

**Yateley Common Management Committee
Hampshire Countryside Service North Sites Team Report March 2024 – compiled
19th February by Nicki Paton**

The team have been working hard across all sites, focussing on scrub clearance on the heathland sites over the winter period.

➤ **Site Maintenance**

Regular works

There have been regular site checks and litter patrols across Yateley Common and all other sites.

Safety inspections of site infrastructure on-going

Ongoing site signage maintenance and replacement

Replace dragon's teeth as required

Monitoring of culverts and ditch clearance as necessary

Maintenance of machinery carried out

Ongoing Ranger's depot maintenance and management carried out

Ongoing facilities management and H&S functions at the Ranger's depot

Infrastructure checks across sites

(On-going regular works on other sites within our remit)

Additional works

Inspection and removal of numerous trees as part of the ongoing tree safety inspections (YC and all sites)

Clear up storm damage trees (or arrange contractors)

Check High Risk Zones following storm events

Removal of fly tipping

Boardwalk repairs

Infrastructure checks

Maintain social media pages

Staff training

Some education sessions

(On-going works on other sites within our remit)

➤ **Conservation Management**

Yateley Common

Checked and removed Pennywort from Wyndham's (main) pond

Scrub clearance

Joint Working Week with Hampshire Countryside Service staff and volunteers – scrub clearance

Flail rights of way

Path cutbacks

Fire break management

Other sites

Monitoring of Exmoor pony herd and regular fence checks at Castle Bottom

Surveys and habitat assessments

Infrastructure checks

Scrub clearance

Scrapes at Shortheath and Broxhead Commons
Glade and ride management at Herbert Plantation
Monthly fenceline checks at Castle Bottom
Boardwalk repairs at Zebon Copse
Holly coppicing and bramble control at Zebon Copse
Willow coppicing in mire at Castle Bottom
Corporate Volunteer Days at Zebon Copse
Joint working days with Hart DC
Fire break management
(On-going regular works on other sites within our remit)

➤ **Illegal/Antisocial Activities**

Fly Tipping – Since November we have only had 1 fly tip event.

Dumped vehicles – Nothing to report.

Motorbikes – Please report any sightings to the Police on 101.

Fires – There have been no fires reported since the last meeting.

Grazing – There has been no fly grazing since the last meeting.

➤ **Tree Inspections**

Ad hoc tree inspections by staff are ongoing. The Service Tree team have been surveying our High Risk areas and are due to complete the most recent round of inspections. We will action any works accordingly as a result of those surveys.

We have been working with Blackbushe Airport to manage some trees identified in a recent survey as penetrating the runway approach on the West End. Works took place over the last few weeks to remove any 'dangerous' trees. Further surveys and work will be required to manage the tree stocks in future years.

Staff checked all the High Risk Zones following the two storm events earlier this year to check for dangerous trees. Numerous trees needed dealing with, some trees were dealt with by contractors.

➤ **Signage & Interpretation**

'Ground nesting birds' signs will be put back up for the spring/summer period. Dogs are still required to be on a lead at Castle Bottom due to grazing livestock.

We are due to replace all the fly-tipping signs which have become faded.

➤ **Wildlife, Surveys and Monitoring**

Staff will be commencing the SPA bird surveys across our suite of sites. (Woodlark have already been heard singing over Yateley Common, Castle Bottom and Broxhead Common). We will also begin to carry out our rapid habitat assessments which help us monitor the condition of habitats and species across the area and adapt our management accordingly. Some surveys on other sites were conducted such as deadwood surveys in our woodlands and a heritage survey at Beacon Hill.

Volunteer reptile surveyors from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Amphibian & Reptile Group (HIWARG) will be carrying out surveys for reptiles and amphibians and we continue to record any sightings.

➤ **Community Engagement**

The Natural England SPA Wardens have been patrolling the heaths and can be seen across the site assisting with user engagement. They will shortly be assisting with

erecting their Ground Nesting Birds/Stick to the Paths signage (1st March – 15th September).

Staff have continued to update social media with information.

➤ **Rights of Way (RoW)**

The Rights of Way Diversion Order (west of Cricket Hill) was confirmed back in March and works have progressed opening up the routes. There is some further work to be completed before the order can be certified; waymarking the routes and improving road crossing points. These works have now been approved by Natural England, so we will work with other HCS teams to complete them over the next two months.

Paths have been mechanically flailed with the tractor and flail over the past few months to cut back vegetation and maintain fire breaks around the site.

➤ **Wyndham's Pool**

Closed season will commence on 15th March for three months.

➤ **Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)**

Scrub clearing for the autumn/winter have now nearly finished (28th February), and a contractor is completing works at three different sites around the common. We had to scale back the extent of our scrub clearance works as we were let down by our initial contractor, who was supposed to complete all the works across the common. Our new contractor is having to use heavier machinery due to the now tight timescales, which has caused some access tracks to become very muddy. Contractors have also carried out some mowing of heather and grass areas.

Staff and volunteers have been working very hard to cut scrub, particularly as the weather has been less than favourable for the past four months.

Staff ran a Joint Working Week with Hampshire Countryside Service staff and volunteers to clear scrub from heathland near Heathlands Cemetery. It was great to see everyone working together and giving those new to practical conservation work the chance to get involved. Over the week, we racked up an impressive 195 hours over five days working hard to clear encroaching gorse, pine and birch scrub from off the heath.

Staff teamed up with Rangers from Hart DC to spend a day working with them at Odiham Common and in return they helped clear willow from the mire at Castle Bottom.

Other works have taken place across our other heathland sites.

➤ **Track Maintenance**

No track repairs have taken place this period. Track repairs works will be likely in the spring. The work will be carried out by HCC staff and volunteers.

➤ **Yateley Common Grazing Consultation**

Discussions are ongoing with other organisations in the area about the operational responsibilities and practicalities of grazing livestock on heathland sites.

We now have a draft license from Forestry England covering the possible the extension to grazing at Castle Bottom. We are meeting with internal colleagues to

discuss this before getting back to FE. It is possible that a new Countryside Stewardship agreement will be drawn up to cover any work required as part of this agreement.

➤ **Archaeology**

Nothing to report.

➤ **Volunteers**

We continue to receive much needed support from our dedicated team of volunteers. This is primarily from the Yateley Society Conservation Volunteers (YSCV) and our regular 'Thursday' Volunteers. HIWARG continue to monitor the site for amphibians and reptiles.

(We had 2 corporate volunteer group sessions with Xylem clearing scrub in the mire at Zebon Copse).

We thank all our volunteers for their continued support. It is very much appreciated.

Volunteer hours since the last meeting:

Month	YC Hours	Other Sites Hours	All Sites Hours
November	98	68	166
December	380.5	41	421.5
January	200	89	289
February	30	21.5	51.5
TOTAL	708.5 (751)	219.5 (164.5)	928 (915.5)

Note: Figures compiled 19th February 2024. Bold figures in brackets are for February 2023.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer or know someone who might be, please get in touch with us via email at northern.sites@hants.gov.uk or telephone on 01252 870425.

➤ **Education**

Last month we started working with Samuel Cody School. They are bringing about a dozen children out to the common once a month to run Forest School activities.

We plan to engage with other local schools and badge groups and be able to offer outdoor sessions again this spring/summer terms.

➤ **Events**

We have not run or been involved with any events since the last meeting.

We plan to run and Easter Trail on Bank Holiday Monday in April and attend the May Fayre on the early Bank Holiday and May.

We will also be celebrating National Nature Reserve Week 20th-31st May and Heathweek 29th July-4th August.

➤ **Website & Social Media**

Facebook – 1580 (1562) follows

X (was Twitter) – 1366 (1372) followers (We don't really use Twitter anymore)

Instagram – 274 (268) (Jean runs this account and isn't currently active)

(last meetings figures in brackets)

[END]

To circulate:

Countryside Team Manager (North) Report