

Wimbledon and Putney Commons
Annual Conservation Report 2021/22



Woodland adjacent to Robin Hood Ride: photographed during February 2022

Summary

Introduction - The Annual Conservation Report for 2021/22 provides a summary of the conservation, volunteering and public engagement activities that have taken place on the Commons from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. (Page 4)

Heathland Management – The origins of heathland can be traced back approximately 7,000 years to a period of time when large herbivores roamed across what is now north-west Europe. (Page 6)

Heathland Management – The Wimbledon Common Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) covers 364.5 hectares out of the Commons' total area of 461 hectares and in 1986, the same area was also designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). (Page 7)

Heathland Management – At the current time, management of the Commons' is carried out under the guidance of a five-year Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship agreement with natural England (Page 8).

Heathland Management – From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, heathland management on the Commons included the coppicing of semi-mature trees, the control of invasive scrub, heather restoration, heather cutting, the maintenance of fire breaks and bracken bruising. (Pages 9-12)

Heathland Management – Condition assessment of the Commons' heathland (Page 13)

Heathland Management – The future management of the Commons heathland (Page 14)

Grassland Management – There are approximately 36 separate parcels of grassland on Wimbledon and Putney Commons and there is a wide range of uses for which these areas are managed. (Page 15)

Grassland Management – To help improve the management of grassland on the Commons, during 2021, it was agreed by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators that during 2022, five additional areas of grassland on the Commons would be managed through a programme of cut and collect. (Page 16)

Grassland Management – During 2021, six areas of grassland were managed by the Commons' Maintenance Team through a programme of cut and collect. (Page 17)

Woodland Management – The woodland on Wimbledon and Putney Commons covers an area of approximately 291 hectares and it is the largest habitat type found on the Commons. (Page 19)

Woodland Management – As part of the Commons involvement with the Forestry Commission's Countryside Stewardship agreement, from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, nine different areas of woodland management were carried out on the Commons. (Page 20-24)

Pond Management – There are nine ponds on Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath, each requiring their own specific management objectives. (Page 25)

Pond Management – Disturbance at the Commons Ponds (Page 26)

Beverley Brook – The Beverley Brook is the only riverine habitat on the Commons with sections passing through Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common. (Page 28)

Restoration of Valley Mires – On Wimbledon Common there are three valley mire systems which include Farm bog, Stag bog and Ravine bog. (Page 29)

Management of invasive non-native species – From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, the management of non-native invasive species included the control of Oak Processionary Moth, Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam. (Page 30-32)

Putney Lower Common – From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 work on Putney Lower Common included litter picking, grass cutting, tree safety work, upholding the Commons' bye-laws and working closely with local schools and organisations. (Page 33)

Volunteering on the Commons – Accompanying the gradual relaxation of the UK's COVID-19 restrictions during spring 2021, from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, volunteers provided a total of 5,489 voluntary hours to help look after the Commons. (Pages 34-38)

London in Bloom – During 2021, Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common were both presented with a Gold Award at the annual London in Bloom event. (Page 39)

Land Management Plan – Since the middle of 2021, work has been carried out to produce a Land Management Plan that will help to guide the management of the Commons natural and semi-natural habitats over the course of the next five years. (Page 40)

References – (Page 40)

Wimbledon and Putney Commons

Annual Conservation Report 2021/22

Introduction:

Looking back over the previous Annual Conservation Report which covered the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, there are multiple references to the immense pressure that was brought to the Commons through the arrival of COVID-19. While the Commons played a vital role in providing visitors with a free and accessible open space on which to exercise and recuperate during a period when most other facilities had been temporarily shut, there were however certain negative implications that accompanied the increased popularity of the Commons as a visitor destination. These included a great deal of 'wear and tear' to many of the Commons' footpaths and open habitats such as grassland and heathland, disturbance to wildlife, a significant number of unauthorized fires and a dramatic increase in the volume of litter that was left behind by visitors to the Commons.

With staff resources stretched to the limit and the availability of volunteers often severely reduced by the requirements of social distancing, unfortunately, between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, certain areas of routine management unavoidably received less attention than would normally have been the case. As social distancing measures in England were eased in April 2021, work on the Commons gradually returned to 'normal' and while the problem of large amounts of litter on the Commons has remained, staff and volunteers have once again been allowed to focus on the wide range of issues that are required to conserve this very important area of natural beauty.

As always, the Commons' Annual Conservation Report provides a summary of the conservation, volunteering and public engagement activities that have taken place on the Commons over the past year.

This year's report is however particularly special as it not only provides details about much of the work that has been carried out on site, but it is also a celebration of the huge effort that has been provided by staff and volunteers to ensure the Commons have been returned to 'good health' after the immense disruptions of the previous year.



Damage to grassland and fly-tips on the Commons were among the many pressures faced by the Commons during the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

Heathland Management:



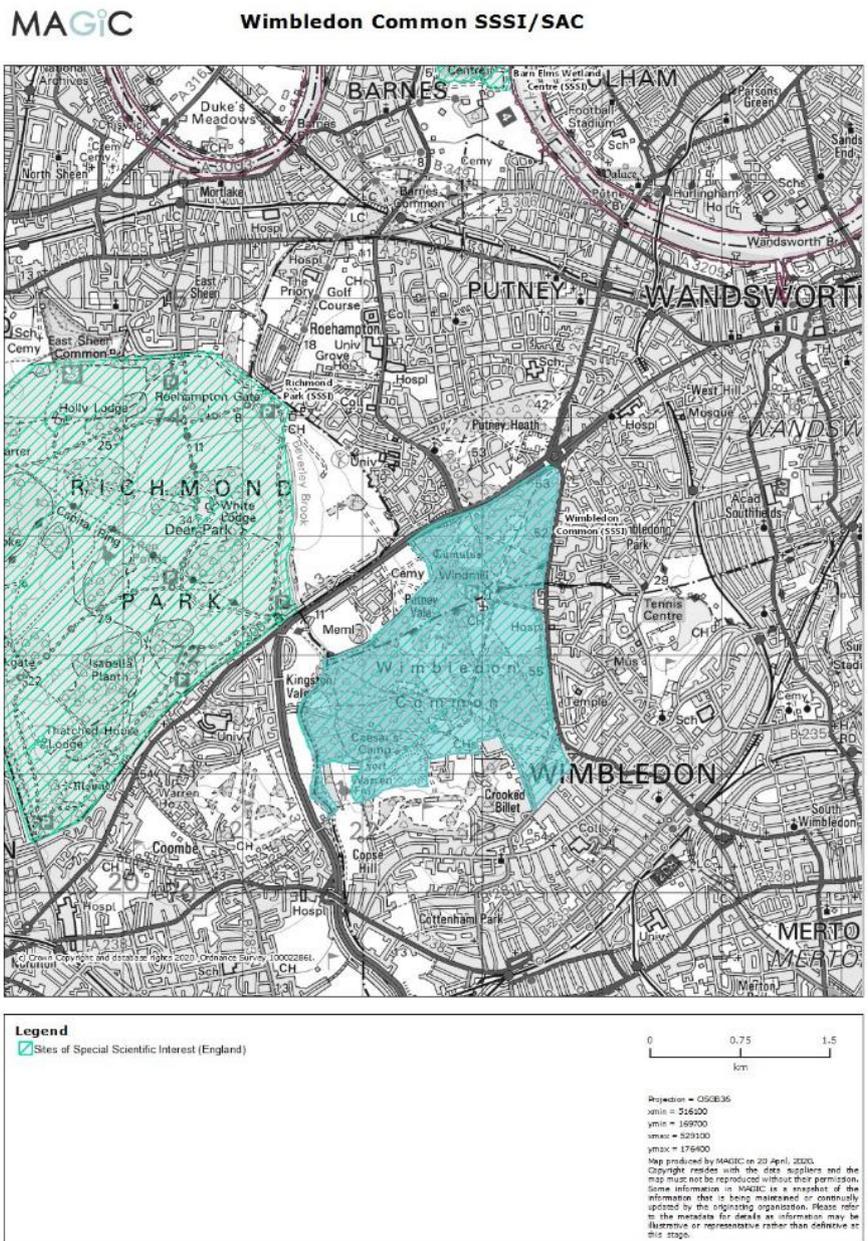
The origins of heathland can be traced back approximately 7,000 years to a period of history when large wild herbivores began to roam across what is now north-west Europe. Throughout Britain's pre-industrial history, heathlands were found in many areas of the British Isles, with their distribution being a result of environmental factors such as climate, geology, soil type and subsequently through the results of human design. Through a combination of historical factors which have included agricultural intensification, afforestation, urbanisation and the decline in traditional management techniques, the extent of heathland in the UK has, over the past 200 years, been dramatically reduced to only 16% of the coverage that was found during the 1800's.

Often located on the edge of urban settlements, in the past, heathland was a common landscape feature around the London area. Currently, there are only 80 hectares of this habitat remaining on fragmented sites around London with the largest single expanse of heathland found on Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath (20 hectares). Lowland heathland is an internationally important landscape which is listed as a priority habitat for conservation in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

In Britain, a large proportion of heathlands have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This designation is awarded to areas of special interest due to their fauna, flora, geological or physiological features and as a result, certain activities are prohibited and there are strict legal duties concerning how these areas should be managed and protected.

While the original SSSI designation for Wimbledon Common was awarded in 1953, the Commons were re-designated in 1986 and with Natural England’s guidance, it is from the designation of this date that management of the Wimbledon Common SSSI has been carried out during recent years.

The Wimbledon Common SSSI covers 364.5 hectares out of the Commons’ total area of 461 hectares and in 1986, the same area was also designated as a Special Area of Conservation for the qualifying features of North Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*, European dry heaths and the presence of Stag beetles.



The Wimbledon and Putney Commons SSSI/SAC includes all of the land apart from the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields that is registered to the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators and is located south of the A3 trunk road. Part of the same Wimbledon Common SSSI/SAC also extends into an area of ground that forms part of the Royal Wimbledon Golf Course.

At the current time, management of the Commons' heathland is carried out under the prescriptions of a five-year Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship agreement with Natural England. According to Natural England, if successful, management under the guidance of the countryside stewardship agreement will result in 'heathland areas with a diverse mosaic structure, including undisturbed bare ground and vegetation in all stages of its life cycle'.

At the operational level, management under the prescriptions of the Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship agreement have included the following operational objectives:

- There should be no loss of heathland which should cover between 50% and 70% of the identified areas of the Commons.
- Restoration of Lowland heathland on degraded sites dominated by scrub and grass.
- Reduce accumulated nutrients and expose heather seed bank.
- Removal of invasive trees from heathland sites to achieve a maximum cover of between 15% and 20%.
- Develop a heather and gorse mosaic of age and structure through all four stages of growth to promote wildlife diversity.
- Collect heather seed in October from existing stands for use both on site and on request from other heathland sites.
- Control Purple moor grass.
- Control pernicious weeds such as creeping thistle, common ragwort and hogweed.
- Control of bracken where it threatens flora.
- Control water loss from wet heath by blocking drainage channels
- Maintain fire breaks.

Heathland Management operations from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022:

From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, heathland management on the Commons included the coppicing of semi-mature invasive trees on two heathland sites, the control of scrub on five heathland sites, heather restoration on three sites, heather cutting on two sites, the maintenance of fire breaks across all areas of heathland and bracken bruising on all areas of heathland where bracken had become a problem.

Control and management of invasive trees:

Invasive trees such as silver birch and turkey oak are controlled on the Commons' heathland to maintain open areas, prevent succession to woodland and in some areas, to improve the structural diversity of the woodland edge. During autumn 2021, invasive trees were felled on heathland next to Tibbet's Meadow on Putney Heath and along a section of heathland that is adjacent to the northern area of Green Ride on Wimbledon Common. In both areas, the initial clearance of low growing scrub was carried out by various groups of volunteers. This activity was particularly helpful as it provided the necessary space for the Commons' Maintenance Team to focus on the clearance of larger trees. As with all heathland tree and scrub clearance, follow up work involved the creation of log piles, the use of some of the brash (cut saplings) for dead hedging and the chipping of all other cut materials.



Heathland adjacent to Tibbet's Meadow – photographed in November 2021

Scrub bashing:

Scrub bashing involves cutting back and stacking invasive saplings on the heathland ready for chipping or subsequent use by the Commons' Maintenance Team. This work is carried out on a regular basis by the Commons' weekend volunteer scrub bashing group, local school parties and the occasional local community group. As with the management of larger invasive trees on the heathland, this work is carried out to prevent woodland succession from occurring on the heathland.

Unfortunately, as a result of the social distancing measures that accompanied COVID-19 during much of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, volunteer scrub bashing on the heathland was significantly reduced during this time and aided by a wet and warm summer during 2021, young trees and old coppice grew at an incredible rate across all areas of the heathland.

With the gradual ease of lockdown restriction occurring in April 2021, volunteering on the heathland soon returned to pre-restriction levels and from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, volunteers helped to clear scrub on five main areas of the Commons.

These areas included:

- Heathland adjacent to the northern section of Green Ride.
- Heathland adjacent to Memorial Ride.
- Heathland adjacent to Roehampton Ride.
- Heathland to the north-west of the junction with Ladies Mile and Inner Park Ride.
- Heathland adjacent to Tibbet's Meadow.



Volunteer scrub bashing areas on Putney heath from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022



Volunteer scrub bashing areas on Wimbledon Common from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

Heather restoration:

During autumn 2021, a programme of heather restoration was carried out on three areas of ground that are located close to the edge of the Wimbledon Common Golf Course. These areas are located close to Caesar's Well, the upper section of Gravelly Ride and the Birches Fairway.

Having selected three suitable restoration sites, the Commons' Maintenance Team removed the top layer of vegetation to reveal the bare ground beneath. Following this, mature heather that had recently been cut from two areas on Putney Heath was then transported to each location and spread across all three areas of bare ground. As this work was carried out during the autumn period, the cut heather was accompanied by a huge amount of heather seed which, when germinated, should help to produce a thick growth of heather within each of the three selected areas. It should be noted however that heather germination can take up to four years to complete and therefore young plants may not be on display for a few more years to come.

After allowing the seed on all three sites to be gradually pushed into the ground by visitor footfall, the final part of this project was to surround each of the three areas with temporary fencing to ensure that new heather shoots are protected from trampling and from rabbit grazing. While the accumulated seeds that were collected from the heather cutting on Putney Heath were put to very good use, the periodic cutting of mature heather on the heathland is something that we have undertaken for many years as this operation helps to promote age diversity in heather and also removes unwanted nutrients from entering the ground.

Although heather is quite a hardy plant, without use of the correct equipment, cutting can sometimes result in serious damage being inflicted to plants which can sometimes kill them. For the work that was undertaken during autumn 2021, a specialist piece of equipment was kindly loaned to the Commons by the team at the

Royal Wimbledon Golf Club and therefore a huge amount of thanks is owed to them for their help in ensuring this task was carried out correctly.



Heather cutting on Putney Heath: autumn 2021



The Commons' Maintenance Team preparing the ground at one of the three heather restoration sites.

Condition assessment of the Commons' heathland:

Approximately every six years, all SSSI land is assessed against the six conditions that are listed below. All SSSI sites are divided into units (although some sites may only have one unit). Each unit is then assessed separately and this can often result in a mixture of 'Favourable, Unfavourable and Destroyed units across one SSSI. At the current time, the heathland on Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath is classed as unfavourable recovering.

Condition assessments for SSSI's

Favourable - The SSSI is being adequately conserved and is meeting its 'objectives'.

Unfavourable recovering - Often known simply as 'recovering', SSSI units are not yet fully conserved but all the necessary management measures are in place. Provided that the recovery work is sustained, the SSSI will reach favourable condition in time.

Unfavourable no change - The special interest of the SSSI unit is not being conserved and will not reach favourable condition unless there are changes to the site management or external pressures. The longer the SSSI unit remains in this poor condition, the more difficult it will be, in general, to achieve recovery.

Unfavourable declining - The special interest of the SSSI unit is not being conserved and will not reach favourable condition unless there are changes to site management or external pressures. The site condition is becoming progressively worse.

Part destroyed - Lasting damage has occurred to part of the special conservation interest of a SSSI unit, such that it has been irretrievably lost and will never recover. Conservation work may be needed on the residual interest of the land.

Destroyed - Lasting damage has occurred to all the special conservation interest of the SSSI unit, such that it has been irretrievably lost. This land will never recover.

Information taken from Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – condition assessment for SSSI's

The future management of the Commons' heathland:

While still under some discussion, as we are coming towards the end of our current CS agreement with Natural England for the management of heathland and acid grassland, one potential route that has been advocated by Natural England is for the Commons to follow a CS mirror agreement.

CS mirror agreements have been offered to land-owners and managers where the existing agreement already delivers the environmental outcomes expected. The duration of the CS mirror agreement will last for a period of five years and following this, it is anticipated that the next phase of heathland management will be carried out under the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme. Under the ELM, there will be three new schemes from which the Landscape Recovery scheme may be best designed to meet the Commons requirements. The Landscape Recovery scheme will support landscape and ecosystem recovery through long-term projects, such as restoring wilder landscapes in places where it is considered appropriate, large scale tree planting and peatland restoration. The Landscape Recovery scheme will begin piloting approximately 10 projects in 2022 and it is anticipated that it will then launch in all areas by 2024.

Under the guidance of Natural England, up to the present date, the management of the Commons' heathland has followed a selective return to heathland in areas that have suffered from the encroachment of invasive trees. Our restoration of heathland on the Commons has remained mindful that this should not lead to the damage of other habitats such as established areas of woodland or grassland which now make up and support the SSSI's habitat mosaic. Where large trees are removed, this will be through the result of planned and selective thinning that will help to promote different age ranges and structures on site.



Heathland scrub bashing will continue to form an important part of any future heathland management programme on the Commons.

Grassland Management:

There are approximately 36 separate parcels of grassland on Wimbledon and Putney Commons and there is a wide range of uses for which these areas are managed. These uses include sports fields, cricket pitches, a golf course, fairground sites and areas of general amenity. Where areas of grassland do not fit into any of these categories, they are either managed as grassland meadows or as road-side verges.

While grassland on the Commons is not managed specifically for the hay which is produced, the techniques that are increasingly being employed on the Commons closely mimic those which have always been used in traditional meadow management. This includes leaving all areas of meadow grassland uncut until the end of the summer and then cutting, baling and removing all vegetation off site. This is alternatively known simply as cut and collect.

The reason for this work to be carried out is that regardless of the actual size of the meadow, management either through mowing or grazing is essential to maintaining a healthy structure, balance and diversity within the grassland setting. Without a suitable programme of management in place, grassland will simply become coarse and rank where it will lose both diversity and interest and eventually turn into scrub or woodland. With regards to removing all the cut vegetation from each site, this work is carried out for two reasons. Firstly, many wild flowers prefer poor, nutrient lacking soil for germination and secondly, without the removal of dead material from the ground, this can lead to the suppression of certain wild flowers which could otherwise become established in these areas. The practice of cut and collect has been employed on the Commons' three areas of acid grassland for over twenty years which has led to a vast improvement in the biodiversity of these sites. These areas include The Plain, Tibbet's Meadow and the small meadow site which is located along the southern section of Centre Path.

The Plain is the largest open area of natural grassland on the Commons. The principal management element for this site is late-summer mowing by contractors of the target conservation area which is approximately 9.7 hectares of the total 11.7 hectares of the site. The area on The Plain which is not mown by contractors has traditionally provided an important area for amenity purposes which includes space for picnicks, playing and for occasional car parking during some of the Commons' busy public open events.

The Plain provides a very important site for acid grassland on the Commons. Acid grassland occurs on nutrient poor, free draining soils with a Ph from 4.5 to 5.5 and it forms an important part of the mosaic of habitats that are found on heathlands. As a result, the management of acid grassland on the Commons forms part of the site's current CS agreement with Natural England. Supporting a wide range of species including invertebrates, reptiles, birds and flowering plants, this increasingly rare habitat is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat and is therefore a top priority for wildlife conservation.

To help increase the area of acid grassland on The Plain, consideration may be required from the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Board of Conservators as to whether the area that is currently set aside for amenity use could be reduced in the future years.



Cut and collect work on The Plain during 2021.

Given the relatively large size of The Plain and the large number of hay bales that are produced during the late summer cut, mowing on all three of the Commons areas of acid grassland is carried out by a team of experienced agricultural contractors.

To help manage other grassland sites on the Commons in a similar way to how The Plain is looked after, during 2021, it was agreed by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Board of Conservators that resources would be provided for contractors to cut and clear vegetation from an additional five locations on the Commons.

These include the following areas:

- West Place
- Wilberforce Field
- Putney Heath Fairground site
- Putney Lower Common Main Field
- Putney Lower Common Fairground site

These areas have been selected as the open ground and relatively large size of each site requires the use of heavy machinery which the Commons do not possess. It is also the responsibility of the contractor who carries out the work to dispose of all cut materials which given the large size of the combined sites would also not be something which the Commons would easily be able to accommodate. Alongside the annual cut and collect work that is carried out on the Commons three areas of acid grassland, work on the additional five areas of grassland will begin towards the end of summer 2022.



Grassland opposite West Place on Wimbledon Common will be cut and collected by contractors during 2022 to help improve the wildlife diversity of this site.

Although external contractors are required to help manage the larger meadow sites on the Commons, most other non-amenity grassland sites on the Commons are too small for large machinery to operate on. Where this is the case, using smaller machinery, the Commons Maintenance Team are involved.

During 2021, the following small meadow sites were managed by the Commons Maintenance Team:

- Southern Pound Meadow
- Small meadow adjacent to Memorial Ride
- Cross Roads Cottage Meadow
- Putney Lower Common Oasis Academy Meadow
- REMPF Memorial Ring

- Westside Common road verges.

In addition to this work, other grassland restoration work that was carried out by the Commons' Maintenance Team involved the use of temporary posts and ropes to encourage visitors to avoid specific areas of the Commons that had been seriously damaged by the heavy and sustained footfall of 2020. The areas of grassland that had been most seriously damaged by visitor footfall were located in two areas around the edge of the Windmill complex. As these areas are within the Wimbledon Common SSSI, permission was not provided by Natural England to re-seed.

With help from the team who are based at the Richardson Evans Memorial Playing Fields, a tractor mounted slitter was used where the use of sharp blades slit the surface of the ground encouraging strong, healthy root growth and rapid recovery after periods of damage. By April 2022 both areas that had been slit and roped off were once again covered by vegetation.



Slitting work was carried out opposite the London Scottish Golf Club House by a member of the REMPf Team during spring 2021.

Woodland Management

The woodland that is found on Wimbledon and Putney Commons covers an area of approximately 291 hectares and it is the largest habitat type that is found on the Commons. Having become established on what was formerly open common land, the Commons' woodland is classified as secondary woodland and there are very few trees that are aged above 150-200 years old.

While the Commons' woodland is comprised of a range of different native and non-native species, woodlands are traditionally described in terms of the dominant tree species which can be found on site. As a result, according to the Commons' National Vegetation Classification (NVC) study that was carried out during 2016, the main woodland type on the Commons has been categorised as oak-bramble-bracken typical sub community (W10a, *Quercus robur-pteridium aquilinum-Rubus fruticosus*).

To help protect and enhance the Commons' woodland, over the past few decades there have been a series of important management agreements in place that have been jointly agreed by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators, the Forestry Commission (FC) and Natural England (NE). At the current time, the Commons' woodland management programme is carried out under the guidance of a five-year Higher Tier CS agreement.

In general, the FC's, CS agreement involves the following objectives:

Lasting for a period of five years, the FC's, CS agreement involves the following objectives:

- To create a more varied range of tree age to ensure good succession
- To maintain and enhance hazel coppice
- To reduce the dominance of holly in the understorey
- To increase open areas within woodland
- To remove invasive non-native species
- To retain non-intervention areas
- To improve wetland areas and ponds
- To encourage a wider range of native species
- To maintain an appropriate and effective health and safety regime
- To maintain and improve amenity
- To obtain grants where available to further objectives.
- To continue to encourage the use of the Commons for recreational and educational purposes.

As part of the Commons' involvement with the FC, CS agreement, from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, the woodland management that has been carried out on the Commons has included the following activities:

- Holly thinning
- Ride management
- Hazel coppicing
- Woodland thinning and the creation of glades.
- The provision and management of deadwood habitats.
- Tree planting
- Tree safety
- The provision of public information
- The positioning of woodland bird boxes

Holly Thinning:

From the middle of November 2021 until the end of January 2022, a small team of forestry contractors carried out holly thinning in the woodland that is located on either side of the upper section of Robin Hood Ride. In total, an area of approximately six hectares of woodland was thinned of holly during this period. This work was carried out to reduce the dominance of holly in selected areas of the Commons' woodland and to help increase the amount of light that can reach the woodland floor. By allowing increased levels of light into the woodland and by providing additional breaks in the canopy, the potential for the natural regeneration of a well-developed structure which should include a ground layer, shrub layer, understorey and canopy has been provided.

As holly is an important woodland species that provides nesting opportunities and an important food source for wildlife, approximately 10% of the holly that is found in each hectare of woodland is retained during each programme of thinning. Holly thinning forms an important part of the Commons' current involvement in the FC, CS agreement and therefore contractors will be carrying out more of this work towards the end of 2022.

Ride Management:

A path or track becomes a ride at the point where it is wide enough for there to be a gap in the canopy which allows sunlight to reach the ground. On the Commons there are numerous paths and rides that traverse the site and from the beginning of January 2022 until the end of February 2022, work was carried out by the Commons' Maintenance Team to improve one of the Commons' main woodland rides which is known as Upper Gravelly Ride.

The main aim of the ride management work that is carried out on the Commons is to create large areas within the woodland which allow enough light to penetrate the woodland edge. Similar to the Commons' holly thinning programme, this work is beneficial to the development of a healthy understorey. With a far more diverse range of invertebrates, birds and plant life occurring along the edges of a woodland than are found within the more shaded interior of these areas, species such as

bramble and hawthorn will eventually provide an important source of food and shelter for a wide variety of species.

In theory, a ride should be approximately 1.5 times wider than the height of the surrounding trees. By reducing shade along the ride, this will provide a wide range of benefits for wildlife. Where large mature native trees were found growing along Upper Gravelly Ride, the healthiest specimens were left undisturbed while non-native trees and trees that were spaced too close to one another to allow healthy development were coppiced to accommodate the development of a well-structured woodland edge. In addition to the tree thinning work that was carried out along Upper Gravelly Ride, other work that was carried out in this area of woodland included the creation of a small number of temporary pools, the creation of deadwood habitats and the positioning of six bird boxes along the edge of the ride.

All six of these bird boxes have been constructed with a woodcrete mix which is a blend of over 70% real wood fibres plus clay, and cement. Compressed and cured at high temperatures, the bird boxes are extremely hard wearing and easily withstand predation from species such as grey squirrel and greater spotted woodpecker. Having trialled these bird boxes in 2021, the occupancy rate is very high and the boxes that have been used along Upper Gravelly Ride are designed to attract birds such as great tit, blue tit, nuthatch and wren. As part of the Commons' current CS agreement with the FC, ride management will continue on the Commons during 2022.



Upper Gravelly Ride photographed during early spring 2022

Hazel coppicing:

Coppicing is one of the oldest woodland management practices that is still in use today. In practice, coppicing involves cutting back the growth of a tree until only the stump remains. Preferably, this work is carried out during the winter months while the tree is dormant and during the following spring and summer periods, new shoots will appear creating a self-renewing source of timber. Given suitable weather conditions, regrowth can be extremely fast with new shoots able to grow up to a height of two metres during the first year.

In a well-managed woodland, coppice provides a dense shrub layer at various stages of growth. This provides an important habitat for a wide range of wildlife and helps to increase invertebrate mass and diversity within the woodland setting. Managed on a rotational basis of approximately 5-7 years, hazel coppicing forms another important part of the Commons' existing CS agreement with the FC and NE. During the latter part of 2021, hazel was coppiced by volunteers on a woodland site that is located towards the bottom of Lower Gravelly Ride. All cut materials were used to create a dead hedge which will provide cover for wildlife and hopefully create a temporary barrier to help protect the area from unnecessary disturbance during the important early growing stage for new shoots.

As the initial stage of hazel coppicing is carried out by volunteers using loppers and bow saws, all remaining stumps were 'cleaned up' by a team from the Commons' Maintenance Department. During winter 2022, the next area where hazel coppicing will be carried out is located along Robin Hood Ride.

Woodland thinning and the creation of woodland glades:

From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, two small woodland glades were created on either side of Robin Hood Ride and one existing glade was managed around the Tangier Stone which is located on Putney Heath. The creation and management of woodland glades provides additional openings within a woodland setting. This helps to maintain open, sunny and warm conditions which would otherwise be lacking in a closed canopy woodland. It also helps to provide a diversity of habitat niches for many species, especially plants and invertebrates. Where similar conditions have been provided on the Commons through past woodland management, natural regeneration of saplings and low growing vegetation has been extremely quick. Similar to areas of the woodland where hazel coppicing has been carried out, woodland glades are managed by volunteers on a rotation of between 5-7 years.

The Provision and Management of deadwood habitats

In Britain, there are approximately 2000 different animal species that have been recorded as living in dead wood. Dead wood is therefore a fundamental component of a healthy woodland and its presence should account for approximately one third of the total volume of timber that can be found on any single woodland site.

Apart from the wood that is found in naturally decaying or fallen timber, a large amount of additional deadwood on the Commons originates from the active management that is carried out across the site.

During the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, a significant amount of deadwood was produced through operations such as the ride work that was carried out along Upper Gravelly Ride. To ensure that as much of the wood that was produced from this work was put to good use, log piles were created along the shaded areas of the woodland edge and long lengths of timber were also buried underground. Although much of the wood that has been used to create deadwood piles will soon become hidden by encroaching vegetation, the large tree sections that have been piled up or buried in the ground will take many years to fully decompose and will therefore provide a habitat for many different species throughout all the various stages of decay.



Large sections of decaying timber provide a very important habitat for many species including stag beetles

Tree Planting:

Towards the end of 2021, 1250 small trees (alternatively known as whips) were planted in five separate woodland locations around the Commons. Species included rowan, hawthorn, spindle, crab apple, wild cherry and hazel. While all the whips were planted in open areas of the woodland with little existing understorey, the majority of the whips that were planted during 2021 were hazel and these were planted to help extend and safeguard existing areas of hazel coppice. While some of these whips were planted by volunteers, given the distance between each planting site, most of the planting was carried out over 1.5 days by two members of the Commons' staff.

Tree Safety Work:

Throughout the year, tree safety work is carried out to address both planned safety operations on the Commons and to deal with spontaneous tree damage or failures which have resulted from naturally occurring events such as high winds and changing ground conditions. As many of the trees on the Commons are quite large, areas need to be temporarily closed off from public use and on occasion, tree safety operations on the Commons will require all members of the Maintenance Team to be involved. Whenever tree safety work is carried out on the Commons, care is always taken to recycle any cut timber for use in various other projects such as providing log butts around the perimeter of the Commons, creating Stag beetle habitats or it is stored as close to where it was initially felled to provide additional deadwood habitats on the Commons.

From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, the Commons' Maintenance Team were involved in numerous tree safety operations but by far the most urgent and, at times, dangerous programme of work on the Commons was caused by the arrival of Storm Eunice during February 2022. According to the Met Office, Storm Eunice set a new record for the fastest wind gust recorded in England with 122 miles per hour recorded at the Needles, Isle of Wight. On the Commons, storm damage resulted in the uprooting of some trees and a great deal of other damage that required tree safety work for the following month. All of this work was carried out by the Commons' Maintenance Team.

Provision of Public Information:

Ensuring that visitors to the Commons are kept up to date with accurate information about what is happening on site forms a very important part of our ongoing woodland management programme. In the case of some of the woodland work that is carried out on the Commons and especially that which involves felling trees, for some people, this may appear counter intuitive to what they consider is the best way to manage a woodland. To ensure that visitors to the Commons are informed about why a specific task has been carried out, information is always displayed on site prior, during and for some time after the work has been completed and a more detailed description of each job is also made available via the Commons website.

As a result of our most recent phase of woodland management, only two emails were received from concerned members of the public and both of these concerns were immediately addressed by the Commons Conservation and Engagement Officer. In general, visitor feedback towards all the various woodland operations that were carried out from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 has been very positive.

Pond Management:

There are currently nine ponds on the Commons.

These ponds include:

- Rushmere
- Bluegate Gravel Pit
- Hookhamslade Pond
- Ravine Pond
- Queensmere
- Curling Pond
- Kingsmere
- 7 Post Pond
- Scio Pond

Having been created by damming wet areas of ground or through the flooding of old gravel pits, each one of the Commons' ponds is quite different from another and therefore each pond requires a programme of management that is tailored to its specific requirements.

Although it is not always easy to rationalise why, ponds and other water courses have the ability to attract large gatherings of people as perhaps very few other landscape features can. As a result, during spring and summer 2021, Rushmere and Bluegate Gravel Pit, became the focal point for large gatherings of young people and while there was no permanent damage caused around either of these sites, small fires were lit and large amounts of litter including bottles and cans were thrown into each of the ponds. Thankfully, following each occasion that gatherings were held at these ponds, staff and volunteers soon cleared the debris away.

Apart from ensuring that the Commons' ponds remained clear of litter, from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, management of these areas was fairly low key. In terms of habitat management around the Commons' ponds, the two additional floating platforms that were 'launched' at Queensmere during the early months of 2021, were successful at attracting a pair of nesting mute swans which subsequently produced a brood of six cygnets. Nesting on Queensmere's largest floating platform, within a few days of the cygnets reaching the water, the original number of six cygnets had been reduced to four. While it is not known what predated on the cygnets, Queensmere is known to contain large predatory Pike which, in recent years, have successfully taken both cygnets and ducklings.

Fortunately, Kingsmere is not currently home to Pike which means that, at least from beneath, waterfowl are reasonably safe from predation. The presence of a large number of non-native carp does however present another set of issues. In large numbers, overstocking of a pond can be detrimental to aquatic flora, and alter the natural ecosystems. Uprooting and disturbing submerged vegetation and stirring up the sediment at the bottom of the pond can contribute to the presence of algal blooms which is a problem that is often encountered in some of the Commons' ponds during the summer period. To help protect and enhance the Commons' ponds, it is suggested that a better understanding is achieved concerning the fish

stocks that are currently found in each of the ponds. If certain ponds are found to be overstocked, it may be the case that some of the fish, especially non-native species, should be removed and relocated to another pond that is located away from the Commons.



Certain ponds such as Scio Pond and Kingsmere are believed to be overstocked with species such as carp.

As mentioned in last year's Annual Conservation Report (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021), in addition to the two new floating platforms that were positioned at Kingsmere during 2021, two duck tubes were also installed close to the island on Kingsmere. On inspection, both duck tubes had been nested in during 2021 and both duck tubes were re-furbished with fresh nesting materials during February 2022.

Disturbance in the Commons Ponds:

Despite the Commons' annual request for dog walkers to keep their dogs under control and out of the Commons' ponds during bird nesting season, unfortunately, while many visitors may observe these requests, a large number of dogs still enter the Commons ponds. As reported in last year's Annual Conservation Report, in 2017, an article appeared in the summer edition of Conservation Land Management magazine entitled, 'Dogs and Ponds: A case study from Headly Heath'. This article covered some of the issues that are connected with public pressure and the effects of dogs entering water bodies on wildlife sites.

According to the article, some of the notable effects of high numbers of dogs entering ponds are:

- Disturbance to the substrate leading to the deposition of sediment on submerged vegetation.
- The adverse effects of turbidity on the presence of dragonfly and damselfly larvae.
- The potential for dogs to spread fragments of invasive non-native plants such as New Zealand pigmyweed from one pond to another.
- The potential negative effects on wildlife from commercial worming pills and tick treatments.

Despite our utmost endeavours, signage alone has not worked. Staff cannot be in all areas of the Commons at once and to be fair, if the owners of a dog are some distance away from a pond, it is not always easy to know when your dog is going run out of sight and jump into a pond. Being in the water is in the very nature of some dogs and so they really can't be held to blame for that.

To help protect the Commons' ponds and particularly to encourage the development of marginal vegetation which provides such a valuable aquatic habitat, during spring 2022, temporary fencing was positioned around selected areas of Scio Pond and Hookhamslade Pond. Accompanying this work, a public notice was also positioned at each of the two ponds informing visitors to the Commons about why the fencing was in place. There have been no complaints received about the use of this fencing and it is proposed that additional temporary fencing should be used in other ponds prior to frog and toad spawning and bird nesting in 2023. It is suggested that an area of Kingsmere should be included in this work and potentially a section of Rushmere or Queensmere.



Scio Pond: spring 2022

The Beverley Brook (Wimbledon Common)

The Beverley Brook is the only riverine habitat on the Commons with sections running through both Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common. While only a very short section of the Beverley Brook passes through Putney Lower Common, there is a much longer section of this watercourse found on Wimbledon Common. Entering Wimbledon Common at Mill Corner, the 2km section of Beverley Brook flows in a northerly direction until it leaves the Common beneath the Beverley Bridge on the A3 By-pass.

While a great deal of restoration work was carried out by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators and South-East Rivers Trust (SERT) during 2018 and 2019, from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, routine management of this area of the Commons included the following tasks:

- Regular WPCC volunteer litter picking events
- Repairs were carried out by SERT to damaged in-stream berms
- Dead hedging was carried out by WPCC staff on nearby ground that had been damaged by heavy footfall during 2020.
- Management of non-native species along the Beverley Brook which included the treatment of Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and Oak Processionary Moth.

Unfortunately, on Sunday 27 March 2022, the Rangers Office received reports that oil had appeared on the surface of the section of Beverley Brook which passes through Wimbledon Common. The Environment Agency (E.A) was contacted and it soon transpired that waste oil had been dumped into a tributary of the Beverley Brook which resulted in a major pollution incident. Fortunately, a clean-up operation was swiftly carried out by Thames Water and the E.A and it appears that only minor damage to the environment resulted from the incident.



SERT repairs to damaged berms along the Beverley Brook

Restoration of Valley mires:

Valley mires are areas of waterlogged deep peat in valley bottoms with characteristic acid wetland plant communities'. (Dartmoor National Parks website:2022).

Recognised as an extremely important habitat type in the fight against climate change, the protection of valley mires is of great importance but over the past century, 94% of the valley mires in the UK have been lost.

On Wimbleton Common there are three valley mire systems which include Farm bog, Stag bog and Ravine bog. In the case of Farm bog which is the largest bog site on the Commons, during 2021 work was carried out by WPCCC Conservator, Oliver Bennett, which found that from a total coverage of 0.6 hectares in 1953 when Wimbleton Common received its first designation as a SSSI, by 2021, this area had gradually reduced to cover only 0.24 hectares of ground.

Raising the profile of the Commons' three valley mires and the need to protect and enhance these habitats into the future has been a very important part of the Commons' habitat management work over the past year. With additional volunteers 'recruited' via on-site notices around the Commons, during much of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, volunteers have carried out a great deal of coppicing on Farm bog and along part of Ravine bog and both sites are now looking much improved. There is however a great deal more work required to protect the Commons' valley mires from future damage and it is hoped that grant funding can be raised to pay for a large-scale restoration project that will help to protect and enhance all three valley mires in the future.

At the current time, the Commons' Fundraising Manager, Maggie May is in the process of applying for a Nature grant which, if successful, would provide the funding for a feasibility study and hydrology report for the Commons. The feasibility study would inform the scale and costs of the proposed valley mires restoration project, alongside any potential impacts which may affect other habitats.



Farm Bog: 2021

Management of invasive non-native species.

According to the definition that has been provided by the Natural History Museum website (2021), Invasive non-native species (INNS) is a term that refers to species that are found outside of their normal range and may have a negative impact on native species, human well-being and the economy. While some INNS, such as grey squirrel and rabbits, have become widespread and familiar to much of the population, there are other species which require more active management.

In agreement with the sentiments that are held within the Richmond Park Management Plan (2019 to 2029), the control of invasive species on Wimbledon and Putney Commons must be tailored to the exact requirements of the Commons alone. Therefore, at the current time, the principal INNS which require periodic management on Wimbledon and Putney Commons include the following examples:

- Oak Processionary Moth
- Japanese knotweed
- Himalayan balsam
- New Zealand pigmyweed
- Parrot's Feather
- A variety of terrapin and turtle species
- Duck potato: discovered at Ravine Bog in 2021 but requires clear ID.

Examples of the management of INNS on Wimbledon and Putney Commons from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 include:

Oak Processionary Moth (OPM):

OPM is a non-native invasive moth species that was introduced to the UK in 2006. First discovered in Kew, West London, despite active management of this highly invasive pest by the Forestry Commission and various landowners, at the current time OPM has become established throughout Greater London and the Home Counties. The caterpillars of OPM are pests of oak trees and present a hazard to human and animal health. Developing tiny hairs which contain an irritating protein called thaumetopoein, contact with the hairs can cause itching skin rashes, eye irritation and in some cases, it can result in a person developing a sore throat and breathing difficulties.

OPM was first recorded on Wimbledon and Putney Commons in 2011 and since this time, we have developed a management approach that we consider to be both appropriate to the situation and manageable with the resources that we have available. Our annual approach to managing OPM focuses on the two key aspects of communication and risk management. This involves using specialist contractors to apply a recognised biological control agent on oak trees in five areas of high footfall during May, the display of public notices around strategic locations on the Commons, reminding local organisations and schools about the presence of OPM on the Commons and the survey and removal of all OPM nests that are found under a height of two metres from the ground.

OPM life Cycle: (Information sourced from the Forestry Commission)

Egg Stage – Eggs are laid from July to early September where each female deposits between 100 and 200 eggs on twigs and small branches in the canopy. The first larvae hatch from the eggs in April.

Larval stage – OPM larvae can be found from April to June. There are six stages during the caterpillar feeding cycle with caterpillars getting progressively bigger during each stage. As they mature, thousands of short hairs cover the larvae and it is these short hairs that contain the irritant toxin.

Stages 1-3: Caterpillars are very small when they hatch, around 2mm long, and are still less than 1cm by the time they reach the third stage.

Stages 4-6 – Caterpillars spin silken nests and the larvae eventually moult to the pupal stage within those nests. During this phase, larvae may also be seen massing on the trunks and branches of trees and moving in the characteristic processions that give the moth its Common name.

Adult moths – Adult moths fly at night from July until early September and they have a wingspan of around 30-32mm.



OPM photograph on the Commons during 2021

Japanese knotweed

Japanese knotweed is a fast-growing perennial that produces bamboo like stems up to a height of 2 metres. Under the provisions made within Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, 'it is an offence to allow Japanese knotweed to grow in the wild'. Wherever Japanese knotweed is identified on the Commons, its location is entered into a data-base and it is treated with a herbicide by the Commons' Maintenance Team. The most effective treatment of Japanese knotweed that is currently available is through the use of glyphosate which is a herbicide that is able to travel through the plant and kill the extensive system of rhizomes.

To avoid any drift that might occur through using a knapsack and sprayer and may result in the damage or destruction of non-targeted vegetation, the chosen method of treating Japanese knotweed on the Commons is through the use of a stem injection kit. This method injects a concentrated mixture of herbicide into each individual cane and is a proven method of killing Japanese knotweed in a safe and effective way.

During 2021, there were 11 Japanese knotweed sites recorded on the Commons and all were treated by the Commons' Maintenance Team.

Himalayan balsam:

Himalayan balsam is non-native invasive plant species which is listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is an offence to plant or allow this species to grow in the wild. Growing rapidly, Himalayan balsam can grow to a height of between two and three metres in a single season. With each plant able to produce up to 800 seeds, in a suitably damp setting such as a river bank, Himalayan balsam is able to spread quickly and will soon smother other nearby vegetation. In recent years, this highly invasive plant has become a particular problem along the edge of the Beverley Brook on Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common.

Controlling Himalayan balsam requires a two-part solution which includes removing the existing plants and trying to prevent the spread of seed. To tackle the issue of preventing seeds from dispersing along the river and producing additional plants downstream, control of Himalayan balsam is carried out during the early to mid-summer periods before the seeds have matured. During this period, the most effective and safest method of controlling Himalayan balsam is by cutting or hand pulling which, on the Commons, is carried out through a combination of staff and volunteer time. Given the very steep banks and the deep silt that is present at various intervals along the Beverley Brook on Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common, removing all the plants that are found is a difficult and dangerous task to complete. When removed, all plants are left in piles away from the immediate area of the watercourse where they will gradually dry out decompose.

Note: No other treatment of INNS was carried out on the Commons during 2021.

Putney Lower Common:

Separated from the main body of the Commons by a distance of approximately one mile, Putney Lower Common is a 20 hectare site which is comprised of open grassland, small pockets of woodland and a small section of the Beverley Brook. The routine management of this area of the Commons is the task of the Head Ranger for Putney Lower Common and this member of staff is based at the small enclosure that is located opposite the Oasis Academy.

Routine tasks on Putney Lower Common include litter picking, grass cutting, upholding the Commons bye-laws and liaising with visitors, local schools and organisations that use the common. In addition to the help that is provided by local volunteers with tasks such as litter picking and bulb planting, any large jobs that are required on Putney Lower Common are usually carried out by the Commons' Maintenance Team. From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, some of these tasks included removal of the invasive Tree of Heaven, the treatment of dense areas of Japanese knotweed, tree safety work and cut and collect mowing around the edge of the Oasis Academy.



During 2021, mowing on Putney Lower Common was kept to an absolute minimum with only a small number of well used footpaths receiving a summer cut.

Volunteering on the Commons

Accompanying the UK government's gradual relaxation of the COVID-19 restrictions during spring 2021, from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, volunteering on the Commons once again brought huge benefits to the management of the site as a whole and hopefully a great deal of enjoyment to everybody who was involved.

From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, volunteers on the Commons provided a total of 5,489 voluntary hours to looking after the site. On the Commons we have always worked on the principle that every task which is carried by volunteers on this site provides a meaningful activity that is needed to help look after the Commons. Although the Commons volunteer programme may grow in the future, it should remain a top priority to ensure that volunteering always benefits the actual needs of the Commons and in this way a real sense of purpose can be maintained among all of our many volunteers. At the current time we are very fortunate in having litter picking volunteers on the Commons on a daily basis and there is usually at least one organised weekly activity that takes place on site, although there may be a short waiting list to join at least some of these groups.

With ongoing tasks such as the management of the Commons' heathland and the clearance of litter to consider, volunteering has become an essential part of looking after the whole site and I would like to thank every single person who has volunteered their time to help on the Commons over the past year.

During this time the following groups provided help on the Commons:

- Weekend scrub bashing team
- Mid-week volunteer estate team
- Beverley Brook volunteer litter picking team
- Duke of Edinburgh volunteers
- Volunteer litter pickers
- Organised single session volunteer groups
- Farm Bog volunteers
- Wildlife recorders

Weekend Scrub bashers:

The Commons' weekend scrub bashing team first met during summer 2015. Since this time, scores of different individuals have become involved with this group and it's great to acknowledge that even after 8 years, some of the original members of the team are still regularly helping to tackle invasive scrub on the Commons heathland. Supervised by the Commons' Conservation and Engagement Officer, the Commons' weekend scrub bashing team are an essential part of how the Commons' heathland and areas of acid grassland are looked after and without their ongoing commitment, these areas would eventually become lost to woodland.

Managing different areas of the heathland on a rotational basis, the group not only keeps much of the heathland open but a suitable amount of scrub in various stages of growth is also maintained somewhere on the heathland which provides an ideal food source and nesting site for many species of wildlife.

While the social distancing rules that were in effect for much of 2020/21, temporarily disrupted much of the management that would have usually been carried out on the Commons heathland, from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, the Commons' weekend scrub bashers helped to clear invasive trees on areas of heathland adjacent to Green Ride and on heathland adjacent to Roehampton Ride.



Scrub bashing along the edge of Roehampton Ride.

Mid-week volunteer Estate Team:

Established in 2018, the Commons' volunteer estate team are a truly flexible group of individuals who meet on a Wednesday morning every three weeks where they carry out a number of activities that are required to look after the Commons. From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, this group have been involved with hazel coppicing along Lower Gravelly Ride, coppicing and the clearance of invasive vegetation at Stag Bog and Ravine Bog, scrub bashing on the heathland to the south of Hookhamslade Pond and painting around the windmill complex.

The Commons' volunteer estate team are currently supervised by a member of the Commons' Maintenance Team who is able to help direct the team where to carry out activities, provide the tools and refreshments and answer any questions about the Commons that may arise during each session. Although this group was formerly supervised by the Commons' Conservation and Engagement Officer, providing other members of the Commons full-time staff with the opportunity to become engaged with volunteering on the Commons has proved to be an ideal method of increasing

the skill base of the staff who are involved and helping to close the gap between the work that is carried out by staff and volunteers.



Mid-week volunteers painting the Commons' Information Centre

Beverley Brook litter picking volunteers:

Established in 2020, the Commons' Beverley Brook litter picking volunteers meet every three weeks on a Wednesday morning where they spend up to three hours removing litter from along the brook. At the current time, this group is managed by Bill Rowland who is also responsible for looking after Putney Lower Common and assisting with a variety of other security and maintenance jobs on the Commons. While there could be scope for this group to be supervised by a suitable volunteer in the future, the presence of a member of the Commons' full-time team means that waders and equipment can be transported from the Rangers Office to the brook and rubbish can be transported to the skip area after the task has been completed.

Duke of Edinburgh Volunteers:

Over the course of the past few years, there have been 165 young people who have helped on the Commons as part of their involvement with the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme. Covering all three levels of the award programme (Bronze, Silver and Gold) from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, there were 89 Duke of Edinburgh volunteers who helped on the Commons providing a total of 711 hours of service in helping to look after the Commons. As many of the Duke of Edinburgh volunteers are under the age of 16 years old, most of the volunteering that is provided by this group involves litter picking. This is an activity that is often carried out under the supervision of a parent or guardian and the person involve simply updates us about

their progress through regular emails and by providing photographs of the litter which they have collected.



Every little bit helps...from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, 711 hours of volunteering were provided to the Commons by DofE volunteers

Volunteer litter pickers

Although some of the Commons' volunteer litter pickers carry out this activity as part of a group, most people prefer to litter pick independently when out walking or even jogging on the Commons. As a group, the hours that are amassed by the Commons' volunteer litter pickers far outweigh those of any other single group and as a result, the Commons as a whole, would look much poorer without their contribution.

Organised single session volunteer groups:

From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, local societies, organisations and schools all provided voluntary help on the Commons. These groups are always supervised by a full-time member of the Commons' team as most groups are largely unfamiliar with the Commons and especially the sensitivity that is involved with carrying out tasks on many areas of the Commons SSSI.

The activities that were carried out by these volunteers included group litter picks and scrub bashing which proved very helpful given the reduction in volunteer help on the Commons during much of the previous year.

Farm Bog Volunteers:

The volunteers who help to look after Farm Bog are supervised by a volunteer leader from London Wildlife Trust (LWT). Their task is to cut back unwanted vegetation from Farm Bog and generally help to protect this important wildlife site into the future. As in previous years, the LWT volunteers have remained busy at Farm Bog where they have kept the site clear of bramble, bracken, reeds and birch saplings, built an impressive dead hedge along the stream to prevent damage occurring to the site and some larger birch trees have also been removed from the perimeter of the valley. As a result, Farm bog has almost been returned to the extent which it covered at the time of original Wimbledon Common SSSI designation in 1953. The removal of trees and scrub will help this site to retain more water than it has been able to for many years and encourage the growth of important sphagnum mosses.

Volunteer Wildlife Recorders

The Commons are truly fortunate to have a number of volunteers who possess specialist knowledge on a wide range of different wildlife subjects. Including expertise on birds, moths, butterflies, dragonflies, damselflies, badgers and plants, the Commons' wildlife recorders provide a valuable source of data that can be used to help manage this important site. Throughout the year, a variety of wildlife walks, talks and training courses are also provided by the Commons' wildlife recorders which help to provide education about many aspects of the Commons flora and fauna. With much of the information that is collected by the Commons' wildlife recorders submitted as part of the Commons' Annual Monitoring Report, thanks to this group, a lasting historical record of the Commons' Natural History is secured.

Public Engagement on the Commons

Although many of the restrictions associated with COVID-19 were gradually relaxed by spring 2021, the fluctuation in COVID-19 cases in London unfortunately had repercussions for many of the Commons' public engagement events that would have otherwise been held during the year.

As an outdoor event, the Commons' annual BioBlitz event, otherwise known as the Weekend of Nature, went ahead and with the presence of reasonably good weather, a well-attended and informative weekend of nature related events was provided. Held over the weekend of 25, 26 and 27 June 2021, various events included small mammal trapping, a bat walk, a butterfly and dragonfly walk, a bird walk, moth trapping, a nature walk and a very informative lunchtime talk that was provided by Alison Pelikan on bee keeping.

In addition to the Commons' Bioblitz, another highlight of the past year was the annual winter talk, held in February 2022, on the charismatic and spectacular swift and what can be done to help prevent the further decline of this species. The talk was provided via zoom by Edward Mayer who has devoted almost twenty years of his life to helping with the conservation of this bird species in the UK.

Other public events held on the Commons during 2022 included wildlife walks and talks that were provided by staff and volunteers.

London in Bloom

Currently in its 53rd year, the aim of London in Bloom is to increase community involvement, care for our environment and maintain our capital city's precious green spaces. Having been involved with the campaign since 2013, the Commons are relative newcomers to this worthy event but it is something that we now look forward to entering each year. Focusing on the key issues of horticultural achievement, environmental responsibility and community participation, each site is marked to a specified framework and each year both Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common are entered into the same category but as separate entries.

With so many activities carried out on the Commons throughout the year, the two hours of judging that are awarded to each site never feels like quite enough time to showcase everything that's been achieved by staff and volunteers.

We were however delighted that during the award ceremony that is held during September each year, Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common were both presented with a Gold Award and Wimbledon Common was also voted by the judges as winner of the category of London Common of the year.

Gold Award

An exceptionally high standard demonstrated throughout. A consistent approach, which demonstrates both best practice and sustainable effort. Meets all of the judging criteria and objectives of London In Bloom and scores very highly in each section of the judge's criteria. Outstanding – 170-200 points (85% - 100%)

Land Management Plan:

Since the middle of 2021, work has been carried out by various members of the Commons' team on a Land Management Plan that will help to guide the management of the Commons' natural and semi-natural environments over the course of the next five years. The plan will provide a pro-active framework which highlights the special qualities of the Commons, the importance of its landscape and identify those areas of the Commons which are vulnerable to damage and therefore in need of additional protective measures in the future. The presentation of the Commons' Land Management Plan is designed to be accessible for anyone with an interest in the future management and protection of the Commons.

The success of the Commons' Land Management Plan will be dependent on the co-operation and involvement of everybody who works, volunteers or has an interest in the future prosperity of the site. Containing background information, biological information, information which relates directly to people, stakeholders, access and recreation, a wide set of management objectives and various wildlife management aims, as soon as this very ambitious piece of work is completed it will be available for comment by anyone who wishes to read it.

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