bramble etc.

In the Croft the `boat` area again requires some `sludge clearance both for aesthetic and environmental reasons (i.e. maintaining the gravel area) and approx 30m of ditch along the boundary needs opening up and clearing out again.

On the tarn itself the fish `refuge` areas which now cover a considerable area need to be maintained if possible.

## **PROJECTS**

A number of idea's to improve the tarn are worth considering.

Experimental planting of crack willow branches which can grow roots in water has been carried out in one small area-if these survive they could be planted on a larger scale to supplement the dead branch refuges in the shallows.

In the croft more water could be let into the area to provide both wetter conditions for wildlife-plants in general and a `backwater` for fish in particular.

In the boathouse area similar work could be done to improve conditions for reed growth and increase the shallow water in an area where fish have been observed exhibiting spawning behaviour.

