

What being a warden involves.

Nature reserves in Harrow are Council-owned land in a wild or semi-wild state. The sites are managed for nature conservation plus, for many of the sites, public enjoyment purposes compatible with nature conservation. As landowner Harrow Council has overall responsibility for the sites. The voluntary warden acts in the interest of nature conservation, and in practise is the person who makes many of the decisions about how the site is managed. The Harrow Nature Conservation Forum is the umbrella body formed of and supporting the work of the wardens. We receive a grant, currently £4000 per year, from the Council, while Bentley Priory receives its own separate grant.

The role of the voluntary warden will be different for the different sites, but the following tasks are typically carried out.

- ✿ Wildlife and vegetation monitoring and surveying. As well as keeping their own notes, wardens should send all reliable records to local/national databases such as Greenspaces Information for Greater London (GIGL) and county recorders.
 - The warden may not be a particular expert in any plant or animal group, but simply by walking around the site at regular intervals over a number of years will notice slow changes and decide whether they are to be encouraged or perhaps, e.g. in the case of progression of grassland to secondary woodland, reversed.
 - The warden should liaise with expert groups, such as the Harrow Natural History Society and the local branch of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, to encourage them to survey the site.

- ✿ Generation of a management plan. The warden should, in collaboration with the Council's biodiversity officer and other interested parties, generate a management plan for the site or update the existing plan as necessary. Depending on the individual warden and the nature of the site the plan may be short or long and detailed, and may be largely written by the biodiversity officer with input from the warden, or vice versa. The overall aim of management of the site should be to enhance the well being of its ecology and to increase the diversity of the habitats present. The management team will identify areas, such as ancient woodland, grassland and pasture, scrub, and water features such as lakes, ponds and streams, within the reserve, and will act over the years to maintain these habitats or even create new or enlarge existing habitats where appropriate.

- ✿ Organization of work on the site. Depending on the site, maintenance and habitat improvement work may be carried out on the site by:
 - Council contractors. These carry out work such as mowing in grasslands and tree surgery or felling to make safe trees that could post a danger to visitors on paths. Contractor work should be in accordance with the management plan for the site. Different sites differ in the degree to which the warden has an input into, and monitors, contractor work. At the very minimum the warden should be informed by the Council as to the nature of the contractor work to be carried out and when it will occur. At some sites the warden will have a greater input, for example instructing the contractors as to which areas should be mowed, and may be present during the contractor visit to ensure that the work is performed correctly.
 - Local volunteer working parties. Most sites have a small group of volunteers who work on the site to, for example, clear scrub or maintain paths. The dates and times of working parties at all HNCF sites are listed in our newsletter, on our website,

on the BBC's Breathing Places website, and in local newspapers. The warden will be present during the workdays and will suggest what tasks could be performed. At these working parties the warden is responsible for safety, and so should either ensure that generic risk assessments are applied or generate and apply risk assessments specific to the location and tasks.

- Volunteers from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. This organization brings groups of usually young volunteers to sites for a days work. Recently we have used BTCV teams for such tasks as scrub clearance, fence repair and creating boardwalks. Although the workers are unpaid volunteers, we have to pay (currently £300 per day) which covers the professional supervisor/driver, transport, insurance etc. The BTCV supervisor is responsible for the safety of these volunteers, so the warden's main role is in deciding what tasks should be performed.

BTCV workdays are often combined with local volunteer working parties, that is, there may be local volunteers as well as BTCV members on the same workday. In this case the warden must identify the local volunteers and make them welcome. Furthermore, although the volunteers will all mix and work together, safety of the local volunteers remains the responsibility of the warden. In practise this usually means no more than ensuring that the local volunteers listen to and pay attention to the safety talk given by the BTCV supervisor at the start of the workday.

- Farmers who bring stock onto the land for grazing. Grazing by cattle or sheep is the best method for encouraging a mix of vegetation including wild flowers in unimproved grassland. The public also appreciate the sight of stock on the land. At present only Bentley Priory is grazed; we would like to see other sites benefit from such management.

- ✿ Liaising with the public to enhance their enjoyment of the site and to encourage responsible behaviour. In most cases this entails no more than brief chats with visitors met on the site. Passers by are often worried when they see trees being cut down: a good warden will explain to them the reasons for this work and the species that the work is intended to benefit. Many sites are adversely affected by free running dogs, and where appropriate visitors should be encouraged to keep their dogs on a lead. Some wardens may go further and, for example, lead guided walks through their reserve or give illustrated talks about their sites to local schools and groups. Where possible wardens should try and recruit new members of the HNCF team, either to be assistant wardens on their own site or to be wardens or assistant wardens on other sites.

- ✿ Wardens should attend the meetings of the Forum. These are held in the evening, three times a year, usually in early January, May and September, at the Harrow Civic Centre. These meetings are the main opportunity for discussing problems with Council staff, as well as for discussing matters between Forum members.

The roles listed above are the core responsibilities of a warden. However as the person on the ground with the greatest sense of care for and greatest understanding of the site, wardens often act as the immediate port of call for administrative and maintenance jobs that are in the final instance the responsibility of the council. Some are listed below.

- ✿ As observers and supporters of natural history in Harrow many wardens participate in committees discussing and deciding on these issues, for example, helping to generate and steer the Council's Biodiversity Action Plan.

- ✿ Liaising with various statutory and voluntary authorities. Depending on the site organisations ranging from Natural England to residents' organisations may wish to have input into the running of the reserve. Wardens may act to resolve these questions at a local level before reporting the outcome to the council. Such organizations may include:

The Environment Agency
Natural England
Water companies: Thames Water
Three Valleys Water
London Borough of Harrow:
Engineers
Parks Department
Drainage
Health & Safety
RSPCA
Police
Local landowners, public and private
Residents' groups

- ✿ Most wardens, and the local working parties they organize, will carry out some litter clearance. Litter clearance is the responsibility of the Council and the relevant officer (at present, Stephen Dimmock) should be told if significant clearance is required. However, wardens will usually pick up items as they walk around their site. The clearer a site is, the clearer it tends to stay. The presence of even a small amount of trash on the ground reduces the likelihood that other visitors will take their rubbish home.
- ✿ Most wardens, and the working parties they organize, will carry out work to enhance public access, such as clearing bramble and ivy from paths. Once again this is properly the responsibility of the Council, but in practise much work is done by wardens and their helpers. By clearing some paths and blocking others, wardens can guide visitors away from sensitive areas, enhancing biodiversity while improving the visitor experience.
- ✿ There are constant threats to sites from proposed housing developments on land adjacent to the reserves. Those that go ahead cause an immediate problem of greater human and domestic animal damage to the sites. More generally, development in the north of the borough represents a creeping suburbanization of the green belt, greatly diminishing the attractiveness of the whole area to visitors. Development between the sites breaks up wildlife populations into isolated islands that are then in much greater danger of extinction during random population fluctuations. Wardens will often help fight inappropriate development and, as volunteers supporting public amenities, are listened to with respect by councillors.

It is worth noting that wardens are not responsible for the maintenance of public order on their site. Ongoing vandalism or vagrancy may be reported to the relevant police Safer Neighbourhoods team. Except for the immediate effects of ongoing working parties (such as swinging machetes!), and dangers immediately generated by the actions of wardens (for example, leaving a half cut tree limb hanging above a path), wardens are also not responsible for the safety of visitors to the sites – this remains the responsibility of the Council.

Relevant contacts and addresses

Harrow Nature Conservation Forum <www.harrowncf.org>
40 Walton Drive, Harrow, HA1 4XA ☎ 020 8933 2823 <admin@harrowncf.org>

Anna Cohen, Biodiversity Officer, Harrow Council, 3rd Floor, P.O. Box 37, Civic Centre,
Harrow HA1 2UY ☎ 020 8736 6080 <anna.cohen@harrow.gov.uk>

Stephen Dimmock, Council officer in charge of litter clearance
<stephen.dimmock@harrow.gov.uk>

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (our main source of external volunteer work
groups) 80, York Way, London N1 9AG <www.btcv.org> ☎ 020 7278 4294 Our current
contact is Gillian O'Brien <g.o'brien@btcv.org.uk> Mobile phone 07740 899 680

Eve Crispe (Chair, Harrow Natural History Society) 58 Ladycroft Walk, Stanmore HA7 1PE
☎ 020 8951 4080

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds:
Bob Husband, Leader of RSPB North West London Group, ☎ 020 8441 8742
Dennis Bristow, Leader of RSPB Pinner Group, ☎ 020 8863 5026

Environment Agency, Thames Region:
☎ (general enquiries) 08708 506 506
(emergency hotline) 0800 807 060

Police Officer with responsibility for wildlife crime: PC Tom Galvin from the Headstone
North Safer Neighbourhoods Team
☎ 020 8721 2994 <HeadstoneNorth.snt@met.police.uk>

Metropolitan Police Safer Neighbourhoods teams

Bentley Old Vicarage is covered by the Harrow Weald team

<HarrowWeald.snt@met.police.uk>

Stanmore Common is covered by the Cannons team <Canons.snt@met.police.uk>

Stanmore Country Park is covered by the Cannons team <Canons.snt@met.police.uk>

Pear Wood is covered by the Cannons team <Canons.snt@met.police.uk>

Roxbourne Rough is covered by the Pinner South team <PinnerSouth.snt@met.police.uk>

Bentley Priory is covered by the Stanmore Park team <StanmorePark.snt@met.police.uk>

Stanmore Little Common is covered by the Stanmore Park team

<StanmorePark.snt@met.police.uk>

For more details see <www.met.police.uk/saferneighbourhoods>

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