

The Erica Trust

Since our last report to the Council meeting in 2019, when we had only just achieved most of the first heathland restoration phase, we have now completed the second old broadleaved woodland restoration phase as well. That is to say we have now pretty much finished the two pronged job we set out to achieve.

In the second phase we were very challenged by the fact that no sooner did the contractors return to site than the rain started and went on, and on. So much so that we felt best to call a halt early the first year, even though it meant leaving the job unfinished, and having to return the following autumn. And that was as wet as the last. But we have now done our worst and nature is starting the healing process. The lines of brash left on the steep slopes, although a bit unsightly for now, saved a lot of burning and smoke production and are doing their job of reducing water movement. They will decompose surprisingly rapidly. With many of the retained broadleaves being so tall and thin, there has been loss to wind blow and these will also decompose naturally. So we will have no trouble in meeting the Forestry Commissions requirement for standing and fallen dead wood! The essential objective of keeping enough broadleaves to provide a prolific seed source and letting in enough light for those seeds to regenerate freely has been achieved.

We have been rewarded in two main ways -

Nightjars appeared as soon as the heath did - in the summer of 2019. We also now have woodlark, and tree pipits (both heathland specialists despite the name) joining them. And the less mobile species are following in their wake. Down in the woods the bluebells have been stunning this year, and the coppiced hazel, safe behind its deer excluding fencing, is also

responding dramatically in response to the new light levels. Invertebrates and dormice (the latter confirmed as present last spring), will benefit along with the flora.

Humans also seem to be enjoying the light. I have been so uplifted by the many comments of support from locals and visitors alike, using not just the original rights of way, but the permissive paths we have been able to open up to provide a range of long and short routes going through both heath and woodland landscapes. The latest permissive path goes through the fence put in to contain the cattle which will be grazing during the summer on the western heathland area only. Very recently I met a lady who told me she had long ago stopped coming to these woods because of the gloom and expressed delight in the change. So despite the challenges for us, the contractors, and not least the parishioners as the 'users' of the land in such a state of flux, we have now got to the much anticipated stage when we can all relax a bit and enjoy a lot.

Lesley Haskins Trustee