

THAMES BASIN HEATHS JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Date: 19th November 2019

Subject: Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Project Update

Report Author: Ruth Shelton, Project Manager

Recommendations:

- To NOTE the contents of the report on SMMM project activity
- To give GUIDANCE regarding the number of seasonal wardens in the current COVID situation
- To APPROVE the Tariff uplift detailed in the accompanying paper

Purpose of the Report:

To provide the Joint Strategic Partnership Board with an update on Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SMMM) project activity since the last meeting in September 2019, including during the COVID-19 lockdown, recent monitoring work and plans for the next six months.

1. SMMM project staffing and recruitment

Seasonal wardens

- 1.1. After a successful recruitment, seven seasonal wardens started with the SMMM project on 1st March 2020, making 6.6 FTE wardens. Six completed the season, with one being offered an alternative position closer to home in March. Of the six that completed the season, only one was new to the project. One returned from the 2017 cohort and five returned from the 2019 cohort.

Year-round team

- 1.2. The new team structure, approved at the meeting in September 2019, is now in place.

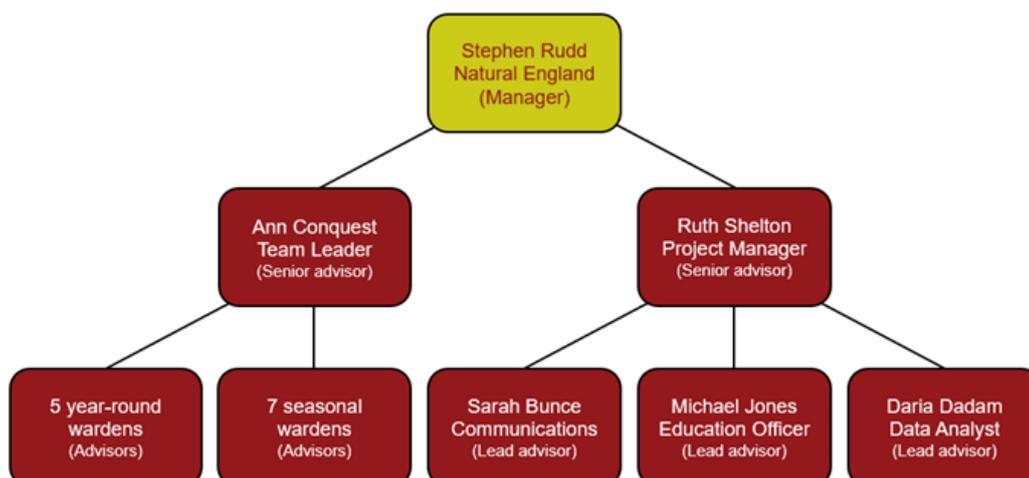


Figure 1 - SMMM Team Structure as of October 2020

- 1.3. We are delighted to introduce Ruth Shelton, who joins us as SAMM Project Manager. Ruth brings a wealth of experience from a wide variety of landscape focused projects and is very much looking forward to meeting you all and working together to protect our heathlands.
- 1.4. The SAMM Project Manager role was made vacant in early 2020 by Ann Conquest's appointment as SAMM Team Leader. Ann covered both roles until Easter 2020. Simon Thompson (former SAMM Project Manager) covered the project management role from Easter 2020 until 18th June 2020. Sarah Bunce (SAMM Communications Officer) then covered the period from 22nd June 2020 to 30th September 2020 on a temporary promotion to senior advisor grade. Ruth Shelton's appointment to the role began on 5th October 2020 and Sarah Bunce stayed on as senior advisor until 31st October to help with her transition.
- 1.5. Ann Conquest was unfortunately unwell from Easter 2020 until 30th September 2020. Michael Jones (SAMM Education & Engagement Officer) covered the role from 22nd June 2020 to 30th September 2020 on a temporary promotion to senior advisor grade. Ann is now fully recovered and has returned to the project as Team Leader.
- 1.6. We are also delighted to introduce Daria Dadam, who joined as SAMM Data Analyst in April 2020. Daria joins us from the British Trust for Ornithology, where she was research ecologist for ten years. Her background is in large-scale data modelling and survey organisation at local and national levels, and she has worked on projects focusing on urbanisation, habitat fragmentation and population trends.
- 1.7. We currently have approvals to recruit six seasonal wardens for the 2021 season. We would appreciate some feedback whether the board want to continue with this level of resource under the current circumstances.
- 1.8. We have five year-round wardens currently.
- 1.9. Ann Conquest and Sarah Bunce are on permanent contracts. The rest of the team have had contract extensions to 2023.

2. COVID-19

- 2.1. Natural England's national operational guidance halted all site visits and suspended wardening throughout the COVID-19 lockdown. The warden team were recalled from site on 17th March 2020 and wardening didn't begin again until early June 2020. Despite the less-than-ideal circumstances, the project made the best use of the time and were able to keep all team members engaged throughout.
- 2.2. Here are some examples of our achievements during lockdown:
 - Wildfire awareness campaign via social media and our website
 - Built a directory of local publications including local newsletters and parish magazines to improve local communications going forward
 - Species profiles written ready for the website
 - Activity sheets for children including a heathland-themed crossword and wordsearch, a heathland nature trail, four new craft activities and four colouring sheets
 - Twenty blog posts published on our website
 - Social media posts throughout June for the Wildlife Trusts' annual campaign to connect people with nature, #30DaysWild

- Kept the public up to date about the status of SANGs via our online directory “Greenspace on your doorstep”
 - Collaborated with other mitigation projects to share ideas
- 2.3. Simon Thompson and Sarah Bunce began working on a COVID-19 risk assessment and working protocol in mid-May, with a view to allowing the team to return to site visits safely. These documents were peer-reviewed by everyone in the team and by our Natural England area health and safety representative, before going for director level approval. Approval was granted in early June and wardening resumed. We were the first Natural England team to resume site visits. Some of the wardens were extremely relieved to be outside again, while others were more cautious, including those with elderly relatives at home or personal concerns.
 - 2.4. Each team member was supplied with a health and safety pack, including hand sanitiser and wipes. We took the decision not to use masks, so as not to invite close interaction. We have stuck to rigorous social distancing, lone working and hand hygiene protocols ever since.
 - 2.5. The working protocol forbids the handing out of leaflets, but our website now has all our publications available as free downloads. We have also been experimenting with a QR code that takes the scanner to our website.
 - 2.6. Under the current restrictions we reviewed our risk assessments again and have halted our engagement activities. The wardens are undertaking tasks which do not involve the general public such as ensuring the GPS mapped locations for all signage opportunities are accurate and building on our ViewRanger walks linking SANGS. More information on the ViewRanger walks can be found in section 5.6.
 - 2.7. No one in the team has tested positive for COVID-19.
 - 2.8. On only one occasion has a health and safety incident been logged involving a member of the public who did not observe social distancing.
 - 2.9. The office at Heather Farm remains closed.
 - 2.10. Our pitstop activities (public engagement using a gazebo), education work, guided walks, car park surveys and winter SANG surveys have been put on hold until further notice. The activities that had been planned for Heath Week 2020 were all cancelled, but in collaboration with Surrey Wildlife Trust, we were able to run a very successful ‘Virtual’ Heath Week 2020 at the end of July (see sections 5.28 and 5.29 for more details).

Monitoring during COVID-19 restrictions

- 2.11. People counter data have been collected as usual and the results are presented in section 7.4
- 2.12. The monthly car park surveys have not been conducted. In 2019, Rob West (Team Leader September 2019 to December 2019) conducted a health and safety review and made the decision to conduct our car park survey work in pairs. We had previously conducted these alone, with the driver following the transect route and recording the data. While we advised drivers to pull over safely to record the data, Rob identified a health and safety risk that could easily be mitigated by working in pairs. Having made this decision, we could not put people at risk by resuming lone working during the COVID-19 restrictions.

2.13. We also took the decision not to conduct any SANG visitor surveys over the autumn of 2020. Not only to protect the health of SAMM staff, but also due to the difficulty of approaching visitors politely while maintaining a safe distance. It also seemed unlikely that visitors would want to engage in this type of interaction.

3. Wardening

3.1. The project provides a warden service on the SPA. During the March to August season we cover seven days a week, from 07:00 to 19:00 (daylight permitting).

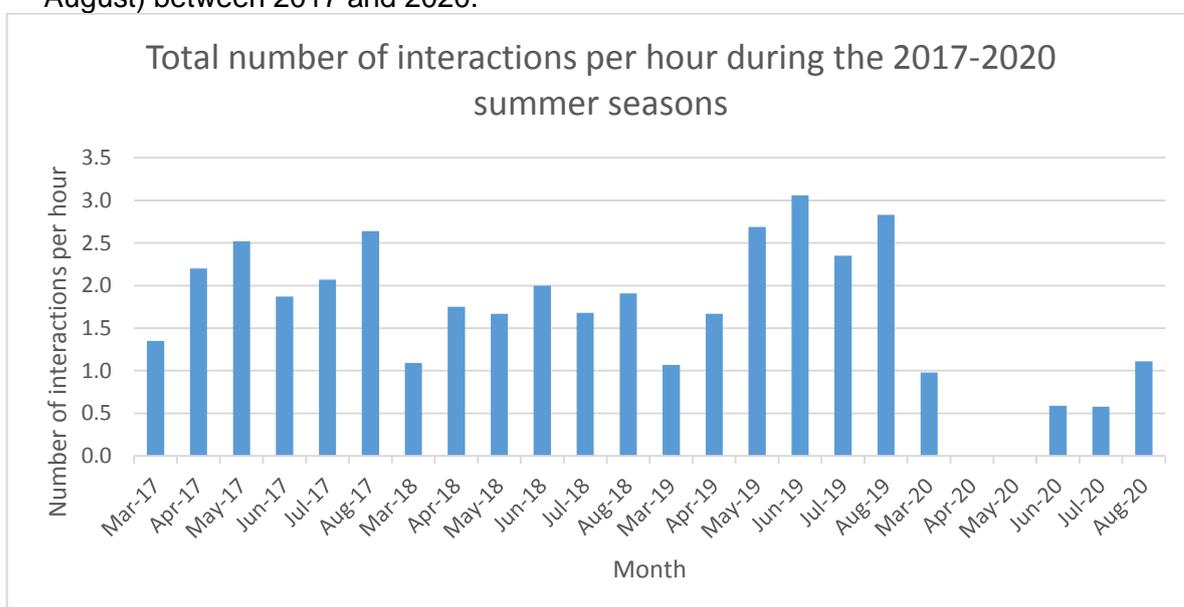
3.2. The following tables set out the number of hours of warden activity delivered on the SPA during (part of) March, June, July and August 2020.

3.3. **Table 1.** Wardening activity delivered on the SPA during 2020.

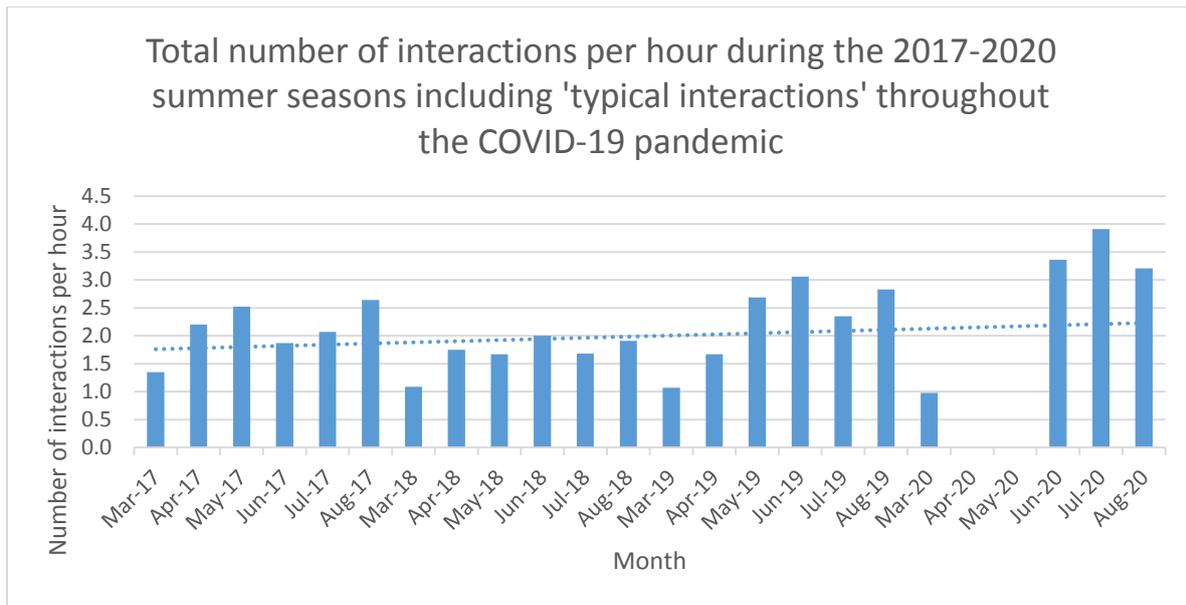
March 2020	Total hours wardened	292.75	July 2020	Total hours wardened	805
	Number of interactions	288		Number of interactions	467
	Interactions per hour	0.98		Interactions per hour	0.58
	Number already spoken to	122		Number already spoken to	96
	Leaflets handed out	272		Leaflets handed out	0
	Number of dogs	285		Number of dogs	533
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	8		Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	49
	Average already spoken to	42.4%		Average already spoken to	20.6%
	Total people count (inc. typical interactions*)	N/A		Total people count (inc. typical interactions*)	3149
	Typical interactions* per hour	N/A		Typical interactions* per hour	3.91
	Total dog count (inc. typical interactions*)	N/A		Total dog count (inc. typical interactions*)	1580
June 2020	Total hours wardened	433.95	August 2020	Total hours wardened	409.2
	Number of interactions	256		Number of interactions	454
	Interactions per hour	0.59		Interactions per hour	1.11
	Number already spoken to	46		Number already spoken to	92
	Leaflets handed out	0		Leaflets handed out	0
	Number of dogs	196		Number of dogs	389
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	2		Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	11
	Average already spoken to	18.0%		Average already spoken to	20.3%
	Total people count (inc. typical interactions*)	1460		Total people count (Inc. typical interactions*)	1312
	Typical interactions* per hour	3.36		Typical interactions* per hour	3.21
	Total dog count (inc. typical interactions*)	767		Total dog count (inc. typical interactions*)	786

* Typical interactions estimate the number of interactions that would have taken place if not following COVID-19 guidelines.

- 3.4. As expected, the number of wardening hours for March was reduced compared to 2019, as all activities ceased on 17 March due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see section 2 for further details). Conversely, the number of wardening hours in June and August 2020 were comparable to those of 2019, whilst the effort in July had exceeded previous achievements, with 800 hours of wardening compared to 558 carried out in 2019.
- 3.5. No events or pitstops were possible between March and August 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.
- 3.6. The total number of interactions per hour have remained relatively stable between 2017 and 2019, with a decrease in the spring and summer months in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (Fig. 2).
- 3.7. **Figure 2.** Total number of interactions per hour during the sensitive period (March to August) between 2017 and 2020.

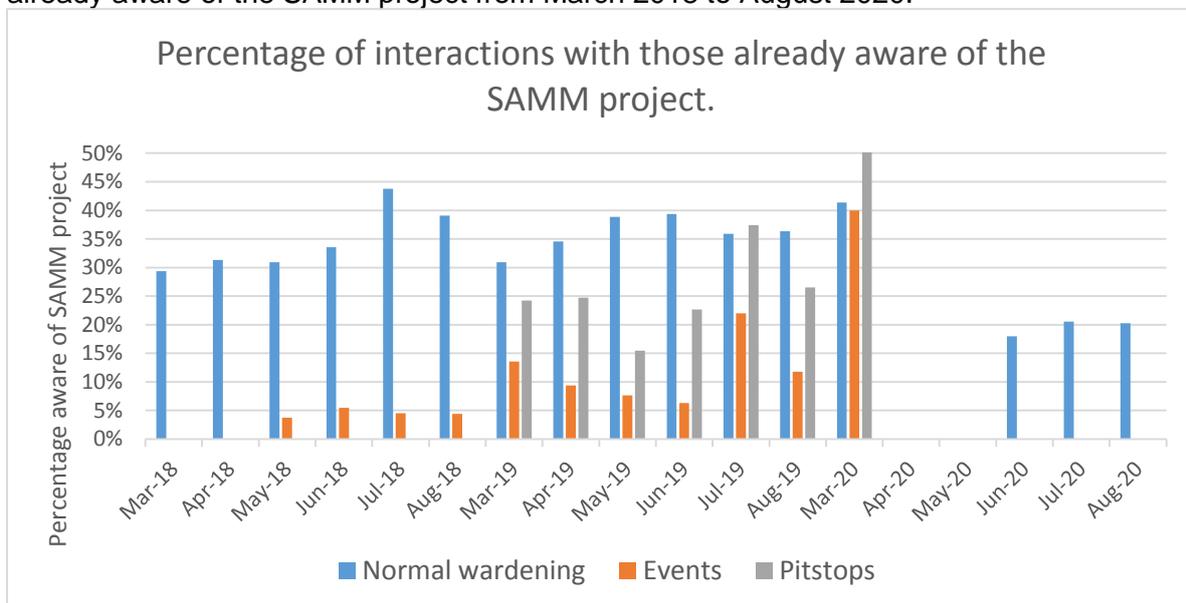


- 3.8. However, when considering the number of interactions, including ‘typical’ ones, there was a suggestion of an increase over time, with the three highest figures, 3.91 (July), 3.36 (June) and 3.21 (August) all recorded during the 2020 summer season. In the absence of pitstops and events, the increase is likely to reflect the higher number of visitors to the SPA recorded in the summer 2020 (see section 7.4 for more details).
- 3.9. **Figure 3.** Total number of interactions per hour during the sensitive period (March to August), including ‘typical interactions’ throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, between 2017 and 2020.



3.10. Figure 4 shows the percentage of monthly interactions on the SPA with members of the public that were already aware of the SAMM project since March 2018. On average, 32.7% of individuals encountered whilst 'normal wardening' said that they were already aware of the project. This figure was slightly down from the 35.8% to August 2019, but it was to be expected given the restrictions on wardening and interactions with members of the public between March and August 2020. Pitstops and events were not possible during the spring and summer 2020, due to restrictions considering the COVID-19 epidemic, therefore no data were available for that period.

Figure 4. Average percentage of monthly interactions with members of the public that were already aware of the SAMM project from March 2018 to August 2020.



4. Access to Special Protection Area land

4.1. There have been no issues or changes. Feedback from landowners remains very positive and we thank all partners for their ongoing support.

- 4.2. Extensions to our existing access agreements have been agreed by all Partners. The agreements have been renewed through to 30th June 2023.

5. Communications, promotions and events

Website

- 5.1. The website can be found at www.tbhpartnership.org.uk and continues to be used to promote our key messages. The website content is designed to inform and inspire visitors and to promote usage of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs).
- 5.2. Recent enhancements to the website have improved usability on mobile phones, made searching across content possible and allowed us to display bespoke messaging on the home page. A new configurable menu has allowed us to structure our pages and draw attention to key campaigns.
- 5.3. Recent additions to the website content include a dedicated wildfire awareness page, leaflet downloads, a page of free activities for kids, volunteering opportunities and an archive of key blog posts.
- 5.4. The new wildfire awareness page was launched in June 2020. Covering causes, consequences and reporting, the page provides written information, infographics and hard-hitting photographs of the damage caused by wildfires. Visitors to the page can also download the wildfire-related newsletter and find links to local fire services, wildfire blogs and interesting research papers on the subject. Judy Rice - Education Manager at Hants FRS - has directly linked to this page from the education section of the Fire Service's website to spread the messages further.
- 5.5. The news and blogs page features regular entries from the team, including a wide range of articles about our work and the wildlife and history of the heaths. Recent articles have included a celebration of the SPA's 15th birthday, a rundown of countryside law, the best SANGs to see bluebells, public access enhancements at Ash Ranges, memorable moments with nature, recording silver-studded blue butterflies, Butterfly Conservation's 'Big Butterfly Count', a new countryside code, promotion for our free kids activities, Heath Week, Countryfile's visit to Ockham, the wildfire at Chobham Common and a celebration for the seventieth SANG.
- 5.6. The online directory of SANGs, 'Greenspace on your doorstep', has long been an important part of the website and is the most visited section. Since the September 2019 booklet edition of 'Greenspace on your doorstep' was published, eight more have been listed online, bringing the total to seventy. The seventieth entry was Chertsey Meads in Runnymede. Each entry has a section on parking and how to find it, a description and a photograph gallery.
- 5.7. A new addition to many of the entries is a link to ViewRanger, a website that allows users to download maps and trail guides to follow on their smartphones using the ViewRanger app. 56 routes have been recorded so far, including single SANGs and connecting multiple SANGs. Users can browse these walks on a map, which has great potential as a tool for publicising SANGs.

5.8. The five most downloaded ViewRanger routes are:

- Naishes Wood at Crookham Park (Hart District Council) – 74 downloads
- Ottershaw Circular (Connecting Ether Hill, Timber Hill & Ottershaw Chase) (Runnymede Borough Council) – 43 downloads
- Chantry Wood (Guildford Borough Council) – 37 downloads
- Hawley Meadows and Blackwater Park (Rushmoor Borough Council / Surrey Heath Borough Council) – 34 downloads
- Wellesley Woodlands Willow Trail (Rushmoor Borough Council) – 34 downloads

5.9. In the period 1st March to 31st August 2020 there were **65,061** page views across the whole website.

5.10. The top performing page, with 5,444 page views, was Warden Nicholas Izzard's article about the difference between swifts, swallows and martins. Part of a long running guide to heathland birds called Birding Beginnings.

5.11. Top 10 most visited pages and the number of page views in the period 1st March to 31st August 2020:

• Swift, swallow or martin?	5,444
• Home page	3,694
• 'Greenspace on your doorstep' home page	3,049
• Buckler's Forest SANG	2,853
• Frost Folly Park SANG	2,283
• Edenbrook Country Park SANG	1,786
• Naishes Wood at Crookham Park SANG	1,724
• Cabbage Hill SANG	1,507
• 'About us' page	1,398
• Free activities for kids	1,339

5.12. The peak number of active users was in June, which may have coincided with our participation in #30DaysWild. The peak can be seen to extend into July and early August, the period in which Virtual Heath Week 2020 ran:

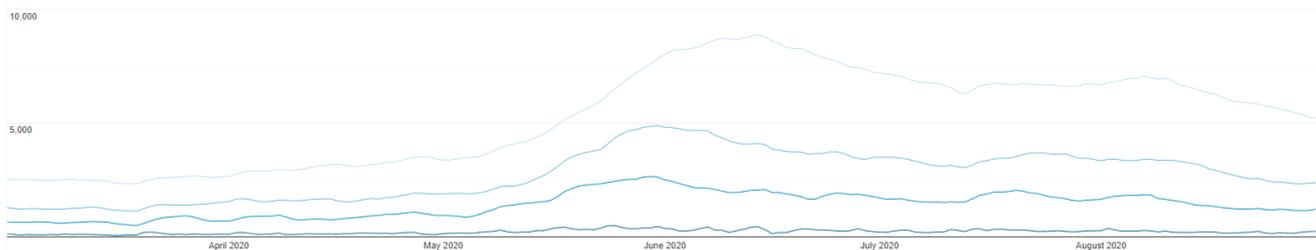


Figure 5 - Active user analysis (source Google Analytics)

Social media

5.13. Our social media platforms continue to spread our key messages and to reach members of the public we were unable to reach during the COVID-19 restrictions.

5.14. We have continued to promote virtual events, our blog posts, and have encouraged users to connect with nature and heathland conservation through downloadable guides and craft activities. Alongside virtual Heath Week 2020, we again promoted

and participated in the Wildlife Trust's 30 Days Wild campaign throughout June. Posts encouraged people to get involved with wildlife and nature, whether in their gardens, local spaces, heathland or virtually.

- 5.15. Alongside core messages about ground-nesting birds and responsible walking on heathlands, two novel campaigns have been run this year, #BeWildfireAware and #HeathlandAtHome. Launching during the main lockdown period, Heathland at Home provided fun and free downloadable craft and wellbeing activities for children and adults, both promoting heathland conservation and serving as an education tool. Wildfire awareness has always been at the forefront of our communication strategy, and this year we have run several #BeWildfireAware posts, with a post always pinned to the top of our Facebook wall to reach all visitors to our page. Our most viewed post this year was about wildfire prevention, reaching over 30,000 people, with other fire posts consistently reaching thousands.
- 5.16. Our Facebook page has 1,031 followers (up by 217 since the last meeting) and 916 likes, with post engagement regularly far exceeding these numbers.
- 5.17. Our Twitter account now has 644 followers (up by 108 since the last meeting). We continue to use this social media platform to spread key messages and engage people about heathlands, SANGs and promote tweets by partners.
- 5.18. This year has seen an increase in content and engagement across platforms, with a new Instagram page debuting in February 2020. This has acquired a following of 260 that we will build on in coming seasons.
- 5.19. Since September 2019, content on Facebook has had 126,858 reaches, with 5,814 since Instagram began.

Heathland Hounds

- 5.20. Heathland Hounds, our dog-focused initiative continues apace. It is based around a popular Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/HeathlandHounds.
- 5.21. Group membership has grown to 1,135 (up by 261 since the last meeting). It features regular posts about responsible dog walking, updates on the ground-nesting season, promotion of SANGs, relevant information from partners e.g. Ash Ranges fencing, as well as more general information about dogs and dog ownership.
- 5.22. We see Heathland Hounds as a key part of our strategy and a key communication channel to a key audience. We are really pleased with the level of interactive within the group. It's reaching the stage where we can use it to gain insight into how our messaging is received. For example, we have solicited useful member feedback on designs for next season's ground-nesting bird signage. It is very useful and interesting to hear from the potential audience and we shall be taking this feedback on board.
- 5.23. The focus of posts changed during the COVID-19 lockdown and we were able to ask members to keep in touch with their experiences out on the SPA and SANGs. Members are fantastic 'eyes and ears' and unofficial ambassadors.
- 5.24. For Virtual Heath Week 2020 we created a short video to explain what Heathland Hounds is about. We asked group members to submit their own videos of responsible dog walking on the SPA or having fun on a SANG. We had two members volunteer to be filmed on their walks – we filmed one on Horsell Common and

another on Barossa. We also shared a range of celebratory posts focussing on members and their dogs – on Instagram and Twitter too.

- 5.25. The members clearly enjoyed the new Heath Week content and we had 131 new members during that week!
- 5.26. Since Sep 2019 we have led seven group walks for members on SANGs – Whitewater Meadows (Sep 2019), Crookham Park (Oct 2019), a Halloween walk at Heather Farm (Oct 2019), a Christmas walk at Farnham Park (Dec 2019), Wellesley Water Meadows (Jan 2020), Chobham Water Meadows, (Feb 2020) and Rowhill Nature Reserve (Mar 2020). We welcomed several new faces these.
- 5.27. We ran public engagement pitstops at Yateley Common (two), Barossa, Ash Ranges (two), Bramshill Forest (two), Velmead, Horsell Common (two), Hazeley Heath and attended a Hart District Council event at Edenbrook Country Park and an event at Wellesley Woodlands SANG with accompanying group walk.
- 5.28. Facebook metrics 20th October 2019 to 18th Oct 2020 show 1,018 active members, 1,091 posts, 3,577 comments and 8,733 reactions.
- 5.29. Feedback from members:

“I’ve learnt a lot from some of our experienced dog owners and ‘Heathland Hounds’ – a local Facebook group you may enjoy following.”

“Love this group. You’ve been a godsend for us!”

“We definitely go for more walks in new places thanks to this page and the very useful booklet. Me and woofers are very grateful x”

“Love the positivity of this group and all the information it gives.”

Virtual Heath Week 2020

- 5.30. We have run an annual week of enhanced public engagement since 2018, and it’s building to become our flagship event.
- 5.31. This year’s annual Heath Week celebrations took place online in collaboration with Surrey Wildlife Trust. Running over nine days from Saturday 25th July to Sunday 2nd August. We produced a variety of videos and social media posts promoting interactive competitions, craft activities, and our key heathland conservation messages – including species spotlights, wildfire prevention and responsible dog walking. Coordinating posts on both the SAMM and Surrey Wildlife Trust social media platforms led to over 25,000 views of videos, with one video about adders, made by Warden Jamie Neaves, reaching over 4,500 views. Even during COVID-19 restrictions, Heath Week managed to raise public awareness of our amazing heathland, with our videos providing an excellent and accessible way of displaying rare species such as Dartford warblers and nightjars to people unable to see them in the wild.

Be Wildfire Aware

- 5.32. We regularly use social media to spread messages around wildfire prevention. The aim is to raise awareness of the causes of wildfires, highlight the significant damage

they cause and provide people with the information about what to do if they discovered a fire. We also share partner posts and other relevant information

- 5.33. We published 17 wildfire prevention social media posts across the season (March to September) and these were some of our most shared posts, helping to spread messages further. One of these posts reached over 30,000 people and generated a lot of engagement. Another wildfire post reached 11,400 and two others reached more than 7000 each.
- 5.34. Warden Florence Cordner did an Instagram story about the large wildfire at Chobham Common that took hold in August, highlighting the scale of the devastation and introduced ways to avoid this happening again in the future. This reached more than 2000 people.
- 5.35. Warden Henry Howells contributed to a video about heathland wildfire prevention. The video was edited by Surrey Wildlife Trust, with additional information from their staff, and was shown regularly during Virtual Heath Week 2020.

K9 Fire Patrol

- 5.36. K9 Fire Patrol is a joint initiative with Surrey Fire & Rescue Service to encourage dog walkers to keep an eye on their local heaths. Members record time spent on the heaths, reporting any fires, fly-tips & anti-social behaviour and spreading information about what to do in the event of a fire. Members' dogs are presented with a hi-viz jacket to promote the scheme and to create a talking point.
- 5.37. Due to COVID-19, and our key staff doubling up on roles, our involvement in the K9 Fire Patrol has hit a lull in during 2020. Our main point of contact at Surrey Fire & Rescue Service has also been helping to run PPE distribution for Surrey.
- 5.38. The patrol is something we remain committed to. Surrey Fire & Rescue Service have recently recruited two dedicated officers for a Wildfire and Rural Partnership and we are keen to work with them next season to make the most of the opportunity presented by the K9 Fire Patrol and the #BeWildfireAware campaign.

New MOD dog walking leaflet

- 5.39. Over the summer of 2019 we worked closely with Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) to produce a new leaflet specific to dog walking on the Defence Training Estate / Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. Fifty percent of the SPA is training estate and it is helpful to have the relevant information to hand out. The leaflet, 'Dog Walking on MOD Land', was published in February 2020 and is available to download from our website.

Partnership Newsletter

- 5.40. May 2019 saw the publication of the inaugural quarterly Thames Basin Heaths Partnership Newsletter, a web-based newsletter for partners. Since then, wardens Rupert Millican, Nicholas Izard and Jamie Neaves have done a great job of continuing this publication. They have shared a variety of news stories around the partnership, some contributed by ourselves, but many contributed by the partners themselves. The next edition is due to come out later this month.

Partnership events

- 5.41. The SPA Warden Team assisted Surrey Wildlife Trust with their habitat management at Poors Allotment and Chobham Common in November 2019 and January 2020
- 5.42. Wild Moor Heath 'Bash 'n' Burn' event saw lots of groups coming together. These included BBOWT, Bracknell Forest, The National Trust, Wokingham Borough Council, Horsell Common Preservation Society and the Canal and River Trust amongst others.
- 5.43. We helped Surrey Wildlife Trust to run a Families 'Pull-a-Pine' event at Poors allotments.
- 5.44. Chobham Common and Whitmoor Common saw two pop up animal magic events in 2019, one for Halloween and one for Christmas. We ran an Autumn walk and talk at Brookwood Country Park SANG and a Christmas wreath-making event at Farnham Park SANG.
- 5.45. August 2020 saw us giving a socially distant introduction to SAMM wardening to the Friends of Thursley Common group.

6. Education

Heathland education

- 6.1. Our Education Officer, Michael Jones, has developed resources and lesson plans that link heathland into the curriculum for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. These can be delivered out on the heath or in the classroom. All cover key project messages.
- 6.2. Sadly, the arrival of COVID-19 saw the cancellation of several planned sessions with schools across the SPA and curtailed further face-to-face outreach.
- 6.3. Before lockdown, however, we were able to deliver 19 sessions to a variety of local schools and community groups, on the heath, in classrooms and in school grounds. These sessions all included the project's key messages around responsible heathland use, but also covered subjects like reptiles, hibernation, seasons, threats (including wildfire), some practical habitat management, litter-picking, classification, conservation careers advice and, of course, lots about ground-nesting birds.
- 6.4. Overall, 650 children took part in these sessions, ranging from reception age to Year 12 students.

Heathland engagement activities - online

- 6.5. To counteract the loss of engagement opportunity, we launched an activities page on the website in April 2020. This includes free downloads of arts, crafts, games and educational resources, designed to take heathland and its amazing species to people's homes. These activities were advertised through social media using the hashtag #HeathlandAtHome, via TBH Partners and local schools.
- 6.6. We introduced the world to #HeathlandAtHome in April 2020. We ran a series of 29 social media posts throughout lockdown and for a period afterwards, as restrictions were lifted. We encouraged followers to join in with salt dough modelling, a green tiger beetle game, a heathland crossword, lots of colouring-in and even learning about the structure of heathland plants. Plus many more.

- 6.7. Activities were widely shared (Facebook Insights indicates that over 18,000 people were reached by these posts) and people contributed to our Heathland at Home art gallery.
- 6.8. As restrictions lifted, we were able to encourage people to download resources like the heathland nature trail and a guide to seek out different heathland plants. These resources encourage people to get to know their local heaths better and reinforce some of our key messages.
- 6.9. Many of these activities were promoted with videos during Virtual Heath Week 2020.

Wildfire education

- 6.10. We continue to spread the word about heathland wildfires to local schools and further develop links with fire services. We promote responsible use of heathland via social media to raise awareness of the destructiveness of wildfires.
- 6.11. 'Our Amazing Heathlands' is a newsletter written to connect schoolchildren with their local heaths and help raise awareness of wildfire.
- 6.12. Issue #1 covered a general introduction to what heathland is, its rarity and some of the fascinating species that live there (with a direct reference to ground-nesting birds). The focus of page 2 was wildfire. Messages centred around what wildfires are, what causes them, the damage they cause (to habitats, species and local communities) and what people can do if they discover a fire. These key messages were aimed to educate and reduce the incidence of fires. It also provided a link to the new wildfire awareness page on the website.
- 6.13. The newsletter's wildfire content was fact-checked and endorsed by the three local fire services (Surrey FRS, Hampshire FRS and Royal Berkshire FRS). All three were happy to have their badges on the publication to help give the messages added weight. It was a good opportunity to further forge relationships with those responsible for fire and safety education across the three counties, which will help with joint educational provision going forward.
- 6.14. Issue #1 was distributed in July 2020 to all secondary schools within 5km of the SPA (x 43) and all primary schools within 1km (x 59). Schools were asked to help spread awareness to students, parents and teachers and advertise the wildfire awareness page, with information on some of the assemblies/classroom sessions available for free.
- 6.15. We have developed a wildfire-themed assembly and separate classroom session and sessions delivered out of the heath introduce students to wildfire as a threat to heathlands.
- 6.16. Additionally, we have now designed two wildfire worksheets, aimed at Key Stage 2, that can be used to support the subject of wildfire with local school children. Again, the contents have been checked with fire services and local teachers.
- 6.17. These worksheets can be used during or after a classroom session (or assembly) on wildfire or a heathland session that introduces the threats to the habitat to embed the messages around responsible use. They can also be used by teachers as a standalone resource.

- 6.18. Again, as with all our wildfire messaging, the themes centre around causes, consequences and reporting fires.
- 6.19. In the future, we aim to do some joint delivery of sessions with local fire services and contribute heathland-specific materials for them to use elsewhere.

Butterfly recording

- 6.20. The silver-studded blue butterfly is a top priority species on the Thames Basin Heaths, so in June and July, we encouraged heathland visitors to turn citizen scientists and record them. A blog post introduced this under-recorded butterfly and included a downloadable guide to separating it from other blue butterflies so would-be recorders could be confident with their identification. This was supported by social media posts to encourage participation. People were asked to report sightings through the iRecord butterflies app and a number of people got in contact to tell us about their sightings.
- 6.21. Next summer will see this citizen science project expand with the proposed launch of 'Silver-Studded Blue Watch 2021', with guided walks, butterfly ID sessions and blog posts designed to raise the profile of heathland butterflies and inspire the local community to get involved in wildlife recording.

Volunteering

- 6.22. In October 2019, we launched a volunteering opportunities webpage to encourage local people to contribute their time to the conservation efforts of our partners. Entries for partners included an overview of activities, contact details and weblinks. This formed part of our promotion of the Year of Green Action - a year-long national campaign designed to get people to connect with and take action to protect and enhance their local greenspaces. We continue to update this information and have supported it via social media and blog posts.

Feedback

- 6.23. Judy Rice – Education Manager (HFRS) – “I love the attached worksheets – would you allow us to share these on our Home Learning Pages for you? Obviously with acknowledgement this is done with your permission?”
- 6.24. Rich Munday – Fire Prevention Lead (Surrey FRS) – “I've taken the time to print off your worksheets and show them to my kids at home (ages 8-15) and they thought that both were very easy to read and also put out a strong message with clear advice on basic actions on what to do if they find a fire. So you have the thumbs up from them”.
- 6.25. Caroline Hutchings – Head of Science (Halstead School) – “Fire on the Heath! - I love this one. Three short scenarios that require thinking it through, rather than telling them what happened. Also, it makes them think about how to get it right.”
- 6.26. Steve Wheatley – Butterfly Conservation South-East England Regional Conservation Manager – “The butterfly will remain a top priority species for the Thames Basin Heaths and an important indicator for heathland condition and for a wide range of other invertebrates. We're lucky to have a strong network of important partners in this area including the three Wildlife Trusts, Natural England and the TBH Partnership, RSPB, Forestry England, MOD, Crown Estate and of course, Butterfly Conservation.

Michael's done a brilliant job of promoting the butterfly through the TBH Partnership e.g. www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/ssb-can-you-help/.

7. SPA and SANGs monitoring

Winter 2019/2020 Visitor Surveys on SANGs

- 7.1. Winter surveys were conducted at ten SANGs in order to analyse footfall, public opinion and usage. Across the sites, wardens spent 180 hours conducting 341 surveys between September 2019 and February 2020. Data will be collated and analysed in due course. All strategic SANGs have now been surveyed and some of the newest bespoke SANGs.

The SANGs surveyed were:

- Ash Green Meadows (Guildford Borough Council)
- Bisley Common (Surrey Heath Borough Council)
- Buckler's Forest (Bracknell Forest Council)
- Cabbage Hill (Bracknell Forest Council)
- Chertsey Common, Longcross (Runnymede Borough Council)
- Clare's Green Field (Wokingham Borough Council)
- Effingham Common (Guildford Borough Council)
- Frost Folly (Bracknell Forest Council)
- Great Hollands Wood (Bracknell Forest Council)
- Swan Lake Park (Hart District Council)

Ground-nesting breeding bird surveys

- 7.2. The Annex 1 2020 breeding bird report has not yet been received.

Survey year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Nightjar	320	313	298	296	326	337	320	325
Woodlark	216	229	180	157	159	161	202	135
Dartford W.	389	529	633	61	38	47	87	118

Survey year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Nightjar	355	313	332	351	366	353
Woodlark	155	147	124	164	112	143
Dartford W.	292	457	430	556	265	488

Table 2. Estimated totals of Annex 1 bird territories on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area and peripheral Sites, 2006-2019

Car park surveys

- 7.3. As mentioned in section 2.12, car park surveys have not been conducted this summer due to a new risk assessment.

People counter data

- 7.4. There were 37 active people counters deployed across 22 SPA sites. Seven SPA sites had more than one counter (Ash ranges (eight) (Fig. 6), Chobham Common and

Fig. 8. Monthly number of visitors for the three people counters present at Forest of Eversley, between January 2017 and July 2020.

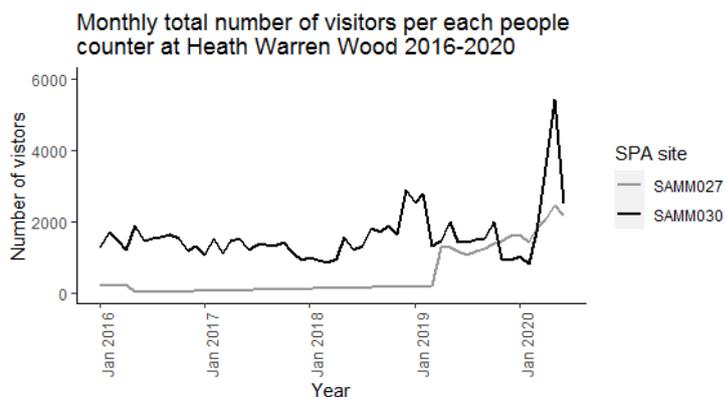


Fig. 9. Monthly number of visitors for the two people counters present at Heath Warren Wood, between January 2016 and July 2020.

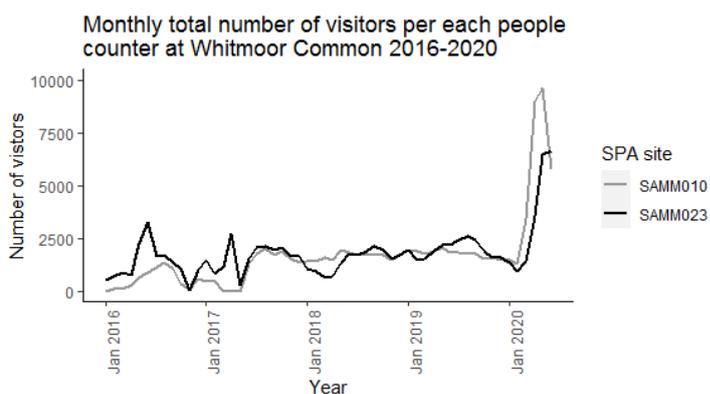


Fig. 10. Monthly number of visitors for the two people counters present at Whitmoor Common, between January 2016 and July 2020.

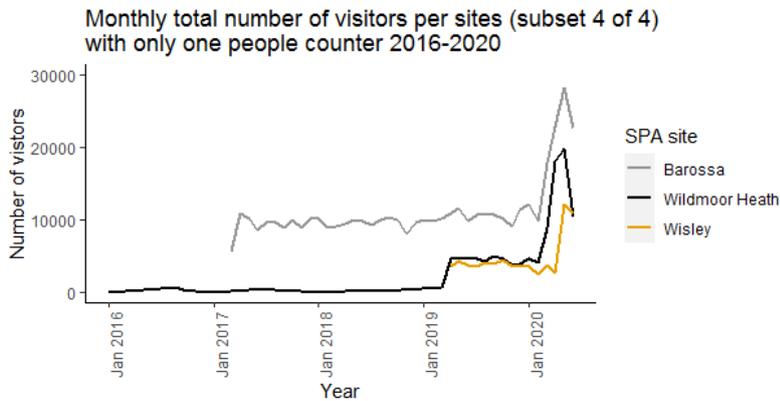
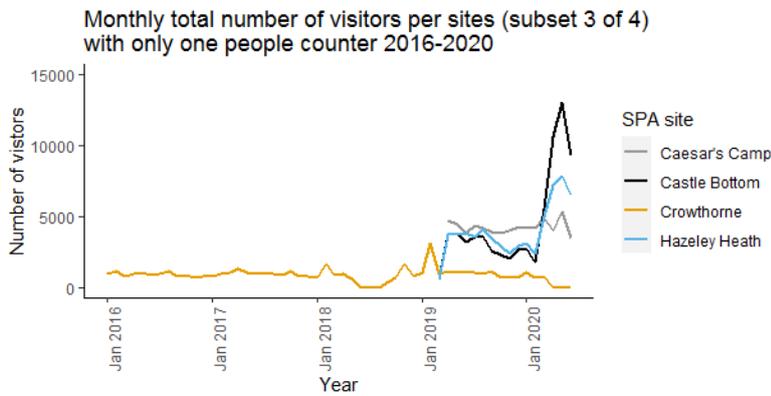
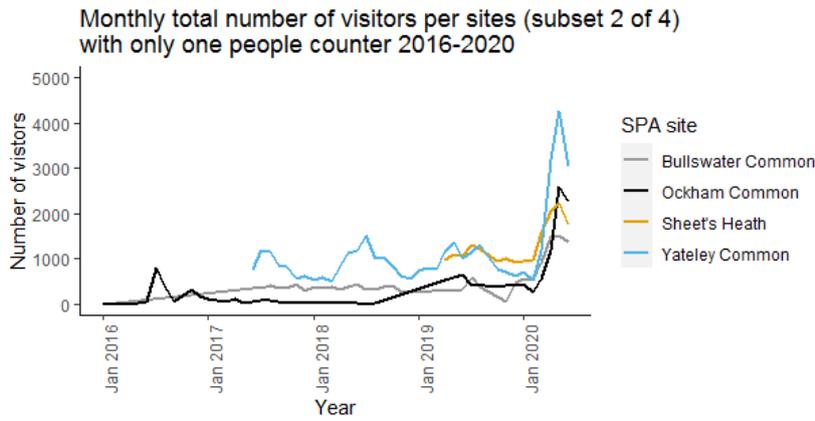
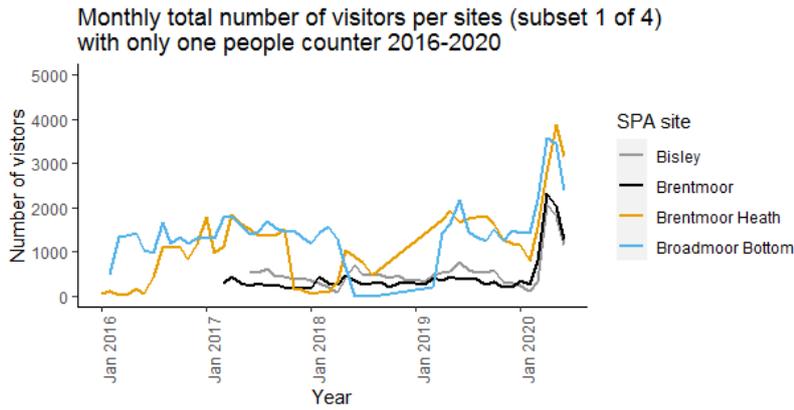


Fig. 11. Monthly number of visitors for people counters present sites with only one people counter, between January 2016 and July 2020.

- 7.5. Future analyses, to be carried out by the next meeting, will be a formal statistical analysis of people counter data to produce a trend over time per site. During the second stage, which will likely be started, but not completed, before the next meeting, trends will be contextualized in relation to the presence of nearby SANGs, for some of which people counter data are being kindly provided by the Local Planning Authorities: the aim will be to understand to what extent the trend in people visiting SANGs and SPA match. The result will be correlative, as cause and effect cannot be established with certainty using the data currently available. The third stage, which will likely not be completed before 2022, will include a statistical model to explain the number of visitors on the SPA in relation to number of visitors at SANGs, as well as distance between each SPA site and the nearest SANG(s), seasonality and other factors that will be identified according to the data available. The aim will be to understand the likely drivers of change, or lack there-of, in visitors on SPA, with the view of drawing recommendations on how to alter visitor numbers if necessary.

8. Other Work

Behavioural insights study

- 8.1. An opportunity arose to work with the Natural England, Bird Aware Solent and the Behavioral Insights Team to determine the most effective strategy to affect behavioural change.
- 8.2. An online randomised controlled trial was undertaken to assess leaflet content and to test the effect of leaflets on people's comprehension of wildlife disturbance. 2,512 dog-owners from across the UK participated in the trial. Some participants were not shown a leaflet, whilst others were shown a usual copy of the leaflet and a third group saw a leaflet developed by the Behavioural Insights Team. Participants were then asked comprehension questions e.g. does a bird flying away when a person comes near constitute a wildlife disturbance? There was strong evidence that leaflets increased participants comprehension of wildlife disturbance relative to the baseline level.
- 8.3. A field-trial was planned to trial methods of redirecting visitors away from favourable nesting habitat. The planned trial consists of placing pawprint signs at decision points (a junction in a path) where visitors can choose between two paths. A pawprint sign acts as an 'affordance cue', where the design of the object can unconsciously influence an individual's behaviour. In this case, the pawprint suggests that "this is the way dog-walkers go".
- 8.4. The planned field-trial was not carried out because of COVID-19 restrictions. In place of this a method has been planned to allow SAMM to conduct the trial in the future. The trial will involve wardens collecting data to measure which route site users take before and after the pawprint signs are installed. If proved successful, the signs could be adopted as a method of directing dog walkers away from sensitive wildlife areas.

SANG best practice guide

- 8.5. Warden Nick Izard has been compiling "SANG: A best practice guide" in collaboration with partners. It includes case studies and good examples of SANG management, and is designed to encourage developers to promote biodiversity and prioritise connecting SANGs to form Nature Recovery Networks.
- 8.6. The guide will be included in the appendix of Natural England's 'SANG Criteria' document that all housing developers must follow.

9. Looking ahead

- 9.1. Ruth and her team will be using the winter season to plan for 2021. Assuming a more normal year, we want to take forward several opportunities including the following.
- 9.2. Continue with our core message of asking heathland visitors to stick to main paths and keep dogs out of vegetation. We will be taking a look at our existing signage to see if it can be improved. In September 2020 we ran several sign designs past Heathland Hounds members and the feedback was interesting. We will be looking at the feedback closely and potentially redesigning signage.
- 9.3. We will continue to build on our 'Be Wildfire Aware' messaging and are currently consulting with the Partnership and Surrey Fire & Rescue Service's Wildfire and Rural Partnership, to see how consistent signage across the SPA can be achieved. We'll be allocating a year-round warden to lead on wildfire awareness and to plan a timetable of public engagement activities for 2021.
- 9.4. We will continue to update 'Greenspace on your doorstep' with new SANGs opening and continue to promote these through wardening, social media and the Heathland Hounds website.
- 9.5. We will be continuing to build a range of educational activities that can be used by a teacher to introduce heathland into further subject areas with the aim of encouraging them to embed heathland into their curriculum, rather than heathland making a one-off appearance in the students' lives and then disappearing.
- 9.6. We are investigating ways to engage with schools remotely over the autumn and winter and continue to build relationships with the aim of returning to significant delivery from the spring of 2021. This winter will see the launch of a dedicated education section on the website.
- 9.7. We consider people moving into new dwellings to be a key audience. We are starting to plan a program to deliver our message to people as they move in.
- 9.8. We are looking at further enhancements to the website, to include a directory of heathland wildlife and a revamped webpage for Heathland Hounds.
- 9.9. We are hoping to create more video materials, including a training video on 'How to be a responsible dog owner on the Thames Basin Heaths'.
- 9.10. We will plan for Heath Week 2021 to be a physical event as in previous years. If we find that any Covid related restrictions do not allow for this we will move to our virtual model developed this year.