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**30 June 2020**

**Report of Biodiversity Management Activity**

**May /June 2020 at The Centenary Glade, Queens Wood HR8**

**Ragwort Control and Cinnabar Moths**

Dymock Forest Rural Action (DyFRA) in partnership with Forestry England maintains a watching brief on the emergent wildflower species at *The Centenary Glade*, Queens Wood HR8.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, our regular cadre of volunteers have not been able to perform conservation management tasks under the guidance of Dave Sykes, (West of England Beat Forester), Kate Wollen (Assistant Ecologist) and Larissa Lingham (Community Ranger).

In 2019 The Glade was cleared of bramble along its central (6m) ride and seeded with fine grass mix (see attached spec: Green Farm, Newent). Germination was poor due to the excessive rainfall of the winter followed by the drought since Covid-19 lockdown at the site on 14 March 2020.

**Executive Summary**

**Context**

June 2019: A botanic survey revealed a 20 sq.m. area of Wood Groundsel (*Senecio sylvatica* ) near #6 on the map attached.

22 May 2020 – DyFRA surveyed two 50 metre botanic transects – diagonally across the site, to record all species present within a 500mm width of the line. The objective was to provide base datum of species present between the bordering, 10m high ‘pyjama stripes’ of planted oak and birch regrowth.

This revealed two specific areas of emergent Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea)* at the Spiral Maze (#3 on the map) and the lower cleared slop (between #5 and #6) amongst a considerable population of marsh thistle *(Circium palustre).* The groundsel had yet to appear.

**Concern**

Although not a notifiable toxin in Forestry lands, the >150m proximity of this ragwort to neighbouring farmland was recognised to be a potential hazard for livestock grazing, and hay production; if not this year, potentially in the near future with its rapid invasion of *cleared land* in the near future. ( A “ruderal” plant species)

The Centenary Glade objective is to increase biodiversity through a regime of woodland coppice production, and to specifically encourage habitat management to benefit butterfly and moth populations. Ragwort is the specific food plant of Cinnabar Moth (*Tyria Jacobaeae*) a BAP ‘priority species’. (BAP = *Defra, Biological Action Plan*)

**Action**

This document describes the research conducted in consultation with FE, landowners, and ecologists to inform the immediate action taken by DyFRA and Forestry England partnership.

* Establish communication channels between ‘stakeholders’ incl. Parish Councils, as stated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between FE and DyFRA. Local liaison by DyFRA personnel
* Covid-19 lockdown of volunteers required action by FE staff, and sub-contractors.
* Risk Assessment for Covid-19 distancing, PPE for handling toxic plant material
* Pulling the entire plant, bagging and removing off site
* Strimming all plants in the dense area (# 5/6 amongst marsh thistle, raking and restrim)
* Off-site incineration of the plant arisings – 3Nº large builders’ bags of plants.
* Return to pull later-flowering specimens – along the Oak compartment to the southern perimeter of the Glade ride. (beyond the last ‘pyjama strip’ rack)
* Maintain a 2020 mowing regime at the #6 location
* Introduce black/gold Cinnabar caterpillars to the Groundsel area – as a longer term biological control of satellite ragwort in subsequent years.
* All the measures employed are legislated for as best practice for conservation management of an ancient woodland habitat.  The option of using pesticide is therefore forbidden.

This initial work was completed by 29 June, with the gratefully acknowledged assistance of the adjacent landowner, farmers and their families and the FE subcontractor.

We expect a secondary flush of ragwort in later summer, as a consequence of climate warming.

Most ragwort plants will be pulled on this occasion, although the lower area will continue to be mowed shorter to encourage other species to establish, cover the area of bare ground, and potentially extend the groundsel (an annual) as a less common woodland species of biodiverse value.

All species will be liable to succession, and it is the further objective of this Community Woodland project to react to such evolution, whist focusing on the value of carbon sequestration contributing to the Climate Emergency policy of the District Councils, and as an exemplar site for the Dymock Forest parishes.

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