

**Yateley Common Management Committee
Hampshire Countryside Service North Sites Team Report November 2024 –
compiled 17th October by Nicki Paton**

The team have been working hard across all sites, focussing on path cutbacks, tree inspections/management and scrub clearance.

➤ **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)

Tree inspections – ongoing inspections of High Risk Zones by surveyor

Removal of fly tipping

Boardwalk repairs

Infrastructure checks

Maintain social media pages

Staff training

Education sessions with badged groups, pre-school and talk delivered

Dragon's teeth replacement

Path cutbacks/Vegetation clearance

Heath Week events

Feel Good Festival

ROW bridleway clearance, surfacing and installation of bollards

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

➤ **Conservation Management**

Yateley Common

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

Habitat and wildlife surveys

Mowing of firebreaks

Japanese Knotweed control

Ragwort pulling

Scrub clearance

Heathland scrapes (re-wetting) on East End

Other sites work

Monitoring of Exmoor pony herd and regular fence checks at Castle Bottom
Surveys and habitat assessments
Infrastructure checks (all sites)
Boardwalk replacement at Zebon Copse
Boardwalk replacement at Castle Bottom
Monthly fence line checks at Castle Bottom
Rhododendron control at Castle Bottom
Bracken control at Castle Bottom
Mire clearance at Zebon Copse
Holly coppicing at Herbert Plantation
Hazardous tree management
Removal of fly-tipping
Ragwort pulling at Shortheath Common

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

➤ **Illegal/Antisocial Activities**

Fly Tipping – Since July we have had 2 fly tip events (a further 2 fly-tips on other sites). We are refreshing all the fly-tipping signage this summer.

Dumped vehicles – Nothing to report. (1 x abandoned, burnt-out golf buggy at Shortheath Common)

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

Fires – There has been one 1 reported since the last meeting, on Brandy Bottom heath south of the Heathlands Cemetery.

Fly-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 are progressing with surveying our High Risk areas. Surveys are ongoing and we will action any works accordingly as a result of those surveys.

All surveys of Medium Risk areas (rights of way, walking routes) have now been completed and records updated. Any follow-up remedial works are ongoing by staff and contractor.

➤ **Signage & Interpretation**

‘Ground nesting birds’ signs were taken down for the autumn/winter period. Dogs are still required to be on a lead at Castle Bottom due to grazing livestock.

All the fly-tipping signs which became faded have now been replaced. This will hopefully address the slight increase in fly-tipping events we have seen recently. (Much of the fly-tipping at other sites is due to them being cut-throughs.)

➤ **Wildlife, Surveys and Monitoring**

Staff completed the spring/summer SPA bird surveys across our suite of sites. The initial territory totals for the three Annex 1 species on Yateley Common North of the A30 and Castle Bottom this year are NJ 12, WL 9 & DW 24 (not yet confirmed). So far numbers of the SPA species seem to be good and comparable with previous years. Table below showing SPA bird data over the past 7 years (2J's *Ecology*).

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Nightjar	14	16	12	22	13	8		12
Woodlark	3	2	4	4	7	3		9
Dartford Warbler	15	4	6	21	21	39		24

(2023 data missing – can be forwarded)

We carried 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. We are hoping that the HCC Nature Recovery Team will be able to assist us with analysing these results to make any changes/improvements to our management.

Volunteer reptile surveyors from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Amphibian & Reptile Group (HIWARG) have been conducting surveys for reptiles and amphibians and we continue to record any sightings.

➤ **Community Engagement**

The Natural England SPA Wardens have been patrolling the sites assisting with user engagement. The summer warden staff have now finished their season, but we still receive help from the permanent staff.

Staff have continued to update social media with information and news.

➤ **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. All the routes are now clear of vegetation, but there is some further work to be completed before the order can be certified. The local Ramblers group are about to embark on waymarking the routes and final works to complete the road crossings are scheduled for next week. We are working with other HCS teams to complete the remaining works.

Paths have been cut back by hand by staff and volunteers over the past few months to cut back spring/summer vegetation and fire breaks around the site have been mown to maintain a reduction in fuel load along path edges.

➤ **Wyndham's Pool**

Angling is available as a member with Hartley Wintney Angling Society or by day ticket from Yateley Angling.

Encroaching vegetation along the north slope of the northern dam across the pond was cut back to free-up the drainage channels.

A young swan was reported to us on The Hospital Pond earlier this month. Staff were unable to reach the cygnet without a boat, so volunteers from The Swan Sanctuary came to rescue the bird. It was taken to their nursery pond to settle before being released at an appropriate site.

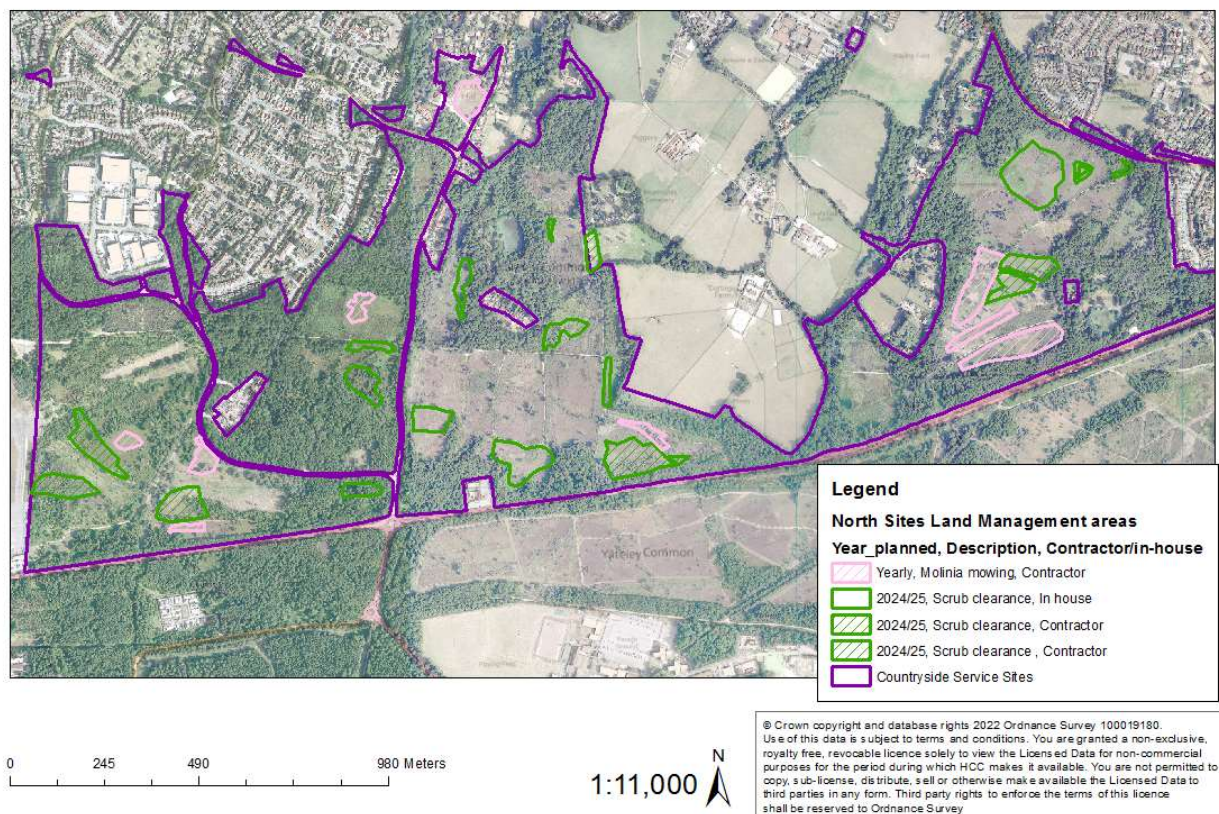
➤ **Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)**

We carried out a small amount of bracken control this summer by hand, not spraying with herbicide. The selective herbicide used for bracken control, Asulox, is no longer

available and alternative methods of treatment are not suitable for use on the open heaths during the summer where ground nesting birds may be breeding. The rich archaeology of the common also restricts what mechanical control we can complete. We are looking into carrying out mechanical bracken control earlier in the year, where appropriate, and await further updates of new research for the ongoing treatment of bracken.

Scrub clearing for the autumn/winter has now commenced, and contractors are due to carry out works in the coming months. Contractors will also be carrying out some mowing of heather and grass areas. The map below shows the areas where they, and staff and volunteers, will be working;

North Sites - Yateley Common Winter Works 2024/25



➤ **Track Maintenance**

Track repairs were carried out earlier this year, but it is likely that some repairs will be needed to the Wyndham's Pool access track at some point due to the persistent poor weather which has impaired the surface.

➤ **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.

Discussions with FE regarding additional grazing at Castle Bottom are ongoing.

➤ **Archaeology**

Earlier this month we embarked on the project to improve the natural water levels on an area of wet heath on the East End (Blackwater). Following our meetings with the County Archaeologist we removed the surface layer of vegetation (Molinia grass) in an area of approx. 20m x 20m and creating a few shallow pools. It is hoped that this will also alleviate local flooding on an area of the common to the north of Reading Road.

Rewetting heaths has several benefits including storing carbon, improving water quality and enhancing biodiversity.

➤ **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 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
July	125.5	54	179.5
August	144	50.5	194.5
September	96.75	64	160.75
October	138	36	174
TOTAL	504.25 (445)	204.5 (402)	708.75 (847)

Note: Figures compiled 17th October 2024. Bold figures in brackets are for October 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**

We continued with our sessions with Samuel Cody school until the end of the summer term. They have requested to continue with their visits over the coming months.

We have run many education sessions with the badged groups such as Cubs and Beavers in the last couple of months and delivered a session to Yateley Pre-school.

➤ **Events**

We ran our Family Nature Day at Wyndham's Pool back in July and also attended the Secrets of the Heath event at Blackbushe, both as part of Heath Week. Both events were particularly well attended. The HIWARG volunteers also ran a Reptile Roadshow at the Gravel Pit which attended by over 300 people.

Our Big Spring Clean event will be running again on 1 March 2025, which is always very well attended by the local badged groups. More info to follow on social media.

➤ **Website & Social Media**

Facebook – 1612 (1597) follows

Due to new corporate branding, our Facebook page name has changed to 'Countryside - North Sites - Hampshire County Council'

We are no longer using X (was Twitter)

Instagram – 276 (273)

(last meetings figures in brackets)

[END]

To circulate:

Countryside Team Manager (North) Report