

# The Fairfield Association

## Arable Field Review, including Wild Flower Margins

### Background

The approximately 6.5 ha field had been intensively grazed by sheep for many years until its acquisition in 2013. It is covered by the NE HLS scheme until 2021. It has been planted with an arable crop on a no-cost basis by a local farmer, Neil Sutcliffe, who has experience of HLS schemes. The crop (a wheat-oat hybrid) is sown in spring, following spreading of manure and sometimes lime; there is a minimal application of pesticide and herbicide and it is harvested such that it leaves residual seeds for birds during the winter. Some lynchets are left uncultivated as "beetle banks" and strips around the field have been planted with wildflower seeds \* In the NE corner there are beehives, tended by their owner, a Fairfield volunteer. The field has been researched by metal detectorists and by an archaeologist.

The area between the crop and Aldcliffe Road includes a bank which has a sizeable population of short-tailed voles and a long, low, wet area in which we have dragged out two scrapes. The scrapes attract visits by, among others, ducks (mainly from the canal) and otters, also from the canal. A concrete structure is thought to be the remains of a platform for a pump originally used to take water to a reservoir on the Aldcliffe Hall Estate

### Progress

- The annual contract with the arable farmer has worked well and we hope to extend it, possibly to cover the length of the present NE agreement.
- Wild Bird Seed Margins and stubble have produced ample seeds for overwintering birds and used by redwing, fieldfare and linnets, but not target species grey partridge or tree sparrow
- Grey partridge and lapwing have been seen. Lapwing and oyster catcher and possibly grey partridge bred in 2014, oyster catcher in 2015
- Brown hare (3) are seen regularly
- Floristically enhanced grass margins (see map), except for the east side, have met targets for broadleaved species such as ox-eye daisy and plantain but grasses such as red fescue are below target. Undesirables are within the target though thistle, dock and nettles are present

### Issues

- In 2015-2016 the extremely mild weather affected numbers and pattern of migration, so fewer winter visitors have been seen
- In 2015 lapwing probably nested but did not raise young. No evidence of partridge nesting or of tree sparrows
- We need two cuts of the margins, after July 15<sup>th</sup> and after August 31<sup>st</sup>.
- Lack of success of flower development in the eastern margin
- We have no monitoring regime for butterflies though four species were recorded in the bioblitz (an FA member has reported 10 species in the reserve as a whole)
- The bee-friendly margin did not regenerate
- The area in between Pony Wood and the crop, on the western edge of Pony Wood and under the trees has become rank.

- The planned footpath from the 'Long Pads', around Pony Wood, to Aldcliffe Rd will reduce the crop area a little (and our HLS grant) and potentially impact on the wildlife.
- We need to continue to check on the ability of the scrapes near Aldcliffe Road to hold sufficient water.
- The insects and small mammals need to be encouraged as much as possible (a) in their own interests and (b) because they act as food sources for a range of animal and birdlife.

### Threats

Egg collectors, predation by crows, magpies, raptors, and foxes and potentially more disturbance with the creation of the new footpath

### \* **Flora Field Wild Flower Mixes, Spring 2015**

#### **A. HE10 Mix 0.29ha, ( 0.26ha required by NE)**

##### **% Variety**

##### **Grass**

20 crested dogstail  
 20 small-leaved timothy  
 20 smooth meadow-grass  
 10 red fescue  
 10 common bent

##### **UK native wildflowers**

5 black knapweed  
 2 yarrow  
 5 ox-eye daisy  
 6 ribwort plantain  
 2 red clover

#### **B. Storton Annual Mix (i.e. bird-friendly) 0.208ha, (0.2ha required by NE)**

##### **% Variety**

15 K48a spring triticale  
 10 K21c poacher white millet  
 5 K14 fodder radish  
 40 Kings spring barley  
 20 Kings spring wheat  
 5 KGOP gold of pleasure  
 5 K23 mustard

#### **C. Bee-friendly Mix**

Birdsfoot Trefoil Borage Phacelia .Red Clover

