

Land Management Report

Report for the Greenham and Crookham Common Commission

April - June 2024

Volunteer Groups

- All the waymarkers have been installed for the Control Tower circular route. A new bench for the route is due to be delivered at the start of July and will be installed soon after. The location has already decided and agreed with bench funder.
- Annual Pyle Hill car park maintenance and path cut back in the local area.
- Cut back paths at Crookham Restoration
- Dismantle board walk near Goldfinch Bottom
- Cut paths around fire plane, installed log turns to hold warning & info signs on the plane and a new waymark post

Field Team

- Fence repairs along A339 boundary
- Fence repairs around control tower car park following escaped cow
- Fence repair alongside new adder tunnels
- 3 new disabled parking signs in car park
- Gate repair at Lower Farm track access gate
- Fence repair at Heads Hill

Seasonal Wardens

- Damage to signage through vandalism has been lower this year. Maybe in part due to more robust signs
- The team have reported fewer interactions with visitors off paths this year. Hopefully a sign that more people are following our requests and noting the signage on the reserve.
- We are working on a new online map so visitors can see all the paths we ask them to use during bird nesting season and the map will show their location. Each of the waymarked routes is individually coloured too. This will be more user friendly than the PDF currently available on the website and linked to via the QR code on our signs. The link to the map will be shared when it is completed.



- The wardens have been running a series of events including regular pop-ups at reserve entrances, nightjar walks and monthly wildlife walks. Events have been popular this year with many being fully booked.

Trainees

- We have recently recruited two new trainees. Amy started at the end of June and Ingrid will be starting in late July.
- Our excellent Trainee Anna who started in July 2023 will be staying on a little longer to continue to build her experience and help get the new trainees up to speed.
- Amy has completed her first aid training already, Ingrid is booked on the next course and then they will both be attending chainsaw training in the autumn.

Surveys

- The adder tunnel work is all completed. Trail cameras were installed in each tunnel at the end of May. So far no reptiles have been recorded but several small mammals have been filmed using the tunnels. This is a good sign as they are a main prey item for adders and will leave a scent trail which adders may follow.
- We will carry out tagging and radio tracking of adders as we approach autumn. This will give us new data on how the adders are moving around the common and if they are using the tunnels.
- The tunnels have generated some good media interest:

Guardian article:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/may/10/adder-girl-tunnels-aim-to-encourage-british-snakes-to-mix-and-breed>

BBC:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cedxqn730gvo>

Local press:

<https://www.newburytoday.co.uk/news/adder-tunnels-helping-to-protect-endangered-snake-9367044/>

Inside Ecology:

<https://insideecology.com/2024/05/16/pioneer-tunnel-project-a-lifeline-for-uks-endangered-adders/>

Local radio:

<https://kennetradio.com/podcast-adder-tunnels-at-greenham-and-crookham-commons/>

- There has also been interest from a site manager with Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust who is keen to see if they can replicate the project on one of their sites.
- Reptile surveys are continuing elsewhere on the common - Adders, grass snake and slow worm have all been seen including adder seen twice at Martindale. No lizards seen yet.
- Weekly butterfly transects are being carried out by a combination of staff and volunteers. Numbers are not looking great this year but that reflects the national trend.
- Tree safety surveys are currently being undertaken by our contractor.
- Ground nesting bird surveys are completed for the year. A full report will be produced and circulated in the autumn/winter. In the meantime Adrian Hickman has provided the summary below:

Interim provisional summary of the breeding bird season at Greenham and Crookham common 2024

Another good year for Little Ringed Plovers with a pair successfully fledging at least two young from a nest on the Fire plane gravel. This is now the seventh consecutive year of successful breeding! Sightings towards the end of the formal surveys in late June indicated that the pair is nesting again in the same area, potentially a second brood. Adults again seen at Crookham pools but no confirmed breeding there.

Very few Lapwings present at Crookham again and no evidence of successful breeding. However, it seems that extensive flood damage to farm fields in the spring provided good breeding habitat for Lapwings in other parts of the county, e.g., Padworth lane and Sulhamstead with good numbers apparently breeding.

Woodlarks, Meadow Pipits, Stonechats and Dartford Warblers were all present in good numbers again with lots of evidence of successful breeding and multiple broods, and in the case of Woodlark, even on the very last visit on 1 July when an adult was seen carrying food to a nest at Crookham pools.

The now expected paucity of skylarks continues, although on a more positive note there was probably at least one territory at Crookham pools, the first since 2021. Further rather scant sightings were scattered along the lozenges but until the data is analysed it is not known how many if any constitute territory status.

There were no Tree Pipits again, this species appears to be practically extinct in west Berkshire with apparently no sightings at other traditional sites such as Snelsmore or Padworth Common. Small numbers however do still occur on heathland in east Berkshire.

Nightingales were again present in the usual Crookham area where successful breeding was confirmed with the sighting of an adult taking food to a nest near the southernmost adder tunnel. There were also records from Pyle Hill, Estovers, adjacent to Aldernbridge heath and within the silos

compound. Subject to data analysis, potentially up to eight territories this year, although not all of them may have sustained.

Was good to find a Reed Bunting in territory again at Crookham pools after an absence in 2023.

Linnets initially seemed slow to establish nesting sites, probably due to the poor spring weather, but were eventually seen frequently and in good numbers across the common with lots of evidence of successful breeding, mainly of adults with noisy fledged young, in many areas.

All subject to alteration after full analysis of the data at the end of the season.

Adrian Hickman and Conor Mackenzie

5 July 2024