

THAMES BASIN HEATHS
JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Date: 17th November 2017

Subject: SAMM Project update

Report of: Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Project

Recommendations:

- To NOTE the contents of the report on SAMM project activity
- To APPROVE the recruitment of an education officer in July 2018
- To APPROVE the SANGs data collection exercise as appended

Purpose of the Report:

To provide the JSPB with an update on SAMM project activity since the last meeting in July 2017.

Summary

This paper sets out for Members the SAMM project's activities and achievements since the last meeting in July 2017.

1. SAMM project staffing and recruitment

Seasonal wardens

- 1.1 One of the summer wardens reduced her hours during July and left the project early, at the end of July to take up a new part time and then full time role with Butterfly Conservation. The remaining 6 wardens (5 full time and one 0.6FTE) completed the season to the end.

Year round wardens

- 1.2 Two of the year round wardens were successful in gaining new roles within Natural England Thames Team and they left the SAMM team at the end of August. To backfill these posts, two of the Short Term Appointment (STA) seasonal contracts were extended to Dec 2017 and an external recruitment exercise was undertaken with interviews held on 14th November. As a result of this recruitment, a new warden is being appointed, who will start in early 2018. One vacancy was not filled. To backfill this post, one of the wardens on a STA has had their contract extended for the remainder of the winter season. A new Fixed Term Appointment (year round) recruitment will be run concurrently with the STA seasonal warden recruitment early in 2018.

- 1.3 In July 2018 the SAMM project would like to appoint a full time education officer to support the existing education and communication coordinator to deliver more school visits. The project would like to extend the provision of educational sessions to school children to teach about the species that live on heathland, the important features of the habitat, and threats to the Annex 1 bird species from Man. This fits in well with the Year 6 science and geography curriculum including food chains, habitats and animal adaptation. It would extend the pilot project that we took over from BBOWT which was very well received by participating schools. Children are our future and messages around behavior change are well received if children are engaged in the first instance and the messages are then readily accepted by older family members. The associated costs of a recruitment are set out below and have been submitted to HCC. The appointment of an education officer will also allow the project to maximize the opportunity of the space available at Heather Farm to provide education to non-school groups. Approval is sought from the JSPB board for a recruitment in July next year.

2. Wardening and Delivery

- 2.1 The project currently provides a warden service on the SPA seven days a week from 07.30 to 19:00 (daylight hours permitting).

SPA Wardening

- 2.2 The updated warden output for the project for 2017 is set out below. The following tables set out the number of hours of warden activity delivered on the SPA during the period July-October 2017.

July	Total hours wardened	728.2
	Number of interactions	1508
	Number already spoken to	725
	Leaflets handed out	1026
	Number of dogs	1622
	Number of dog walkers (5+)	42
	Average already spoken to	48.08%

August	Total hours wardened	583.4
	Number of interactions	1538
	Number already spoken to	608
	Leaflets handed out	1302
	Number of dogs	1371
	Number of dog walkers (5+)	52
	Average already spoken to	39.53%

September	Total hours wardened	322.95
	Number of interactions	842
	Number already spoken to	300
	Leaflets handed out	818
	Number of dogs	746
	Number of dog walkers (5+)	44
	Average already spoken to	35.63%

October	Total hours wardened	312.75
	Number of interactions	473
	Number already spoken to	181
	Leaflets handed out	436
	Number of dogs	480
	Number of dog walkers (5+)	21
	Average already spoken to	38.27%

- 2.3 The tables above show the total hours wardened, the number of interactions undertaken during those hours, the number of people already spoken to, the number of leaflets handed out, the number of dogs with the people/groups spoken to, and the number of dog walkers with five or more dogs. The number of people already spoken to, and the percentage of total interactions which were with people already spoken to provide an indication of how many site users have been made aware of site sensitivities through previous interactions with the warden team.
- 2.4 The number of hours wardened remained high over the sensitive summer period, with number of hours dropping off when the seasonal wardens left at the end of August.
- 2.5 The level of interactions is expected to be lower during the autumn/winter than in the spring and summer due to the sites being quieter, and there being fewer sensitivities on the SPA during this period. The number of leaflets handed out is also lower than in the spring and summer, as the majority of our literature relates to the ground nesting bird sensitivities on the SPA, which is less relevant outside the bird breeding season.
- 2.6 The number of dog walkers with five or more dogs is included as individuals with large numbers of dogs are likely to be commercial dog walkers, which are considered to be a growing problem on the Special Protection Area (SPA).
- 2.7 The figure showing the number of people already spoken to provides the project with an indication of the level of saturation that has been achieved. This year to date (Jan-Oct) the average percentage of people on the SPA who have been previously made aware of the project, and its key messages, is 37.2%, with this figure rising to an average of 40.3% of people during the sensitive period.
- 2.8 The tables also show the number of dogs walked by the people spoken to by wardens: This was on average over 1 dog per interaction (although an interaction may be a group rather than an individual). The number of dog walkers with five or more dogs provides a suggested level of commercial dog walkers interacted with, although some will be individuals who just own a large number of dogs. The highest number in any single month was August when 52 dog walkers with 5 or more dogs were spoken to.
- 2.9 To summarise, during 2017 (1st Jan until the end of October) the project has delivered 5406 hours of wardening on the SPA; handed out 7775 pieces of literature, and spoken to 10,578 people or groups, who had 10,783 dogs.

SANGs Visitor Surveys

- 2.10 The project has now received the analysis of the SANGs visitor surveys undertaken during the autumn and winter of 2016/17. A summary of the report is appended to this paper and will be presented separately.
- 2.11 A new methodology was recommended by Footprint Ecology to undertake the 2017 winter SANG surveys using an app called SNAP, hosted on iPads. The recommendation was that this would facilitate easier and more accurate data collection, be user friendly and remove

the need for data to be transferred from paper to digital form once the surveys had been completed, hence being more efficient and removing error due to multiple data handling. This recommendation has been taken forward and 6 i-Pad devices have been purchased in order to conduct the 2017 surveys. Footprint ecology are advising on and supporting the setup of the survey, which is currently being finalised in preparation for doing 12 more SANG surveys this autumn/winter.

3. Access to SPA land

- 3.1 The project has recently been extending the dates for some current access agreements to align them to the end of the NE hosting period. Extended agreements have been signed with Surrey Heath BC, Surrey Wildlife Trust and Horsell Common Preservation Society. Most other agreements were already aligned.
- 3.2 A new access agreement has also been signed with Woking Borough Council to warden at Brookwood Heath and Sheets Heath near Brookwood. An orientation event is being arranged with the land manager for the wardening team in early December.
- 3.3 Negotiations with the MoD have progressed very well, with a final draft of the access agreement having been agreed following a meeting with James Nevitt, Senior Access & Recreation Advisor with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) and Lieutenant Colonel Mark Ludlow – Training Safety Officer (Security and Access) South East (TSO(S&A)SE). The agreement is now with Vanessa Cole – Government Legal Service to ensure that the final draft is aligned with national objectives and agreements. Lieutenant Colonel Dickie Bishop – Commander Service Delivery Training South East. (Comd SD Trg SE) and Natural England Area Manager Andy Smith are expected to sign the agreement by the end of the calendar year.
- 3.4 The SAMM project designed and produced a new, robust ground nesting bird sign and put these up, by agreement with the Access Management and Monitoring Partnership group across a large proportion of sites on the SPA, including MoD sites. This was a big step towards having consistent signage with consistent dates, with an access management period from 1st March to the 15th September, following evidence that the birds are breeding and fledging their young and so are still susceptible to disturbance in some years until well into September.

4 Communications, Promotion and Events

- 4.1 The Thames Basin Heaths Partnership website can be accessed at www.tbhpartnership.org.uk and continues to receive positive feedback. We are currently reviewing the website and plan to make additions to content in early 2018, to include a calendar of events, downloadable resources and a “how you can help” page, linking to the volunteering pages of partner websites as well as a dedicated page for our Heathland Hounds initiative.
- 4.2 The ‘Greenspace on your doorstep’ booklet is being handed out by the wardens on-site and at the pit-stop events in SPA car parks. The A5 booklet contains details of all the SANGs listed on the website along with a pull-out map. The booklet is also now available from most local authority offices/visitor centres and from the Ministry of Defence Range

Marshalls. The booklets still prove very popular and a new print run of 2000 leaflets has just been delivered. We are currently updating content and liaising with Local Authorities to update information for new and existing SANGs so that we can keep web and printed material current.

- 4.3 Our 'Heathland Hounds' project, a dog owner focused initiative promoting positive behavior (specifically on the SPA but also more generally) has made good progress since its launch in March. This initiative is being promoted through pitstops and active engagement with dog walkers both on-site and through social media. Heathland Hounds has a social media presence through Facebook, with people invited to join the Heathland Hounds group via promotion by the Wardens and through temporary signs placed on SPA site notice boards. The group is beginning to build steadily and we are seeing an increase in engagement with the FB site and on regular organized dog walks on SANGs, which is developing successful new interactions with dog walkers specifically. Heathland Hounds has recently had organized walks at Crookham Park, Heather Farm, Shepherd Meadows, Riverside Nature Reserve and Chobham Water Meadows.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/HeathlandHounds/748305735317721/>
- 4.4 During the 2017 bird breeding season the project has built on the experience gained in 2016 when we trialled a small number of guided walks on SANGs. This year we undertook walks on Riverside Nature Reserve, Lark's Hill and The Cut Cluster, Chantry Wood, Buckhurst Meadows, Wellesley Woodland, Brookwood Country Park and engaged a younger audience with a Pokémon Go walk at Lily Hill Park.
- 4.5 The project used 'Love Parks Week', organised by Keep Britain Tidy (14th – 23rd July), to promote SANGs by taking photographs of the sites and promoting them through our social media with the #LoveParks, promoting Chobham Place Wood, Bassets Mead, Ambarrow Woods, Shepherd Meadows and Peacock Meadows. <https://t.co/NsNRrSkHyR>
- 4.6 In addition to the activities and initiatives listed above the project has also been holding a greater number of pitstops on the SPA sites, including at new venues such as the Red Cross Centre at Yateley, Ash Vale car park, and Caesars Camp and Aldershot Road where we have been engaging new contacts during the nesting season to spread our message to the public.
- 4.7 On 26th of September several members of the SAMM team travelled to Exeter to meet with a group of colleagues who deliver other mitigation projects in the South of England. We met with individuals from projects such as the Urban Heaths Partnership, a project mitigating against development around Poole in Dorset; Devon Loves Dogs, an initiative to promote responsible dog ownership in Devon, and Bird Aware, based in the Solent, which is concerned with bird disturbance to overwintering waders and wildfowl on the coast. The project has since been developing links with these projects and also the South Downs National Park initiative, "Take the Lead Campaign", to share ideas, tools and best practice to maximize public engagement opportunities. This will result in direct cost savings and maximize the effectiveness of the SAMM project.
- 4.8 Our team also organized a wildfire awareness training event in July, which was well attended by partner organizations on the AMMP group and run by Rob Gazzard, an experienced forester and wildfire behavior expert. This raised awareness of the importance of good habitat management for wildfire prevention, and gave our wardens and site managers the skills they need to be more confident in dealing early and decisively with

wildfire incidents, should they arise, reduce the impact of events on Annex 1 birds and other heathland species and improve the safety of site users.

5 School Based Education

- 5.1 The Communication and Education Officer, with support from one of the wardens, led three schools visits for primary schools in the Crowthorne area, to the SPA heathland at Wildmoor Heath in October. Groups of 1 Year 6 class from Pine Ridge and 2 Year 6 classes Birch Hill Primary School were treated to an interactive classroom session and then later taken out to the heathland on a field trip to learn about the rare and sensitive habitats and the species they support. These visits were very well received by the schools involved, and were publicized on their twitter feed e.g. see- <https://t.co/db8hNjoda0>

6. SPA and SANGs Monitoring

Automatic people counter installation

- 6.1 The report summarizing the results of the Automated People Counter Data is appended to this paper and will be presented separately. Some unreliable people counters are due to be replaced in 2018 by the much more reliable Chambers Radiobeam counters, so that the data set going forward is robust and reliable.

Car Park Counts

- 6.2 The project continues to undertake monthly car park transects across the SPA area, and is now in the second year of undertaking this work.
- 6.3 The second 12 months of car park transect data collection will be completed in December 2017, and Footprint Ecology will subsequently be commissioned to undertake an analysis of this data in early 2018.

SANGs monitoring information

- 6.4 In order to produce an annual report, and to inform SANGs promotion and monitoring, the SAMM project would like Local Authorities re-introduce the practice of recording SANGs data for their own borough, as detailed in the appended spreadsheet, so that the SAMM project manager can collate SAMM, SANG information and bird data to produce an annual report on the strategy. The SAMM project will be asking Local Authorities for this data at the JSPB Officers meeting in early January 2018 and the data collected by the end of January 2018. This data will inform the SAMM project of any summer SANG surveys that need to be undertaken, any new SANGs adding to the database and allow for more accurate budgeting. Approval for the data collection as per the attached spreadsheet is sought at this meeting.

7. Looking forward to 2018

- 7.1 In January 2018, the Project will take delivery of 3 new branded lease vans, which will provide us with a great opportunity not only to maximize our visibility on the SPA, increasing awareness of the project, but also allow us to take full use of the project gazebos with less logistical juggling. This will also help us to develop our pitstops to be even more engaging to the public, by allowing us to develop our resources so that we can offer new information and engagement opportunities with repeat customers.
- 7.2 The project manager has been working hard to progress the lease agreement with Horsell Common Preservation Society for a new office base at Heather Farm, which offers numerous benefits to the project over the current office base at Alice Holt. This has been slow to progress since the JSPB approval of the move last year. However, negotiations are now progressing well and we expect to move in January 2018. Negotiations with the Forestry Commission have also resulted in a reduced required notice at Alice Holt, meaning there will be minimal overlap in rental payments.

Appendix 1- Costings for project as agreed and projected costs with addition of full time Educational Officer

Scenario	Original 2017/18 figure from Jan 2017	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Basic SAMM programme (as currently operated)	£427,000	£431,331.00	£453,087.00	£442,367.00
Salary	£298,878.00	£309,113.18	£309,113.18	£309,113.18
T&S	£41,093.00	£42,100.00	£42,100.00	£42,100.00
NPRC	£10,098.00	£19,069.00	£22,720.00	£19,000.00
Programme	£65,350.00	£49,467.82	£67,572.82	£60,572.82
Hosting and assoc.	£11,581.00	£11,581.00	£11,581.00	£11,581.00

Enhanced programme with dedicated Education officer, recruited July 2018	Salary	£309,113.18	£328,013.18	£338,013.18
	T&S	£42,100.00	£44,100.00	£44,100.00
	NPRC	£19,069.00	£24,720.00	£22,000.00
	Programme	£49,467.82	£62,188.02	£48,188.02
	Hosting and assoc.	£11,581.00	£11,581.00	£11,581.00
		£431,331.00	£470,602.20	£463,882