

# Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Volunteer Report 2023



## Martin Thomson

## Annual Summary of Volunteer Hours 2023

2023 was another strong year for volunteer involvement at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common covering a wide variety of different volunteer roles. These range from the regular Thursday practical work sessions (including students from Berkshire College of Agriculture), weekend practical sessions (both Burnham Beeches and Friends of Stoke Common), ad hoc practical work days with smaller numbers of volunteers (e.g. helping out with pre-livestock turnout fence repair), corporate groups, ecology and hydrology monitoring volunteers, admin and support volunteers, and livestock lookers (covering Stoke Common and Hedgerley).

The table below details the month-by-month volunteer involvement split into under and over-18s, including hours of BB staff time contributed and whether or not they were directly supported.

Month	No. Attending	Running Total Hours	Hours over 18s	Hours under 18s	BB Staff time	Directly supported	Indirectly supported
January	78	440.75	416.25	24.5	70.5	245.25	195.5
February	113	557	527.5	29.5	87.5	520	30
March	92	423.5	413.5	10	67.5	383.5	26
April	123	783	632.5	150.5	93.5	387	138
May	135	723.5	702.5	21	77	479	238.5
June	89	468	450.5	17.5	90.5	378	90
July	99	454	451.5	2.5	103	404	50
August	33	270	270	0	12	218	46
September	98	428	411	17	94.5	383.5	44.5
October	93	506.5	478.5	28	72.5	451	55.5
November	89	365.5	347.5	18	94	350.5	15
December	68	348.5	341	7.5	39	297.5	46
	<b>1110</b>	<b>5768.25</b>	<b>5442.25</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>901.5</b>	<b>4497.25</b>	<b>975</b>



## Volunteer Projects—scrub cutting and burning season

- The bulk of the winter volunteer tasks (Thursday BB and FOSC) were spent over at Stoke Common, working on a number of scrub clearance areas on the main and west common, along with track edge thinning. This included extensive young birch, pine and gorse removal in the mire area of the main common as well as clearance of dense encroaching birch and pine in the area surrounding the Starfruit Pond
- Cut and lay Aspen adjacent to bridleway on north common to form effective barrier
- Cutting and burning birch scrub in BB mire
- Two sessions clearing young birch scrub around the Junipers on the BB heath
- Scrub and small tree clearance / thinning in the WD5 wood pasture restoration areas at BB
- Constructing brash barriers at top and middle pond made from existing materials resulting from contractor thinning works in preparation for future pond silt removal
- Removal of small beech regeneration along Burnham Walk to maintain open grassy glade
- Cutting of small holly regeneration around old pollards on Mendelsohns Slope and in Egypt
- Constructing dead hedge at top of swallow holes along Burnham Walk
- Set up birch Christmas trees at BB café and SC Main Common
- Cutting and bundling small birch scrub in BB Mire, removing to quarry for use in later dead hedging tasks
- Small birch clearance in Hartley Court Inner Moat, using arisings to top up brash barriers to reduce foot traffic across banks



## Volunteer Projects—Spring and Summer 2023

- Car park maintenance, comprising weeding out the French drains in bays 1-4, digging out the drainage grips and weeding round the car park machines and cafe
- Removing and clearing out the four main cattle grids on Sir Henry Peeks Drive and Juniper Drive, as well as the two mini grids on Lord Mayor's Drive, in preparation for the return of livestock
- Stoke Common reptile survey—preparing and numbering survey sheets in workshop then setting out sheets in survey areas J and K with BB Thursday volunteers, then setting out the remaining survey areas (A-I) with Friends of Stoke Common on their weekend task in April. The sheets were also lifted as a volunteer task in June at the end of the survey period
- FOSC supported and undertook National Bat Monitoring surveys at both SC and BB
- Taking down the blue rope used to close off more sensitive areas of the reserve during the wetter winter months (Sevenways Plain, Hartley Court Moat, area of Egypt woods etc.)
- Litter pick covering all areas of Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common, split across multiple tasks
- Removal of remaining section of redundant invisible fence cable in Egypt
- Invasive species removal—Variegated Archangel at Nile stream
- Digging out drainage grips on path going downhill past the quarry and fitting new re-vestment boards
- Surfacing work—Topping up and resurfacing areas of footpath with gravel from the BB quarry:
  - Path leading from Hawthorn Lane up to Crossways gate
  - Path from Little Common down to Nile Stream
  - Topping up areas around dog bag dispensers
  - Stoke Common—resurface corner down by Woodman's Cottage
- Replace foot bridge over Nile stream
- Coronation volunteer event—one day event celebrating the contribution of volunteers to the Reserves. This included a stall staffed by both volunteers and BB staff to promote volunteer involvement, a practical dead hedging demonstration and a guided walk highlighting recent volunteer projects



## Volunteer Projects—Spring and Summer 2023

- Volunteer visit and guided walk at National Trust Cliveden, hosted by Ranger Josh Turner
- Taking down temporary fence around Stoke Common Starfruit Pond before return of livestock
- Replacement of damaged section of Boviguard invisible fence cable at Pumpkin Hill
- Topping up wood chip path in Egypt
- Installation of new information sign board at Hartley Court Moat with edged gravel path
- Weed and tidy garden behind Burnham Beeches Estate Office
- Hosted a stall at the Stoke Poges Village Fete to promote volunteering at Stoke Common
- Bracken control
- Cutting back encroaching vegetation along bridleways and footpaths at Stoke Common
- Middle Pond
  - Replacement of middle pond fence
  - Clear channel through vegetation along edge up to inlet to help maintain effective drainage
  - Install new interpretation signs at top and middle pond





## Eco Volunteer Projects 2023

As well as the practical volunteer work focussing on habitat management and estate works, a hugely valuable contribution is made by the team of eco volunteers who carry out a wide variety of ecological survey and monitoring work. Working across a number of different projects, the data that is gathered and recorded helps to measure the success of our management techniques across both National Nature Reserves, as well as providing valuable guidance on future management. This builds into a bank of available data that can be drawn upon at both a local and wider level.



Collecting Juniper berries from the heath





## Eco Volunteer Projects 2023

Key projects with which the eco volunteer team have been involved over this year are:

- Annual Vegetation surveys – monitoring various survey plots on an annual basis to assess changes in species presence and proliferation over time
- Butterfly transects—monitoring for presence and population health of the different species
- Cutting of experimental pollard plots—trees are cut in specific moon phases by staff using pole saw and Silky saw, with volunteers measuring and counting branches cut from each tree and recording data to assess tree health and response to cutting
- Fixed point photography, monitoring changes over time at specific locations
- Investigating the viability of our Juniper seeds, including analysis and writing up of data
- Re-examination of *Pyrenula nitida* (lichen) transplants done back in 2002, last checked in 2016, many of which were still in place and had healthy lichen on them
- Working with an undergraduate student on Stoke Common who is analysing and writing up collected information regarding the grazing exclusion plots (photo below)
- Training day on the use of lichens for monitoring air quality (in preparation for full project)





## Key Project Highlights—Middle Pond Fence Replacement



**Period:** Monday 24th—Friday 28th July

**Number of days:** 4

**Number of volunteers involved:** 9

**Total volunteer hours contributed:** 118

**Total staff time:** 53.5

The project was led by Martin Thomson and involved replacing the 30 metre length of post and rail fence running along the edge of the outflow at Middle Pond, which had become rotten. Machined round 1.8 metre wooden stakes with a flat face milled into them were secured to the dam wall with metal retaining clips. Four rows of half round machined 3.6m rails were screwed onto the posts to create the fence. As the project had been well planned and we had strong numbers of volunteers offering to help, the actual Middle Pond fence was largely completed within the first two days, leaving the last two days to work on the replacement of the fence at Upper Pond. This was approximately half completed as it was necessary to order longer stakes due to the Upper Pond being deeper at the outflow. The decision was made to complete the Upper Pond works the following year.



## Key Project Highlights—Hartley Court Moat Information Board



**Period:** Monday 8th—Friday 15th June

**Number of days:** 2

**Number of volunteers involved:** 11

**Total volunteer hours contributed:** 61.5

**Total staff time:** 19.5

The project was led by Chris Morris and involved replacing the worn interpretation board at Hartley Court Moat with a new board. To minimise ground damage from visitors walking up to the information board a new gravel path was created from McAulliffe Drive up to and around the new board. The path was edged with recycled plastic composite battens and lined with Terram secured to the battens with staples to prevent the new gravel being in direct contact with the Scheduled Ancient Monument. The gravel was levelled out with shovels and rakes then compacted down with a Wacker Plate to achieve a smooth surface with a slightly raised profile in the middle to allow for effective water run-off.



# Stoke Common Reptile Survey

Date	Group	Task	No: Attending	Hours over 18s	Hours under 18s	BB Staff time	Directly supported	Indirectly supported
30/03/23	BB Vols	Reptile sheet preparation and laying on the West Common	11	59.5	0	14	59.5	
01/04/23	FOSC	Laying reptile survey sheets Main Common	20	77.5	3.5	14	81	
30/04/23	FOSC/BB	SC reptile survey	17	95				95
31/05/23	FOSC/BB	SC reptile survey	17	81.5				81.5
01/06/23	BB Vols	Lift reptile sheets / final survey	9	40		12	40	
03/06/23	BB Vols	Lift reptile sheets / final survey	1	4		4	4	



**Period:** 30th March to 3rd June

**Number of days:** 66

**Total volunteer hours contributed:**  
357.5 (of which 176.5 unsupported)

**Total staff time:** 44 hours





## Key Project Highlights—Coronation Volunteer Event



**Period:** Monday 8th May

**Number of days:** 1

**Number of volunteers involved:** 8

**Total volunteer hours contributed:** 37.5

**Total staff time:** 22

As part of the national celebration of volunteering undertaken to mark the Coronation of King Charles, we hosted a celebration event next to the café run by staff and volunteers. This included:

- 'Meet and greet' stall allowing members of the public to find out more about volunteering and the management of both Nature Reserves including a display by the Eco Volunteers
- Practical demonstration of volunteer work building a dead hedge at Victory Cross
- Guided walk by volunteer Katie Ayers highlighting recent volunteer projects and achievements
- Staff interviews by Martin Thomson and Jordan Payne on BBC Radio Berkshire promoting the event and volunteering at Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common