ACLE LANDS TRUST: CHAIRMAN’S REPORT 2019

I am pleased to report on a year of considerable activity managing our Trust Lands for wildlife and the local community. Here is my summary of the year’s work and challenges:

In **DAMGATE WOOD** we maintained the footpath, adding granite chippings as necessary, controlling vegetation and removing parts of trees identified from our regular safety inspections as problematic.

Recently discovered encroachments into the wood from some neighbouring properties were all removed, amicably and to the general satisfaction of all parties. Resulting remedial work included BVCG (Bure Valley Conservation Group) volunteers clearing away a large accumulation of household rubbish, and burning garden refuse and alien vegetation *in situ*. The natural habitat is now in a much healthier state.

Late last summer we became aware of several plants of the noxious Japanese Knotweed growing in a confined area. We began eradication at once, and it’s expected to take two or three seasons of work to get rid of it.

As a precaution, we have employed a tree surgeon to fell several fast-growing tall willows which could have posed a threat to adjoining properties were they to be dislodged during an exceptional storm.

Last summer our benches and waste bin areas were targeted by vandals. I am pleased to report that this ceased following action by our local police.

We are aware of two concerns which will need addressing in coming years. The one is the looming effect of Ash die-back disease. Some very large Ash trees beside the path are affected. The second is anecdotal evidence that the wood is less wet than it used to be. If it dries out, the habitat will succeed to less desirable dry woodland. We will liaise closely with Natural England and other professional conservation bodies over any actions needed to meet these issues.

**ROMAN WOOD** is where our volunteers’ were able to help us most. BVCG and NWT work parties devoted multiple man-hours to several tasks.

In August we scythe-mowed and raked the wildflower meadow, repeating the operation in September, followed by a rotary-mow to further reduce nutrient levels in the soil. All cuttings were removed.

This winter we trimmed and added binders to the roadside hedge. Our woodland thinning operations were directed at allowing more light around particular trees, and we also planted some understory wild flowers. At the edge of the meadow we opened up some sheltered grassy channels into the scrub.

We held an open day in May, jointly with NWT, but unfortunately on this occasion the public response did not really justify the efforts involved.

We used our new rotary attachment to our mower to cut the paths in summer, and our new “chipper” attachment to produced chippings from the Hazel which we spread on muddy sections of the paths in November. The dry conditions that followed rendered it unnecessary to extend this. Our paths provide a vital amenity for the many dog-walkers who use them every day.

In **CONSTABLE DOLES**, control of invasive willow saplings is a routine job we do in winter to preserve the SSSI fen flora. We remain able, at present, to provide important low-density grazing during summer with our own “in house” small herd of cows, but last summer it was financially challenging for those of our Trustees who are personally responsible (as it was for all graziers).

In July, as well as cutting back thistles, we now do some mowing and raking up to reduce the proportion of soft rush on the site. This is necessary to achieve our aim to raise the condition of this Site of Special Scientific Interest from the second highest category of “unfavourable recovering” to the highest category of “favourable”.

Natural England’s own elaborate plans to improve water quality and retention on this particular SSSI are currently stalled at the implementation stage due to lack of funds.

**WEAVERS WAY**. This was our first year since we took over responsibility for mowing and keeping this public way passable around Acle. We purchased a new reed-trimming brush-cutter to facilitate this. Helped by a dry summer, we met our new obligation without difficulty. The County Council was impressed because they received no complaints from the public for the first time in several years!

The benefit to wildlife of our work is evident from our **BIOLOGICAL SURVEY RESULTS**, especially the insect life and flora. Our Inventory of Biodiversityaccumulates data continuously. It’s a comprehensive scientific record that is seen by few people, and we propose to include a presentation of this work at next year’s AGM. Our thanks to Tim Hodge for kindly keeping it updated on our behalf, and to the specialist naturalists who contribute their records.

I **THANK** all those who have helped us this past year. The **PARISH COUNCIL** is always supportive of our cause. Our volunteer work groups **BVCG** & **NWT TRINITY BROADS** are key to our success. Their energies have kept us on top of our management objectives for the year.

I thank my fellow **TRUSTEES** who are always generous with their time and respond quickly whenever things need to be done. We all find it rewarding to see positive results after another year.

*Nigel Robson*