



Heath Hands Activity Update: 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025

Report to: Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee and Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee.

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Heath Hands overview

1. Heath Hands is a registered charity delivering conservation, community, learning and wellbeing programmes across Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, Keats House and at the Kenwood Estate.
2. This short report summarises the charity's main activities on NLOS during this financial year according to its strategic and charitable objectives and Strategy and pursuant to the Partnership Agreement signed with the City of London Corporation through until 2029.

Highlights

3. The involvement of volunteers has been growing on Hampstead Heath over the last twelve months with over 14,000 hours contributed compared to a usual annual average of 10,500. For a breakdown of activity across the sites, compared against the average please see the graph on page 3.
4. Our current number of active volunteers is 191. Over the past 12 months, we recruited 51 new volunteers, with 38 individuals leaving, meaning our overall number of registered volunteers involved this year was 242.
5. In 2024 Heath Hands celebrated its 25th anniversary.

Strategic Objectives

6. The Heath Hands' Strategy (2021 - 2030) provides strategic direction, and outlines our aims and objectives and priorities through 2024/5. This report outlines below our work in furtherance of these four strategic aims (Community, Conservation, Learning, and Wellbeing) since our last report to this committees.

Conservation

7. Heath Hands' practical volunteering sessions are running across all parts of Hampstead Heath, with involvement of teams and sites as shown on graph 1 on page 3. The Ranger Team restarted sessions on the Heath Extension in December, and we provided support for the Heath and Hampstead Society-led grazing project on the Extension in September.
8. The annual wildlife monitoring projects surveying reptile, butterfly, dragonfly and phenology transects have been very successful, the latter in collaboration with LNHS. We supported several hedgehog surveys in 2024, and detailed reports on all this activity can be found on our website: www.heath-hands.org.uk/ecology-wildlife. The launch of the 2025 season begins in early April with plans for the addition of a new reptile transect covering Sandy Heath and the upper Hampstead pond chain.



9. Around the Hive, our efforts to improve biodiversity have continued this year with more than 50m² of new wildflower meadow created and 150m of new native hedgerow created. Across the Heath, we have installed 9 grass snake breeding sites, 28 hedgehog nest boxes, 10 house sparrow terraces and 5 stag beetle loggeries.
10. This year our Hedgehog Friendly Heath project has seen continued collaboration on wildlife connectivity with organisations such as Growing Green, Highgate Cemetery, Highgate Neighbourhood Forum, Frognaal Gardens, Kentish Town City Farm and more. We held a workshop with these groups in February to share knowledge and prepare for the hedgehog surveys in Highgate Wood later this year.
11. Since April 2024 we have run 50 corporate volunteering events, with over 700 individuals contributing almost 2,500 hours to conserving Hampstead Heath.

Community

12. We have welcomed over 2,700 participants across our community outreach and events programmes in the last year, including at our 6th annual Community Fun Day and the Conker Championships.
13. To engage different audiences and bring new visitors to the Heath we collaborated with a range of local organisations including QCCA, Umoja Health forum, GOAL youth club and New Citizen Gateway. Our Community Newsletter now reaches over 500 organisation and members of the public, and you can find out more here: www.heath-hands.org.uk/community-activities
14. In the coming weeks, we will launch of more informal drop-in volunteering sessions to provide more opportunities for a wider range of participants from the local community.

Learning

15. Our free family-friendly weekend nature interpretation sessions have engaged over 5,000 visitors to the Heath on a variety of topics. The regular opening of Dairy Interpretation Centre in partnership with English Heritage has been an ongoing success, providing a good basis for opening the former tennis hut at Parliament Hill, once repairs are completed.
16. We have over 20 active Heath Friendly Schools and our regular Youth Volunteering sessions have enabled over 900 young people to learn about nature conservation and volunteer. We have a particular focus on young people with SEN, and host weekly sessions for Swiss Cottage School. Further information on our youth activities can be found here: www.heath-hands.org.uk/youth
17. The Heath Hands staff team have led 37 guided walks and workshops for the public over the last year. Topics are varied, and have included history, geology, trees, bats, the River Fleet, nature poetry, butterflies and nature journalling. Our nature photo exhibition at the Dairy and Hive, featuring photos from the 2025 Hampstead Heath calendar, welcomed over 500 visitors.
18. Heath Hands funded two paid work experience placements this year, providing development opportunities for those seeking a career in the environmental sector.



Wellbeing

19. Our free health and wellbeing programmes including health walks, social prescribing and forest bathing workshops have welcomed over 2,000 participants across the year.
20. We launched a third health walk in Spring 2024, and there are now three each week for varying fitness abilities. Further information on our wellbeing activities is here: www.heath-hands.org.uk/health-connections
21. We completed a pilot project providing nature therapy sessions for parents/carers of young people facing a significant diagnosis this winter and are applying for grant funding in collaboration with the Brandon Centre to continue the programme.

Graph 1

