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rev. 1. Final

Report of Biodiversity Management Activity

May /July 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 the 2018 disturbed soil of a central (6m x 250m) ride. The area was seeded with a fine grass mix in October 2019. 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.

By May 2020 two discrete patches (c.20sq.m. each, see map) of Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) emerged. As a specified weed under the Weeds Act 1959 its control was addressed, as reported in the former draft of this document (30.6.20)

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.

Concern

The specific risk assessment in Defra's "Code of Practice How to Prevent the Spread of Ragwort" (PB 9840 /2007) a 55 page document, states:

Assessing the Risk Posed by Ragwort

12) Where land is affected by ragwort the owner/occupier should make an assessment to determine whether action should be taken to prevent the spread of ragwort to neighbouring land by establishing the risk posed to grazing animals or forage production

13) The following three risk categories are provided as **guidelines** for assessing risk:

High Risk: Ragwort is present and flowering/seeding within 50m of land used for grazing by horses and other animals or land used for feed/forage production

Medium Risk: Ragwort is present within 50m to 100m of land used for grazing by horses and other animals or land used for feed/forage production

Low Risk : Ragwort or the land on which it is present is more than 100m from land used for grazing by horses and other animals or land used for feed/forage production.

The distances given above are **guidelines only** and when assessing risk, account should also be taken of particular local circumstances and other relevant factors such as prevailing winds, topography, shelter belts, natural barriers, soil type and vegetation cover of receiving land.

Whether or not the density of ragwort is high or low, the risk factor will be determined by the likelihood of it spreading to land used for grazing and/or feed/forage production.

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

The June 2020 document described the research conducted in consultation with FE, landowners, and ecologists to inform the immediate action taken by DyFRA and Forestry England partnership.

- Maintain 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 continues at this date
- 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 areas
- Off-site incineration of the plant arisings
- Return to pull later-flowering specimens – in the central ride

- Introduction of Cinnabar caterpillars to the Groundsel area – as a longer term biological balance of ragwort in subsequent years.
- All the measures employed are legislated for as best practice for conservation management of an ancient woodland habitat. (F.E., GCC, FODDC, Natural England and Defra) The option of using pesticide is forbidden.
- **July 2020. (rev 1 29.7.20)**

A further survey (attached) was undertaken to evaluate the risk zones (50,100, 150m) from the two epicentre sites of Ragwort germination.

FE ecologists have further reviewed the biodiversity objectives, and confirm that the cinnabar moth is a declining species in closed canopy woodland. Their advice is that sufficient individual plants of common ragwort, and woody groundsel should be encouraged as species of disturbed ground. Forestry England is confident that the risk from these plants seeding 100m and more from neighbouring farmland, and shielded by mature forest habitat with dense bramble to the west, has now been mitigated.

We expect a secondary flush in later summer at the two epicentre sites of ragwort, as a consequence of climate warming. These will be hand pulled, and a We will continue to monitor the species and succession at the Centenary Glade, specifically along the central ride of disturbed soil.

All species will be liable to succession, and it is the further objective of this Community Woodland project to react to such evolution, whilst 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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