Case study 2025 - Throop SANG

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October 2025

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Summary

BCP council's heathland mitigation team have converted a low biodiversity 30acre private farm into an improving biodiverse public SANG (Suitable alternative natural greenspace), for local foot traffic which alleviates the many pressures on local SSSI nature reserves. This case study has found a marked increase in various species diversity and density from baseline data and 2023 survey results. Bats, Birds, Butterfly and Bee species in particular have benefitted from a 'green' approach to delivering a SANG with creation of high quality and varied robust habitat. These results highlight how land managers can achieve biodiversity improvements on public, disturbed SANG sites.

Introduction

This case study provides an overview of the biodiversity at Throop Water Meadows SANG (also known as Throop SANG), in 2025, with the objective of evaluating the effectiveness of ongoing site management efforts in supporting wildlife. Comprehensive species surveys were conducted by our conservation team in collaboration with local ecological consultancies, focusing on key taxa including bats, birds, butterflies, and otters. Additional species data was collected through surveys led by local experts and BCP Council Rangers, as well as through incidental observations.
All the data collected from the various surveys will be or have already been uploaded onto living record or onto relevant conservation organisations' databases (e.g. British trust for ornithology, Butterfly conservation). Throop SANG is a 30 acre former private farm that has undergone a transformation through various habitat management techniques as is an important link in the Stour valley way, improving the connectivity along this important stretch of river and surrounding habitats.

Bats

Abbas Ecology carried out a Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) in 2019, revised in 2021 at the SANG. In the PEA report, the site was described as having a potentially low value for foraging bats due to the lack of linear features, such as hedgerows.

Bat surveys were carried out in 2022 by Tetra Tech. These included walked transect surveys, automated detector surveys and tree roost assessment surveys.
The walked transect survey in June found four species of bat, which were Soprano pipistrelle, Common pipistrelle, Noctule and Daubenton's bat. The pipistrelles were the dominant species, with only occasional passes of the other species. Most bats were found foraging near trees along the river stour, which provide shelter and invertebrates to eat.

The automated detector surveys were positioned in the east and west of the site in June and showed significantly higher levels of activity in the east, which was near a stream leading to the Stour. Two additional species were recorded, which were Brown Long-eared bat and Serotine.
Other surveys carried out by a local volunteer showed an additional species Nathusius' pipistrelle is present on site.

The value for the foraging and commuting bats present has been assessed as Local or Parish level by Tetra Tech based on the Wray et al. method (see Appendix 1), supporting Abbas Ecology's prediction.

Subsequent to this, the 2025 surveying season performed by the team yielded Common, Soprano and occasionally Nathusius's Pipistrelle, Noctule, Serotine and Daubenton's bat. The dominant species were Soprano and Common pipistrelles, with 31 Soprano pipistrelles identified on one survey in April. A survey in May recorded 7 species in one survey. The 2024/25 planting regime in several areas around the site will play an important role in foraging opportunities for the bats in the future.

Species	**2023**	**2025**
Brown long-eared	0	0
Common pipistrelle	4	18
Daubentons	0	3
Myotis species	2	2
Nathusius pipistrelle	2	3
Noctule	2	7
Serotine	2	2
Soprano pipistrelle	24	31

Table 1: Highest count for each species recorded on surveys in 2023 and 2025

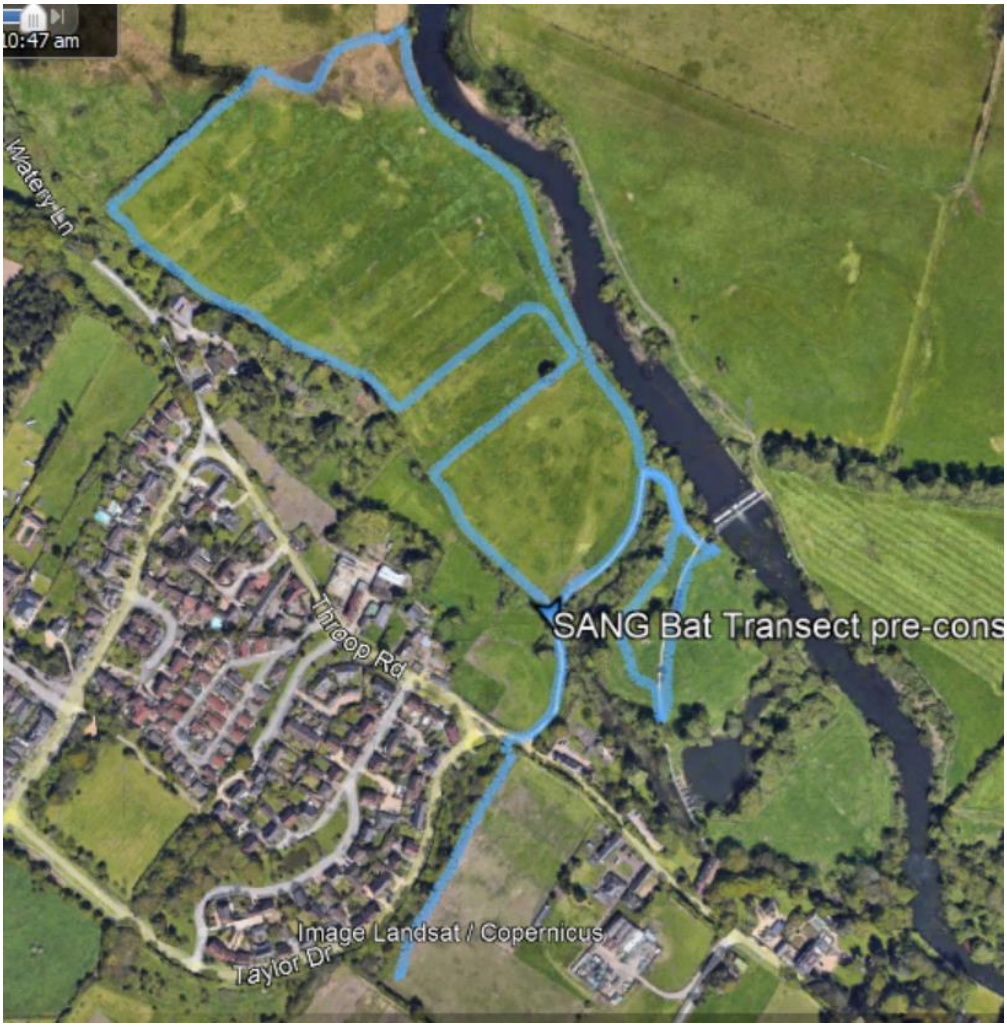


Figure 1: Bat transect route – Throop SANG

The bat transect route (in blue), starts at the SANG car park and moves north, lasting for approximately 2 hours. The team used a Batlogger device and found the busiest areas of bat activity were near the mill stream, the south-eastern end of the SANG and the woodland near Taylor drive.

Birds

All the bird surveys were carried out once a month on both Careys field by volunteer Silvia Freire and on the main Throop SANG route by the ranger team. The data has been uploaded onto BTOs BirdTrack database in line with the other bird survey data from BCP central sites.
The winter bird surveys were conducted from January to March and will be completed monthly in November to December. In the first three months of the year, 35 species were recorded on site.

There has been a good number of ad hoc observations on site which include: Spotted Flycatcher, Norther Wheatear, Nightjar, Great White Egret, Western Barn Owl, Tawny Owl, Water Rail, Eurasian Siskin, Cuckoo, Lapwing and Kingfisher.

Some of the more ‘commonplace’ green listed species such as Great Tit, Robin, Blackbird, Carrion Crow, Goldfinch and Magpie were widespread and are now a familiar feature on site.

In 2025, The highest number of species spotted on a survey was 36, with an average of 26 species found each survey. In 2024, the highest number of species was 25 with an average of 20 species a survey. In 2023 the highest number of species was 24 species with an average of 19.

The highest total number of individual birds in 2025 recorded on a survey was 172. The highest total number of birds recorded in 2024 was 136 and 74 in 2023. The avian biodiversity and density on site is moving in a positive direction.

Previous actions to improve habitat by planting native trees and hedgerows has been delivered, with more planting planned in 2026.

Species	Baseline	2025
Blackbird	4	7
Blackcap	1	1
Black-headed Gull	13	18
Blue Tit	5	12
Brent Goose	3	0
Bullfinch	2	0
Buzzard	3	2
Canada Goose	2	2
Carrion crow	0	9
Cattle Egret	1	0
Cetti's warbler	0	2
Chaffinch	2	4
Chiffchaff	1	7
Common Gull	1	0
Common Sandpiper	1	0
Collared Dove	0	0
Cormorant	3	6
Dunnock	3	4
Egyptian Goose	4	0
Fieldfare	0	0
Feral pigeon	0	8
Goldcrest	0	2
Goldfinch	0	59
Goosander	2	0
Great tit	5	8
Great spotted woodpecker	2	1
Greenfinch	12	8
Grey heron	1	3
Grey Partridge	2	0
Grey Wagtail	2	1
Greylag Goose	5	0
Herring Gull	2	20
Hobby	0	1

House martin	0	20
House sparrow	3	19
Jackdaw	0	11
Jay	1	3
Kestrel	2	2
Kingfisher	0	0
Little Egret	1	3
Little Grebe	1	0
Long-tailed tit	5	8
Magpie	3	6
Mallard	8	14
Meadow pipit	3	19
Mediterranean Gull	0	1
Mistle Thrush	0	1
Moorhen	7	8
Mute swan	10	4
Nightjar	1	0
Nuthatch	0	1
Peregrine falcon	0	1
Pheasant	5	3
Pied Wagtail	0	5
Raven	0	1
Red kite	0	1
Redwing	1	1
Reed Bunting	1	1
Reed warbler	1	4
Robin	4	10
Rook	0	5
Sedge Warbler	1	0
Snipe	22	0
Song thrush	2	2
Sparrowhawk	1	1
Starling	200	35
Swift	4	11
Tawny Owl	1	0
Teal	3	0
Stonechat	0	4
Swallow	0	15
Treecreeper	0	1
Wheatear	0	0
Whitethroat	1	4
Woodpigeon	17	24
Wren	3	7

Table 2: Baseline versus 2025 highest individual count for species spotted during surveys at Throop SANG

Figure 2: Kestrel are a common sight on Throop SANG now with the improvement of habitat for prey species

Figure 3: Stonechat have been found breeding on site

Invertebrates

Butterfly transects were undertaken weekly between the beginning of April and the end of September 2025 around the SANG by the team. Our data was uploaded to the UK Butterfly monitoring scheme (UKBMS), with all the rest of the data across the central BCP countryside sites. We followed the UKBMS transect methodology.

The transect route was split into seven sections to roughly follow areas of different habitat. Surveys were carried out during calm, warm, sunny days when possible. The route was walked at a continuous pace and butterflies recorded within 5m ahead or to the side of the surveyor. The highest amount of Butterfly activity was found in sections 1, 2, 6 and 7.

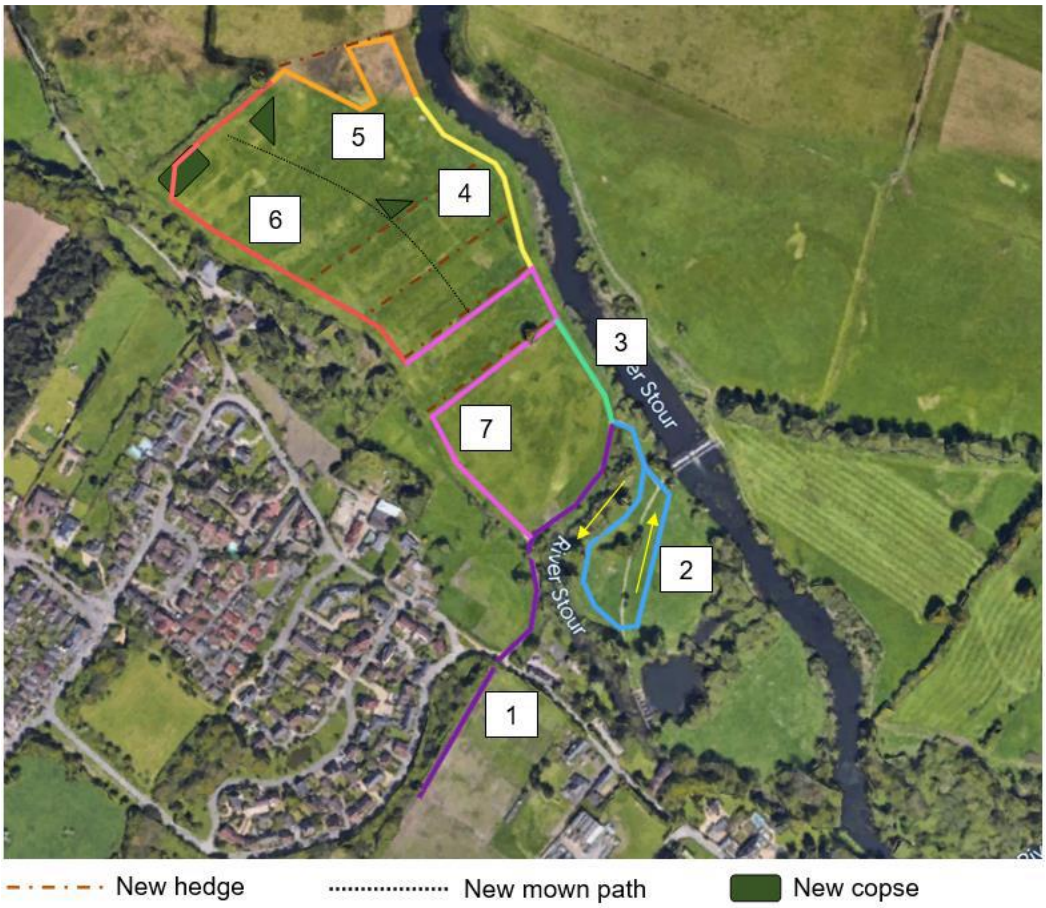


Figure 4: Butterfly transect route on Throop SANG

Species	Baseline	2023	2025
Small Skipper	1	8	39
Small/Essex Skipper	0	2	4
Large Skipper	5	9	0
Brimstone	2	4	1
Clouded yellow	0	0	1
Large White	0	10	45
Small White	0	10	41
Green-veined white	1	0	9
Orange Tip	0	4	1

Small Copper	0	2	1
Brown argus	1	0	1
Common Blue	1	2	9
Holly Blue	3	4	3
Red Admiral	1	17	13
Painted Lady	1	2	1
Peacock	3	18	14
Comma	0	3	10
Speckled Wood	2	5	4
Marbled White	2	2	1
Gatekeeper	1	61	107
Meadow Brown	50	183	89
Small Heath	2	0	0
Small Tortoiseshell	4	0	0

Table 3: Highest count of each species spotted during transects during 2025, 2023 and baseline surveys

In total, 20 species of butterfly were spotted at Throop SANG during the 2025 transect survey period. Additional ad-hoc sightings of Small heath, Small Tortoiseshell, Purple hairstreak, Large skipper and Clouded Yellow were also on site this year. In comparison, 16 species were identified during the Baseline, with 18 species in 2023, indicating the improved habitat management is having a positive effect on butterfly species on Throop SANG.

Recommendations for improving Butterfly species on site:

- Continue floristic diversity by restoring the floodplain meadows.
- Increase species diversity in hedgerow species to provide more food opportunities.

Bee surveys were carried out by Silvia Freire and followed the Bumble Conservation Guidelines for their Bee surveys. The transect route follows the same path as the butterfly transect and is walked once per month in March to October in fair weather with low winds and between 11am and 5pm.

Species	**Baseline**	**2023**	**2025**
Andrena nitida	0	0	1
Andrena sp.	0	0	1
Bombus sp	0	0	1
Brown Banded Carder Bee	0	9	2
Buff-tailed Bumblebee	0	6	8
Common Carder Bee	0	18	24
Common Mining Bee	0	1	0
Early Bumblebee	1	0	9
European Hornet	0	0	1
Garden Bumblebee	0	1	1
Honey Bee	1	40	26
Large Sharp Tailed Bee	0	1	0

Patchwork leaf-cutter bee	0	0	2
Red-tailed Bumblebee	0	2	0
Shrill Carder Bee	0	4	0
Tawny Mining bee	0	0	1
Tree Bumblebee	0	0	2
White-tailed Bumblebee	1	14	11

Table 4: Total Bees spotted on surveys across 2025, 2023 and the baseline study

Recommendations for improving Bee species on site:

- Continue delivering higher quality floodplain meadow habitat.
- Create new habitat piles which include brash and logs.
- Encourage more flowering species on banks.
- Coppice bramble thickets on rotation to provide more flowers.
- Cut small patches of finished thistles to encourage regrowth and reflowering in autumn.

The data available for Odonata in 2025 is currently incomplete bar ad-hoc sightings, with a presence/absence survey planned in 2026. All sightings are entered onto living record.

The transect route encompasses the waterbodies and wet areas of the SANG, including the ditch, the mill stream and along the river.

Figure 5: Route of the Odonata survey in pink

No data for Riverflies has been collected in 2025. Records of riverflies including Blue Winged Olive mayfly and Narrow-Bodied Stoneflies were found at two sites upstream of the Stour at the SANG.

Actions to improve habitat for invertebrate species:

- Plant more native trees and shrubs.
- Encourage wildflowers to re-establish.
- Sensitively manage the river corridor.

Mammals

Formal surveys of Otter and Water Vole have been carried out at the SANG in previous years, though Roe deer, Field Mouse and Weasel have been observed ad hoc. There has been no conclusive evidence of Water Vole yet, but they have been reported (Guy Finucane, 22).

Guy Finucane surveys for Otter and Water Vole for the Dorset Mammal Group and has evidence of activity nearby the boundaries of the SANG, including spraints, a couch and photographs of Otter at Hicks Farm. There was also a holt nearby, so it is likely that Otter utilised the river corridor along the SANG as part of a wider territory (Finucane, 2022).

Surveys were carried out on several dates in June and October 2025 by Guy Finucane. The slower flowing water at Mill stream and pond are conditions favoured by water vole, but much of the riverbank on these stretches has
wide mud margins which is not suitable habitat and there hasn't been any sighting of the species.

The flooding in 2024 had a largely negative impact on Otter numbers both locally and nationally. However, potential signs of Otter activity around Throop SANG with discarded food sources and an ad-hoc sighting showed that there might be a small contingent or solitary individual in the area.

Key species:

- Otter
- Water vole

Actions to improve habitat:

- Sensitive management of river corridor
- Grazing grassland areas
- Protect potential Water Vole habitats by preventing dog access into the mill stream.
- Limit feeding of water birds on the waterways as it leads to a rapid increase in the population of brown rats
- Planting native trees and shrubs.

Reptiles and Amphibians

Reptile surveys have been carried out by BCP without much success. It is possible that low numbers of reptiles used the site due to lack of suitable vegetation structure. Grass snakes have been seen ad hoc by locals and BCP staff. No amphibian surveys have been carried out.

Key species:

- Grass snake
- Slow worm

Actions to improve habitat:

- Ditch restoration
- Grazing grassland areas
- Creation of a wildlife pond
- Creating brash piles for refugia, basking and hibernation

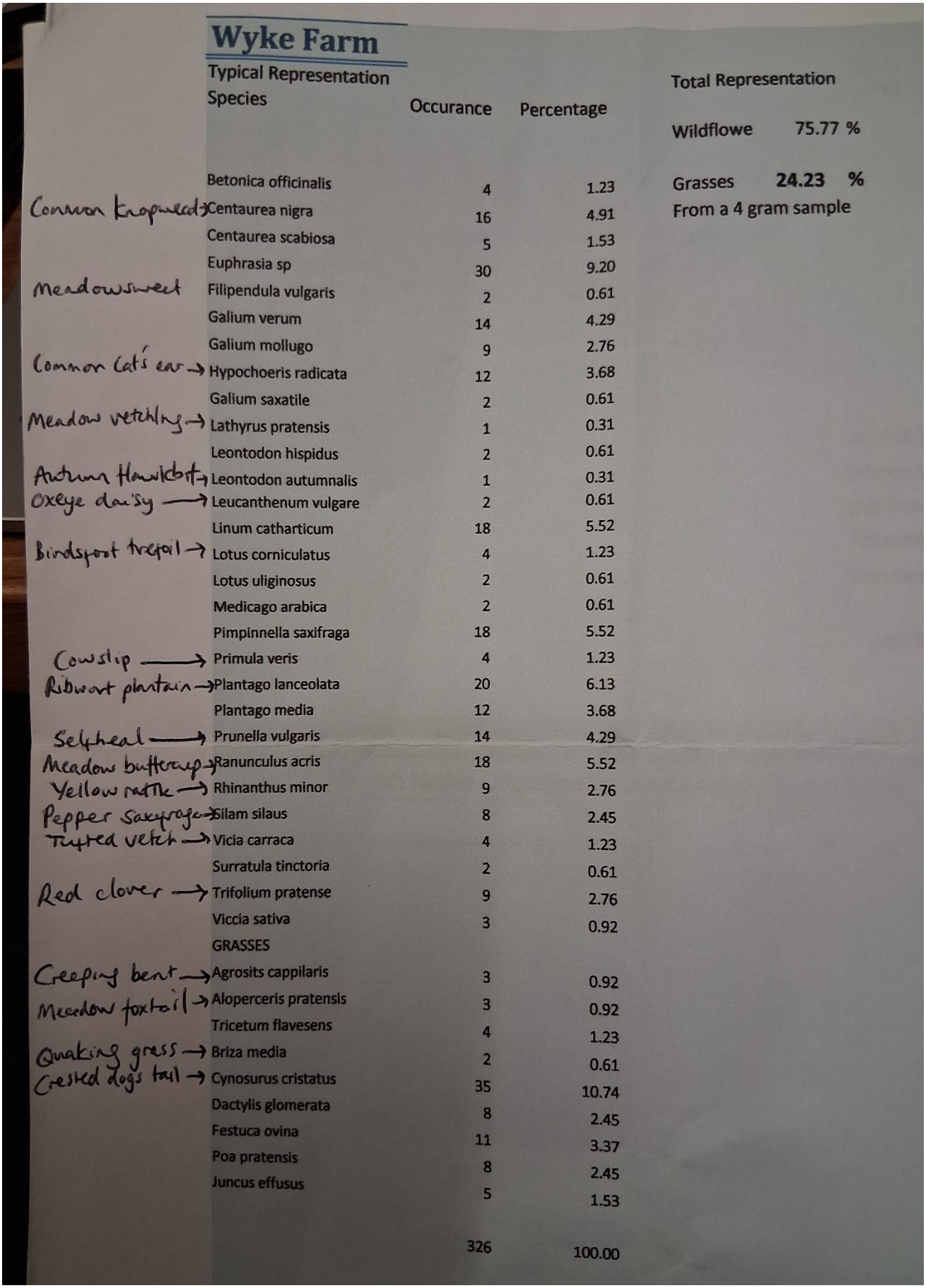
Plants

Abbas Ecology's 2019 PEA, taking place on the private farm after flowering season, noted only the dominant presence of False Oat Grass within the horse paddocks, with some Yarrow, Autumn hawkbit and Red clover in the sward. There were patches of Marsh Cudweed in poached bare soil, Amphibious Bistort on the river margins and Purple Loosestrife in the reed swamp. The open grassland at the SANG was described as having low ecological value, being dominated by coarse grasses and lacking good structure. Another field was dominated by bramble patches and ruderals including Teasel, thistles and Burdock.

No formal plant surveys have been undertaken in 2025, but the intensive floodplain meadow restoration project which consists of 26 x 3m rotavated strips - has already seen a diverse range of native meadow plants already emerge, with more expected next season. After working in partnership with the Countryside regeneration trust, who have undertaken an impressive floodplain meadow restoration project of their own at Bere Marsh farm - Our seed mix was purchased from Heritage seeds, who collected the specialist mix from Wyke farm, a large-scale floodplain meadow restoration project itself that has been going for nearly 25 years. A local farmer harrowed, seeded and rolled the mix into the ground, which was subsequently grazed later in the year to knock back encroaching dominant grass species.

Throop SANG has also seen an impressive planting regime in 2025 that has installed some 2,154 whips and 6 mature trees, through various funding streams. 170m worth of native hedgerow whips have been awarded to the site from the Tree council/DEFRA Trees outside woodland fund which will further help to increase biodiversity on Throop SANG.

Figure 6: Throop SANG floodplain meadow restoration project



Wyke Farm

Typical Representation

Species	Occurance	Percentage
Betonica officinalis	4	1.23
Common knapweed → Centaurea nigra	16	4.91
Centaurea scabiosa	5	1.53
Euphrasia sp	30	9.20
Meadowsweet Filipendula vulgaris	2	0.61
Galium verum	14	4.29
Galium mollugo	9	2.76
Common Cat's ear → Hypochoeris radicata	12	3.68
Galium saxatile	2	0.61
Meadow vetchling → Lathyrus pratensis	1	0.31
Leontodon hispidus	2	0.61
Autumn Hawkbit → Leontodon autumnalis	1	0.31
Oxeye daisy → Leucanthenum vulgare	2	0.61
Linum catharticum	18	5.52
Birdsfoot trefoil → Lotus corniculatus	4	1.23
Lotus uliginosus	2	0.61
Medicago arabica	2	0.61
Pimpinnella saxifraga	18	5.52
Cowslip → Primula veris	4	1.23
Ribwort plantain → Plantago lanceolata	20	6.13
Plantago media	12	3.68
Selfheal → Prunella vulgaris	14	4.29
Meadow buttercup → Ranunculus acris	18	5.52
Yellow rattle → Rhinanthus minor	9	2.76
Pepper Saxifrage → Silam silaus	8	2.45
Tufted vetch → Vicia carraca	4	1.23
Surratula tinctoria	2	0.61
Red clover → Trifolium pratense	9	2.76
Viccia sativa	3	0.92
GRASSES		
Creeping bent → Agrosits cappilaris	3	0.92
Meadow foxtail → Aloperceris pratensis	3	0.92
Tricetum flavesens	4	1.23
Quaking grass → Briza media	2	0.61
Crested dogs tail → Cynosurus cristatus	35	10.74
Dactylis glomerata	8	2.45
Festuca ovina	11	3.37
Poa pratensis	8	2.45
Juncus effusus	5	1.53
	326	100.00

Total Representation

Wildflowe 75.77 %

Grasses **24.23** %

From a 4 gram sample

Figure 7: Seed mix species used in the floodplain meadow restoration project with the percentage of each found in mixture

Actions to improve habitat:

- Grazing grassland areas
- Topping ruderals followed by grazing
- Hay cut, followed by grazing
- Green hay cut from suitable donor site, followed by grazing
- Cutting back dominant grass species around whips

Baseline

Throop SANG currently features a variety of habitats which have been carefully built up and created by the team. However, it looked very different before. Mature woodland, developing planted woodland, bramble scrub, reedbed and swamp, riverbank and wet margins and native hedgerow, were described as good resources for wildlife such as birds, bats and invertebrates. The original open grassland was assessed to be of low ecological value, and the overall biodiversity of the site was found to be modest (Abbas Ecology, 2021).

No further protected species surveys were recommended by Abbas Ecology except for Otter, which is now being surveyed. The implication was that other than Otter and bats, the site had low potential for protected species whilst the site was still a private farm.

The creation of the car park was assessed as having little impact beyond the removal of several trees, which have negligible potential for roosting bats, and the possible damage to old hedgerows which were prevented by protective fences and buffer zones during works. With planted native flowers on the banks of the car parks in conjunction with planted whips and volunteers cutting back encroaching thistle, dock and grass species, the car park area is now yielding excellent invertebrate species which in turn is encouraging various birds into the area.

Future Survey Schedule

A yearly survey schedule (Table 5) has been created to monitor various species over time. Surveys will follow standard survey methodology by trained surveyors to create a comparable data set. Bird, bat and Otter surveys will use the same method as the baseline surveys.

We expect future vegetation surveys to follow the Rapid Condition Assessment method, streamlining the data and focussing on key indicator species to quickly assess changes in habitat quality. There is scope for a good botanist to record all plant species present to prove changes in biodiversity at greater intervals of time.

Butterfly surveys will follow UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme method, picking up day flying moths at the same time. Regular bioblitzes could help fill any gaps in biodiversity data not included in routine surveying.

Task	Description	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Breeding bird survey	Once per month between 6am-11am												
Winter bird survey	Once per month												
Butterfly survey	UKBMS method: Weekly 10:45-15:45 in favourable conditions												
Moth surveys	Daytime moths included in Butterfly surveys aswell as ad hoc records												
Bat survey	Monthly: 2 hours after sunset												
Bee survey	Monthly												
Odonata survey	Presence/absence survey annually as well as ad hoc records												
Amphibian survey	Visible inspection and ad hoc records												
Mammal survey (Badger, water vole & Otter)	Four times a year												

Table 5: Proposed yearly survey schedule

Conclusion

The team are very happy with the direction that Throop SANG is moving into in terms of visitor enjoyment of the site, as well as the increase in biodiversity for a wide variety of native species. The site is now seen by many as a robust nature reserve in its own right, which only encourages more visitors in and away from SSSIs and other precious nature reserves. One of the main reasons that the public visits SSSI nature reserves is the abundance of flora and fauna and Throop SANG is looking to mimic that wild feeling for our users who could easily choose to visit a barren, open monotypic grassland in the form of parks, if they just wanted their dogs to run around. Ultimately, we believe this management style is the benchmark for how SANGs should be delivered, encouraging additional people and dogs to the countryside whilst delivering biodiversity gains for multiple species.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Scoring system for valuing commuting and foraging bats

Geographic frame of reference	Number of bats
International	> 50
National	41-50
Regional	31-40
County	21-30
District, local or parish	11-20
Not important	1-10

(Wrey et al., 2010)

Appendix 2: Otter and Water Vole survey 2025

Hicks Farm – Site of Alternative Natural Greenspace

Otter and Water Vole Survey – 2025

Surveys were carried out on several dates in June and October 2025 by Guy Finucane.

Water Vole (Arvicola amphibious)

As previously reported, slower flowing water, as found on the mill stream and mill pond, is preferred by water voles but much of the riverbank on these stretches has wide mud margins which is not suitable habitat. Private gardens meet the riverbank along Areas 2 and 11 (see plan WV1). This is a more suitable habitat but no evidence of water vole habitation was observed. No detailed survey has been conducted for this 2025 report but I visit the river almost on a daily basis and no evidence of water vole activity was observed.

A number of holes in the riverbank were observed on the northern section of Area 14 but I have since established that these are occupied by brown rats (Rattus norvegicus).

Plan WV1

As water voles are our most endangered mammal, it would be prudent to protect potential habitats, for water voles and other wildlife, by preventing dog access into the mill stream. Feeding of water birds in this location should be discouraged as it leads to a rapid increase in the population of brown rats (Rattus norvegicus).

Otter (Lutra Lutra)

2024 was bad year for our local otters. Flooding in 2024 was hugely detrimental to otters both locally and nationally. Locally, two kits are known to have died and another was seen running along the footpath leading from the sewage works to the river. Separated from its mother, it is unlikely that the kit would have survived.

Otter kit rescued from the riverbank near Kingfisher Barn in April 2024. Unfortunately, it didn’t survive.

Dead otter kit found beside footpath near Throop Mill Cottage. It’s possible it became separated from its mother, wandered into hostile territory and was killed by a jaw bite from an adult male.

Mother and two kits observed at Stour Valley Local Nature Reserve in October 2024. These elusive mammals tend to be much more ‘visible’ when raising kits. The lack of any subsequent sightings, despite prolonged daily visits over the following three weeks, leads me to question if these kits survived.

Dead kits were sent to the Environment Agency and then onwards to Cardiff University for post mortem. The high mortality rate in 2024 may account for the infrequency of subsequent sightings into 2025.

Areas around Hicks Farm SANG and stretches of river upstream and downstream of the SANG were surveyed on various dates in June and October 2025.

A survey of the mill pond in June found a large number of fresh water mussel shells on both sides of the channel close to where it meets the main river. This could be indicative of otter feeding although no otter footprints were observed and no spraint was observed in the vicinity.

Freshwater mussel shells beside the mill pond – June 2025.

In August 2025, a reliable source advised me of their sighting of an otter near the weir bridge. It was observed on the path on the north side of the river, crossed the grass and entered the river under the weir bridge and then headed downstream.

In October 2025, I surveyed areas around the millstream, the north side of the river from the weir bridge, heading upstream, and the south side of the river from the weir bridge up to the Wessex Water road bridge. No evidence of otter activity was observed.

Survey conclusions

No evidence of water voles and limited evidence of otter activity in 2025 in the area of the SANG although otters are present a short distance upstream. The two kits observed in 2024 and 2025 will soon be separating from their mother and will need to find territory of their own so may take up territory in the vicinity of the SANG.

Report Submitted by Guy Finucane
30th October 2023

Appendix 3: Reports referenced

Hicks Farm SANG BAT REPORT 784-B032855 (Tetra Tech Limited, 2022)
Hicks Farm SANG BREEDING BIRD SURVEY REPORT 784-B032855 (Tetra Tech Limited, 2022)
Hicks Farm SANG WINTERING BIRD SURVEY REPORT 784-B032855 (Tetra Tech Limited, 2022)
2021 Odonata Survey Stour Valley · Millhams Mead · Throop Nature Park Report. Reference: BCP-OS-01 (BCP Council, 2021)
Hicks Farm SANG - Otter and Water Vole Survey – Spring 2022 (Guy Finucane, 2022)
Hicks Farm SANG - Otter and Water Vole Survey – Winter 2022 (Guy Finucane, 2022)
Preliminary Ecological Appraisal: Proposed Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace at Hick's Farm, Throop. August 2019 revised January 2021. (Abbas Ecology, 2021)
Hicks Farm Plant species list FA Woodhead 2018 (Felicity Woodhead, 2018)
Hicks Farm Species Records GF and Otter and Water vole survey 2025 (Guy Finucane, 2022)

Urban Greening project evaluation

The Urban Greening project aim was to: '**Enable communities to take practical action around urban greening (residents, business and private small-scale landowners or local facilities).'**

The two primary work packages were:

- 'Curate and create resources to enable people to make nature-positive changes on their own land.' (4.1)

- 'Provide practical support through pilot projects to enable action and test programmes for scalability.' (4.2)

These were split further and achieved as outlined in this Evaluation document.

4.1 Curate and create resources to enable people to make nature-positive changes on their own land

We created several different types of resources. Each to engage with different community groups, in different ways, with an aim to reach the widest audience achievable.

These include:

- 2 presentations made for in person wildlife gardening talks.
- 10 downloadable how-to guides on wildlife gardening.
- Multiple 'Back 2 Nature' events held in parks engaging people around and sharing the subject of the downloadable guides.
- 4 videos created for social media further adding to the content of the guides.
- Interactive map for members of the public to have their nature improvements added too, showing all nature friendly gardens across BCP.

Breakdown and Engagement numbers:

Wildlife talks: 8 talks given on wildlife gardening (Presentations can be found here: Presentations), 150+ attendees. Talks delivered at Stewarts Garden centre, Red House Museum, 2 Churches and 2 Community centres.

Talks always well received and requests for more. Presentations can continue to be used for future talks.

Testimonials from talks:

"You speak so well, the enthusiasm and passion is amazing, and it was a great balance of hard hitting truths, optimistic information about how people can help, all delivered with humour and sincerity. I'm sure the popularity of these will grow if there is appetite to continue in future." Stewart's garden centre

"Sorry this is late but I just wanted to let you know there were very many compliments about your talk a couple of weeks ago." Red House museum

“Just wanted to say how much I enjoyed the talk at Stewarts last night. Very clear, interesting and helpful. I have tried to get my head around changing the lawn to wild flowers but always seemed so complicated. You made it easy to understand and have inspired me to get going! Many thanks Jane”

“Your talks were brilliant, it got all the important points across but I think you have so many do able solutions to people that they left feeling like they could have a positive impact.” Stewart’s garden centre

Downloadable How-to guides: 10 guides made covering Meadows, Composting, Ponds, Tree planting, Bird Boxes, Flowers for Pollinators, Butterflies and Moths, Garden Habitats, Gardening for Hedgehogs and Bulb planting.

Total downloads to date: 462

Example downloadable guide covering Meadows

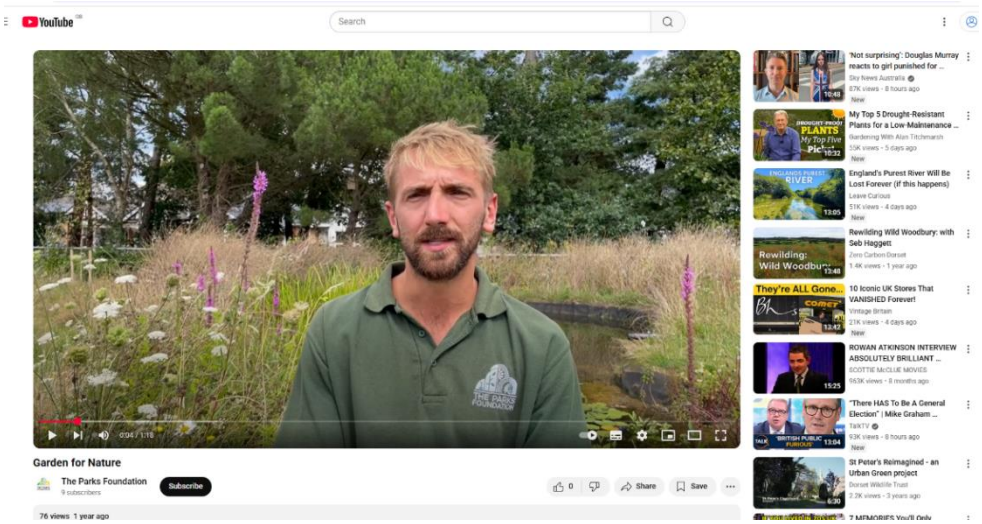
Back 2 Nature events: Events to engage residents with urban nature conservation. Each event had a take home message encouraging people to think about how they can encourage wildlife into their own outdoor spaces. Often more pitched at children and parents they expanded on the content of the downloadable guides.

- August 23 – Bird boxes: 159 attendees across GHPs
- September 23 – Hedgehogs: 177 attendees across GHPs

- October 23 – Magical mycelium: 124 attendees across GHPs
- Break for winter works, reduced number of parks where events were held moving forwards.
- March 24 – Meadows: 51 attendees
- April 24 – Ponds: 102 attendees
- May 24 – Butterflies: 12 attendees
- June 24 – Dragonflies: 19 attendees
- July 24 – Hawkmoths: 17 attendees
- **Total Back 2 Nature attendees: 661**

Craft butterflies made during an event

Social Media Videos: 4 Videos created shared across Youtube, Instagram and Facebook totalling



Garden for nature landing page video gained 80 views.

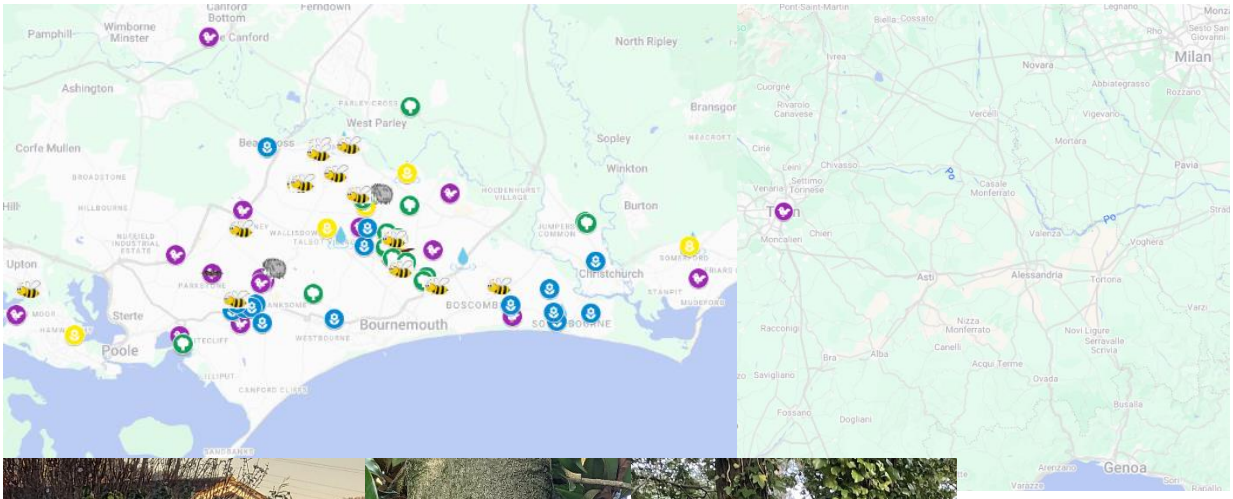
Gardening for Hedgehogs video gained 828 views total across multiple platforms.

Bird box installation guide video gained 1813 views total across multiple platforms.

Bulb planting video gained 642 views total across multiple platforms.

Gardening for Hedgehogs video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_s2eEEwfGs

Interactive Map: We created a map logging actual changes people had made in their own outdoor spaces after attending one of our events. The map is currently on TPF website and will continue to be updated as and when people send in locations and pictures of changes made. One of our bird boxes even made it further afield to Italy.



Left: Photos of bird boxes put up.

Top Left: Map of BCP

Top Right: Bird box in Italy!

4.1 Conclusion

The various resources were well received over the different medias, and the map demonstrates good engagement and community action.

Further work and Legacy post project

The benefit of the recourses created is they can continue to be present on our website and used or referred to during future events. We would expect to see videos continue to gain views and online guides continue to be downloaded. The guides are useful references when printed out and displayed during events and with minor adaption could be used in a ‘train the teacher’ methodology to expand school engagement capacity.

One more downloadable guide covering ‘dragonflies’ was near completion and will be completed and added to the website post project.

We intend to continue to add videos covering the topics in the guides as we believe the twin media format helps us reach the widest audience with minimal administration which benefits the core charity.

We will continue to update the map as and when members of the public submit improvements. The administration time needed for this is minimal and it benefits the charity’s wider goals.

One more wildlife talk presentation was booked with Stuarts Garden centre with more of a focus on natural predator’s vs pests rather than unnatural methods. These 3 presentations will then be able to be reused in the future if we feel the venue is suitable and benefits the charity’s wider messaging or progression.

4.2 Provide practical support through pilot projects to enable action and test programmes for scalability.

We took part in seven main projects across the BCP catchment, with other smaller bits of work tying into each.

The projects are:

- Swift street and conservation
- House martin tower and pond
- Greening street planters
- Sustainable Urban Drainage systems(Suds)
- Littledown Greenway
- Schools adopting urban greening
- Maintenance Maps

Swift street – Portfield Close, Christchurch and Swift awareness.

The Parks Foundation worked with Christchurch Harbour Ornithological Group and BCP Council to identify Portfield Close as a swift hotspot with potential for improvement. Swifts are a now red-listed bird that frequents our urban areas to next in buildings however it is facing issues in available nest sites and food source.

TPF and CHOG then started door knocking along Portfield close to engage residents with swift conservation and offer them the chance to have a swift nesting box and silhouette to attract them installed.

12 houses had boxes and silhouettes installed down Portfield close.

Christchurch Junior School on board with the project. See schools breakdown below.

We also helped CHOG to deliver events in 5 locations during Swift Awareness Week (29th June – 7th July 2024) – In these we promoted swift conservation and encouraged members of the public to get a box fitted or adopt urban greening principles to encourage flying insects(swift food sources) . 60 attendees.

Kings Park (Gloucester road) Swift Awareness event

House Martin tower and pond

The Hoburne estate has a good population of House Martins, however their long-term future is uncertain. Some residents actively deter the birds from nesting on their property, and the building site where they currently collect mud to build their nests is soon to be closed. The project aims to secure the birds longevity by providing alternative nesting sites (HM tower) and a long-term source of sediment (pond) to build their nests.

Collaborative project with CHOG, New Milton Men's Shed, NM Sand and Ballast. Men's shed built the nest tower. NMSB provided aggregates for pond works. BCP helped with permissions and Tower installation.

TPF installed a wildlife pond and native planting with the help of 20 volunteers. The house martin tower was installed in November 2024 with approx. 70 local people attending its official opening, including councillors, young rangers, residents etc.

Reduced mowing practices in surrounding greenspaces were added to a maintenance map to further encourage increased biodiversity and flying insects (House martin food source)

While it was expected to take some time for house martins to start using the tower/pond we documented multiple occasions of them using the pond to clean and gather mud during its first summer. Really good feedback from local residents including "best thing to happen to Hoburne" – Local resident.

Volunteers planting up the pond at Hoburne

House Martin tower grand opening event

House Martin tower during construction and installation

Local news post: https://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/news/25134222.wildlife-area-help-house-martins-opens-highcliffe/

Greening street planters

We were approached by a community champion at Bourne Community Hub who put forward the idea of improving the baron and unloved chicane planters over a handful of roads on the Bourne estate, with the aim to create a nectar rich corridor running along Arne Ave, Northmere Rd, and Melbury Ave.

The Councils landscape architect created a suitable planting list. 1000 plants were bought as well as compost, funded by Bourne Big Local, a community group, for £3,000. Completed over several planting days with the team from the Parks Foundation, ensuring fellow residents were on board with 25 local volunteers. 24 planters were completed April 2024.

Bourne Community Hub to be responsible for planters going forward with TPF paying BCP to water over summer 2025 to help plants establish. Some issues later arose around volunteers maintaining the beds on a busy road.

Before

After

Sustainable urban drainage (SuDs) in parks

We pursued two Suds projects both with the aim of capturing rainwater and finding an alternative usage or allowing it to soak away naturally. This reduces pressure on urban sewage systems, reduced tap water consumption and can provide valuable wetland habitat for a large number of species.

The projects were:

- Community gardens rainwater harvesting. We identified several locations around our community veg growing gardens or next to our park ponds where rainwater could be harvested from a roof to provide water through hotter dry periods. Ponds particularly benefit from natural rainwater to sustain the delicate ecosystem in the water, whereas community garden volunteers could more easily water the vegetables during summer and not need excess tap water. The rainwater is stored in large heavy duty rainwater butts which we sourced and installed with relevant permissions.

Pelhams park growing space water butt

- Wetland Suds projects. We spoke with the BCP Councils expert to identify key drainage problem areas and attempted to come up with a solution. Often centred around tarmac areas with improper drainage. We would capture and divert the rainwater at source and slow down its flowrate with landscaping and native planting to allow it time to soak away naturally. This would also provide a wild area that would remain wetter than the surrounding landscape for longer, allowing a more diverse range of wetland suited wildflower and grass species and providing a different habitat for a wide range of wildlife. We identified 2 locations which would benefit.

Winton Rec wetland Suds

The Littledown Greenway

A multi stakeholder wildlife corridor project running from the river Stour in the east to Boscombe over cliff nature reserve in the south. By engaging various landowners with nature conservation green space management techniques, we can create a 3.7km nature corridor. Nature corridors are vital for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem health by connecting fragmented habitats. They enable wildlife to move freely between areas, supporting essential activities like foraging, breeding, and migration. This connectivity helps prevent local extinctions, enhances genetic diversity, and improves the overall resilience of ecosystems.

Key stakeholders:

- BHLive Littledown Park
- NHS – Royal Bournemouth hospital
- JP Morgan
- BCP council – Kings Park and Woodland walk
- Gloucester Road residents
- St Peters Catholic Primary School, Avonbourne Academies, Iford Academy (Tregonwell)

Littledown park

Site meetings with the BH live general manager and BCP parks ops to discuss long term management of greenspace resulted in them adopting a reduced mowing regime with cut and collect.

Royal Bournemouth Hospital and JP Morgan

Speaking with grounds staff, they were both keen to adopt some urban greening principles

Kings Park and Woodland Walk

~6000m2 meadow with cut and collect initially agreed with 1 semi mature oak tree planted. See ‘Further work’ below for woodland walk infrastructure improvements.

Gloucester Road

Initial engagement with residents to try to encourage adoption of Urban greening principles.

St Peters Primary, Avonbourne and Iford Academy

The 3 schools border each other through the Littledown greenway, enabling us to connect them with a circa 700m native hedgerow (and associated marginal meadow habitat) running along their perimeters. Further details in schools breakdown below. Planting occurred in two phases over two winters 2023/24 and 2024/25.

Schools adopting urban greening principles

12 schools engaged with Urban Greening principles. Schools were selected based on proximity to Green Heart Parks or in areas where there is potential to enhance wildlife connectivity. Emails were sent out offering free advice on how to enhance biodiversity of site, initial site meetings highlighted key areas to focus on. In some cases, we delivered planting events with the students and supported by paying for watering where necessary over the following years to ensure success of the project.

St Peters Catholic Primary School

- 425m native mix hedgerow planted (approx. 1900 whips)
- 1 wildlife pond installed

Part of the Littledown Greenway wildlife corridor project. We offered the school free advice and trees to enhance biodiversity onsite. The school already had funds for a pond but had doubts about installation. We helped plan and install the pond and fencing. Part of the Littledown greenway project this school received the largest portion of the planned hedgerow for connectivity.

Two planting events held over phase 1 and 2.

Phase 1, 2024: Planting of hedgerow carried out during Feb half term with students, parents and staff (45 attendees).

Phase 2, 2025: This event finished the hedgerow at this school (60 attendees)

Pond installed with students during school time.

Avonbourne Academy

- 150m native mix hedgerow planted (approx. 600 whips)

The second stretch in the Littledown greenway hedgerow. One planting event held in phase 2, 2025 during school (20 attendees).

Iford Academy

- 125m native mix hedgerow (approx. 550 whips)

The final section in the Littledown greenway hedgerow. Whips planted with students and staff.

Joseph Phillips – Iford Academy head teacher:

"The planting project you undertook at Iford was great as an opportunity to engage our students with their natural environment and also provide ecological enhancement on our site. You and your colleagues were great working with our very challenging cohort and the students responded really positively to you. The whips are growing well and we are already seeing the beginning of the hedgerow. We would be very keen to participate in any future projects."

Iford Academy students and teachers planting the hedge

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School –

- 9 semi-mature native trees

- 20m hedgerow
- Annual/perennial meadow sown (50m2)

Planted with students and staff

Ronald Rideout – Site manager:

“Dear Josh, sorry that you are leaving. As you know the assistance you gave us was invaluable in setting up our tree planting, hedge planting, and the wildlife garden. It is now getting established and made such a difference to the children's education in such a deprived area. Thank you again for all your help and we wish you well in your new position.”

St Joseph’s students planting trees

Somerford Primary School

- Annual/perennial meadows sown (80m2)
- Mowing regime reduced allowing natural meadow regeneration
- 3 x double swift boxes and 3 x silhouettes fitted

We had built a relationship with the school by inviting them across to Watermans Park in 2022 to help plant some trees. During the project we installed a meadow in their front green along with agreeing a reduced mowing plan. Swift boxes installed as they were near a potential hotspot and had a suitable building. They will continue to monitor the boxes for activity.

Somerford Primary School – Swift box installation and annual/perennial meadow

Christchurch Jr School –

- Installed 3 x swift double boxes and 3 x swift silhouettes as part of the Portfield close Swift Street project
- Advised on 3 semi-mature trees and native whips.
- Adopted reduced mowing regime

Due to their proximity to the Portfield swift street they agreed to have swift boxes installed on their building, they will continue to monitor them. Site walk and consultation lead them to reduce mowing and bring nature into their school.

Sam Fuller – CJS Head Teacher:

Since your involvement at CJS, we have seen a positive impact:

- We now have two areas of grassland within the school site which we have allowed to grow to meadow. This has seen increased wildlife and more children wanting to play/explore in these areas.

Swift boxes and silhouettes on CJS building

- We have Swift Boxes and silhouettes which are hoping will encourage swifts (part of the Portfield Road swift street project). We have shared information about this with our families and it has meant greater discussion and interest being shown.

There is a good deal more talk about our environment now, with children actively wanting to do their bit to help it thrive.

Longspee academy

- Advised on urban greening principles

We started delivering regular 'Longspee Ranger' sessions funded the academy and another project, getting the students out into Slades Farm to help with park maintenance.

Longspee has now built a polytunnel and growing space and the school collective plans to roll out more in other sites.

Magna Academy

- Advised on urban greening principles and native tree species.

Katherine Stafford – Magna Academy:

> "Working with Josh and the Urban Greening Project has been extremely beneficial for our academy. He has educated our Magna Changemakers for Climate group about how to re-wild the playground and which plants would thrive in that environment. He also advised our site team about what instructions to give our local council regarding rewilding our grounds and advised on

the purchase of trees for one of our playgrounds. Josh has always been willing to advise and visit the academy and the students have learnt a lot from him."

- Planted trees with the school and advised on hedge planting and the allotment space.

Site walks with other schools to encourage adoption of Urban Greening principles

- Bayside Academy
- Avonwood Primary School
- Manorside Academy
- Twynham School

Maintenance Maps

Site visits planned to all our existing Green Heart Parks with with BCP Council architects, park operative area managers and ground staff team leaders present to establish a maintenance map for each. The maps primarily look at mowing plans to identify areas that could be left to no-mow meadow or potentially to receive a yearly cut/collect. The maps would also be updated with completed tree planting and green infrastructure completed by us under the GHP project along with plans for future works. The resulting map will optimize the benefit for nature in that area while considering all other park uses and practicalities with input from park Ops. A copy will be made available for residents and the council will then adopt that plan as their primary maintenance reference.

This has resulted in 50km2+ of no mow meadow being officially committed to by BCP Council providing habitat for millions of invertebrates, which in turn will feed into the wider ecosystem.

Maintenance map for Muscliff Park

4.2 Conclusion

Each project was deemed a success by us and stakeholders, achieving its initial aim with further roll out and scalability only dependant on additional funding. While we would not expect to see an immediate biodiversity improvement as nature can take time to recover, the methods we used are well documented to be beneficial an in some cases we have seen a remarkably quick benefit to wildlife, E.g. Hoburne house martin pond.

Further work and Legacy post project

We have continued with swift awareness post project, with our partnership alongside CHOG. Using most of the materials created for the 2024 events we delivered 6 events in 2025 engaging 160 people with swift conservation.

The house martin tower and pond will receive its own maintenance map and will be maintained by BCP council alongside one of our GHP volunteer groups.

Not all the Suds have been installed by project end so we will continue to install them in time for water to be collected and used in summer 2026.

The Littledown greenway project has gained a lot of traction with interest from other potential funders and partners looking to get involved. As stated, watering is paid for until summer 2026 and we will continue to monitor the success of the hedgerow. Funding was sourced to install a wildlife pond, plant native understory whips and install bird boxes in Woodland Walk in 2025, this further adds to the nature infrastructure along the Greenway. We are looking to get as much of the greenway put into maintenance maps and will revisit stakeholders to check on progress and encourage more.

We will continue to develop our relationships with the schools involved with the project, inviting them to future events and checking on the improvements they made, offering further advice if needed.

Not all the GHP parks have been visited for their maintenance map or if they have, some are still awaiting the map to be completed by the BCP architects. We will continue to push the final parks and will adopt the same mapping method for any future green spaces the charity moves into.

GREEN HEART PARKS

We believe that our community parks can thrive when we work in partnership. The co-management of our community parks, where BCP Council continues with its current levels of maintenance and The Parks Foundation provides additional benefits including fundraising, community engagement, nature education, biodiversity improvements and café management. Continual collection of data about park use, satisfaction and changes in demand will help create spaces that communities can cherish.

Staff Efforts

Co-ordination of the sites by Parks Activators who will bring together maintenance teams, local stakeholders, volunteers etc.

Team Park - Volunteers

Increased breadth and depth of volunteering meaning more opportunities to get involved.

Grants, Donations Legacies

Generate additional funding for parks by working with trusts, philanthropists and corporate partners, as well as promoting donations from residents.

INCOME GENERATED IS REINVESTED INTO OUR PARKS

Healthier communities

More welcoming spaces will encourage longer visits that will improve the mental and physical wellbeing of park users.

Closer communities

Work with individuals and groups to achieve specific goals, resulting in a community that feels better connected to their parks and each other.

Safer spaces

Anti-social behaviour and vandalism reduce in parks because of increased activities, informal staff presence and infrastructure improvements.

Connecting with nature

We will improve our parks for nature, creating more habitats for birds, animals and insects, to address the ecological crisis and to give our communities spaces on their doorsteps where they can connect with and learn more about wildlife.

Greenspace Economy

Increase income through the improvement of redundant buildings, introduction of new facilities and fundraising events.

THE PARKS FOUNDATION Working in Partnership

BCP Council

Nature Pledge

The Nature Pledge is a list of principles that help nature thrive in our gardens and greenspaces. Putting these principles into action, whether you have **a window box, a small area at your workplace or a large private garden**, can improve habitat for wildlife and insects, as well as mitigating the impact of climate change and improving your physical and mental wellbeing.

Could you, or your workplace pledge to support nature in the BCP area?

The pledge

Help our nature thrive. Whether you have a window box, small balcony, a large private garden or a small greenspace at your place of work; join us in pledging to do things better for nature, to help bring wildlife to your home, school or workplace.

- plant **native/wildlife-friendly** tree and plant species
- collect **rainwater** for watering
- stop or **reduce chemical use** to control weeds
- only use **peat-free compost** - or make your own if you can
- allow areas to **grow naturally** without interference and leave space for wildlife
- use **natural ground cover** and not artificial/plastic products
- install **bird and bat boxes**
- **reduce mowing** to allow more nature in your garden
- manage **trees for wildlife** value, leaving deadwood and ivy where possible
- install **ponds** or encourage **wetland areas** if safe to do so
- consider **nature-friendly material** choices
- create more **food growing** spaces
- **volunteer** some time to improve nature locally

Working together

THE PARKS FOUNDATION

BCP Council

Programme Summary:

Dorset Peat Partnership

DORSET
Catchment Partnerships

Our programme focus

Healthy peat habitats support fantastically diverse and highly specialised wildlife. They reduce climate and flood risks by storing significant carbon and rainwater and improve water quality downstream by trapping nutrients and sediment. Dorset's peatlands are fragmented and often in poor condition due to historic land drainage. By restoring peat in Dorset, this programme will:

- Restore, connect and expand the range of protected habitats and species.
- Mitigate climate risks by holding water back in the landscape to reduce downstream impacts of high rainfall events and improve drought resilience.
- Reduce wildfire risk through removal of fuel load, increasing water in the landscape as a firebreak and providing a refuge for wildlife in high-risk areas.
- Reduce CO_2 loss from degraded peat and eventually sequestering additional carbon.

Discovery phase- December 2021-August 2023

80 sites were assessed for the potential to deliver high quality outcomes within a tight funding window. 16 sites covering a total of 172ha were prioritised for restoration, with a number of other sites noted as high potential for future restoration but where delivery is complex, long term or requires significant preparation.

At the 16 priority sites, in-depth surveys were carried out to assess peat depth and condition, water levels at different times of year, vegetation, and the implications of potential restoration on any historic environment features present. Detailed restoration plans were then developed.

Restoration phase- August 2023- March 2025

Spread over two years, the programme will deliver peatland restoration over 16 sites across the Dorset Heaths SAC. Restoration is tailored to each site, but primarily comprises:

1. Removing trees and scrub which very effectively pull water out of the peat through transpiration and break up the peat structure with their roots
2. Flailing Purple Moor Grass (*Molinia sp*) tussocks to limit regrowth and maximise habitat potential for peat-forming sphagnum mosses.
3. Identifying and blocking artificial drains to hold water within the mire and stop the remaining peat degrading further.

Canford Heath Focus

BCP's Canford Heath was part of this project and in 2025, two mires underwent restoration works, with pre and post monitoring.

- At Culliford Crescent an incised drainage gully was removing water from the mire habitat. This has been filled with the spoil banks and the material from the felled Scots Pine trees, utilised to create timber dams to slow the flow and block water in this area, also reducing flooding of the nearby urban infrastructure.
- Larger scale works on the north side of the heath, saw a main drain that ran west to east through the site, blocked with a series of timber and peat bunds, to improve and rewet

the habitat. Dense tussocks of Mollinia were mulched, to allow groundwater back to the surface.

Peat is the biggest Carbon store in the UK; it needs to be kept wet to lock in its carbon. If it dries and oxygen and sunlight reach the peat, it then starts to release Carbon Dioxide. These rewetting projects will increase the areas that retain water and hold it for longer.
A good functioning peatland captures more Carbon than woodland, though it's about the right system in the right place, so both peatlands and woodlands work together to mitigate climate change.

Information about the additional carbon capture, that has been calculated for the 16 site across Dorset, is detailed below and more information is available at Dorset Peat Discovery Project | Dorset Catchment Partnerships & Dorset Peat Partnership Project

Carbon dioxide equivalent emissions across the 16 sites before restoration was calculated at 3.32 tonnes per hectare/per year. By restoring these sites, the emission factor will reduce to 0.32 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, per hectare/per year, over a transmission period of 15 years.

Our partnership

The Peat Partnership is led by Dorset Wildlife Trust and includes the National Trust, RSPB, BCP Council, Dorset Council, Forestry England, Natural England and the Environment Agency. The partnership also includes one private landowner.
The partnership has an established steering group, chaired by the Catchment Partnership. Our partners are experienced at working together and readily share expertise and resources to achieve the ambitious delivery plans of this programme within a tight window, as well as secure a sustainable legacy of monitoring and ongoing restoration.

Funding

The programme is funded through approximately £900,000 from Government's Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme covering the Discovery and Restoration phases. This has been matched by £100,000 from the Wytch Farm Landscape Access and Enhancement Fund and approximately £200,000 in cash and in-kind contributions from other partners. This funding will ensure the approved restoration of the 16 sites up to 31st March 2025. All activity after this date will be funded through other sources and partners' core maintenance budgets.
The current tranche of delivery is the beginning of the story of peatland restoration in Dorset and partners are working to embed future restoration in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and develop future conduits for building on the success of this initial work.