

THAMES BASIN HEATHS

JOINT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD (JSPB)

Date: 5th July 2023

Subject: SAMM Project Update

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

Recommendations:

- i. To NOTE the contents of the report on SAMM project activity
- ii. To NOTE recruitment updates
- iii. To APPROVE a change to seasonal warden recruitment (page 3)
- iv. To APPROVE a change to a five-year cycle for the Carpark Transects (page 37)

Purpose of the Report:

To provide the JSPB with an update on SAMM activity since the last meeting in November 2022.

Summary

This paper sets out for Members the SAMM project's activities and achievements since the last meeting in November 2022, 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 Greenspace' (SANG) for the new residents to use. Alongside this, 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. An update on the investment fund forms part of each JSPB meeting.

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 raising 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 inform Members that our year-round warden Nicky Buckland was successful in her application for the new Communications Officer role to work alongside our current Communications Officer Sarah Bunce. She started her new role on 20th February 2022. She has retained some of her wardening responsibilities which she will hand over to the replacement year-round warden once they are in post.
- 1.2. This year-round warden role is currently advertised on the Civil Service Jobs website, and we hope to interview in July for a start date in September.
- 1.3. We are also delighted to inform Members that we have a wonderful team of seasonal wardens this year. We had five wardens start on 27th February 2023 before the ground nesting bird season officially starts (two full time and three part time). This is the first time we have started them this early and it has proven to be hugely beneficial. It meant the seasonal wardens could get a head start in their training and get out to warden on the heaths sooner. Their contracts run until the 15th September when nesting season officially ends.

- 1.4. In order to achieve our goal of having 6 full-time seasonal wardens we engaged in a second round of recruitment. We had two more (one full time and one part time) starting on 24th April 2023. Their contracts also end on 15th September.
- 1.5. In total for 2023 we have 5.6 full-time equivalents (FTE) seasonal wardens.
- 1.6. Recruitment within the SAMM team and the wider conservation sector has proven difficult again this year. This is illustrated by the need to advertise the roles twice and conduct two induction periods to assemble the terrific team we have.
- 1.7. Given that this is the second year we have experienced these difficulties and there is no indication that the recruitment situation is likely to improve before next year we would like to propose a change to the seasonal recruitment strategy.
- 1.8. Currently we aim to recruit six wardens for a six-month seasonal contract. Following careful consideration, we have determined that the most effective course of action would be to recruit two year-round wardens and two seasonal wardens for a trial period of two years to gauge their effectiveness.
- 1.9. We have tabulated the advantages and disadvantages of these proposed changes overleaf for your consideration.

Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages of proposed changes to wardening structure.

Model	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Current</p> <p>6 seasonal wardens</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger number of wardens for nesting season • Lots of fresh ideas for seasonal intake • Invigorated team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Time needed to recruit ○ Small number of candidates • Repeat induction period required • Coaching and training for 6 individuals in this challenging role • Annual repeat of coaching and training • Time needed to organise startup kit including IT and H&S provision for 6 each year.
<p>Proposed</p> <p>2 year-round wardens and 2 seasonal wardens for 2 years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger number of wardens year round • Fresh ideas from seasonal intake • Invigorated team • Knowledge retention • Single induction period • Potential to have full team fully trained for start of nesting season • Increased capacity for planning during winter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active warden count reduced by 2 during nesting season • Annual repeat of training and coaching of seasonal staff

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year-round support for education • Improved partner relationships • Increased efficiency with no increase in cost. 	
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- 1.10. The salary costs of the proposed changes are equal to the current model.
- 1.11. With the board’s approval we would like to adopt the proposed team structure with immediate effect and begin recruitment.
- 1.12. If the board approves these changes and we are successful in our recruitment the salary costs for 2023/24 will be higher than budgeted due to the increased staff number during winter 23
- 1.13. This increase can be absorbed into the current project budget due to the successful award of the SPA Visitor Survey which came in comfortably under budget (please see page 28 in Section 6)

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. This year we have trialed some new ways of wardening with the aim of being more inclusive for all abilities and it has been successful. Our seasonal warden Jeremy experimented with mini pop-ups and a ‘Come and meet the Warden’ board. Our new mini pop-ups require only a small, lightweight foldable table (3kg), some leaflets and a chair. For those that are unable to walk around for hours they can easily adopt this style when needed and it has been highly effective. After a visit to Bird Aware Solent to see their ways of working, Jeremy suggested adopting the idea of placing an A-board stating ‘Come and meet the Warden’ by an entrance point. As a result, visitors have seen to be approaching us more and instigating more conversations with us. They come to us with questions and are already interested in knowing more, which has opened up a whole new dialogue.
- 2.3. Last Autumn/Winter we held several seasonal events with various themes, including a ‘Halloween Heathland’ at three locations which were very positively received and reached 171 people. We did three Christmas wreath making events and have been asked back to SCC’s Christmas pop-up as we “were the stars of the day.”
- 2.4. We held two new events to celebrate ‘World Forestry Day.’ Nicky held an event with Forestry England on Bramshill and Wardens Mike and Ruth created and led a guided walk on Lily Hill Park SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) called ‘Treemendous Trees. We like to lead events on SANGs to encourage their use and Lily Hill was perfect for this as it has a wide variety of native and non-native species.

- 2.5. We participated in the Yateley, Blackwater & Derby Green ‘Great Big Green Week’ and attended the Sustainability Fair at Yateley Green for the second year running. We were able to talk to a large amount of SPA users for the first time and get them excited to explore new ‘Greenspace on your Doorstep.’
- 2.6. We helped organise Wildfire Awareness week for the Easter holidays with SFRS. This was its first year and was pivotal in informing the public about the risks and issues of wildfire before Heath Week this year. The idea came about due to the fact fire engines only attended 4 out of the 5 wildfire events during Heath Week last year as they were tackling wildfires! It was thought that earlier engagement of the public on this subject was needed. Wildfire Awareness Week went really well, and we can build on it for next year. We did 5 wildfire events that reached 250-300 people. They were designed to be fully interactive and there was lots for the kids to do. The HH wildfire event went very well with the fire dog present. This was fantastic in engaging the dog owning target audience. Since litter can be a fire fuel, we decided to do a partnership litter pick, as a result we rid 8 sacks of litter from within Chobham Common. They thanked us massively for our help and support during the planning process and week and said they couldn’t have done it without us.
- 2.7. We are in the midst of planning Heath Week 2023 (24th-30th July) and so far, have 26 events planned with various partners and other organisations, including SFRS, Hart DC, SWT, ARC Trust, BVCP and FE. We are holding our usual repertoire of events and hoping for even more partners to get involved with hosting their own events too. We have put extra focus on leading more guided walks for multiple reasons; they require fewer staff, have a limited number of attendees so we can pick places with smaller car parks we may not have used for events before. Lastly, they allow for a lengthier and higher level of engagement and as a result, a deeper understanding may be achieved. The Hampshire ‘Reptile & Amphibian Roadshow’ is being repeated for a second year. It was so popular last year we had complaints that we needed more parking to accommodate the 251 people spoken to. As a result, we have switched location within the same site to allow for this.
- 2.8. This year the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) reached out to us to discuss leading some joint pop-ups. The Access team had gained an Access & Recreation Advisor who wanted to use these to engage with the public and potentially bring along a soldier to highlight how well hidden they can be in the landscape. Seasonal Warden Kay took this on and has booked in two pop-ups a month from June to the end of the season, spread out across MOD land on the SPA, with a combination of new and old pop-up locations.
- 2.9. Over the winter season we completed 79 SANG surveys, surveying each SANG for one hour, counting and interviewing people. This summed up to 256 interviews. This year, we will have 79 SANGs to survey, and we started earlier in the season. We felt that it would be interesting to gather data on how

SANGs are used during the GNB season so we decided to see if we could sustain summer SANG surveys too. Progress is good and we will report our findings as soon as they are collated.

2.10. We successfully completed 7 planned car park transects last season after a 3-year hiatus. This year we have trained 7 seasonal staff and have already completed 3 transects and plan to carry out 6 more to return to our pre-covid amount of 9 per season.

2.11. Over winter we attended lots of volunteer work parties on the SPA with our partners. These are a great chance to talk to local people about the project and spread our message, as well as improving our partner relationships whilst carrying out direct heathland improvements. We worked with HIWWT on Velmead, Surrey Heathlands Partnership on Brookwood, Hampshire County Council in Yateley and many more. We always seek to ensure we support our partners fairly and consistently.

2.12. The following table (Table 2) sets out the number of hours of warden activity delivered on the SPA between October 2022 and May 2023, inclusive:

Table 2. Wardening activity delivered on the SPA between Oct. 2022 and May 2023.

October 2022	Total hours wardened	177.73	November 2022	Total hours wardened	265.5
	Number of interactions	1208		Number of interactions	827
	Interactions per hour	6.80		Interactions per hour	3.11
	Number already spoken to	78		Number already spoken to	156
	Leaflets handed out	831		Leaflets handed out	1214
	Number of dogs	171		Number of dogs	322
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	5		Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	11
	Average % already spoken to	6.46		Average % already spoken to	18.86

December 2022	Total hours wardened	121.5	January 2023	Total hours wardened	153.8
	Number of interactions	439		Number of interactions	1125
	Interactions per hour	3.61		Interactions per hour	7.31
	Number already spoken to	110		Number already spoken to	201
	Leaflets handed out	725		Leaflets handed out	709
	Number of dogs	180		Number of dogs	168
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	12		Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	3

	Average % already spoken to	25.06		Average % already spoken to	17.87
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February 2023	Total hours wardened	261.13	March 2023	Total hours wardened	420.24
	Number of interactions	1564		Number of interactions	1194
	Interactions per hour	5.99		Interactions per hour	2.84
	Number already spoken to	102		Number already spoken to	370
	Leaflets handed out	691		Leaflets handed out	1613
	Number of dogs	300		Number of dogs	561
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	4		Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	12
	Average % already spoken to	6.52		Average % already spoken to	30.99

April 2023	Total hours wardened	498.67	May 2023	Total hours wardened	541.72
	Number of interactions	994		Number of interactions	2020
	Interactions per hour	1.99		Interactions per hour	3.73
	Number already spoken to	217		Number already spoken to	480
	Leaflets handed out	1177		Leaflets handed out	1839
	Number of dogs	656		Number of dogs	783
	Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	11		Number of dog walkers (5+ dogs)	13
	Average % already spoken to	21.83		Average % already spoken to	23.76

2.13. The number of hours wardened over the winter and for the first three months of the summer season were largely comparable to those of the same period in 2022. It is worth noting, however, that the hours wardened in February and March 2023 were much higher than the same months in 2022, due to the seasonal wardens starting at the end of February, earlier than in previous years.

2.14. Twenty-seven pitstops/pop-ups and 42 events were possible between October 2022 and May 2023, as well as 79 winter SANGS surveys.

2.15. The Team interacted with 635 people during pitstops/pop-ups (106 of whom were met as part of Heathland Hounds pop-ups), and 1,233 during the TBH events. May 2023 saw the highest interaction per hour ever recorded for the month (3.73 vs 2.72 in 2022). This was also the second highest interaction per hour ever recorded, only behind the record of July 2022 (3.85 interaction/hr) (Fig. 1).

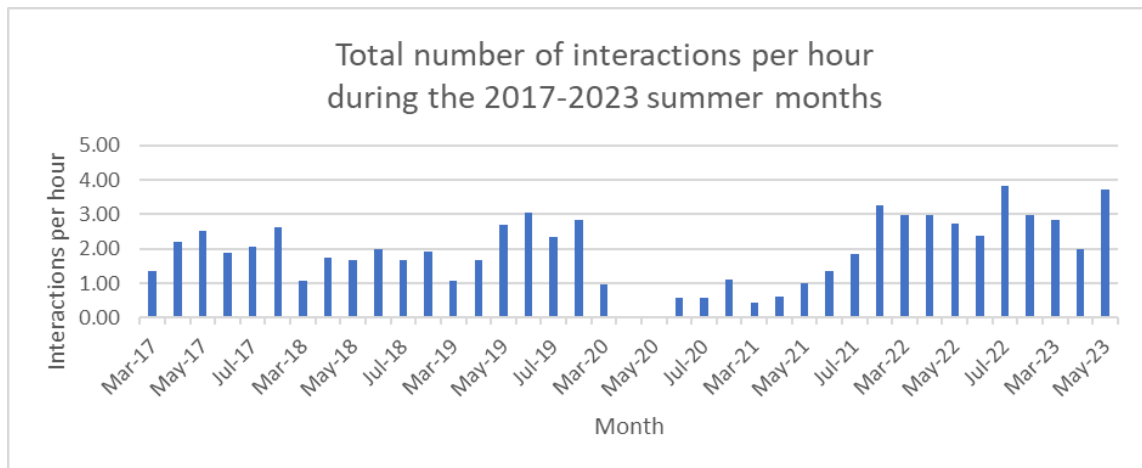


Figure 1. Total number of interactions per hour during the sensitive period (March to August) between 2017 and May 2023.

2.16. 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, during the period May 2022 to May 2023 24.4% of individuals encountered whilst ‘normal wardening’ said that they were already aware of the project. This figure was slightly higher than the average of the previous 12 months (20.2%), but still lower than pre-pandemic average of 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.

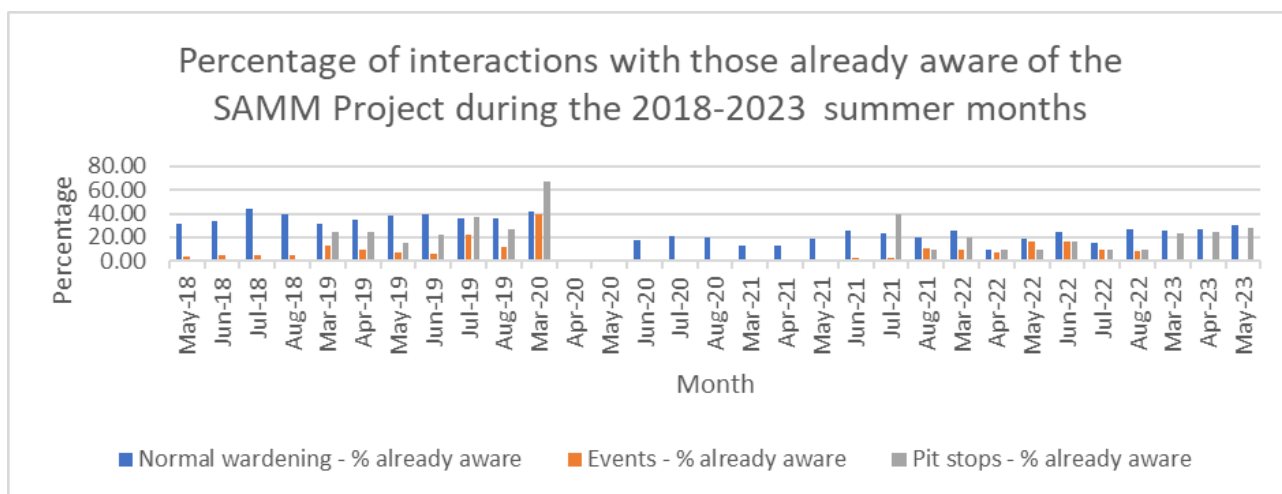


Figure 2. Average percentage of monthly interactions with members of the public that were already aware of the SAMM project during the sensitive period (March to August) between 2018 and May 2023.

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 are in the process of being renewed through to 30th June 2026.

4. Communications

Our most exciting news is that we now have two Communications Officers. Nicola Buckland, warden with the project since July 2015, has been appointed to a new communications role and has joined Sarah Bunce in the 'comms department' as of the end of February.

Website

4.1. The project's 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).

4.2. Our directory of SANGs is called 'Greenspace on your doorstep' and is consistently the most visited part of the website. As of June 2023, it lists 80 SANGs across Surrey, Hampshire, and Berkshire.

Two new additions since the last report:

Water's Edge, a new lakeside walk in Mytchett, part of the Water's Edge housing development. Managed by Nicholas King Homes.

Folly Heights, a new meadow walk close to Farnham for the Folly Heights development. Managed by Cala Homes.

4.3. Looking at the period since the last report. Since 1st November 2022 there have been **54,104** page views across the whole website. Compared to **58,768** in the same period in 2021/2.

4.4. Looking at the period since the last report. Since 1st November 2022 there have been **54,104** page views across the whole website. Compared to **58,768** in the same period in 2021/2.

4.5. Top 10 most visited areas of the website since 1st November have been:

- Greenspace on your doorstep 27,088
- News & blogs 10,767
- Event listings 3,958
- Home page 3,300
- Wildlife Gallery 1,591
- About us 1,143
- Heathland Hounds 992

- Downloadable content 548
- How can I help? [\[OB\]](#) 427
- Long Valley opening times 304

Leaflets

4.6. As well as the online directory of SANGs on our website, we also produce a popular free booklet. The current edition was created in 2019 and lists 62 SANGs.

4.7. A new edition is close to completion and will list 82 sites, including two brand new ones that are about to go live.

Of the 20 new entries, many have been open for quite a while, having just missed the last publication cutoff.

Blue Mountain (Bracknell Forest)
 Chertsey Meads (Runnymede)
 Finchwood Park (Wokingham)
 Folly Heights (Waverley)
 Frimley Fuel Allotments (Surrey Heath)
 Hartland Country Park (Hart)
 Hawley Farm (Hart)
 Horsley Meadows (Guildford)
 Keephatch Meadows (Wokingham)
 Mindenhurst (Surrey Heath)
 Moulsham Meadows (Hart)
 Oldlands Copse (new – Guildford)
 Poulter's Meadows (new - Hart)
 Runfold Ridge (Guildford)
 Southwood Country Park (Rushmoor)
 Water's Edge (Surrey Heath)
 Wellesley Water Meadow (Hart)
 Whitewater Meadows (Hart)
 Windlemere (Surrey Heath)
 Windmill Meadows (Bracknell Forest)

Social media

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

4.9. Social media statistics as of 12th June 2023 (Table 3) show our following is gradually increasing as we become better known.

Table 3. Social media followers as of 12th June 2023.

	Oct 20	May 21	Oct 21	May 22	Oct 22	June 23
Facebook	1,031	1,188	1,315	1,482	1,662	1,801
Twitter	644	751	793	872	932	971
Instagram	260	340	399	505	592	694

The number of followers (Table 3) does not adequately reflect our reach on social media (Table 4).

Table 4. Social media reach as of as of 12th June 2023.

<u>Reach</u>	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Facebook	8,299	33,205	23,421	18,547	19,147	10,106
Twitter	13,100	19,300	12,000	14,500	12,500	4,500
Instagram	912	914	690	2,282	1,357	560

A few examples of recent high-performing posts:

 **Thames Basin Heaths Partnership** Published by Sarah Bunce · 30 May at 10:45 ·  

This is the sight we dread! We haven't heard yet what caused the wildfire on Ash Ranges in Surrey to break out on Saturday, but unofficial estimates say that 60 hectares of habitat may have been lost. This is especially shocking news at this time of year, when Nightjars are laying their first eggs. ~Sarah

Please help us spread the [#BeWildfireAware](#) message...

- 👉 No fires or BBQs
- 👉 Dispose of cigarettes responsibly
- 👉 Take all litter home

If you see a fire in the countryside, dial 999 as soon as safe to do so...

1. Get to a safe place and keep your distance
2. Note the location of the fire
3. Call 999 and ask for the Fire & Rescue Service
4. Give as much information as you can



Facebook post reach 3,867 **Higher than typical** Typically 196-782

Facebook post comments 6 **Higher than typical** Typically 0-3

Facebook post shares 17 **Higher than typical** Typically 0-2

Facebook post reactions 59 **Higher than typical** Typically 8-26



Thames Basin Heaths Partnership

Published by Nicola Buckland · 28 May at 14:45 · 🌐



Chobham Common in Surrey is one of my favourite heaths, so it was a pleasure to help run a celebratory National Nature Reserves Week event alongside Warden Steve yesterday!

With a long and varied military and filming history, there's certainly a lot to talk about when it comes to Chobham Common. As the largest lowland heath National Nature Reserve in the South-East it also boasts high numbers of dragonfly, beetle and spider species, to name a few!

We chatted to lots of visitors enjoying a walk with their dog, visiting as a family to spot wildlife and even a wildlife cameraman in training!
~Nicky

Thank you to Adam from [Surrey Wildlife Trust](#) for joining us.

[#ThamesBasinHeaths](#) [#NNR](#)

[Natural England in the Thames Solent Area](#) [Natural England](#)

[Explore Surrey's Countryside](#)



Facebook post reach 1,516 **Higher than typical** Typically 196-783

Facebook post comments 2 **Higher than typical** Typically 0-3

Facebook post shares 3 **Higher than typical** Typically 0-2

Facebook post reactions 42 **Higher than typical** Typically 8-26



Thames Basin Heaths Partnership

Published by Nicola Buckland · 24 May at 09:30 · 🌐



A big thank you to the dog walkers that alerted Warden Henry to this campfire at Whitmoor Common in Surrey yesterday. Without prompt calling of the Fire Service the result could have been a heathland fire.

Fortunately Henry spoke to the individuals involved, who were unaware of the potential danger.

Please help spread the word and prevent the spread of wildfire!

[#BeWildfireAware](#) [#ThamesBasinHeaths](#)



Facebook post reach 1,231 **Higher than typical** Typically 196-785

Facebook post comments 5 **Higher than typical** Typically 0-3

Facebook post shares 8 **Higher than typical** Typically 0-2

Facebook post reactions 37 **Higher than typical** Typically 8-26

Top Tweet earned 807 impressions

May is an exciting time for us here at TBHP!
The Nightjars are arriving back from Africa
and we're anticipating the first churrs
anytime now!

As soon as we hear they're back, we'll let
you know!

[#ThamesBasinHeaths](#) [#Surrey](#)

[#Hampshire](#) [#Berkshire](#)

[#MoreThanJustNightjars](#) [#Nightjar](#)

pic.twitter.com/fgJBzj85g4



Heath Week

- 4.10. We run 'Heath Week' at the start of the school summer holidays every year, with family-oriented activities across the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area to raise awareness of how rare and fragile heathland is. This is our flagship week and a great chance to make a splash about heathland locally. In 2023 Heath Week will run from Monday 24th to Sunday 30th July.
- 4.11. Across July and especially during Heath Week, we aim to achieve the highest number of social media accounts and the highest number of website visits across the year.
- 4.12. The full event line-up can be viewed on our website at: <https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/heath-week/>.

Heathland Hounds

- 4.13. The private Facebook group has 1,560 members as of June 2023.
- 4.14. Group admins Nicola Buckland and Jo Wilsher continue to build positive relationships with dog owners using the SPA, promoting responsible behaviours. Activities include group dog walks on SANGs, pop-ups on the SPA, wardening in Heathland Hounds uniform and supporting partners at dog-friendly events.
- 4.15. The Facebook group continues to thrive, with active members peaking at 783 on 11 Jun 2023. Core messages reach a wider audience via the Twitter and Instagram accounts
- 4.16. The Heathland Heroes initiative was launched via both TBHP and HH social media platforms in May. It focuses on celebrating responsible behaviours on the SPA. Following a positive interaction with a warden, a photograph is taken of the dog and shared with explanatory text.



5. Education

5.1 Introduction

Our Amazing Heathlands, our heathland-focused schools programme, is run by Michael Jones – our Education & Engagement Officer. The aim of the programme is to meaningfully connect school children and their teachers to wildlife and their local heathlands through fun and engaging activities. People are inspired to take an active role in protecting our heathlands – from minimizing disturbance to ground-nesting birds to reducing wildfires to getting involved in biological recording through citizen science.



Our Amazing Heathlands

5.2 Engagement data

During the period since the last report, the “*Our Amazing Heathlands*” schools programme continued to reach more schools and their children. Word is spreading about our educational offering and feedback has been incredibly positive.

From **1st November 2022 to 31st May 2023**, the activities of the Education and Engagement Officer directly engaged with **6160** children and adults through the schools’ programme, sessions for uniformed groups, guided walks, and talks (Table 5).

During this time, **119 sessions** were delivered – including **94** to children of primary school age (including uniformed groups).

The remaining sessions included heathland talks to local groups, guided walks and conservation careers talks to secondary school students.

Table 5. Summary of the number of engagements and sessions per month from November 2022 to May 2023.

Month	Number of engagements	Number of sessions
November 2022	253	8
December 2022	180	8
January 2023	855	17
February 2023	1161	20
March 2023	2664	19
April 2023	19	1
May 2023	563	29
June 2023 (to 21 st June)	465	17

These are high-quality engagements, taking place in sessions ranging between one-hour and up to three-hours. There is time for a deep level of engagement and considerable nature connections.

5.3 Historical engagement data

Year on year, the “*Our Amazing Heathlands*” education programme continues to grow (Table 6).

Table 6. Summary of number of engagements and number of sessions of the “*Our Amazing Heathlands*” education programme between 2019 and 2023.

Year	Number of engagements	Number of sessions
2019	853	38
2020 (Pandemic year)	644	19
2021 (Pandemic year)	1068	34
2022	3589	107
2023 (to 21 st June)	4292	103

Excellent ongoing relationships are being developed with local schools and new schools are being added to the list.

Teachers are encouraged to get their children to help spread the word about how amazing heathland is, but also how fragile it is and how they can raise awareness of issues like wildfire and disturbance. This often takes the form of designing posters to ‘*Help the Heath*’

5.4 Schools – Our Amazing Heathlands

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 look after them. This helps to spread our key messages about responsible heathland beyond the direct interactions.

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)

5.5 Advertising our offering

220 primary schools have been identified within 5km of the SPA (62 within 1km) and contact is being made with them as and when possible – identifying the best teachers to contact. Schools are offered a range of curriculum heathland-themed engagement and learning opportunities for the children. This offering takes the form of assemblies, classroom sessions and heathland visits, if possible. A number of schools are within walking distance of their local heath, with these children often visiting in the company of their teachers.

Articles have been written for community magazines raising awareness about learning and engagement opportunities and this has proved an effective way to spread the word and create awareness of the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership within the local community.

An introductory [video](#) to highlight the benefits of learning about heathland can be viewed by teachers is used to explain the benefits of the sessions in a quick and engaging format.

Educational and engagement opportunities and celebrations of success are regularly promoted via social media and blogs on the website.

5.6 Sessions available

Several curriculum-linked sessions aimed at a KS1 and KS2 audience have been developed to provide teachers with something that caters for all their needs, including: -

- Introduction to heathland
- Heathland discovery
- Heathland seasons
- Heathland wildfire
- Heathland in the dark
- Heathland species: classification
- Heathland species: adaptation
- Heathland species: food chains
- Heathland - physical and human features
- Heathland plants
- Threats to heathland

5.7 Heathland as an outdoor classroom

There are agreements in place with partners to run educational sessions on the following heathlands: -

- Chobham Common (Surrey CC)
- Whitmoor Common (Surrey CC)
- Ockham and Wisley Commons (Surrey CC)
- Bramshill (Forestry England)
- Wildmoor Heath (BBOWT)
- Lightwater Country Park (Surrey Heath BC)
- Horsell Common (Horsell Common Preservation)

This allows schools across the SPA buffer zone opportunities to visit their local heathland and spread our sessions across the three counties.

Sessions have also been run at Yateley Common Country Park (Hampshire County Council), but these are currently arranged on a session-by-session basis. There are also plans to co-run heathland sessions with Hart District Council later in the summer term.

We are always looking to add to this list to make it easier for schools across the Special Protection Area to visit – often without the need to arrange transport (the cost of which is often a barrier to participation).

5.8 Resources

We continually develop our resources (based on feedback and research) and produce new ones to expand our offering. These resources are designed to be used during sessions to provide focus and give the children something to take away with them as a reminder of their learning. Other resources are available to provide teachers with activities to embed learning after the event and provide extra value to the experience.

5.9 “Our Amazing Heathlands” - Feedback

Feedback has been incredibly positive from children and teachers alike. Teachers are rebooking sessions when they get a new class each academic year and are happy to act as referees for new schools that are interested in recommendations.

Here is a selection of feedback: -

Year 2 Teacher (Wildmoor Heath School)

- *“Thank you so much for our wonderful trip into the Heath. The children loved it. In science we have just covered habitats and food chains and we are now learning about animals including humans and so the walk was a great hook for our topic.”*

Year 4 students (Wildmoor Heath School)

- *“Dear Michael. Thank you so much for taking us on that wonderful trip to the heathland. It was an incredible trip and an amazing experience. The great part was I learnt so much!! I was also amazed when you talked about the rare birds. I can't believe we saw a Dartford Warbler. I came home with so much knowledge.”*
- *“Dear Michael. I loved the heath walk because I learned a lot about the heath and different types of plants. I really loved seeing the Dartford Warbler and the pointy fungi. Nature is my favourite thing and I never knew about the Dartford Warbler.”*
- *“Dear Michael. I think you did really well at talking to us about the heath and all its nature. I found it very interesting. We all had a wonderful time.”*



Fig. 3 Children from Wildmoor Heath School learning about heathland conservation.

Year 5 & 6 Students (New Scotland Hill School)

- *“It was really interesting because we found out about our heath and the nature that lives there. In just one hour I saw loads of things.”*
- *“It was really good and well organised. It was interesting to learn how many creatures thrive on the winter heath.”*
- *“I enjoyed it because we identified what we saw and made field guides for our own heath.”*
- *“We found a Yellow Staghorn Fungi, which was awesome!”*
- *“It will really help me in science because we sorted the living things on the heath into their categories.”*
- *“It was a really fun experience because I loved finding all the wildlife.”*
- *“I thought it was fascinating to know how many creatures and plants were on the heath on such a cold winters day.”*

Forest School Lead (Hurst Lodge School, Yateley)

- *“I just want to say thank you for your time and enthusiasm on Friday. We all loved seeing you and hearing really interesting facts. You did a brilliant job captivating the students and igniting their interests and we'd love you to come back as soon as possible. The work you do is so important and I*

believe we can really make a difference.

- *We look forward to hearing more about reptiles and amphibians too and it was obvious that you really had an amazing impact..."*

Eco Committee Students (Barnsbury Primary School)

- *"Thank you for the Whitmoor session at school yesterday, Zach loved it. He found it so interesting, he was full of facts when he got home. Thank you so much!" [Parent]*
- *"I really liked it. I learnt it from Michael. I didn't know what a nightjar was. It makes a calling sound." (Had a go at making the noise to show me 😊) [Year 1]*
- *"It was really good. I liked when he mentioned lots of facts about the common and the nightjar." [Year 3]*

Forest School Lead (Hurst Lodge School, Yateley)

- “Thank you so much for meeting us at the common on Friday. We all had a great time and agreed that it was nice to see the children showing curiosity in nature and enjoying the thrill of finding something on the spotter sheets. The children thrived on the freedom the space gave them. One child said the morning was 10/10 and they all agreed they would go back.
- The children fell silent in the minibus, you wore them out. Some of these children are not so keen to join in with PE lessons, this trip gave them plenty of fresh air and exercise opportunities. Perfect.”

Year 3 Teacher (Maybury Primary School)

- “Thank you SO much for all your hard work and efforts this week. The Horsell Common trips have been a HUGE success and we are already talking about organising something for the last week of the summer term - I will be in touch!
- Year 4 came back buzzing saying it was brilliant! Thanks so much.
- Just another huge thank you. The staff have raved about how good the visits were and how amazing you were. Credit where credit is due! 😊”

Forest School Lead (Hurst Lodge School, Yateley)

- “We had the most amazing sessions with Michael - his knowledge and passion are second to none and the students and staff alike feel inspired to help preserve our beautiful heathland.”



Fig. 4 Classwork by Year 4 students - Potter's Gate School, Farnham.

5.10 Uniformed Groups

There continues to good demand from uniformed groups and sessions have been designed to introduce children to their local heathlands and enable them to work towards badges. To meet further badge

requirements, the on-heath activities can be supplemented with the ‘Help the Heath’ poster challenge.

Feedback:

Leader (Horsell Brownsea Cubs)

- *“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.”*

Leader (1st Windlesham Scouts)

- *“I think your thanks was left to the Scouts themselves and it was certainly heart felt, as I have never known them to spontaneously burst into applause or tell someone how well they do their job!”*

5.11 Wildfire Education_– www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/wildfire

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.

In January and May, the Education Officer participated in [Junior Citizen](#) at Reigate and Guildford. Junior Citizen sessions teach Year 6 children about being safe in the countryside.

Through these sessions, **2222** Year 6 children learned about their local heathlands, the significant issue of wildfire, how to avoid it and what to do if they spot one (Safe place / Ring 999)

These events are a fantastic way to engage with many local children about one of our key messages.



Fig. 5. Junior Citizen - Guildford

5.12 Education Webpage – www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/schools

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

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

5.13 Noticing Nature – Wellbeing Walks

In November and December 2022, I ran a series of five weekly ‘Noticing Nature’ walks at Caesar’s Camp near Farnham in collaboration with Farnham Primary Care Network.

These wellbeing walks were designed to introduce local people to the wonderful heathland on their doorsteps. They were advertised directly to the local community in community centres and GP’s surgeries. This community had been identified

In the walks, participants were encouraged to slow down and notice the nature around them. From looking for fungi, to smelling Gorse flowers to listening to the birds close by everyone was able to make meaningful connections with the landscape around them.

One of the weeks focused on mindfulness and was hosted by Elinor Newman from the South Downs National Park Authority.

Aside from the wellbeing benefits for participants, people discovered just how special heathland was – from its amazing species, like nocturnal Nightjars, to how fragile the landscape is. Lots of birds nest on the ground, so are at risk from disturbance (especially from dogs) and destructive wildfire are a real threat.

Connecting people with their local heathland introduces them to the special species that live there, encourages them to look after the area by taking ownership for this special habitat. They can then encourage others to get involved and help protect the landscape.

These walks were discussed at “*Cultivating a Green Health & Wellbeing Movement in Surrey*” - The Surrey Heartlands Green Social Prescribing Programme in May 2023 at WWF-UK in Woking and there was lots of interest in weekly wellbeing walks being set up. Planning for this is ongoing.

Feedback

- “*I liked looking at nature with Michael. It made me happy*” [Ryan – a primary aged child, not in school embraced the sessions!]
- “*Having a guided walk made me much more observant, made me slow down to actually see what was around me and enabled me to be much more appreciative. It got me out in the fresh air, moving and meeting other people.*”
- “*It was great being out in the open air on a beautiful day in such an interesting place. I really felt the benefit of the time, both physically and mentally. I would encourage everyone to engage with this project.*”

5.14 Teeny Tiny Heathland

Education Officer Michael loves the smaller creatures that inhabit our heathlands and has created a social media series called “Teeny Tiny Heathland.” These posts seek to introduce the mini world of wonder that can be found on our local heathlands. Slowing down to sense what is around you on you walks increases nature connections and more connected people demonstrate an increased level of positive behaviours for the environment. #TeenyTinyHeathland

6 SPA and SANGs monitoring SPA Visitor Survey

- 6.1. Every five years since the project began, we have conducted a survey of the Special Protect Area visitors. This is a very large piece of work and beyond the capacity of the wardening team to deliver and so is let to an external contractor each time. Previous survey results can be found on our website here [Published reports - Thames Basin Heaths \(tbhpartnership.org.uk\)](https://tbhpartnership.org.uk)
- 6.2. We are delighted to inform members that Footprint Ecology have won the contract this year. The survey will commence in July and we will provide an update in our next report

Annex 1 Breeding Bird data collection

- 6.3. The surveying of the extremely important Annex 1 birds the Nightjar, the Woodlark and the Dartford Warbler is underway. 2Js Ecology currently produce a report for us detailing the findings and we will be able to share that with you in our next report
- 6.4. As agreed in the June 2022 JSPB meeting, we are seeking to ensure robust succession planning for this essential information. This piece of work is progressing well, and we will provide a further update in our next report.

Visitor Surveys on all SANGs: comparing winters

- 6.5. Visitor surveys were completed for all SANGS in each of two winters: winter 2021/22 (from December 2021 to March 2022), and winter 2022/23 (from 8 October 2022 to 27 February 2023).
- 6.6. The SAMM Team undertook visitor surveys, achieving full coverage of all SANGS available at the time in each winter: 75 SANGS in winter 2021/22 and 79 in winter 2022/23, a 5-fold increase compared

to pre-2021 surveys. This was possible as a result of a streamlined methodology, compared to previous years, where one-hour surveys replaced two-hour ones. The Team also counted all people seen on site.

- 6.7. To compare the two winters, the same methodology was used, including covering each site during the same time of the day, although surveyors were allowed to change the day of the week, or, in the case of 20 SANGS, survey them at weekends instead of weekdays to increase the weekend coverage to 30%, to reflect the number of weekend days compared to weekdays.
- 6.8. Table 7 shows the summary figures for each winter survey. Winter 2022/23 was characterised by more SANGS covered with more people encountered, but despite this a similar number of interviews were undertaken each winter. This highlights the constraints surveyors face, specifically that the time it takes to interview someone cannot be shortened to accommodate more interviews, even when footfall is higher. A maximum of 12 interviews were possible in an hour.

Table 7. Summary figures for the winter surveys 2021/22 and 2022/23.

	Winter 2021/22	Winter 2022/23
Number of SANGS surveyed	75	79
Total number of interviews	262	256
SANGS surveyed without interviewed possible	7	4
People counted	836	984

- 6.9. The main activity undertaken by people visiting SANGS was dog-walking in both winters (including commercial dog-walkers) (76% in 2021/22 and 85% in 2022/23), followed by non-dog walking (22% - 2021/22 and 12% - 2022/23); all other activities were represented in much smaller proportions, but nevertheless similar in both winters (Fig 6).

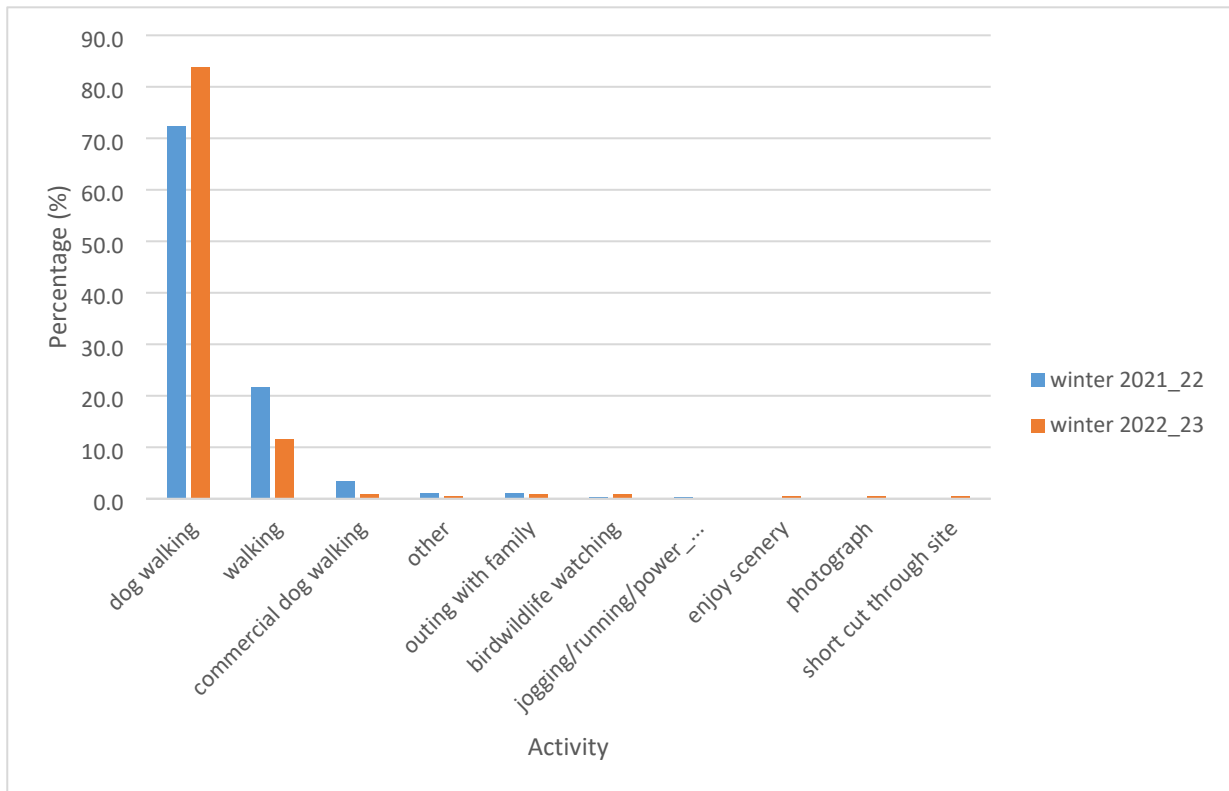


Fig. 6. Summary of the frequency of the main activity undertaken on TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winter 2022/23 (orange; n=256).

6.10. Surveys in both winters showed that the majority of visits lasted from 30 mins to an hour, followed by shorter visits of less than 30 minutes. The main difference was that whilst in the first winter people visited SANGS more frequently for up to two hours than in the second winter, longer walks of up to three hours were recorded only in winter 2022/23. (Fig. 7).

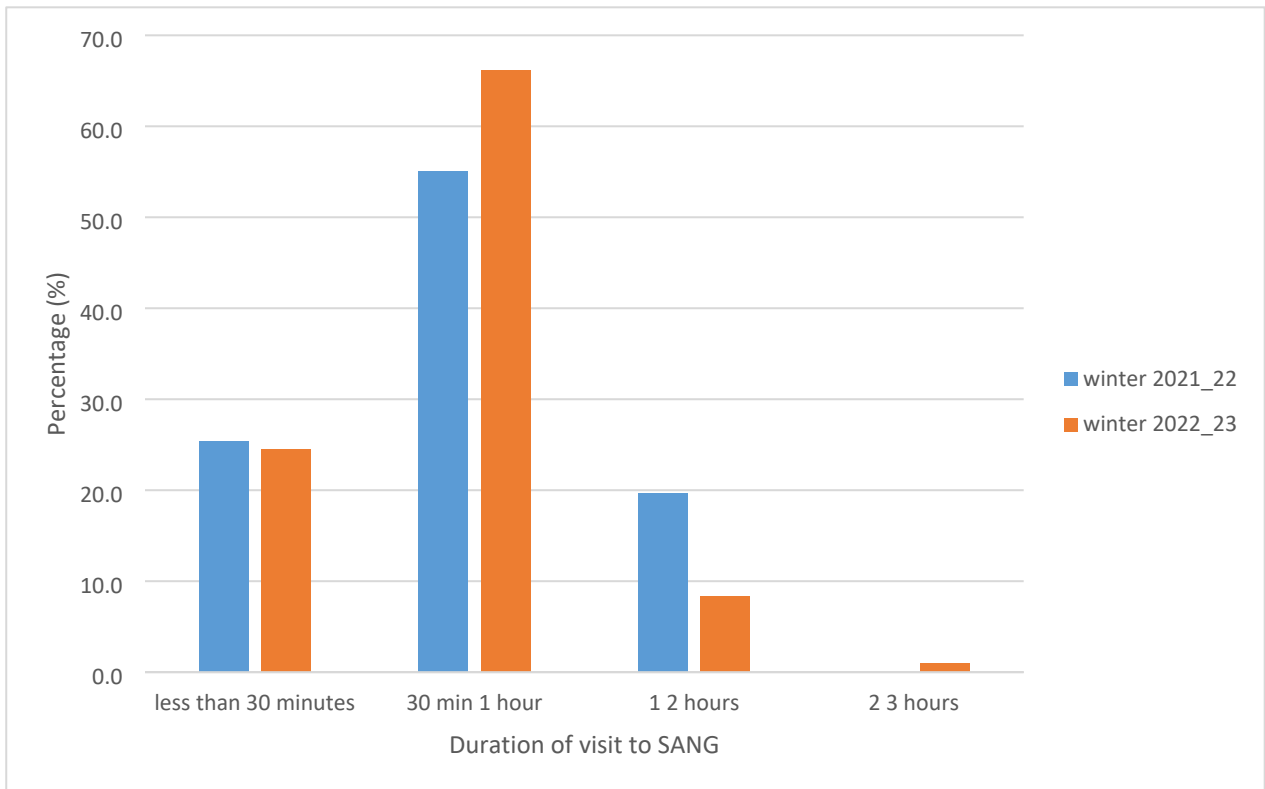


Fig. 7. Summary of the length of visits to the TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winter 2022/23 (orange; n=256).

6.11. The frequency of visits was also remarkably similar between winters. Just over a third of respondents in 2021/22 stated they visited SANGS one to three times a week (38%), followed by daily or nearly daily visits (28% and 14%, respectively) (Fig. 8). A similar pattern was observed in winter 2022/23 (37% 1-3 times a week, 28% most days, 15% daily) (Fig. 8). People visited SANGS equally on weekdays and weekends in the majority of cases (64% - 2021/22 and 67% - 2022/23), although in winter 2021/22 six times as many respondents said that they used the site only during weekdays (31%), than weekends-only (5%) (but this total would have been impacted by a disproportionate surveying effort on weekdays), compared to the following winter, where twice as many people stated they visited only on weekdays (22%) compared to weekends only (11%) (in winter 2022/23 31% of surveys were carried out at weekends, suggesting this result is reliable).

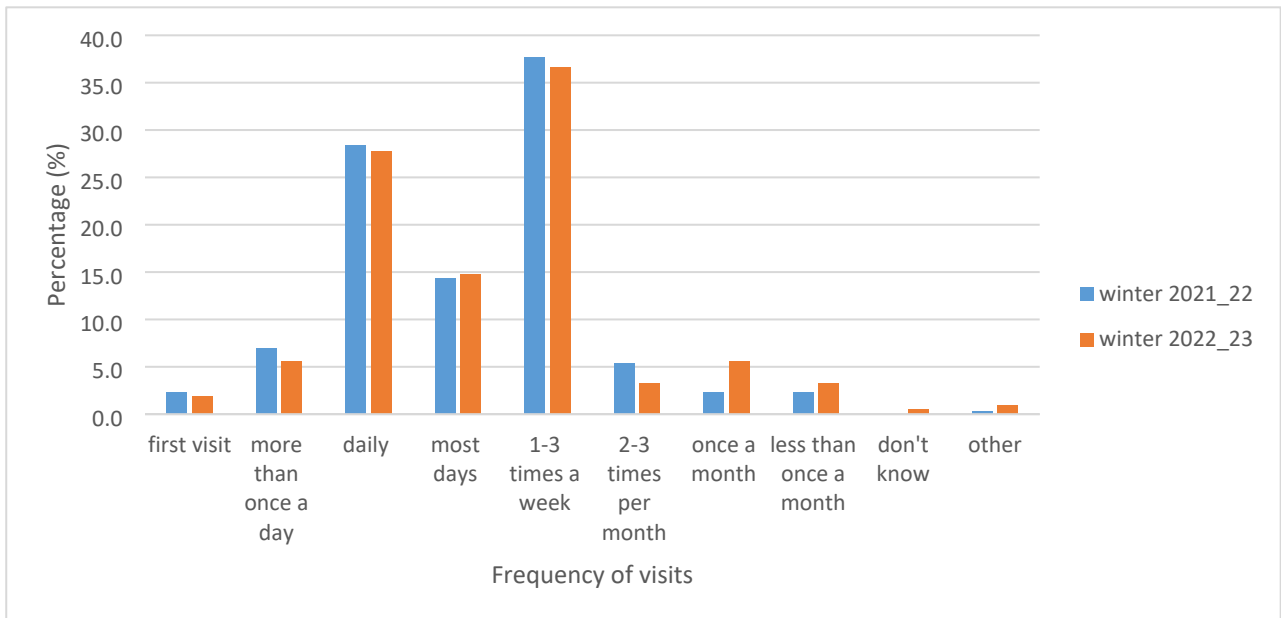


Fig. 8. Summary of the frequency of visits to the TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winter 2022/23 (orange; n=256).

6.12. The main mode of transport to a SANGS was split evenly between private vehicle (50.3%) and on foot (49.7%) in winter 2021/22, but during the following winter people arrived to SANGS by vehicle more often (55.5% vs 44% on foot) (Fig. 9). The Met Office recorded lower-than average temperatures in the TBH SPA zone in winter 2022/23, and slightly above average in winter 2021/22 (Met Office 2023, 2022); this could have influenced the mode of transport.

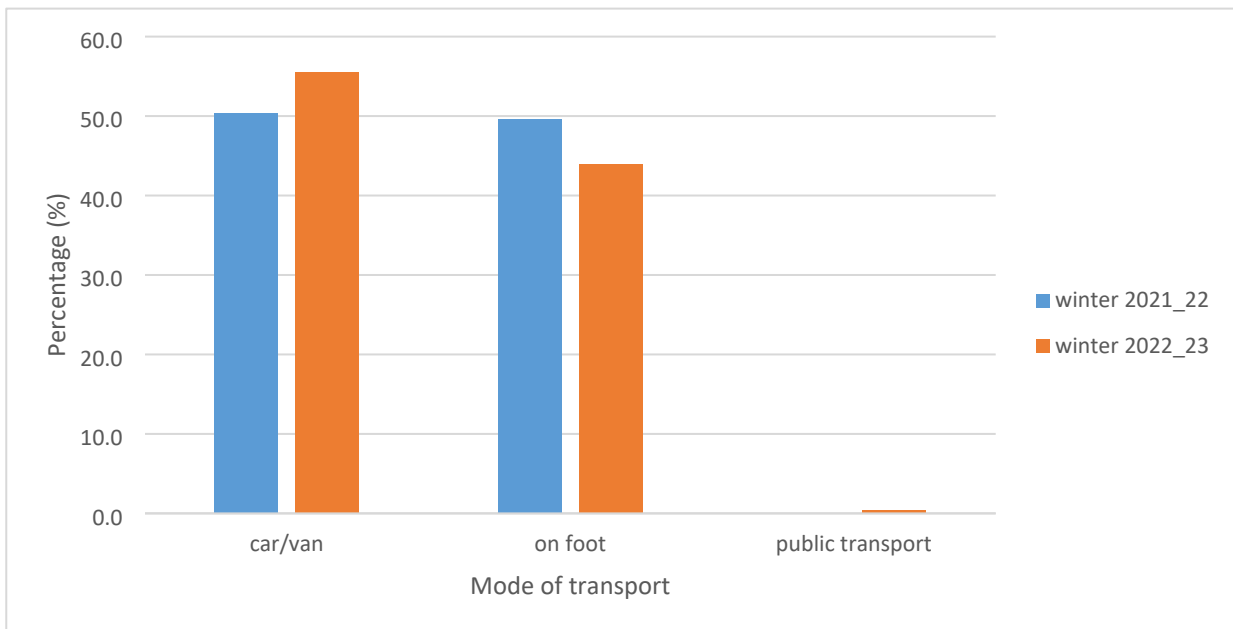


Fig. 9. Summary of frequency of mode of transport used to access TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winter 2022/23 (orange; n=256).

6.13. The majority of people arrived within 1 mile of the SANGS in both winters, followed by the up-to-2-mile category (Fig. 10), a result in accordance with the previous surveys (see the SAMM Project Update

Report June 2022). This suggests that usage of SANGS in winter is consistently undertaken mostly by local people.

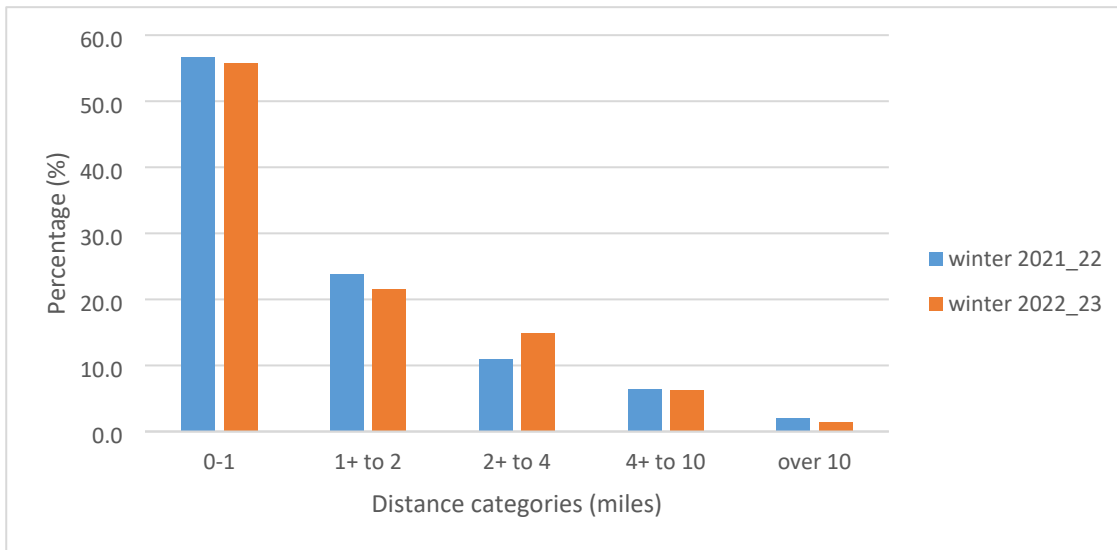


Fig. 10. Distance travelled from home to TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winter 2022/23 (orange; n=256).

6.14. 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 winters, although it was cited less frequently during winter 2022/23 (51% - 2021/22 and 37% - 2022/23). The second-most mentioned reason for visiting varied between the two years: in 2021/22 “dogs' enjoyment” was the only other reason mentioned by more than 10% of respondents, whilst in winter 2022/23 “variety” was the second most frequent reason (9%). However, it should be noted that when all dog-related categories were combined (“dog enjoys it” and “dog can be off lead”), this became the second-most mentioned reason for visiting in both winters (Figure 11).

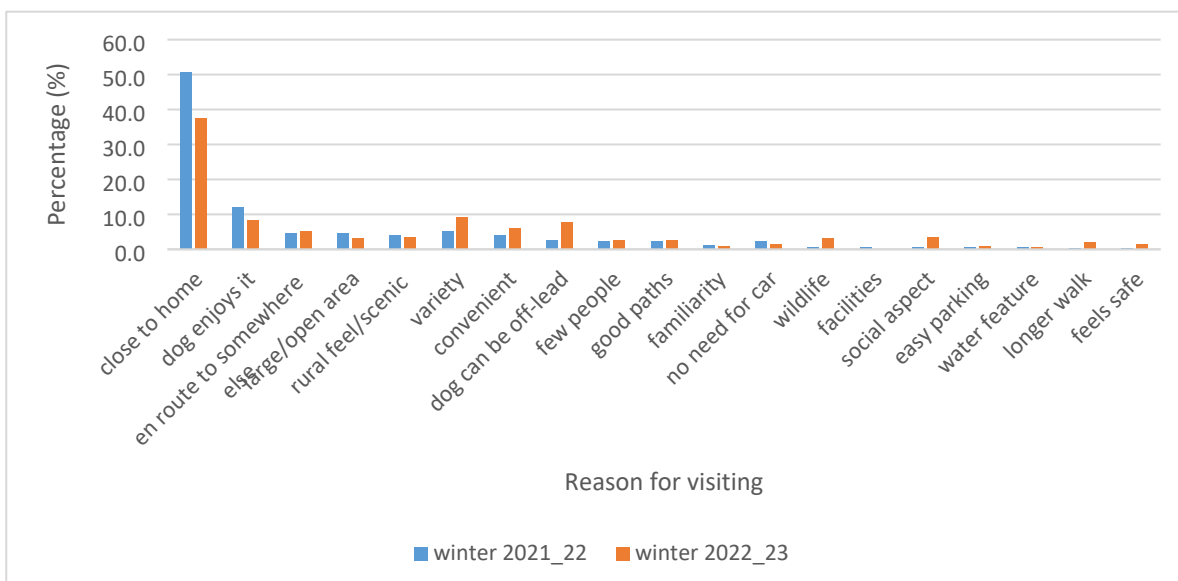


Fig.11. Summary of the frequency with which characteristics of a SANGS were listed as important aspects by visitors during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winter 2022/23 (orange; n=256).

6.15. Visitors were also given the opportunity to tell us what aspects of a SANG needed improving: the most frequent answer in both winters was “no improvements needed”, followed by the need for more amenities (e.g. coffee-cart, dog-washing facilities, toilets, captured under the “other” category), then suggestions of better paths, and more dog-poo bins (Figure 12).

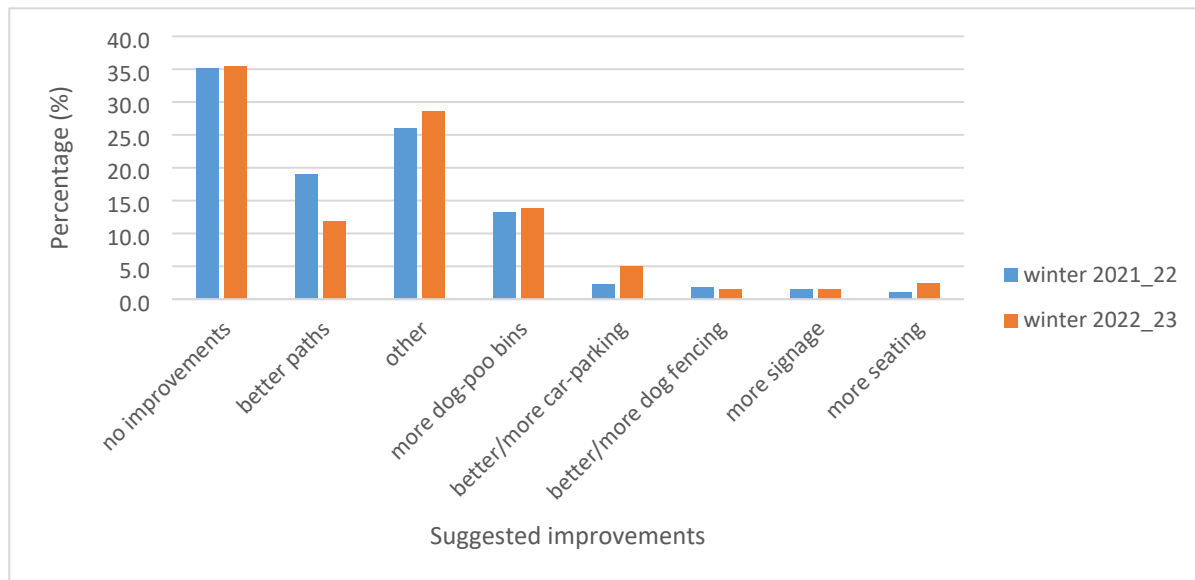


Fig. 12. Summary of the frequency each improvement was suggested by visitors to the TBH SANGS during winter 2021/22 (blue; n=262) and winter 2022/23 (orange; n=256).

6.16. In summary, results from the two winters provided very similar answers, which suggests that the behaviour of visitors to SANGS is likely constant over time, at least at the moment. It is therefore suggested that winter SANGS visitor surveys be carried out every other year, alternating it with summer SANGS survey, currently undergoing their first year.

Car park transects: comparing four years of data

- 6.17. Car park transects have been carried out every year with the exception of 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions.
- 6.18. All six transects were carried out by wardens of the TBH SAMM project. Each warden drove a set route (transect) recording all vehicles found at pre-determined car parks, and the six transects were driven simultaneously each time to avoid double-counting vehicles that may have moved between car parks.
- 6.19. We use dashboard mounted cameras to record footage of the car park as the transects are driven. The wardens review the footage and submit their findings for analysis.
- 6.20. A total of 33 hours and 57 minutes were spent driving the transects in 2022. A similar volume of time is engaged reviewing the footage, collating the results, and submitting the results for analysis. In addition,

we must consider the time taken to train participants and to organise the transects when evaluating its effectivity.

6.21. The last four years of available data were compared, to assess changes that may have occurred over time, and especially comparing pre- to post-pandemic years. For each year, five sessions over the summer were selected to ensure comparability between years: one session at the end of June, two in July, and two in August. Two of the five sessions had covered a weekend (apart from 2019 when three sessions had occurred at the weekend) (Table 8). The numbers of vehicles across the six transects and five sessions were pulled together to provide a total per each year (Fig. 13).

Table 8. Dates of the transect sessions for each of the four years considered. Weekends are underlined.

Year	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
2022	29 Jun	<u>3 Jul</u>	11 Jul	9 Aug	<u>28 Aug</u>
2019	<u>29 Jun</u>	24 Jul	<u>27 Jul</u>	<u>17 Aug</u>	19 Aug
2018	29 Jun	25 Jul	<u>28 Jul</u>	<u>18 Aug</u>	20 Aug
2017	30 Jun	26 Jul	<u>29 Jul</u>	<u>19 Aug</u>	21 Aug

6.22. Across the four years there was not a noticeable difference in the number of total vehicles recorded year-on-year, and no difference was evident between the pre- and post-pandemic period (2022 vs 2019) (Fig. 13), although 2017 recorded fewer vehicles than 2022. However, this constitutes a five-year interval, so changes could be expected.

6.23. A breakdown of the type of vehicles present in car parks was also provided as a percentage of total vehicles recorded for that year (Fig. 14). In 2022, a higher percentage of commercial vehicles had been recorded compared to previous years, whilst in 2017 and 2018 the percentage of vehicles with a bike rack was higher than in subsequent years. However, overall, the proportion of each vehicle category was relatively similar across all years.

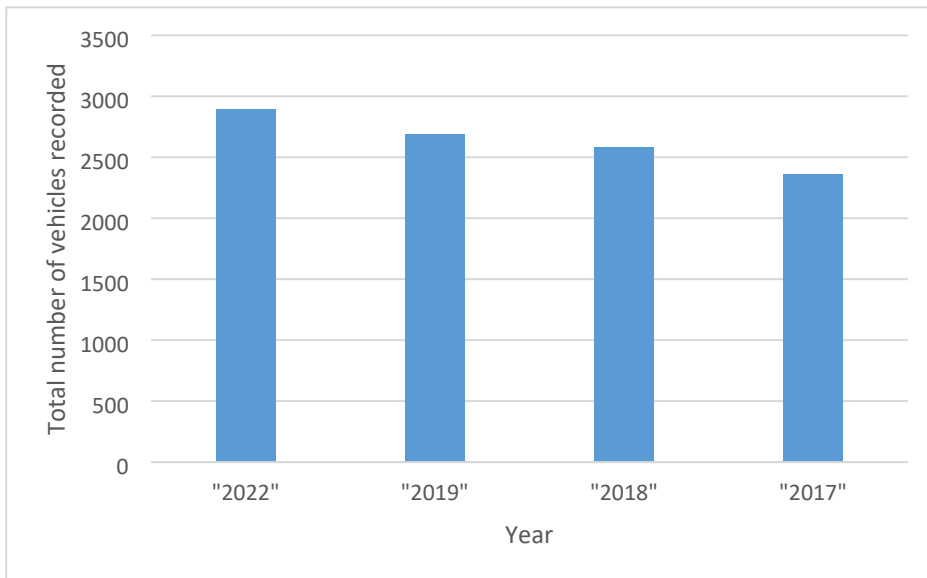


Fig. 13. Summary of the total number of vehicles recorded across all transects and five summer visits (June to August) over five years of car park transects.

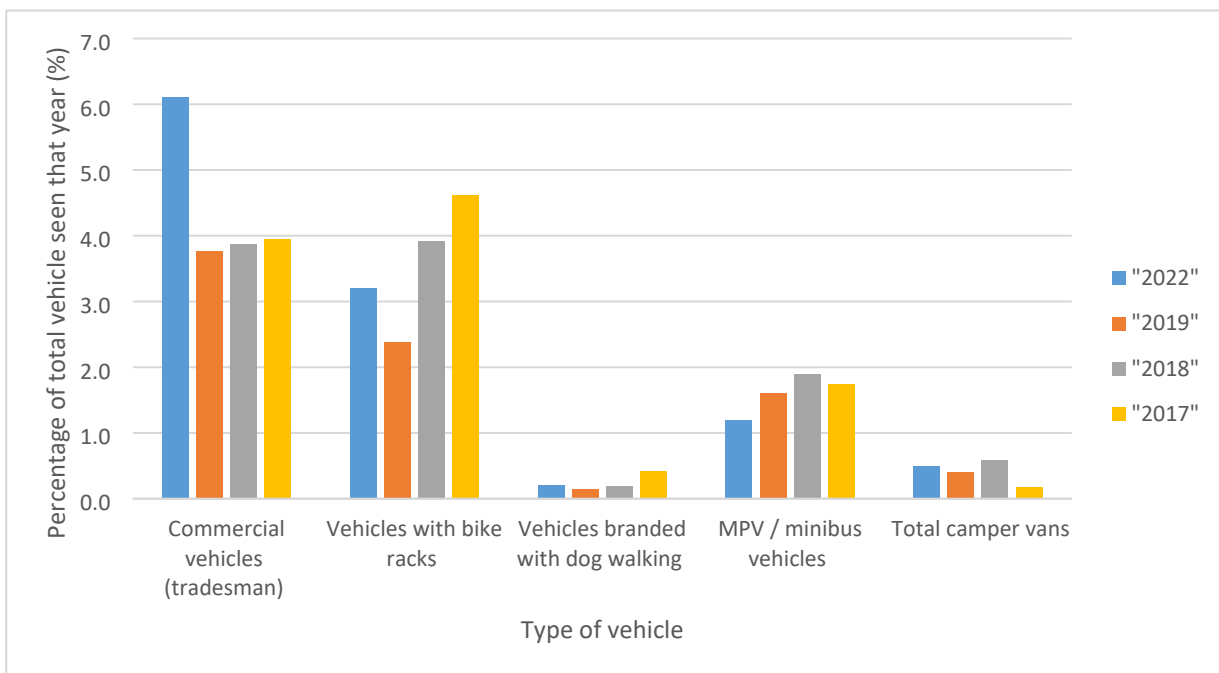


Fig. 14. Summary of the category of vehicles (reported as a percentage of total vehicles) recorded across all transects and five summer visits (June to August) over five years of car park transects.

6.24. Conclusions: there is no evidence of noteworthy changes in the total number of vehicles recorded, nor in the composition of these vehicles, year-on-year. Some differences could be seen between 2022 and 2017, but, over a five-year interval, changes are to be expected.

6.25. We suggest that, going forward, the car park transects should be conducted every five years instead of annually, to minimise the time pressure on the wardens conducting the survey whilst retaining its benefits.

- 6.26. We would like the board's approval to make this change. This will allow us to align carpark transects with the SPA visitor survey (please see page 28)

References

Met Office 2023. Seasonal Assessment – Winter 2023.

https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/binaries/content/assets/metofficegovuk/pdf/weather/learn-about/uk-past-events/summaries/uk_monthly_climate_summary_winter2m_2023.pdf. [Accessed June 2023].

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7. Other news

- 7.1. Our Access Management and Monitoring Partner (AMMP) meetings continue quarterly and are well attended. We have now developed a hybrid style to our meetings to facilitate participation
- 7.2. Our January AMMP meeting focused on habitat management, with a speaker from the Butterfly Conversation Trust joining us and our April meeting focused on wildfire and wildfire prevention.
- 7.3. Our Heathland Hounds group continues to be lively and active. Starting in 2016 we currently have over 1,500 members. This group are key to delivering our messages to dog owners and are strong supporters of the SANG network. More details will be given in the presentation.
- 7.4. The winter months are our chance to spend some time planning our strategy for the coming season. We are always keen to ensure we are as effective and efficient as we can be, and these strategy sessions help us to ensure we are.
- 7.5. The team continue to work incredibly hard and very effectively despite the challenges we all face as a result of living with *COVID-19*
- 7.6. The office at Heathland House is well used by the team. It provides an effective hub for our activities, an office and meeting space.

8. Looking ahead

- 8.1. With the Boards approval we will begin to recruit for the new year-round warden positions as detailed in Section 1
- 8.2. We will continue with our core message of asking heathland visitors to stick to main paths and keep dogs out of vegetation.
- 8.3. 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.
- 8.4. Interconnectedness continues with the newer Heathland related groups, The Western Thames Basin Landscape Partnership hosted by RSPB and 'Heathland Connected' also hosted by Natural England. We will continue to share knowledge and enable a uniform message across the region.
- 8.5. We continuously update the 'Greenspace on your doorstep' section of our website with each new SANGs as it opens [Greenspace on your doorstep - Thames Basin Heaths \(tbhpartnership.org.uk\)](https://tbhpartnership.org.uk). We promote these through wardening, social media and the Heathland Hounds website. [Heathland Hounds - Thames Basin Heaths \(tbhpartnership.org.uk\)](https://tbhpartnership.org.uk)
- 8.6. We are very nearly ready to go to press with our updated 'Greenspace on your doorstep' leaflet. The current leaflet has 64 SANGs in it and this new one will have 82.
- 8.7. We expect to secure the new method for collecting the Annex 1 Breeding Bird data soon and will provide an update when possible.
- 8.8. The SPA visitor survey will be conducted throughout the summer, and we hope to share the results with you in our next report.
- 8.9. We will be continuing to build on our excellent range of educational activities.