

THAMES BASIN HEATHS JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD (JSPB)

Date: 22 June 2022

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 a request to recruit an additional year round warden to fill the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staffing budget
- To APPROVE requests for data regarding SANG use from all Local Authority Partners
- To CONFIRM that it is the Boards intention for the tariff to increase in line with inflation on an annual basis as discussed in the November 2020 meeting.
- To OFFER GUIDANCE on succession planning within the project

**Purpose of the Report:**

To provide the JSPB with an update on SAMM activity since the last meeting in November 2021.

**Summary**

This paper sets out for Members the SAMM project's activities and achievements since the last meeting in November 2021, recent monitoring work and plans for the next 6 months.

**Brief Project Overview for new Board Members.**

I have been asked to provide a very brief project overview for the newly elected councilors who are now sitting on the JSPB. I hope this meets that requirement.

The Thames Basin Heaths Partnership is a landscape-scale partnership of local councils, land managers and nature conservation bodies working together to conserve the heathland of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) across

Surrey, Hampshire, and Berkshire. The story of this innovative and nationally significant project began back in 2005 when the Special Protection Area (SPA) that sits at its core was notified. The designation occurred due to the areas international importance to three rare Annex 1 birds, the Nightjar, the Woodlark and the Dartford Warbler.

In 2009 the JSPB in conjunction with Natural England produced a delivery framework to mitigate the impact of an increasing residential population on the SPA. A 'buffer zone' (400m to 5km) was established around the SPA and each new residential development built within the zone is required to provide 'Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces' (SANG's) for the new residents to use. In addition, each development pays a tariff which supports the work of the SAMM project in perpetuity. An additional zone has been established (5km to 7 km) which carries a smaller portion of requirements. Payment of the tariff and its investment is managed by Hampshire County Council. We currently use approximately 30% of the annual income to fund the SAMM project activities and the remaining 70 % is invested.

The team of highly trained and deeply knowledgeable SAMM wardens focus on finding innovative ways to connect local people with nature, to get them talking about heathland and share simple messages about sticking to main paths; spreading the word about SANGs and wildfire awareness, all with a view to protecting the rare heathland species of the SPA. The team host quarterly meetings of the 'Access Management and Monitoring Partnership' (AMMP) to enable all 26 partners to discuss issues and share best practice. We also gather and analyse data about usage of the SPA and SANG's. We share our findings with as wide a group as possible and provide information about the populations of the Annex 1 birds. More details about the project's activities are housed in the body of this report.

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## **1. SAMM project staffing and recruitment**

- 1.1. We are delighted to report that we have six seasonal wardens in post.
- 1.2. Very unusually recruitment has been challenging this year and the SAMM project has faced the same difficulties as the entire conservation sector.
- 1.3. As a result, we only had three seasonal wardens in post for March 2022. Happily, an additional round of recruiting attracted some excellent candidates and a second batch of seasonal wardens started at the beginning of May 2022. All training and inductions have now been completed and all seasonal wardens are confident in their role.
- 1.4. Ruth Papworth and Steven Lockett are returning seasonal wardens having worked for the project previously. We are glad to welcome them back. Zhinlap Tamang has come to the SAMM team after being an apprentice with Natural England a few years ago.
- 1.5. We are supporting Sam Kendall, Dan Rogers and Louis Harrington-Edmans as seasonal wardens in their very first roles within the conservation sector.
- 1.6. In order to try and ease any difficulties in recruitment next year we are looking to deepen the pool of prospective candidates by offering opportunities for individuals to gain knowledge and experience of our work.
- 1.7. To this end we have started to offer work experience placements and job shadowing opportunities.
- 1.8. We have also improved our connections with the local colleges that offer conservation courses such as Merrist Wood and Sparsholt College. Students from Merrist wood who are studying wildlife and conservation came a spent an afternoon with us. We took them on a guided walk across Heather Farm SANG and the SPA. We introduced them to this amazing project and explained the issues facing designated sites and their management. Sparsholt college have expressed interest in a similar offering. We expect these to become annual events.
- 1.9. The new seasonal wardens have integrated with the existing team brilliantly and have helped us to deliver all the amazing results we will detail throughout this report.
- 1.10. Currently all positions are filled in line with the agreed project structure as shown below



However several of the team work part time rather than full time. This means that instead of having a team of 13 working full time we are a team of 12.2. This is 0.8 down in terms of Full Time equivalent (FTE) posts as shown below. The salary of another full-time role at advisor level would be completely covered by the differences in FTE across the team.

Role	Level	FTE
Project manager	Senior Advisor	0.8
Team Leader	Senior Advisor	1
Senior warden	Lead Advisor	1
Communications Officer	Lead Advisor	1
Data Analyst	Lead Advisor	0.8
Education officer	Lead Advisor	1
4 year-round wardens	Advisor	3.6
6 seasonal wardens (Each for 6 months so 0.5 FTE)	Advisor	3
		12.2

1.11. With the board's approval we would like to recruit another full-time year-round warden this year. This will give us another team member to help deliver this important work with no increase in agreed salary budget.

## 2. Wardening

2.1. The project provides a warden service on the SPA. During the September to April season we cover 5 days a week, and from March to mid-September we work 7 days per week from 07:00 to 19:00 (daylight permitting).

- 2.2. We are well prepared for Heath Week 2022 (25<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> July), with 25 events in the itinerary so far! We are working together and with partners to plan exciting and engaging events, completing risk assessments, hiring vehicles and getting the resources together.

We will be repeating some successful events which were new last year e.g Zoe's 'Sensory Scavenger Hunt' and 'Heathland Herbivores' together with our popular classics e.g 'Butterflies & Other Things with Wings'. We are teaming up with partners for the first time e.g Hampshire & Isle of Wight Amphibian & Reptile Group and Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue to mirror similar events that we do currently with Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust & Surrey Fire & Rescue to span all three counties.

- 2.3. We have been hosting many pop-ups this year and have recently purchased an off-road trolley to allow us to do this in places that were previously out of reach. We've made a new goal for each seasonal warden to attend or host two pop-ups or events per month on the weekend, which is going well so far. We are making extra effort to roll out our wardening presence evenly across the counties, despite access issues relating to small car parks that restrict some events.

- 2.4. Due to the efficiency of the new methodology and the dedication of the TBH SAMM team, we surveyed all 75 SANGs between December 2021 and early March 2022. This totalled 75 hours of wardening time and is the first time we've surveyed every SANG, despite there being the highest number of SANGs to date. We surveyed each SANG for one hour, counting and interviewing people. In total, 262 interviews took place and 836 people were counted. Results are presented in Section 6.  
The team is planning to undertake SANG surveys this summer at a subset of sites, to be able to compare data to the winter results. We are also planning to resume the car park transects this summer.

- 2.5. Over winter 2021, we volunteered with numerous partners including Hampshire County Council Countryside Team at Castle Bottom and Surrey County Council where we litter-picked SANGs as a team. Most recently, we attended a community event in Upper Hale, Farnham to lead a guided walk and were also present at 'Wild About Woking' with Woking Borough Council and Surrey Wildlife Trust.

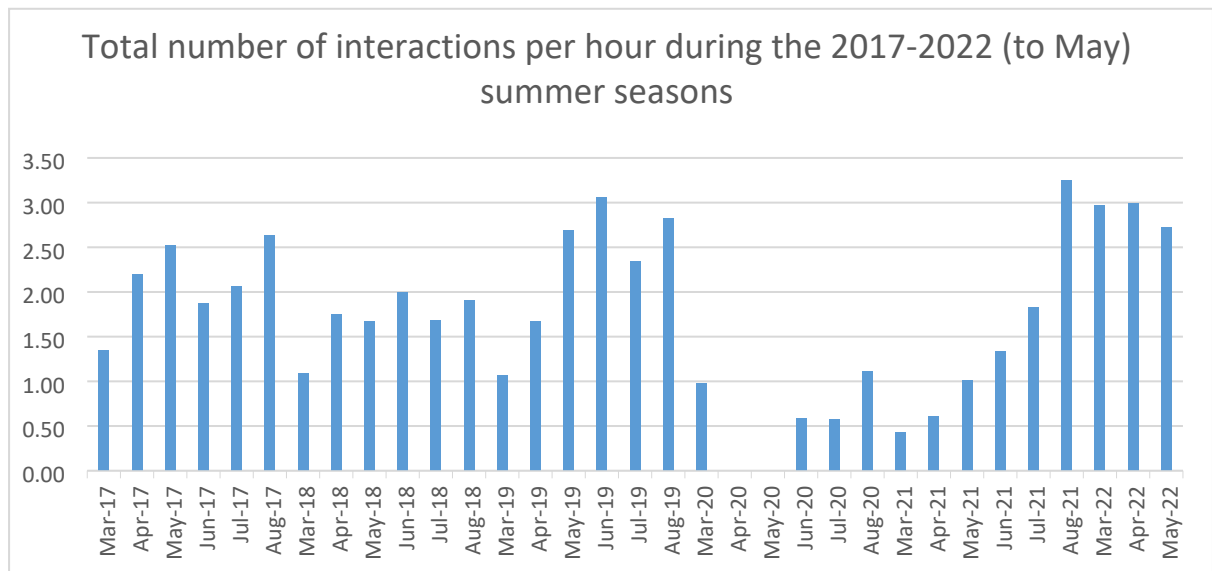
- 2.6. The following table sets out the number of hours of warden activity delivered on the SPA between November 2021 and May 2022, inclusive (Table 1):

**Table 1. Wardening activity delivered on the SPA between November 2021 and May 2022.**

<b>November 2021</b>	Total hours warded	223.59	<b>December 2021</b>	Total hours warded	117.19
	Number of interactions	505		Number of interactions	412
	Interactions per hour	2.26		Interactions per hour	3.51
	Number already spoken to	83		Number already spoken to	49
	Leaflets handed out	793		Leaflets handed out	486
	Number of dogs	335		Number of dogs	231
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	6		Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	7
	Average already spoken to	16.4%		Average already spoken to	11.9%
<b>January 2022</b>	Total hours warded	156.6	<b>February 2022</b>	Total hours warded	161.34
	Number of interactions	488		Number of interactions	409
	Interactions per hour	3.11		Interactions per hour	2.53
	Number already spoken to	116		Number already spoken to	145
	Leaflets handed out	395		Leaflets handed out	179
	Number of dogs	299		Number of dogs	257
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	8		Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	12
	Average already spoken to	23.8%		Average already spoken to	35.4%
<b>March 2022</b>	Total hours warded	280.48	<b>April 2022</b>	Total hours warded	541.98
	Number of interactions	832		Number of interactions	1625
	Interactions per hour	2.97		Interactions per hour	2.99
	Number already spoken to	137		Number already spoken to	138
	Leaflets handed out	1303		Leaflets handed out	2267
	Number of dogs	499		Number of dogs	813
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	9		Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	21
	Average already spoken to	16.4%		Average already spoken to	8.5%

<b>May 2022</b>	Total hours warded	475.6
	Number of interactions	1294
	Interactions per hour	2.72
	Number already spoken to	217
	Leaflets handed out	1831
	Number of dogs	554
	Number of dog walkers	9
	Average already spoken to	16.8%

2.7 The number of hours wardened and the number of interactions per hour returned to pre-Covid-19 levels (Fig. 1), a testament to the dedication of our wardens, especially considering that the six seasonal wardens had joined the SAMM Team later than in previous years (see section 1.1).

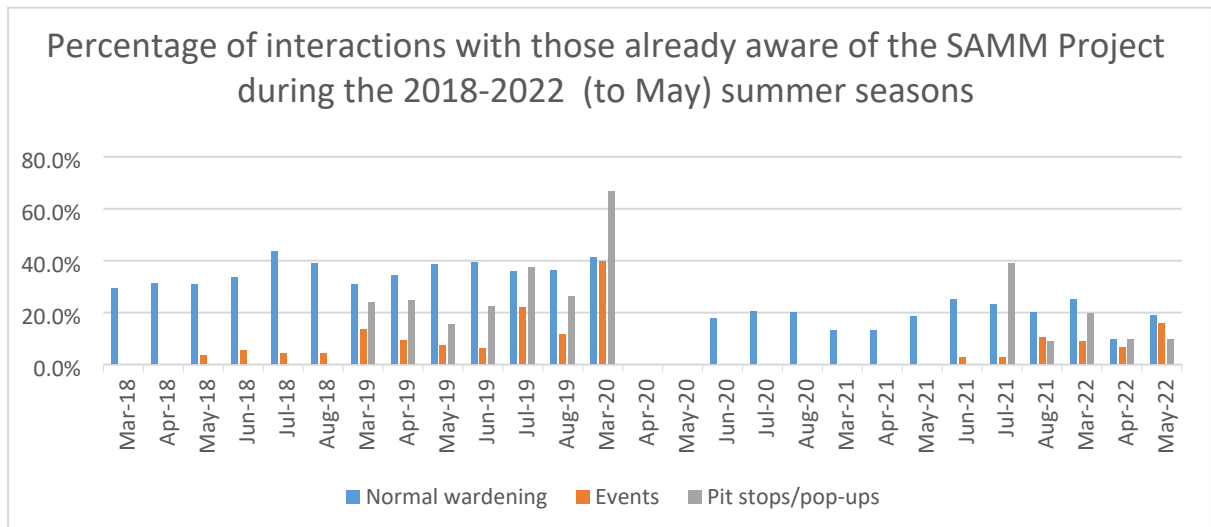


**Figure 1.** Total number of interactions per hour during the sensitive period (March to August) between 2017 and May 2022.

2.8 The easing of Covid-19 restrictions has allowed the Team to re-start regular events and pop-ups (pit-stops), alongside regular wardening (Fig. 2). In May, in particular, the number of interactions were double those in 2021 (1,294 vs 621), despite 20% fewer hours wardened in 2022 compared to 2021, due to the last three seasonal wardens starting that month, compared to March in previous years.

2.9 Thirty-three pitstops/pop-ups and 49 events were possible between November 2021 and May 2022.

2.10 Figure 2 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, 25.3% of individuals encountered whilst ‘normal wardening’ said that they were already aware of the project. This figure was up from the 21.3% to October 2021, but still lower than the average 35% between March 2018 and February 2020. However, with an increase in the number of users to the SPA since the pandemic began, it is not surprising that a lower proportion of people had previously interacted with the Team.



**Figure 2.** Average percentage of monthly interactions with members of the public that were already aware of the SAMM project from March 2018 to May 2022.

### 3. Access to Special Protection Area land

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

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

### 4. Communications

**Partnership working** In response to reports of large numbers of out-of-control dogs at Sheet’s Heath near Brookwood in Surrey, we mounted a mini-campaign to spread the word about this fragile site. Sarah Bunce and Tim Britt Searle organised a series of site popups and were joined by staff from Woking Borough Council and the Rural Crime PCSO for the Woking Beat (Fig. 3). This was followed up with social media posts and articles on our website asking visitors to avoid nesting areas, and if in doubt to keep to the woodland perimeter.





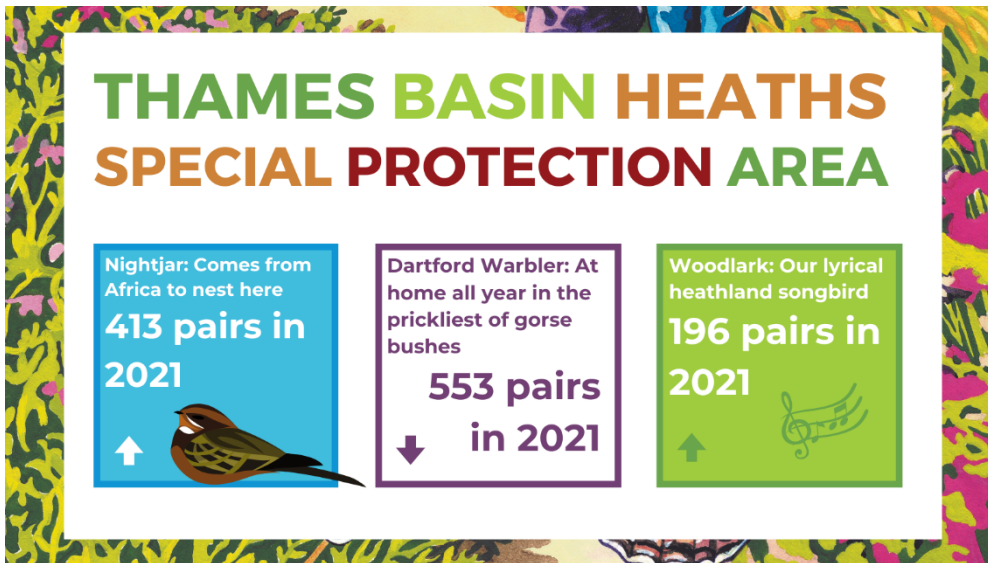
**Figure 3.** Our wardens Tim and Steven at a pop-up with a Rural Crime PCSO officer.

4.2 When a local resident shared his concerns about the number of dogs at Chobham Common in Surrey, we stepped up our on-site presence, with extra wardening hours, popups and a group warden day.

### **Special Protection Area Bird Survey**

4.3 As you know, the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area was created to protect three species of rare bird, the Nightjar, Woodlark and Dartford Warbler. The numbers are monitored by a team of volunteers coordinated by 2Js Ecology and we're delighted to share the 2021 results announced in January 2022.

4.4 Figure 4 illustrates the latest bird numbers. The Nightjars had a particularly good season with 413 territories recorded in 2021, the highest on record, up from the previous high of 404 in 2020. And we're really happy to see the number of Woodlarks increasing gradually. The picture for Dartford Warblers is more complicated, the number of territories is down on the previous season when exceptionally high numbers were recorded, but it's not considered a cause for concern. Their numbers were steady on most sites although there were significant reductions on Chobham Common and Ash Ranges. At Chobham, wildfires in 2020 reduced the area of suitable habitat, while on Ash, restricted access may have resulted in an underestimate. A brief spell of severe wintry weather may also have affected the population, particularly on large sites such as Ash where there is limited shelter from snow.



**Figure 4.** Summary of number of pairs of Nightjar, Dartford Warbler and Woodlark found on TBH SPA in 2021.

### National Heathland Conference

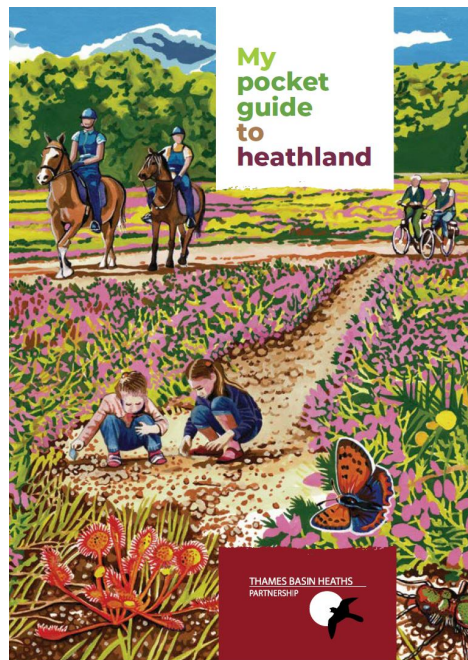
4.5 We attended the National Heathland Conference, held at Ufford Park near Woodbridge in Suffolk in May. It's a great opportunity to meet like-minded people and compare notes. Ruth Shelton and Daria Dadam gave an engaging presentation about our work on the Thames Basin Heaths.

### Communications

4.6 The period November to June is always a busy one for communications, with the start of a new ground-nesting bird season to remind the public about, last season's results to relay and signage to review, as well as day to day SANG promotion and social media & website content to keep fresh.

### Leaflets and branding

4.7 The third of our project leaflets as now been revamped to fit in with the branding of our other leaflets. The educational booklet "My pocket guide to heathland" (Figure 5), originally put together by the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust. Artist Tim Bernhard has painted another beautiful heathland scene for us, part of which appears on the cover of the new edition of booklet (shown below).



**Figure 5.** The new educational booklet “My pocket guide to heathland”.

4.8 We regularly hand out three key leaflets:

- A5 booklet listing SANGs called **Greenspace on your doorstep**. Redesigned in 2019 and downloadable from:  
<https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/03/Greenspace-on-your-doorstep.pdf>
- A5 foldout leaflet about the heaths, redesigned in the winter 2020/2021:  
<https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/05/TBH-Leaflet-2021.pdf>.
- A6 booklet aimed at children and families called **My pocket guide to heathland**. The new version can be downloaded from:  
<https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/content/uploads/2022/04/TBH-Pocket-Guide-to-Heathland.pdf>

### Website

4.9 Our website can be found at [www.tbhpartnership.org.uk](http://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).

4.10 The website has recently had improvements to freshen its appearance and bring it into line with the fonts and colours used on the three leaflets and other materials.

4.11 Looking at the period as a whole, in the period 1st November 2021 to 31st May 2022 there have been **55,692** page views across the whole website. Compared to **70,901** in the same period in 2020/21. A disappointing decrease of 21% overall. The number of visits to the homepage was up 14% and the number of visits to the 'Greenspace on your doorstep' pages was down 28%, so the decrease may reflect that the SANGs are becoming better known.

4.12 Top 10 most visited areas of the website since 1st November 2021 have been:



4.13 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 news about how to protect heathland wildlife, our activities and events, SANGs and heathland-inspired road names.

4.14 The online directory of SANGs, **Greenspace on your doorstep**, has long been an important part of the website and continues to be the most visited section. Since we updated you in October 2021, three more entries have been added, bringing the published total to **seventy-seven SANGs**. Each entry has a section on how to find it, a description, a link to a route on OutdoorActive (formally ViewRanger) and a photograph gallery. Our Communications Officer Sarah Bunce is working to refresh each of the entries, bringing some of the older text and photographs up-to-date.

4.15 In the period 1st November 2021 to 31st May 2022 there were **31,791** visits to SANG pages and the five most visited pages were:

- Buckler’s Forest (Bracknell Forest Council) – 2,783 views
- Hartland Country Park (Hart District Council) – 1,698 views
- Brooklands Community Park (Elmbridge Borough Council) – 879
- Brookwood Country Park (Woking Borough Council) – 836 views
- Chertsey Common, Longcross (Runnymede Borough Council) – 789 views

### Social media

4.16 Our social media platforms continue to spread our key messages. We are on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

4.17 Social media statistics as of 31<sup>st</sup> May 2022 show our following is gradually increasing as we become better known (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Summary of monthly social media statistics for October and May between 2020 and 2022.

<u>Followers</u>	<b>October 20</b>	<b>May 21</b>	<b>October 21</b>	<b>May 22</b>
<b>Facebook</b>	1,031	1,188	1,315	1,482
<b>Twitter</b>	644	751	793	872
<b>Instagram</b>	260	340	399	505

The number of followers does not adequately reflect our reach on social media. Table 3 illustrates figures for this year so far.

**Table 3.** Summary of monthly reach via social media between January and May 2022.

<u>Reach</u>	<b>Jan 22</b>	<b>Feb 22</b>	<b>Mar 22</b>	<b>Apr 22</b>	<b>May 22</b>
<b>Facebook</b>	9,815	35,492	13,079	42,848	13,483
<b>Twitter</b>	11,200	16,200	16,900	23,400	10,600
<b>Instagram</b>	760	1,446	486	903	736

4.18 A few examples of recent high-performing posts:

 **Thames Basin Heaths Partnership**  
Published by [Sarah Bunce](#) · 15 February · 🌐

We're asking for everyone's help again this season 😊

If you're visiting the heaths of [#Surrey](#), [#Hampshire](#) & [#Berkshire](#)... from 1st March 2022 we're asking you to please keep to main paths and to keep dogs out of low-growing vegetation, like heather, gorse and grass 🙏

This'll help protect the rare birds that nest on the ground here. The birds give the heaths a huge amount of protection, so protecting birds protects heaths! Protecting heaths protects birds!... See more

**THAMES BASIN HEATHS  
SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA**



**Keep to main paths**



**Keep dogs out of vegetation**

29,657 People reached    1,090 Engagements    ↑ +25.8x higher Distribution score    [Boost again](#)

- We've tagged over 20 posts (on each platform) with the hashtag **#PawsOnPathsPlease** and many of our partner organisations have supported this campaign, using the same hashtag. The most successful post in terms of reach was one that went out in mid-February, reminding visitors about the start of the nesting season. It reached over 29,000 on Facebook.
- A post in mid-February, about the emergence of Adders reached 3,500 on Facebook and 2,300 on Twitter.



- Warden Nicola Buckland wrote a post about the 'After Life' bench at Lightwater Country Park that was liked by Ricky Gervais and was our top performing March post on Twitter, reaching over 4,300 people.
- An April Fool's post crafted by Seasonal Warden Steve Luckett 'announced' a top secret reintroduction of the long-extinct Thames Bison. The Basin Bison went down a storm on social media reaching over 8,000 people on Facebook alone.
- Understandably the sad fire at Ash Ranges in April caught people's attention and 6,400 people saw our post on Twitter and 2,800 on Facebook.
- Pleasingly, posts about our events have done extremely well. For example, three posts about our 'Spring into Nature' events for the Easter holidays reached 4,000, 5,500 and 8,300 on Facebook; and a post about a walk called 'Heathland For Beginners' reached over 7,000 on Facebook.

**Top Tweet** earned 4,347 impressions

Warden Nicky's taking a pew on the 'After Life' bench at Lightwater Country Park in Surrey. What a wonderful way to encourage people to reach out 😊

More on our website at:  
[tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/hope-is-e...](http://tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/hope-is-e...)

#ThamesBasinHeaths  
 #LightwaterCountryPark #AfterLife  
 @rickygervais pic.twitter.com/9v36sugAa9



**Top media Tweet** earned 2,054 impressions

We're so excited to be the first to announce that a small herd of Thames Bison has been reintroduced at a secret location on the #ThamesBasinHeaths, where they're helping to shape the heathland landscape. More on our website at...

[tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/ancient-b...](http://tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/ancient-b...)  
 pic.twitter.com/HthjjsLUiw



Heath Week

4.19 Heath Week will be back again this year, **Monday 25<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> July**. We're yet again teaming up with the Fire & Rescue Services to bring visitors a Wildfire Roadshow. Other exciting things in the pipeline include two Reptile Roadshow events,

a joint-venture with Forestry England to showcase the history and wildlife of the commercial forestry areas, a mindfulness walk, several Nightjar walks and a session on how to use your phone to identify wildlife. We'll be working hard to publicise these events via local newspaper articles, parish magazine listings, social media and posters on site noticeboards.

### Partnership Newsletter

4.20 Started in May 2019, the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership Newsletter goes out quarterly to organisations across the partnership. It shares a variety of news stories, including our own news, news from land managers and news about SANGs. Please contact [sarah.bunce@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:sarah.bunce@naturalengland.org.uk) if you would like to be added to the circulation list. The next issue will be published in September 2022.

[Click here to view the latest newsletter in your browser.](#)

## **5. Education**

- 5.1 During the period of this update, “Our Amazing Heathlands” schools programme continued to reach more schools and their students. Word is spreading about our educational offering and feedback has been great.
- 5.2 From 1<sup>st</sup> January to 10<sup>th</sup> June, the Education and Engagement Officer has engaged with more than 1500 children and adults through the schools programme, sessions for uniformed groups, guided walks and talks. During this time, 40 sessions were delivered – including 25 to children from primary schools near to the SPA.

### **Schools – Our Amazing Heathlands**

- 5.3 The goal of our schools programme is to meaningfully connect school children and their teachers to wildlife and their local heathlands through fun and engaging activities. Sessions focus on:
1. Nature connections
  2. Heathland and its species
  3. Threats to heathland
  4. How to help look after heathland and its species

These curriculum-linked sessions can be delivered remotely, in school or out on the heath and are designed to introduce fantastic plants and animals (including rare ground-nesting birds) and cover threats to the landscape – including wildfire and disturbance.



The aim is for children to go home after a session inspired by their nature experiences and tell their family and friends about our amazing heathlands and what everyone can do to help keep them safe.

- 5.4 There are onward opportunities for the children to join in with 'Help the Heath' and design posters encouraging visitors to do the right thing when visiting. (#BeWildfireAware, avoid disturbance, pick up dog waste and not littering).

### Nature connections

- 5.5 Enhancing peoples nature connectedness is really important part in encouraging people to look after our heaths. Research has indicated that enhancing a person's nature connectedness, leads to pro-nature behaviours and improved mental health. This underpins all of our educational offerings – encouraging people to stop, look and listen and notice what is around them.

### Advertising our offering

- 5.6 All primary schools (c.220) within 5km of the SPA were contacted via email and offered the opportunity of some heathland-themed engagement for the children. This would initially be via assembly or classroom visit, but could be extended to a heathland visit if possible.
- 5.7 Articles were written for local community magazines raising awareness about our educational offerings and this has proved a good way to spread the word. To encourage schools to get involved, we have produced a video to highlight the benefits of learning about heathland.
- 5.8 Educational opportunities are also promoted via social media and blogs on the website (Fig. 6). Here are a couple of examples: Spring on the heath / Connections with nature

Teachers, let us help you connect your children with nature

FREE fun & engaging opportunities to put your local heathland at the heart of your curriculum!

THAMES BASIN HEATHS PARTNERSHIP

Our Amazing Heathlands

Perfect for KS1 & KS2

Blue Drinker Blue

WYAMRS!

I ❤️ heathland

[www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/schools](http://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/schools) • Online • In classroom • On heath •

Figure 6. Educational opportunities are promoted via our website, as well as blog and social media.

## New sessions

- 5.9 As a way of being able to run heathland sessions and continue nature connections over the winter months, we have developed a “*Heathland in the Dark*” session that is perfect for uniformed groups. The best feedback was “*That was one of my favourite meetings, it was SO dark!*”
- 5.10 We have also developed a classroom-based session that focuses-in on heathland birds. It covers bird anatomy, lots of detail about Nightjars, Woodlarks and Dartford Warblers, ground-nesting and comparisons with more common birds.
- 5.11 We delivered our first session to nursery-aged children and provided some resources for a heathland visit they had planned.

## Additional new sites

- 5.12 We now have agreements in place to be able to run educational session on Surrey County Council heaths (Chobham Common, Whitmoor Common, Ockham and Wisley Common) and Forestry England’s Bramshill. This has enabled us to offer sessions across a wider area than previously.

## New resources

- 5.13 New resources have been developed to support both our in class and on heath sessions (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8). These are designed to help focus the children’s attention and provide a handy reminder of what was covered after the session has finished.



**Figure 7.** Worksheets designed to be completed during a class session - to keep children focused and provide a resource to use in the future.



Figure 8. Various resources that can be used during an on-heath session

## Feedback

5.14 Feedback has been incredibly positive (Fig 9). Here is a selection:

**Yr. 4 Child** – *“I liked spotting things in the heathland, the whole walk and listening to the birds chirp”*

**Yr. 4 Child** – *“I liked exploring!”*

**Yr. 4 Child** – *“I liked learning Dartford warblers have red eyes”*

**Yr. 1 Teacher – Wildmoor Heath School, Crowthorne**

*“Thank you so much for Tuesday, the children really enjoyed finding out more of the heath and the spotter sheet was perfect.”*

**Yr. 1 Child** – *“I had the best time ever!”*

**Yr. 6 Teacher – Wildmoor Heath School, Crowthorne**

*“Thanks so much once again for such a great morning of exploring, discovery and learning. The class were really engaged and can't wait to go out again in the spring/summer to discover more! The fungi most definitely fascinated many of them, including the adults! Thanks again for a great trip. We hope to do it again in the summer.”*

**Teacher – Briars Nursery, Lightwater**

*“Thank you so much for visiting today. It was so interesting and I have never seen the children so engaged. Some of the children drew pictures after you had gone of the plants you showed them. When they left, they were telling their parents all about the talk you gave them.*

*I think this is such a wonderful idea to go to schools to talk about nature.”*

**Teacher – Briars Nursery, Lightwater**

*“The children at the Cabin still talk about your visit.*

*You have definitely inspired a new generation of children to listen, look and respect our natural wildlife and habitats.*

We will definitely stay in touch for a visit next year and will spread the word amongst our local schools. Thanks again!"

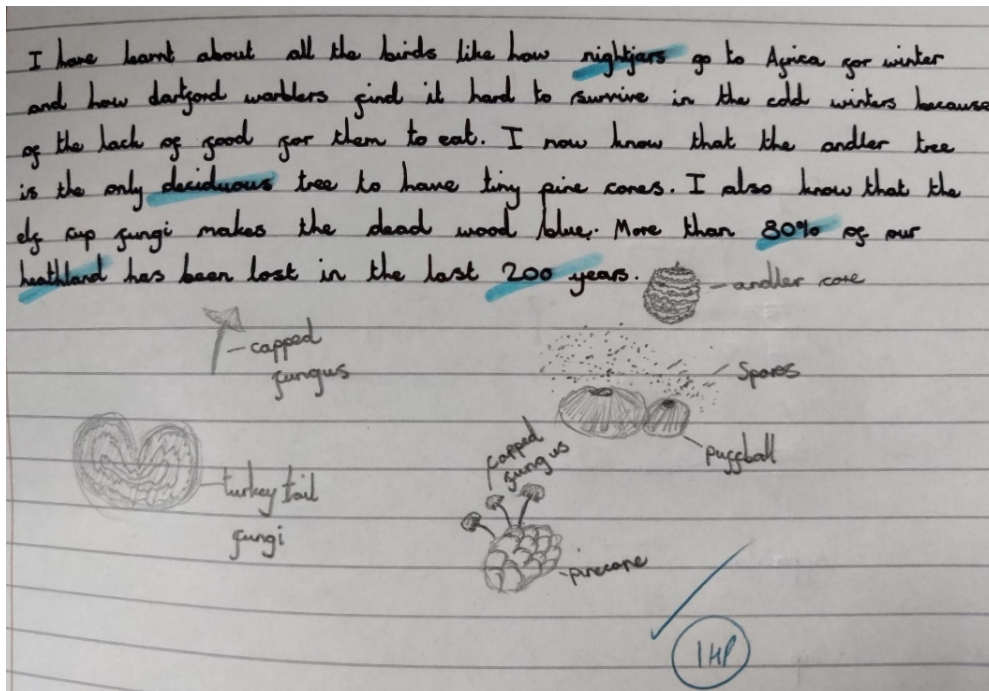


Figure 9. A Year 6 child's work after a heath walk

Yr. 4 Teacher – Potters Gate School

"I was just talking about how amazing the lesson was to one of the teachers who forwarded your email. We all loved it and found it so interesting - thank you. We can't wait for your return after half-term.

We are going to work on creating some posters [Fig. 10] before you return, giving each group a topic to work on – how to protect the heathlands, how to identify different plants you find etc. I am also setting them 'homework' of going to the heathlands over the half-term, and they will have their identification booklets you gave them too."

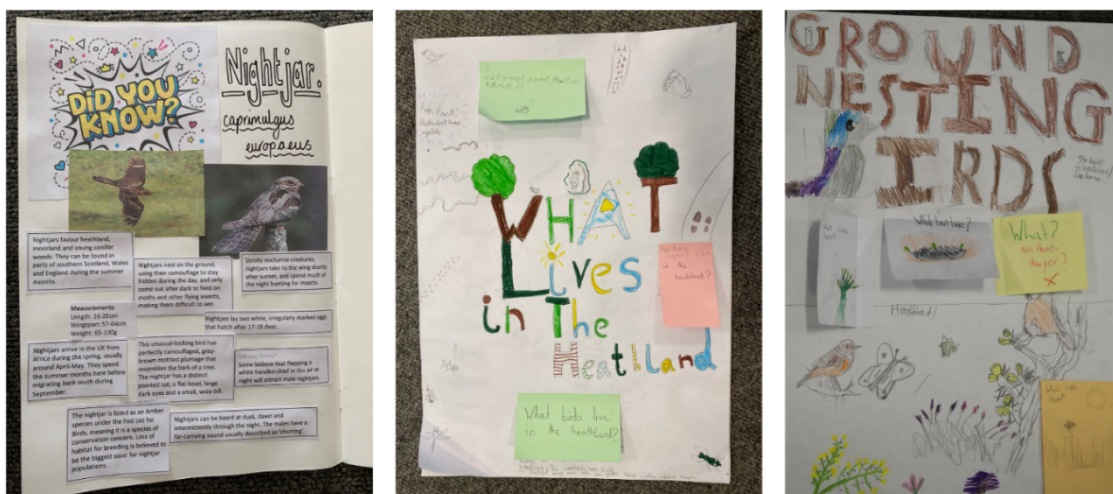


Figure 10. Year 4s at Potters Gate School designed posters about heathlands and the ground-nesting birds

## Heathland INSET training

5.15 In April 2022, a heathland-themed INSET session was delivered to the entirety of the staff at Wildmoor Heath School. The school is within a two-minute walk of Wildmoor Heath and the teachers often take groups out onto the heath. The aim of the session was to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge to be able to better link the amazing resource on the school's doorstep to their educational aims and encourage them to embed the heathland into the curriculum. It was also used as a further opportunity to promote the sessions we offer and get some teacher insight to be able to improve our offering.

The plan will be to offer this INSET training to other schools that are on the fringes of the SPA.

## Secondary Schools

5.16 Now that the Natural History GCSE has been given the green light, we are monitoring developments to see how learning about heathland can feed into this. This will be a great way to get heathland into secondary schools.

5.17 In April 2022, a conservation careers session was delivered to the Year 10 students from the Winston Churchill School, Woking. It provided an opportunity to encourage students to consider a career in conservation, whilst promoting responsible heathland use and the TBHP too.

5.18 We are working with the [Thames Valley Learning Partnership](#) to look at opportunities to get secondary school children in Berkshire involved with some practical heathland conservation tasks in the Autumn term.

## Uniformed Groups

5.19 There continues to good demand from uniformed groups and we have sessions designed to introduce children to their local heathlands and enable them to work towards badges. In order to meet further badge requirements, the on-heath activities can be supplemented with the 'Help the Heath' poster challenge.

Feedback example: *"The cubs had a fantastic time, it was so nice to see how much interest they took in things that usually pass them by – the gorse, the birdsong. . . It was wonderful to see a Dartford Warbler too, even if only fleetingly! The session was just what we were looking for and hopefully will encourage the cubs to spend more time on the common and appreciate the habitat."*

## Wildfire Education – [www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/wildfire](http://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/wildfire)

5.20 Wildfire education is covered in all sessions, so all participants learn about the causes and consequences of a fire. They also find out about what to do if they discover a fire. Progress with developing a standalone session (to be delivered in partnership with local fire and rescue services has been slow, but we continue to work with Surrey FRS



to move this forward. The plan to trial targeted school assemblies in areas where heathland wildfires have occurred is still ongoing.

### **Our Amazing Heathlands – Education Webpage** [www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/schools](http://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/schools)

5.21 The [education webpage](#) continues to be updated.

It provides information for local teachers about free educational offerings and how they can get involved.

### **Heathland at Home –** [www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/activities](http://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/activities)

5.22 This webpage continues to provide visitors with a range of fun heathland-themed arts, crafts and games. This page is now detailed in the new TBH leaflet to help further spread the word.

### **Citizen Science**

5.23 As part of efforts to boost the nature connectedness of visitors to the heathland, we continue to encourage visitors to take a closer look at the nature around them. A big part of this is to encourage them to get involved in [citizen science](#).

Silver-studded Blue Watch has returned in 2022 (Fig. 11), with the first sighting at the end of May. We are, once again, asking people to keep an eye out for this amazing butterfly, let us know using #SilverStuddedBlue and also report it via iRecord. More information can be found [here](#).



**Figure 11.** Advert for the Silver-studded Blue Citizen Science project.

5.24 To help people ID and record the wildlife they spot on their walks, we ran a “[Discovering Nature with Your Phone](#)” walk. It introduced them to some of the best nature identification and recording apps.

- 5.25 In order to connect people with the heathlands they visit, we also ran a “Heathland for Beginners” walk. It introduced people who walk on their local heathland regularly, but didn’t really know much about it, to a wonderful, but fragile landscape.

Some feedback from these events: -

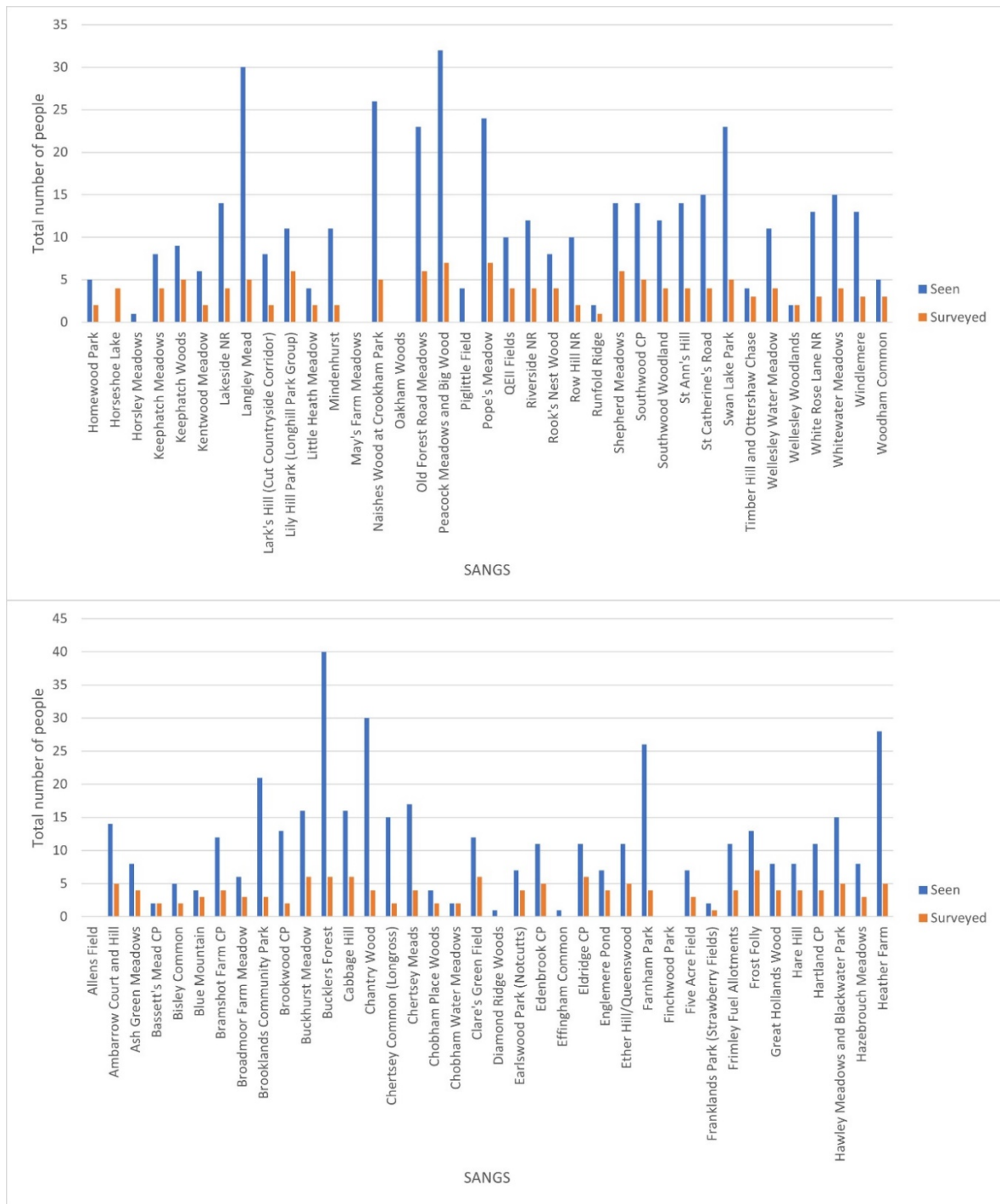
*“The 2 hours flew by and we seemed to cover a lot of ground and learnt loads in that short time. Having learnt about the special environment heathland provides, I can see how important it is to protect these landscapes for the future.”*

*“I knew nothing about bird song and hoped this would be a good way to make a start on identifying a few basic songs. I came away feeling like I could match some birds to their songs. A whole new skill and all right on my doorstep.”*

*“Thank you for the “Discovering nature with your phone walk”. I have been out in my garden recording all the wildlife. I even submitted sightings to a spider recording scheme!”*

### **Winter 2021/2022 Visitor Surveys on all SANGs**

- 6.1 From December 2021 to March 2022 the SAMM Team undertook visitor surveys at all 75 SANGs that were open at the time, the first time a complete coverage was attempted. Compared to previous years, the methodology was changed to one-hour survey, instead of two-hour, at each site to cover all sites.
- 6.2 A total of 262 surveys were undertaken at 68 sites, with a further seven SANGs (Allens Field, Daimond Ridge Woods, Effingham Common, Finchwood Park, Horsley Meadows, Oakham Woods, and Piglittle Field) surveyed without encountering people able to undertake our questionnaire (Fig. 12). Overall, surveyors encountered 836 people across all sites.

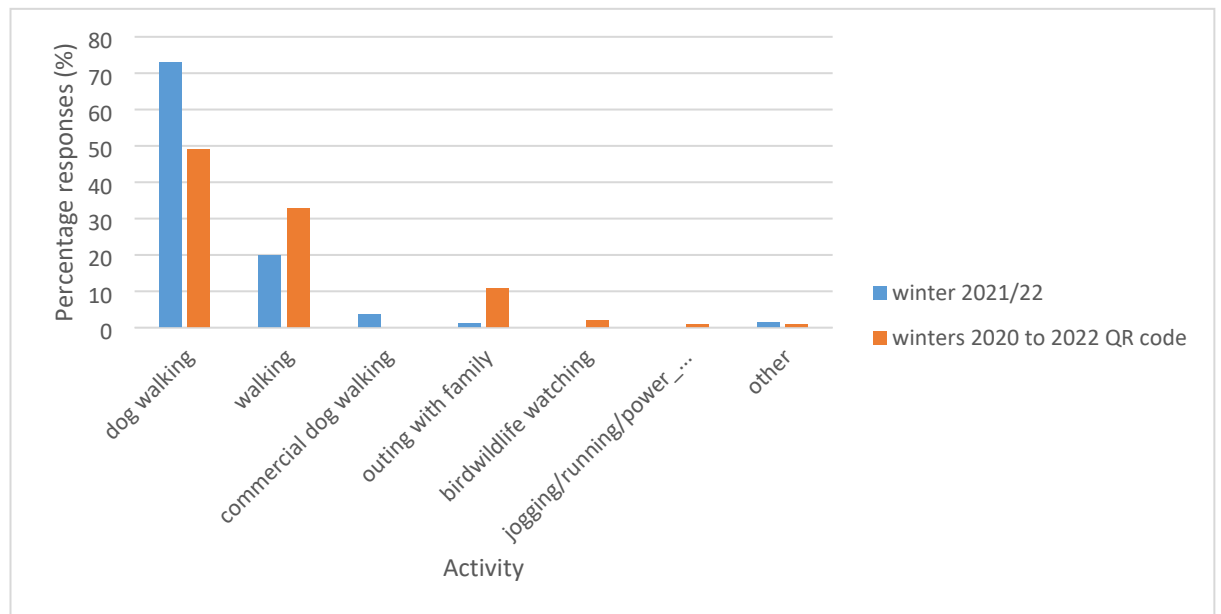


**Figure 12.** Number of people seen (blue) and surveyed (orange) at each of the 75 SANGS surveyed in winter 2021/22. Total number of responses: 262.

6.3 In December 2020 we set up a QR-code-based SANGS survey to collect data despite Covid-19 restrictions. The survey is still ongoing, and results from the winter responses received using this method (covering 46 SANGS and 483 responses between December 2020 and March 2022 during all months of December, January, February and March) are compared to the survey carried out in person over the winter 2021/22, below.

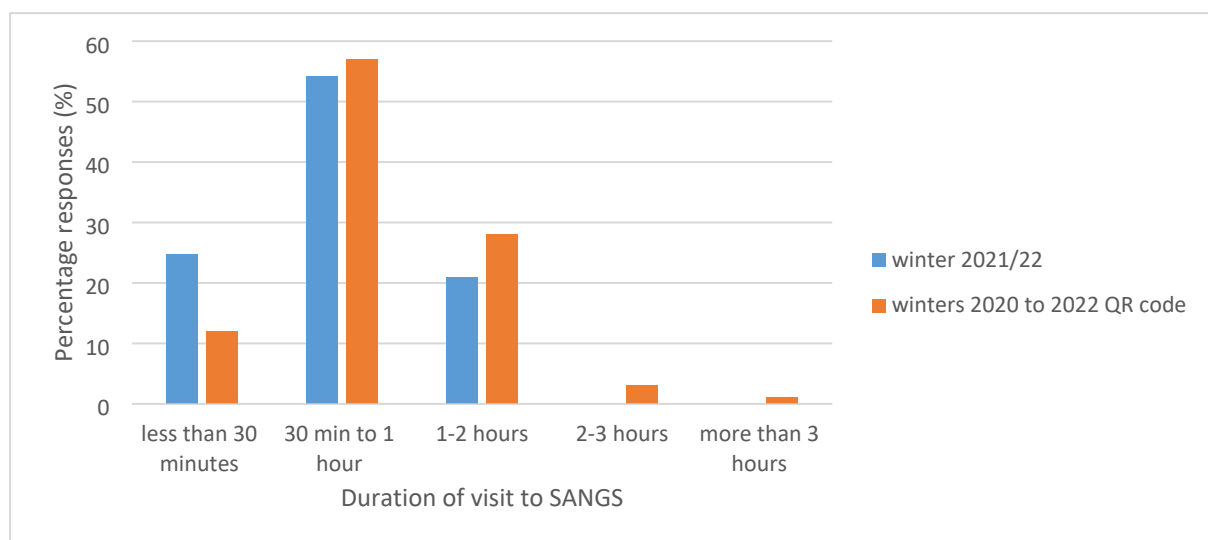


6.4 The main activity undertaken was dog-walking (including commercial) (>70%), followed by non-dog walking (20%) and other activities; the hierarchy of responses was similar to the one obtained through the QR code survey (49% dog-walking and 33% walking)(Fig. 13).



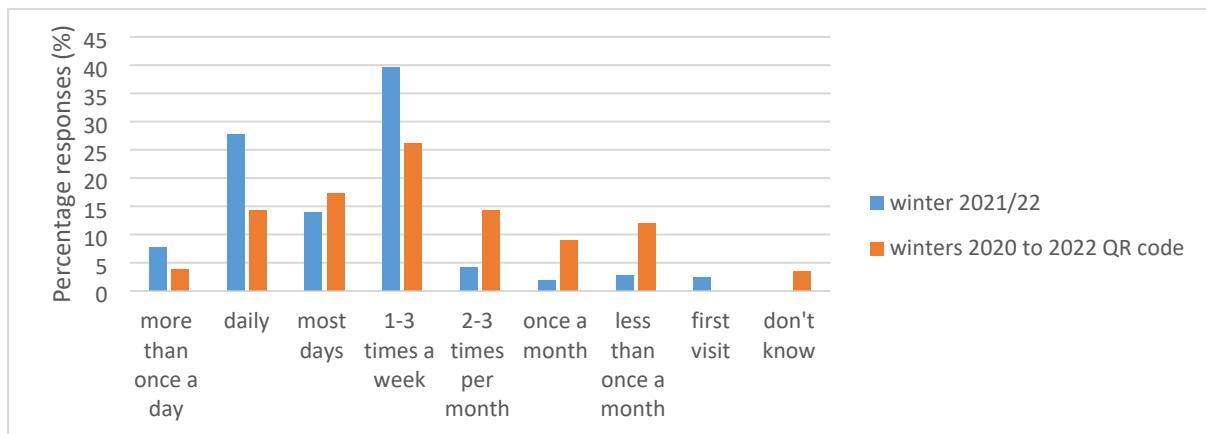
**Figure 13.** Summary of the frequency of the main activity undertaken on TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winters 2020 to 2022 (orange; n=483).

6.5 Both surveys showed that the majority of visits lasted from 30 mins to an hour, but whilst in winter 2021/22 the second most common length of time was less that 30 minutes, over the last two winters longer visits were more frequent (Fig. 14).



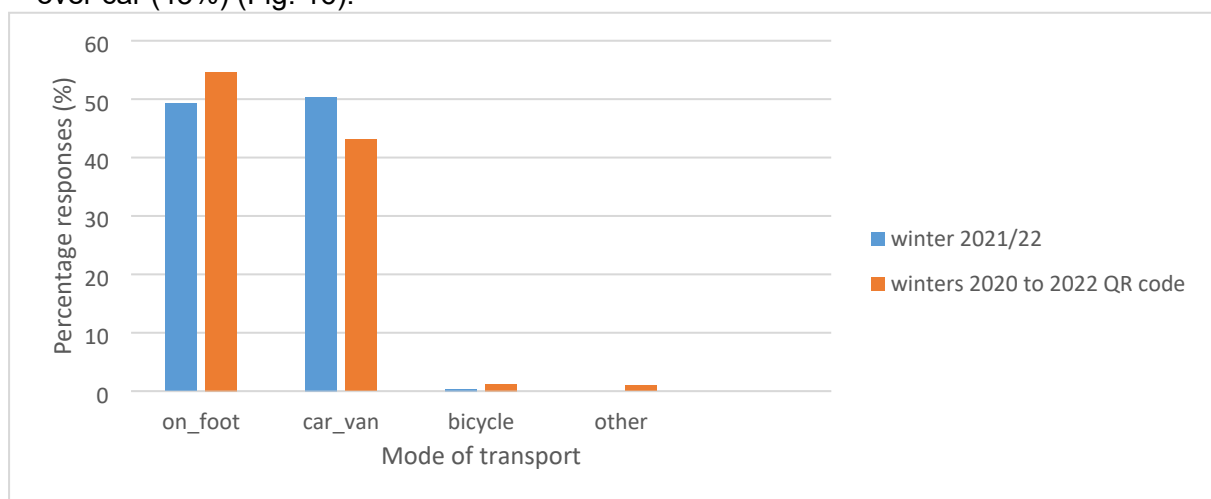
**Figure 14.** Summary of the length of visits to the TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winters 2020 to 2022 (orange; n=483).

6.4 Just over a third of respondents in 2021/22 stated they visited SANGS one to three times a week (39%), followed by daily or nearly-daily visits (27% and 14%, respectively) (Fig. 15). A similar pattern was observed with the QR codes over the last two winters (26% 1-3 times a week, 17% most days, 14% daily) (Fig. 15). People visited SANGS equally on weekdays and weekends in the majority of cases (61%), although half as many respondents said that they used the site only during weekends (31%), followed by weekends-only (but this total would have been impacted by a disproportionate surveying effort on weekdays) (5%), with the remaining answers taken by first or very recent-users. The questions was not asked in the QR-code survey.



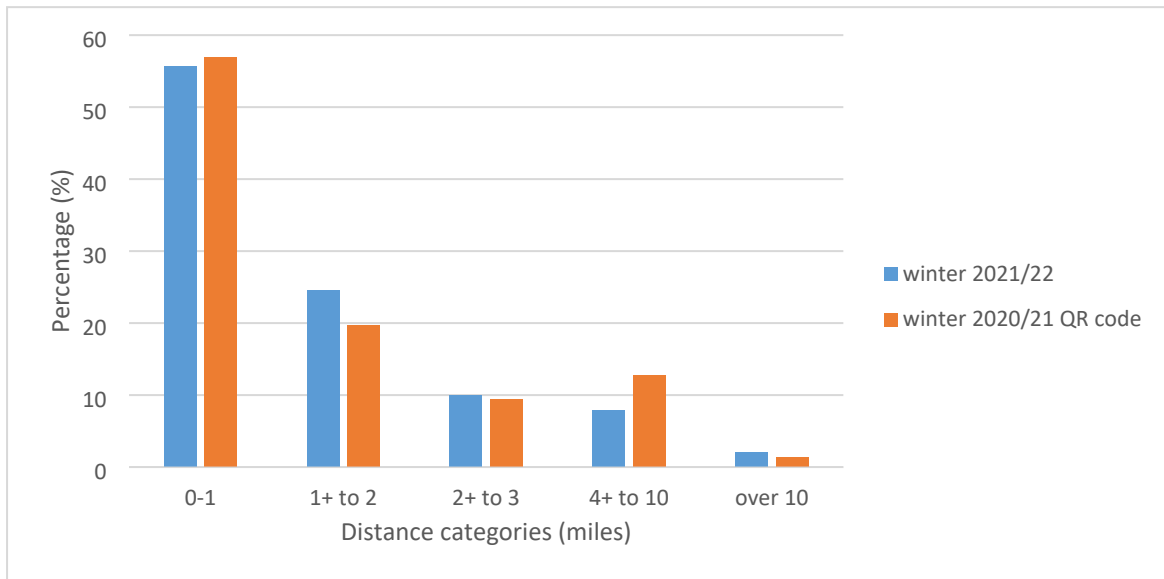
**Figure 15.** Summary of the frequency of visits to the TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winters 2020 to 2022 (orange; n=483).

6.6 The main mode of transport to a SANGS was split evenly between private vehicle (50%) and on foot (49.9%). This was more evenly split than in previous QR-code based surveys where in winter there was a tendency for people to arrive by foot (55%) over car (43%) (Fig. 16).



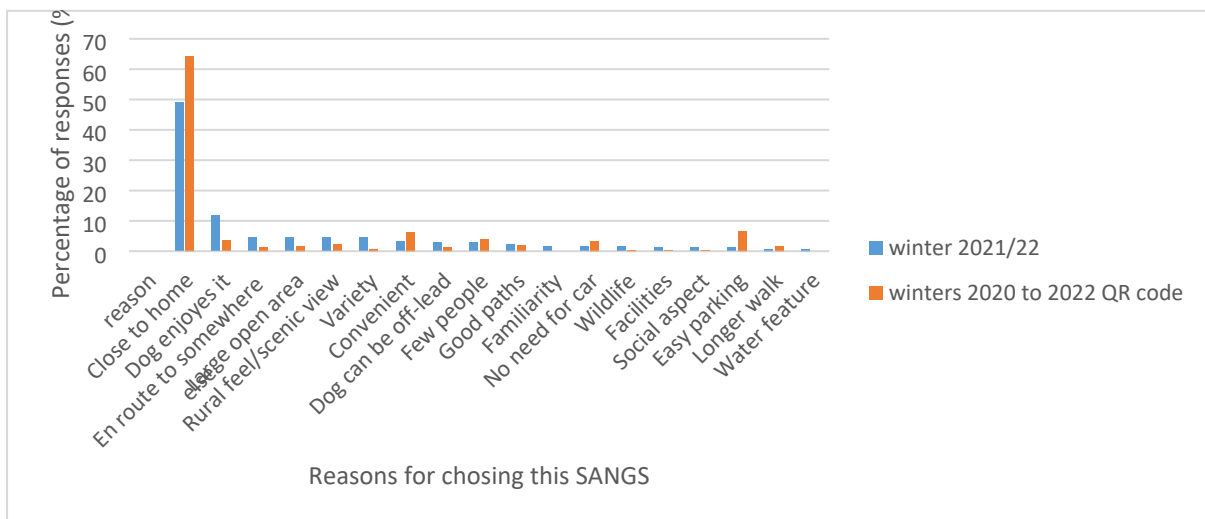
**Figure 16.** Summary of frequency of mode of transport used to access TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winters 2020 to 2022 (orange; n=483).

6.7 The majority of people arrived within 1 mile of the SANGS followed by the up-to-2-mile category, a result in accordance with the previous QR-code-based survey (Fig. 17), which was based on 46 sites. This suggests that usage of SANGS is undertaken mostly by local people.



**Figure 17.** Distance travelled from home to TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winters 2020 to 2022 (orange; n=483).

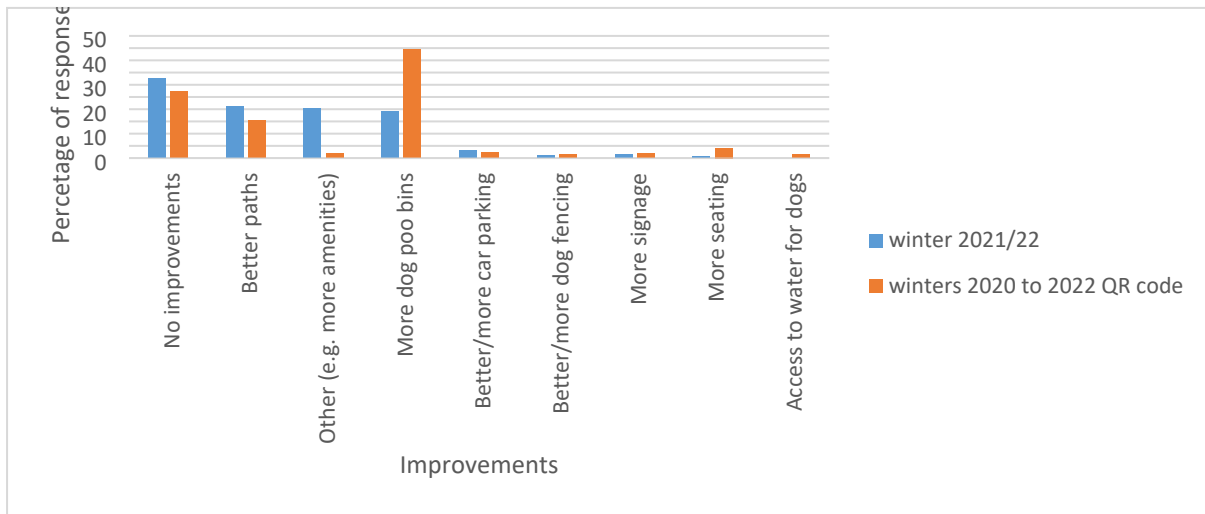
6.8 When asked to list the main aspects of the SANGS which particularly attracted the visitor to the site, most responses mentioned proximity to home as a key reason for visiting in both surveys, followed by their suitability for dogs in winter 2021/22 and convenience (proximity and ease of parking) in the QR-code survey (Fig. 18).



**Figure 18.** Summary of the frequency with which characteristics of a SANGS were listed as important aspects by visitors during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winters 2020 to 2022 (orange; n=455).

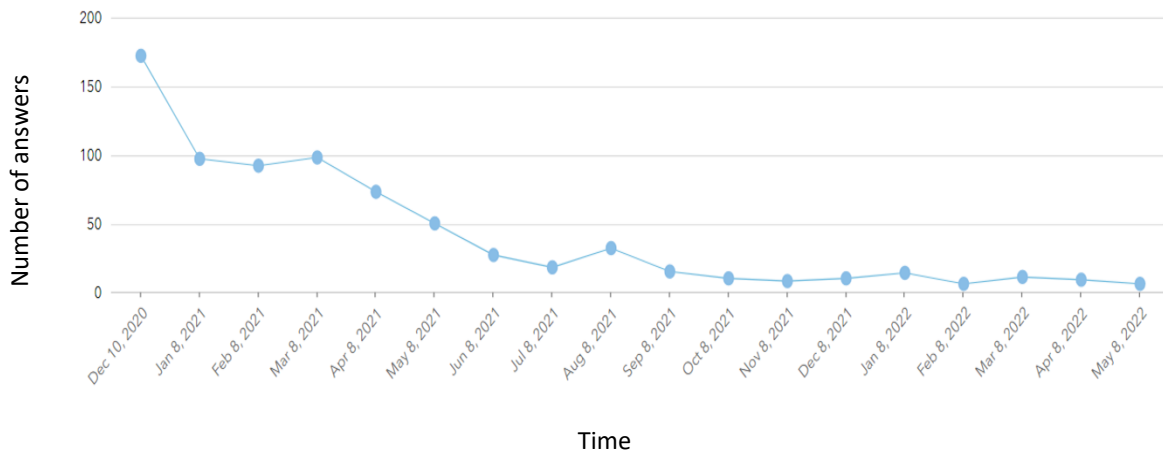
6.9 Visitors were also given the opportunity to tell us what aspects of a SANGS needed improving: the most frequent answer in the winter 2021/22 survey was no improvements needed, followed by better paths, more amenities (e.g. coffee-cart, dog-washing facilities, toilets), and more bins, whilst the most frequent answer over

multiple winters was more dog-poo bins, followed by “No improvements” and better paths (Fig. 19).



**Figure 19.** Summary of the frequency each improvement was suggested by visitors to the TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winters 2020 to 2022 (orange; n=439).

6.10 In summary, the two surveys gave comparable answers, providing us a further tool to carry out SANGS survey when resources (i.e. wardens’ time) are limited. However, the interest in taking part in the QR-code survey has been decreasing with time (Fig. 20), suggesting that in-person surveys cannot be completely substituted by other means.



**Figure 20.** Number of answers to the QR-based survey from December 2020 to May 2022 (n=766).

## 7. Other news

7.1. The team continue to work incredibly hard and very effectively despite the challenges we all face as a result of the global pandemic.

7.2. The challenges of recruiting, inducting and team building were met well by all involved and have set a template for our future recruitment

- 7.3. It has not been possible to separate out the impact of *COVID-19* and its variants from the body of this report, rather it forms an integral part.
- 7.4. Some of the team members have tested positive for the virus. The source of the infections appears to have been outside of work in each case and we have been effective in not transmitting it amongst the team. Most have now fully recovered however Project manager Ruth Shelton is experiencing some 'Long Covid' symptoms. At the time of writing this report I am pleased to say that we are all testing negative. The team have coped well with the extra pressures these illnesses has placed on them particularly during the induction periods.
- 7.5. The office at Heathland House is open again and available for the teams use. We are operating under a DEFRA approved Room Ventilation Assessment (RVA) which has proven to be very effective in containing any infections. Last week DEFRA provided us with a CO2 monitor which will help us to explore further easing of restrictions within the office. We continue to work remotely and meet outdoors where possible.
- 7.6. We have had some communications with the various planning departments involved in this project. We ask the board to please confirm that it is their intention that the tariff paid by developers within the buffer zone be increased annually in line with inflation in order to avoid any further large increases as discussed in the November 2020 meeting.

## **8. Looking ahead**

- 8.1. With your support we will recruit to fill the upcoming year-round warden vacancy and will report on this for the next meeting.
- 8.2. Since we last met the team have spent some time considering our succession plans and looking for ways that we might be able to 'future proof' the SAMM project.

As you know we currently benefit from the excellent work conducted by 2js Ecology to gather the necessary data about the annex 1 bird species that lie at the core of this project. The 2js agree that by 2032 we will need to be doing things differently and we are in the process of determining what that might look like. We are in the process of identifying a series of options and the cost implications of each. We will present these to the Board on 22<sup>nd</sup> June and ask for some guidance.

- 8.3. Also, on the subject of succession planning, Communications officer Sarah Bunce has indicated that she would like to move to part time in May 2023 and is looking towards

retirement. Sarah has been an essential constant within the team for many years now and holds responsibility for several elements vital to the project's smooth operation. We would like to ask the Boards opinion about recruiting an additional communications officer now to ensure a smooth handover of these responsibilities. It would also provide us with additional resource in the short term which may allow us to open new communication opportunities and spread our message to a wider audience. The increase in project budget will be detailed on 22<sup>nd</sup> June.

- 8.4. We will continue with our core message of asking heathland visitors to stick to main paths and keep dogs out of vegetation.
- 8.5. We will continue to build on our 'Be Wildfire Aware' messaging and build our relationship with Surrey Fire & Rescue Service's Wildfire and Rural Partnership. We will also continue to work with Berkshire and Hampshire fire services.
- 8.6. 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.
- 8.7. 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.
- 8.8. We will be looking at how best to supplement the data sets we have with additional data and will consider benefits of installing additional people counters on the SPA and report on this for the next meeting.
- 8.9. We consider new residents within the buffer zone to a key audience. We continue to plan a program to deliver our message to people as they move in.