

# Land Management Report

Report for the Greenham and Crookham Common Commission  
July-September 2023

## Volunteers:

- Two of our long-term dedicated volunteers, Nigel Williamson and Howard Darby have been recognised with volunteer awards for outstanding individual contributions. Our long-term bird ringer Jan Legg has been awarded a lifetime achievement award. Congratulations and thank you to them all.
- Several more volunteers have been on a pesticide training course to use herbicide as stump treatment. This helps prevent the regeneration of scrub where we clear it on the heathland.
- Our two Wildlife Trainees Anna and Marth are settling in well. They have both passed their first aid training and will be attending a week long chainsaw course in mid-October. They are now taking on leadership of the weekly volunteer group.

## Site Works:

- An area of ash dieback work at Bishop's Green is planned for this winter. It comprises about 60 ash trees which border on properties either side of a thin strip of the common. There is also a powerline running through the trees so a challenging job for our contractors.
- The gorse work planned this winter is to continue with the cut and collect and mulcher combination which was effective last winter. We will also trial some areas of scraping and pulling up gorse with an excavator. Work will be carried out on the lozenges but also on areas of gorse south of Bury's Bank Road. As last year we will plan several days of burning stands of gorse. In summer 2024 we would like to propose carrying out some foliar herbicide spraying on areas of regenerating gorse.
- The volunteers have been targeting the regenerating areas of the invasive species Italian alder. It seems to be incredibly tenacious and herbicide stump treatment is not as effective as on other scrub species. We would like to propose carrying out some foliar herbicide spraying on any areas of regeneration in summer 2024.

- The Field Team have trimmed the hedges they have laid to promote lower growth and thickening of the hedge.
- The tree safety survey results have been compiled and there are 66 trees on GCC which our contractors EJM will be making safe this winter.

### **Species and Surveys:**

- An ecologist has been carrying out a Species Recovery project for Natural England reviewing the status of the Critically Endangered heathland lichen. Initial results show some very good species, including several new to Berkshire records. These included the Notable *Cladonia firma*, new to Berkshire and its second inland record after the New Forest.
- There is also an ongoing pool frog survey by external ecologists contracted by NE. The objective of the research is to investigate the identity, genetics, and potential origins of non-native water frogs in Southern England (the water frog complex includes marsh frog, pool frog, edible frog and Perez's water frog). Non-invasive samples will be taken from the frogs (by swabbing their flanks and axillae) and sent to the University of Leiden and RAVON in the Netherlands. Researchers at the UoL will conduct genetic analysis to confirm species, sub clades, and likely origins. This will provide more information about these frogs, how related they are, and hence how they might have arrived, the means and rate of spread (e.g. natural spread or by anthropogenic means), and possible impact on native species of amphibian. Frogs will be captured from their pond(s) by netting, or by using a lure (comprising a child's fishing rod and a feather!). Once captured the frogs will be quickly skin swabbed, weighed, measured and photographed. They will then be immediately returned to the same pond. We have not received any initial data from this survey other than the fact that pool frogs are very hard to catch.
- The team of staff and volunteers have continued to carry out the weekly butterfly transects on Greenham. The later summer records are an improvement on the very poor numbers we saw in spring and early summer but still below average. An exception is red admiral which has had a very good late-summer boom.

### **Seasonal Wardens:**

- The Seasonal Wardens finished their season at the end of August, having completed their annual report. The full report has been shared with the Commission. There has been a decrease in weekday visitors, but this has

been replaced by an increase in weekend visitors. The most common types of visitors continue to be dog walkers. We are looking at more ways to engage with dog walkers such as volunteer wardens.

- Adrian Hickman's bird surveys were completed. The report is still being written but the initial interpretation of the results shows:
  - Woodlark, Dartford warbler, stonechat and meadow pipit are all present in good numbers with a minimum of 14, 17, 28 and 26 territories respectively.
  - Nightingale numbers are down compared to 2022 but still within the usual range.
  - Multiple sightings of skylark indicate two territories. However, there was no evidence of successful breeding.
  - Lapwing were also unable to breed successfully from 2-3 nesting attempts.
  - Little ringed plover bred successfully on the fire plane gravel with one chick fledging out of the four that hatched. There was also a probable fledged chick from another nesting attempt near the runway cross. At Crookham Pools up to three adults were present and courtship and mating were observed, but there was no evidence of successful breeding detected from a brief nesting attempt in the NW corner of Crookham Pools.
  - There were no ringed plover, redshank, tree pipit, yellowhammer or reed bunting.