

Stanmore Common LNR, Harrow: Statement of Significance

Bluebell Heath Management Committee July 2012

Stanmore Common is the open space in Harrow with the greatest sense of wildness. Visitors feel that they could get lost in the network of winding paths. This sense of remoteness is valued by many visitors but discourages others. In contrast to the other open spaces in Harrow's Green Belt, which look out over urban Harrow and central London towards the North Downs, views in Stanmore Common are northeast over open land albeit cut by the M1 motorway. The soil grades from London Clay in the lowest, northeast sections through Claygate Beds to the quickly draining Stanmore Gravels on the north, west and south. Stanmore Common contains good examples of three habitat types and their associated fauna:

- **Mature woodland** on the south and west sides suffered significant felling around the 2nd World War but is otherwise likely to have been continuously wooded since 1660. It contains a rich flora including many ancient woodland indicators together with a rich invertebrate fauna, many of which depend on the considerable amounts of standing dead timber.
- **Acid grassland and heath** is a rare habitat in southeast England. The loss of large areas of open heath on Stanmore Common was recorded by the local naturalist Eliza Brightwen, who described in 1904 how the "golden sheen of the furze blossoms spreading over more than two hundred acres" she remembered from 1880 had been replaced by birch woodland. By 1990 only a few small glades retained the lovely, special flora including heather, white heath bedstraw and yellow-flowered tormentil. Considerable work by volunteers rescued heather bushes from under the deep shade of willow scrub and restored the open glades of Cerrislande and Oakmead to complex and lovely mosaics of grasses, both tall and short, mixed with young tree saplings, heather, bracken, and gorse. These are lovely places to come upon when the low winter sun illuminates frosty grasses, or to rest among flowers on a warm summer's day.

A project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund will in 2012-2015 perform a similar but larger scale restoration of Bluebell Heath. Bands of scrub will be cleared, while a small section of young birch woodland will be cleared and reseeded with heather. When complete Bluebell Heath will form a broad sweep of grassland and heath giving the visitor a great sense of openness. It will provide considerable space for colonization by the flora and fauna of the smaller residual acid grassland habitats, helping to ensure the survival of these plant and invertebrate communities.

- **Wetlands** develop in springs and flushes on the interface between the Stanmore Gravel/Claygate Beds and the London Clay and are home to a specialized community of plants and invertebrates including rarities such as Sphagnum moss. At the lowest part of the Common a boardwalk crosses the marshy Pynding Mersc, giving a sense of adventure and providing opportunities for pond dipping.

There is a long history of human settlement and activity in Stanmore and clues of this are present all over the Common. The open heaths themselves are the result of clearance in the 17th century, while a series of earthworks probably all belonged to a 16th century or later rabbit warren documented in 1667 as the coney warren. The rounded hill-like mound called Fox-Earth is the most obvious, but this may possibly be an older mound re-used. South of Warren Lane lie Brewer's Ponds, created in the late 19th century as a reservoir to serve Clutterbuck's Brewery.

IN DEPTH

Results of research done during generation of Statement of Significance

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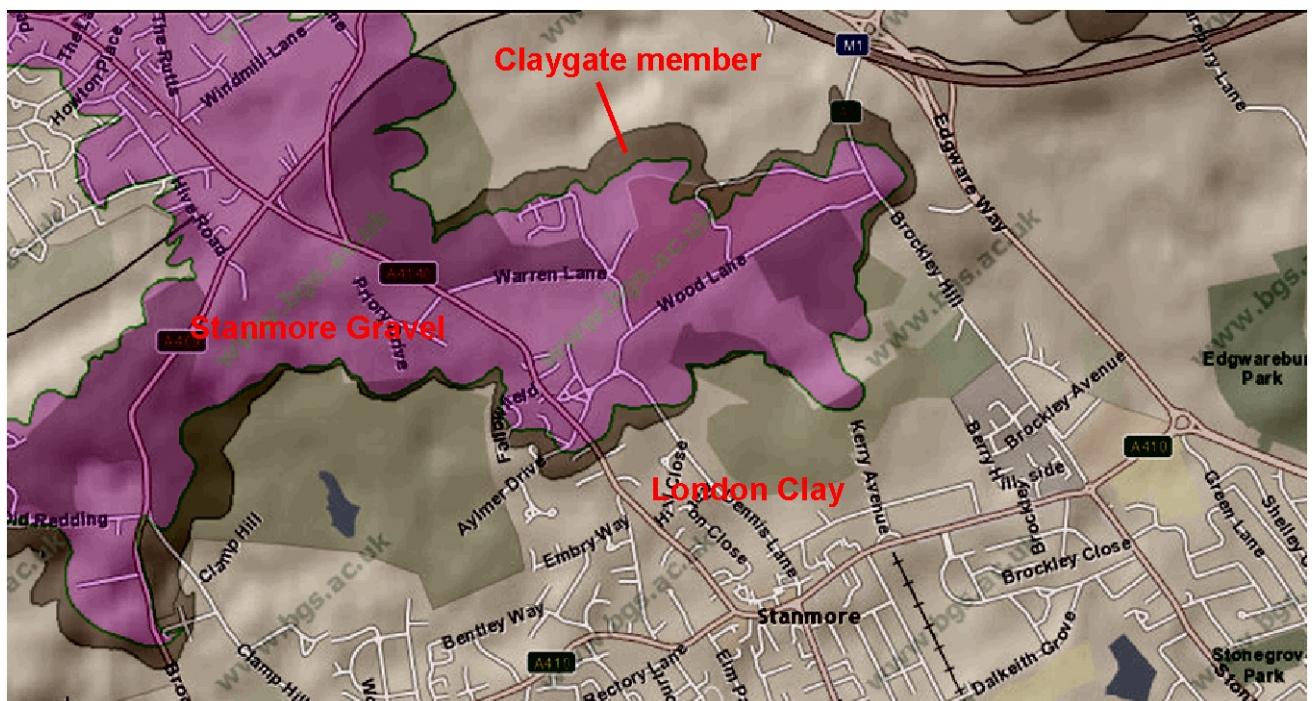
1. CURRENT STATUS

Stanmore Common is situated on Harrow's north boundary with Hertsmere and is entirely owned by the London Borough of Harrow. It has an area of 49ha (= 121 acres) and its centroid (geometrical centre) lies at TQ16044 93815.

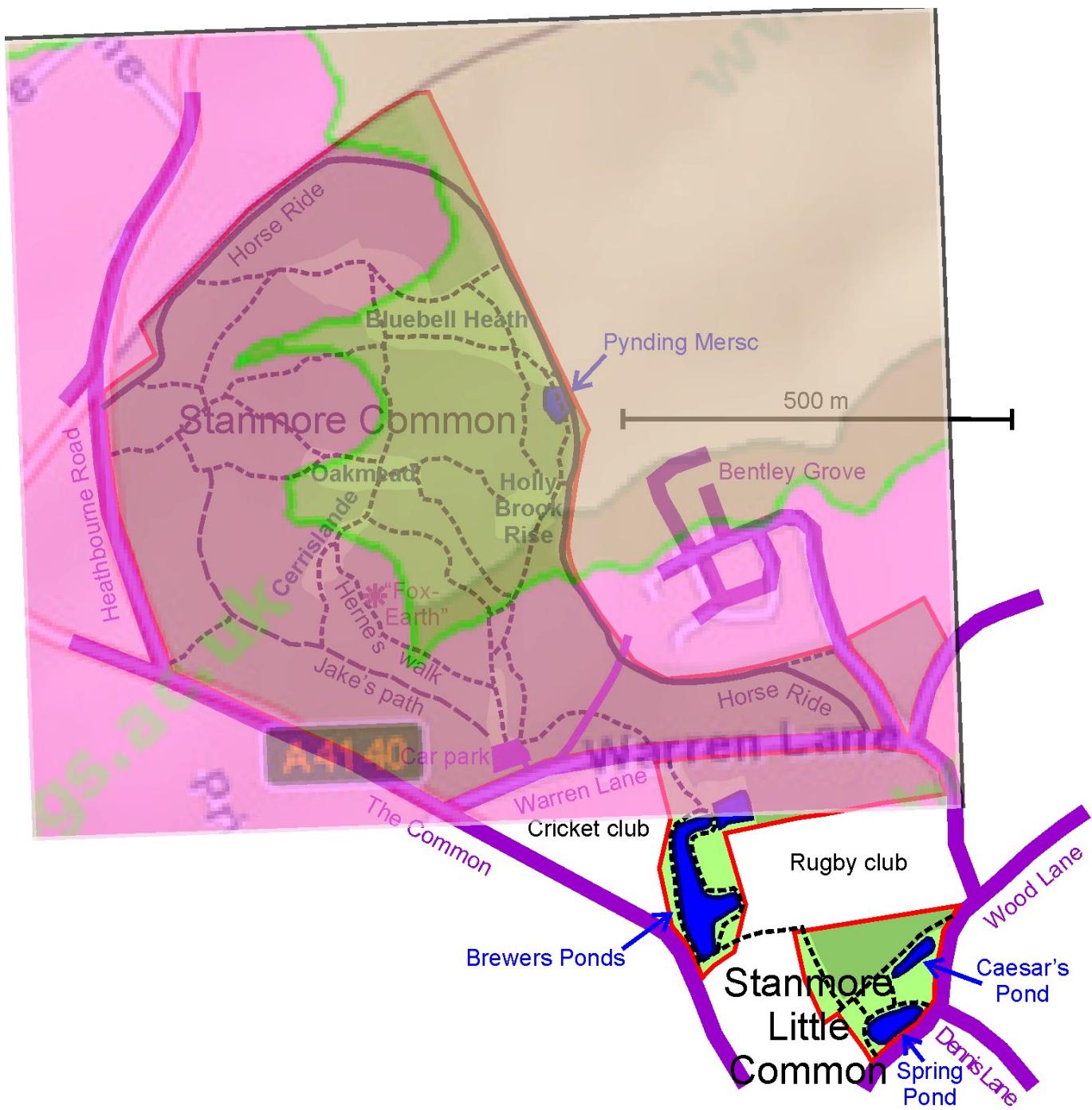
Stanmore Common is a statutory Local Nature Reserve (LNR). It is on Green Belt Land and is a designated Local Wildlife Site (until recently known as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation). The site formerly enjoyed Site of Special Scientific Interest status (SSSI), primarily on the basis of its nationally scarce invertebrates, particularly those species breeding in decaying timber.

Stanmore Common is warded and managed by volunteers in partnership with the Local Authority. Liaison takes place through Harrow Nature Conservation Forum (HNCF), a branch of Harrow Heritage Trust which provides oversight on the management of some of Harrow's key wildlife areas. Other key partners include Harrow Natural History Society (HNHS) along with conservation volunteers from a range of other organisations.

2. GEOLOGY



The lowest areas of Stanmore Common lie on London Clay. Above this lie the quicker draining Claygate Member while the Stanmore Gravels form the highest areas and generate a quick draining, acid soil. The map below shows the geology map superimposed on the plan of Stanmore Common, and reveals that New Heath, and the area of Flushing Wood that will be scraped and planted with heather, are on the Stanmore Gravel, while the more easterly parts of Bluebell Heath lie on the London Clay.



The characteristics of these three strata are detailed below.

London Clay Formation - Clay, Silt and Sand. Sedimentary Bedrock formed approximately 34 to 55 million years ago in the Palaeogene Period. Local environment previously dominated by deep seas. Setting: deep seas. These rocks

were formed in deep seas from infrequent slurries of shallow water sediments which were then re-deposited as graded beds.

The London Clay typically comprises bioturbated or poorly laminated, slightly calcareous, silty to very silty clay. It commonly contains thin courses of carbonate concretions – “cementstone nodules” – and disseminated pyrite. At depth, where fresh, it is grey, blue-grey or grey-brown in colour. Near the surface the uppermost metre or few metres typically weathers to clay with a distinctive brown colour produced by the oxidation of pyrite. The London Clay may contain thin beds of shells and fine sand partings or pockets of sand, which commonly increase towards the base and towards the top of the formation. Glauconite can be present in the sands and in some clay beds. White mica grains may be present. At the base and at some other levels, there may be a thin bed of black well rounded flint pebbles.

5 sedimentary cycles have been recognised in the London Clay, each recording an initial sea-level rise and marine transgression followed by gradual shallowing of the sea. The base of each cycle of deposition is typically marked by a sparse pebble bed. This is covered by thick clays, which become progressively more silty and sandy upwards.

The Claygate Member: Clay, Silt And Sand. Sedimentary Bedrock formed approximately 34 to 55 million years ago in the Palaeogene Period. Local environment previously dominated by shallow seas. Setting: shallow seas. These rocks were formed in shallow seas with mainly siliciclastic sediments, comprising fragments or clasts of silicate minerals, deposited as mud, silt, sand and gravel

The Claygate Member is the uppermost part of the London Clay Formation and corresponds to the upper part of the last of the 5 sedimentary cycles in that formation. It typically comprises interbedded fine-grained sands, silty clays and silts. The proportion of sand tends to increase upwards. The clays are generally blue-grey where fresh and brown where weathered.

The Claygate Member deposits are of tidal marine origin and represent a transition to the overlying Bagshot Formation (absent at Stanmore and Harrow Weald but capping Harrow Hill and Hampstead Heath). They occur only as scattered outliers throughout the Thames Group outcrop.

Stanmore Gravel Formation - Sand And Gravel. Superficial Deposits formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary Period. Local environment previously dominated by rivers. Gravel and sand, clayey near base. Gravel mostly composed of flints, up to 150mm in diameter, with a little quartz, quartzite and Lower Greensand chert in the fine fractions. Matrix of orange-brown, pale grey, red mottled clay and sandy clay, with pockets of coarse sand. Locally with layers of silt, clay or peat. Interpreted as offshore or beach gravels (Ellison et al 2004), or possibly fluvial (Bridgland 1994).

Setting: rivers. These rocks were formed from rivers depositing mainly sand and gravel detrital material in channels to form river terrace deposits, with fine silt and clay from overbank floods forming floodplain alluvium, and some bogs depositing peat; includes estuarine and coastal plain deposits mapped as alluvium.

Hilltop occurrences of gravel at between 130 and 150m OD in the extreme north-west of the London district have been named the Stanmore Gravel. This typically contains well rounded pebbles of flint, with lesser proportions of quartz pebbles, subangular to nodular flint, quartzitic sandstone and some other types. These are set in a clayey, sandy matrix with some pockets of coarse sand. The deposit is up to about 5m in thickness.

The Stanmore Gravel is of uncertain age and origin. It has been proposed as river deposits from south bank tributaries of the proto-Thames (ie when the Thames flowed north of London to the sea at Colchester prior to the Anglian glaciation), rather like the older of the Thames terraces. However, its distribution suggests it is a westwards correlative of the Red Crag of East Anglia and that it therefore comprises marine deposits of latest Pliocene to earliest Pleistocene age.

As such, it could yield significant information about the early Quaternary palaeogeography and climate and about the long-term rates and patterns of vertical movement in the London region.

There are very few natural exposures (and none at Stanmore Common?) though it is exposed at Harrow Weald geological SSSI.

HYDROLOGY

The wetland habitats and their flora and fauna at the site are dependent on water entering the site *via* flushes, old drainage channels and run-off from the site's perimeter. Maintaining the site's hydrology is a high priority for us, and for many years we have been carrying out small-scale works (e.g. by extending existing seasonal marshes) in order to extend the retention-time of water on the Common.

HISTORY

Two earthworks on the Common

The entries for Stanmore Common in the Greater London Historic Environment Record (Appendix 1) are based largely upon notes on visible earthworks made by G F Cole in the late 1940s (Cole 1951). His most prominent site is marked on the current OS 1:10,000 map as a long narrow earthwork labelled *Pillow Mound* in the archaic lettering used for an antiquity. He identified it as a representing a rabbit warren, a rectangular mound with ‘quite well defined sides, ends and corners...surrounded by a clearly visible ditch’.

About 60m to the SW is another mound, then ‘known locally as the “Fox-Earth”’. Cole describes this as ‘tumulus-like’, sub-circular, and suggests that it could possibly be the remains of a tumulus; by this he means an artificial burial mound, which are usually late Neolithic to early Bronze Age in date (although some can be Roman).

In 1985 these two mounds were the subject of a measured survey, as part of the Harrow Archaeological Survey Project (Watkins 1985). The rectangular earthwork, in woodland and dense undergrowth, was plainly a pillow mound (that is, an earthwork constructed for the management of rabbits; see below). It lies on low flat ground, is 42.8m long and 8.6m wide, and has sharp corners and a continuous ditch around it. One end is very slightly rounded. The other earthwork, 60m to the SW, is in a very different location, being a prominent subcircular mound on high ground, which slopes away to the east. This one was found to be 18.2m across, not including the surrounding ditch, and 1.5m high with steeply rising sides and an almost flat top.

Both form and position suggest that this could have been a burial mound (apart from the flat top, which could be a later modification), but there are other possible uses.

The disturbance in the top might be due to digging into the mound in the past; it could have resulted from the installation and later removal of the timber cross trees of a post mill for turning grain into flour. As Watkins observed, this is, however, a long way from the common fields of the manor, and although a good spot to catch the wind an early mill is perhaps unlikely here (although it is not far to the east of the post-medieval windmill at Bushey Heath). Other uses might be for a beacon, or a gibbet, but there is no record of either in Stanmore. Watkins did not realise that pillow mounds can be circular, and concluded that this was most likely a burial mound unrelated to the rectangular earthwork. Rabbit warrens do, however, often include

round earthworks (Williamson 2006, 40), so although this could be an older mound adapted for the purpose (and burial mounds have often been re-used for other purposes, from windmills to World War II anti-aircraft guns) there is at present no real evidence that it is. It has not been excavated.

Other earthworks

About 200m from Belswood Cottage (at the junction of Heathbourne Road and Magpie Hall Road) Cole noted a ‘triple warren’, also rectangular and surrounded by a ditch ‘formed by the removal of soil for the construction of the mound’. About 100m NE of this earthwork ‘are what may be the remains of a single warren, indicated by a rectangle of ditches’; and ‘in the extreme NE corner of the Common are remains of an earthwork...which have a somewhat similar appearance...i.e parallel ditching’. So Cole briefly recorded at least four, possibly five, pillow mounds upon the Common. His identification of these mounds as all belonging to a warren is likely to be right, both from the rudimentary descriptions and because a warren rarely if ever consisted of a single earthwork. He assumed them to be medieval (hence the date given them by the GLHER), but Williamson (2006, 32) concludes from archaeological, documentary and map evidence that ‘most surviving pillow mounds were built between c.1550 and 1850’. It is worth summarising Williamson’s relevant conclusions here:

‘The archaeology of rabbit warrens’:

- ‘Coneys’ (the word used until the 18th century) were reintroduced to Britain in the medieval period, for their meat and fur, but only became adapted to the climate after many generations and needed careful management.
- A manorial lord could introduce rabbits onto his waste without infringing the common rights of his tenants. Into the 17th century warrens, like fishponds and dovecotes, were important symbols of status, ‘to be proudly displayed beside the main approaches to the mansion, or carefully positioned on the skyline’. It was only from the 18th century that they gradually lost their symbolic and financial value.
- Around two-thirds of known pillow mounds are found on common land. Their primary purpose was to provide the rabbits with a raised area of loose dry soil with good drainage, in which they could burrow. Most mounds lie roughly at right-angles to the slope of the ground.

- They are usually rectangular, with an external ditch and neat corners, but come in many forms, sizes and arrangements. They are usually in groups (one warren could contain a great many individual mounds) and can often re-use existing earthworks.
- Many warrens were enclosed within boundary ditches, to keep the rabbits from escaping and damaging crops, or within banks of earth and turf on heathland.
- Fodder for the rabbits was often provided, and piled on top of the mounds to help keep them dry in the rain. Cuttings of hazel, elder and ash were favoured for this. The above is applicable to the earthworks on Stanmore Common, which appear to represent a standard post-medieval warren. It is quite possible that all the earthworks belong together as a single monument, scattered across much of the present Common. The bank seen by the Ordnance Survey (below) may or may not be one of the features of the warren.

Many warrens had a lodge for a keeper, to guard the rabbits from vermin and poachers and as a place to keep the nets and equipment for the catch, but ‘where small warrens were established on open commons or lay close to a mansion, they were usually absent’. Warren House in Wood Lane may get its name from its proximity to the warren, not because it had any functional link with it.

Who was responsible for this warren is hard to say, although one obvious candidate would be the Duke of Chandos in the early 18th century. But the ‘coney warren’ on Stanmore Common is documented in 1667 (VCH 1976, 102), and could be earlier in origin. There were other wealthy estates on and below the ridge from the Tudor period onwards, as by this date Stanmore, reachable on horseback, was already favoured by City businessmen for their country properties. This is just the period when pillow mounds and their related earthworks become most common, from c.1550 onwards. The nearest estate, of course, was The Grove just to the east, where the streams issuing from the Common fed two artificial lakes in the grounds. The Grove, however, is largely an 18th century and later estate. The Limes (see the postscript below) is another candidate.

Bluebell Heath is not the site of any of the recorded earthworks, but clearance may reveal something which could relate to the warren (or traces of past gravel digging, like those seen by the Ordnance Survey). In addition, it is quite possible that objects may be revealed when the topsoil is stripped from part of the Heath. These could include a scatter of prehistoric worked flints, Roman potsherds or even coins, and metalwork of any date relating to past uses of the common. It will be necessary to

monitor the clearance, and record any earthwork or artefacts. Advice can be sought from the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (kim.stabler@english-heritage.org.uk for north-west London).

Gravel extraction

The history of manual gravel extraction at the Common, including its historical duration and cessation date, are unknown to the author. That history is written widely over the Common's landscape, in the form of hundreds of small and mainly shallow pits. The small size of these pits is however thought to suggest an early date.

Postscript

'*Boudicca's Mound*': this is said in the Stanmore Common Nature Reserve leaflet to be one of the obvious archaeological remains on the Common (presumably the highly visible round earthwork, which Cole says was known locally as the Fox-Earth), but this is not the case. The name applies to a mound in the grounds of The Limes, which was excavated in 1954. As 17th-century pottery was found beneath it this was evidently a post-medieval prospect mound, a small artificial hill created within the pleasure grounds of a private estate to provide a view, and deliberately given a fanciful name.

References

- Cole, Gilbert F (1951): Coney warrens at Stanmore; *London & Middlesex Archaeological Society Transactions* n.s.10, 60-62
- VCH (1976): Victoria County History of Middlesex, vol. 5.
- Watkins, C J (1985): *A survey of two earthen mounds on Stanmore Common*. Harrow Archaeological Survey Project, 2nd interim report. Unpublished typescript in Harrow Local History Collection, Civic Centre Library.
- Williamson, Tom (2006): *The archaeology of rabbit warrens*. Princes Risborough: Shire Publications.

The quotation from Eliza Brightwen in the Statement of Significance is from *Quiet Hours with Nature* pub. T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1904.

CURRENT USAGE OF THE COMMON

The site's users include walkers and ramblers, dog-walkers, horse-riders and geocachers etc., as well as of course by many naturalists and country-lovers through the decades.

Mapping the Site

In the past the management of the site has been made difficult by the lack of reliable maps. Much of the site is wooded, and features such as management parcel boundaries, woodland paths and habitat features could not be properly charted from aerial photographs. In 2010 however, high sensitivity recording GPS/GIS and cartography was employed to accurately map all footpaths, watercourses, management compartment boundaries as well as the locations of numerous ecological features, allowing the production of accurate printable maps for the use of wardens, visitors and recorders.

WILDLIFE & HABITAT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

We regard records of the Common's species and habitats as the keystone of our management strategy, which is to develop our management in the light of our growing knowledge and understanding of the site's wildlife and its requirements. In other words, instead of imposing formulaic management on the Common's wildlife, we first ask it what it needs!

THE HABITATS OF STANMORE COMMON

In broad terms habitats at Stanmore Common can be divided into; woodland and scrub, grassland and wetland features. Certain habitats are prioritised under Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs).

UK BAP Priority Habitats include: Lowland dry acid grassland, Lowland mixed deciduous woodland and Wet woodland.

London BAP Priority Habitats include: Acid grassland, Woodlands, Standing water, Heathland, Ancient woodland, and Rivers and streams.

Harrow BAP Priority Habitats include: Grassland, Woodlands, Standing and running water, Heathland, Bare ground and Decaying timber.

Other key habitats of the Common include a range of wetland features such as flushes, marshes and ditches, and ancient woodland as revealed by the 34 Ancient Woodland Indicator plant species recorded here.

THE SPECIES OF STANMORE COMMON

Species Recording

We actively encourage species recording at the site, and many people have studied and recorded the wildlife of Stanmore Common over the years. This process is on-going and as a result we have significant datasets of a variety of major groups which we can use to encourage understanding of the site and to guide and prioritise appropriate site management.

In the early 2000's HNCF published a series of reviews of the *Reviews of the Wildlife & Habitats of Stanmore Common LNR*: **No we didn't! Does Simon mean HNHS?**

- Part I Flowering Plants, Ferns & Horsetails of Stanmore Common: [Superseded by a detailed botanical survey which we commissioned in 2010]
- Part II Mosses & Liverworts (Bryophytes) of Stanmore Common
- Part III An Annotated Checklist of the Fungi of Stanmore Common
- Part IVa Hoverflies, Soldier Flies & Dance Flies of Stanmore Common
- Part VIIa Sphagnum Habitats at Stanmore Common: A Preliminary Audit and Action Plan

In 2010 HNCF commissioned a detailed botanical and habitat survey of the 30 management parcels (see below in the section on Flora).

Invertebrates

Stanmore Common is known for its invertebrate fauna, and the sites original designation as an SSSI was based largely on insect records from the site.

Butterflies (Lepidoptera): Both the White Admiral and Ringlet butterflies are resurgent at the site having been apparently absent for many years. The first recent records of the White Admiral were in 2003, and by 2010 they were fairly common at the site. It is a London BAP- and National BAP Priority Species. On the other hand the Small Copper is a declining butterfly in London and elsewhere and it is gratifying to see that its population at the Common survives. Although the Small Heath butterfly (a National and London BAP Priority Species) was recorded here as recently as 2003, it is in regional decline and unfortunately its current status at the site is uncertain.

Moths (Lepidoptera): Light trapping and rope baiting carried out over recent years have given us a substantial list of the moths of Stanmore Common. Highlighted and scarce species include: Flounced Chestnut (one of the National- and London BAP Priority Species found at the Common, and a very scarce species), Light Orange Underwing, Hedge Rustic, Alder Moth, Birch Mocha, Gold Swift, Northern Winter Moth, Peacock Moth, Small Elephant Hawk Moth, Suspected, Lead Coloured Drab, and Scarce Prominent.

Beetles (Coleoptera): Beetles breeding in decaying timber include *Melandrya caraboides*, *Bitoma crenata*, *Abdera quadriasciata*, *Megatoma undata*, *Orchesia undulata* and *Sphindus dubius*. The Welsh Chafer (*Hoplia philanthus*) is a large beetle which may be seen on the right day flying around oak trees in clearings. *Zeugophora subspinosa* and *Gonioctena decemnotata* are both found on aspen leaves, whilst the Eyed Ladybird *Anatis ocellata* is a member of the Common's pine-associated fauna.

Flies (Diptera): Flies breeding in decaying timber include *Ctenophora pectinicornis* a wasp-like 'gloss-finish' cranefly, the crimson and black hoverfly *Brachypalpoides latus* as well as the hoverflies *Mallota cimbiciformis* and *Myolepta dubia* which both breed in rot-holes in large trees. The hoverfly *Dasysyrphus pinastri* is an aphid-feeder, normally on conifers, and the scarce fungal feeding hoverfly *Cheilosia longula* has also been recorded here. Other scarce but distinctive hoverflies include *Xanthandrus comitus* which feeds on gregarious web-making caterpillars and *Sericomyia silentis* which breeds in acidic flushes in grassland. The first UK record of an adult of the Nationally Scarce flat-footed fly *Agathomyia wankowikzii* was at the Common in June 2000; its larvae are gall-formers in Artists' Fungus (*Ganoderma applanatum*).

Bees, Wasps and Ants (Hymenoptera): The site's solitary bees include the Sleepy Carpenter Bee *Chelostoma florisomne* which is known for curling-up and falling asleep in flower heads, and the very scarce metallic blue-green *Lasioglossum leucopus*. Solitary wasps include *Cerceris rybyensis* which preys on solitary bees, *Crossocerus styrius*, a rarity of damp woodlands where it nests in the dead broken stems of birch, and *Crossocerus walkeri*, a Notable species of unpolluted ponds and

streams, where it preys on small mayflies. Among the social wasps the Hornet (*Vespa crabro*) has increased its range in urban areas in recent years and can now be seen at the Common. The ant *Lasius platythorax* is very similar to- and country-cousin to the common black ant (*Lasius niger*). However it normally nests in dead wood and is a shade-tolerant species.

True Bugs (Hemiptera): The lace bug *Cixius similis* is an uncommon species of scrubland on acidic substrates. The tree hopper *Centrotus cornutus* is a Local woodland species recognisable by its distinctive 'horns'. On the surface of woodland pools and becalmed sections of stream the red-and-black Water Cricket *Velia caprai* can sometimes be seen swimming in small flotillas.

Grasshoppers and Crickets (Orthoptera): The attractive Long-winged Conehead *Cnephacia longana* is a non-native colonist to the UK and was first recorded at the Common by the warden in 2010. If you are very lucky you might see the Slender Ground-hopper (*Tetrix subulata*) swimming underwater in pools and large woodland puddles at the Common. Otherwise it may be found on bare mud or other damp places, or in rushy habitats in the open.

Spiders: The Common has been visited on more than one occasion by the LNHS Spider Recorder, and any scarcer species found will be considered in the future management of the site.

FLORA

In 2010 HNCF commissioned a detailed Flora and Habitat Survey of all of the 30 management compartments at the Common. As a result we have an up-to-date audit of our wildflowers, trees, shrubs and ferns.

A number of **London BAP Priority Species** occur the Common including: Hard-fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Marsh willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*), Devil's-bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Lily-of-the-Valley (*Convallaria majalis*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Green ribbed sedge (*Carex binervis*), Heath wood-rush (*Luzula multiflora*), and Heath spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) which is also a Harrow BAP Priority Species.

Around 50 species at the Common are classified as **Notable in London**: These include: Green-ribbed sedge (*Carex binervis*), Brown bent (*Agrostis vinealis*), Velvet bent (*Agrostis canina*), Heath spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*), Marsh willowherb (*Epilobium palustre*), and Pill sedge (*Carex pilulifera*). The common is home to the only colony of Heath spotted-orchid in London.

The 34 species of **Ancient Woodland Indicators** for South East England recorded at the Common include: Wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Lily-of-the-Valley (*Convallaria majalis*), Wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Three-nerved sandwort (*Moehringia trinervia*), Wood millet (*Milium effusum*), Wood meadow-grass (*Poa nemoralis*) Creeping soft-grass (*Holcus mollis*) and Broad-leaved helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*).

The Common's characteristic **flora of acid grassland** habitats includes: Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*), Pill-sedge (*Carex pilulifera*) and Heath Wood-rush (*Luzula multiflora*).

Scarce and local **Ferns and Horsetails** include: Hard fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Lady-fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), Soft Shield-fern (*Polystichum setiferum*) Intermediate Polypody (*Polypodium interjectum*) and Great Horsetail (*Equisetum telmateia*).

Characteristic trees at the site include: Pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, Downy birch *Betula pubescens*, Silver birch *Betula pendula*, Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*, Aspen *Populus tremula*, and Beech *Fagus sylvatica*. **Rarer trees** of the Common include: Sessile oak *Quercus petraea* Wild service-tree *Sorbus torminalis* and a massive ancient Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, (trunk girth 219cm as measured in 2010).

Fungi : As a result of annual fungal forays over many years by Harrow NHS, and of surveys by Prof. Bruce Ing, an internationally renowned mycologist we have records of close to 500 species of fungi making Stanmore Common among the best recorded fungi sites in London.

Mosses and Liverworts: Wet areas on acidic soil support several uncommon species of moss which depend on these habitats.

BIRDS:

Red Data Book species present at Stanmore Common are Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*), Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus minor*), Song Thrush (*Turdus philomenos*) and Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), UK BAP species include Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) and , Lesser Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*)as a winter visitor.

There is a large population of Treecreepers (*Certhia familiaris*) and Nuthatches (*Sitta europaea*) . Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*) breed in the wet woodland habitat and Woodcock (*Scopolax rusticola*) is another uncommon species also associated with wet or damp woodland. Twany Owl (*Strix aluco*) almost certainly breeds on the reserve. Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) despite huge national declines still holds summer territory on the common. Notable new arrivals are the ubiquitous Ring Necked Parakeet(*Psittacula krameri*) Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) and Raven (*Corvus corax*). For a number of years Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) has bred on the reserve.

MAMMALS:

Bats are a harrow bap species and they are also priority species at a London and national level. Stanmore Common has recorded Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), Soprano Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), Daubenton's Bat (*Myotis daubentonii*), Brown Long Eared Bat (*Plecotus auritus*), Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*) and Serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*). The latter species was last recorded about 10 years ago. Hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*), UK BAP species are present. Deer are represented by Muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*) and rare sightings of Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*).Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) are rare and Moles(*Talpa europaea*) are common. Weasels (*Mustella nivalis*) are very occasionally seen. Badgers (*Meles meles*) have been reported but no set has been found. Mammal trapping has been done, the species found have been Woodmouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), Bank Vole (*Myodes glareolus*) Common Shrew (*Sorex araneus*) and Pygmy Shrew(*Sorex minutus*).

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS: Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*) a UK BAP species occurs in Great Brewers Pond and has also been recorded at Pynding Mersc. Common Frog (*Rana temporalis*) has also been found at the pond sites and elsewhere. There have been no recent newt records from the site but it is hard to believe that newts are not still present. Grove Ponds which are beyond the site boundary offer the best hope. Grass Snake (*Natrix natrix*) is quite common and may be found basking within south facing woodland edges on warm spring days. However, there have not been recent sightings of Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*). Red- Eared Terrapin (*Trechemys scripta elegans*) is present in Great Brewer's Pond. There are historic records for Common Lizard, but its present status at the Common is uncertain.

FISH

A fairly recent survey of the Grove Ponds found the following species : Carp (Cyprinus sp.) Pike (Esox Lucius), 3 Spined Stickleback (Gasterosteus aculeatus), Perch (Perca fluviatilis), Common Roach (Rutilus rutilus), and Tench (Tinca tinca)

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Stanmore Common and Stanmore Little Common

Find out more about your local nature reserves



Leaflet produced by Harrow Nature Conservation Forum June 2012



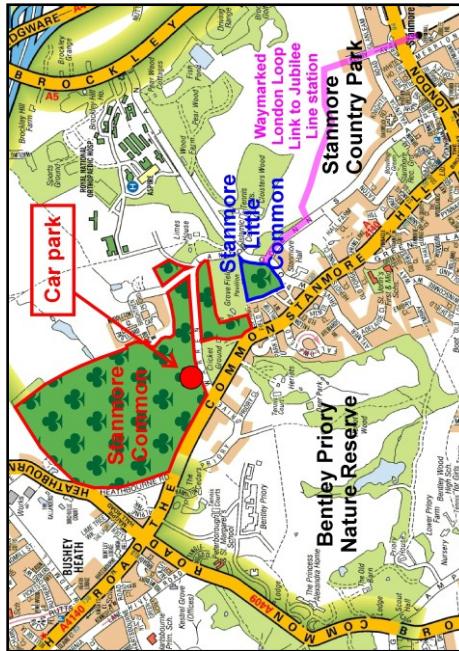
Harrow Nature Conservation Forum

Management
Both Commons need continual management to keep them attractive for wildlife and people. Several of the open glades are cut annually by council contractors, but all the rest of the work, including mowing of the smaller glades, is by volunteers who also record species and remove rubbish.



If you would like to help, whether at one of our working parties or as part of the warden team, contact the chief warden or Harrow Nature Conservation Forum.

How to find the reserves



holly and yew are all increasing. The ground flora of the woods includes bluebells, wood sorrel and the wild garlic or “ransoms”. The woods to the south and west of Herne’s Walk contain a high number of ancient woodland indicator species, indicating that although felling has removed old trees, these areas have been continuously wooded since at least 1600.

The Common is rich in animal life. There are foxes, munjac deer, weasels, hedgehogs, moles and lots of mice, voles and shrews that are food for hungry tawny owls. At night pipistrelle bats fly around the trees chasing gnats and moths. Grass snakes are common. The bird life includes all three woodpeckers and breeding hobby. Buzzards call their cat like mews, red kites drift slowly overhead, while kingfishers are regularly seen on Brewer’s Ponds. The reserve has an excellent invertebrate fauna many of which live inside the huge amounts of dead and decaying timber.

Archaeology

Within the Common, four to five earth mounds have been identified which probably all belonged to a 16th century or later rabbit warren documented in 1667 as the coney warren. These mounds were constructed to house rabbits, bred for meat and fur. The rounded hill-like mound called Fox-Earth is the most obvious, but this may possibly be an older mound re-used. South of Warren Lane lie Brewer’s Ponds, created in the late 19th century as a reservoir to serve Clutterbuck’s Brewery, the prominent 18th century brick building with the weatherboarded clock tower on the west side of the A4140 ('The Common'). The bell in the clock tower is dated 1726. Sadly brewing ceased in 1916 and the building is now housing. The ponds in Stanmore Little Common are also man-made. Spring Pond may be the 'stony mere' which produced the name Stanmore. This name appears in an 8th century Saxon charter, so the pond must be older. Caesar's Pond is named for an 18th century story that it supplied water for a supposed Roman fort, but unfortunately this is untrue. There never was a Roman fort here, but it is just possible that the Spring Pond supplied water to the Roman pottery kilns at the east end of Wood Lane on Brockley Hill.

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Stanmore Common is the northernmost of Harrow's open spaces. It is a wonderful place to explore: paths snake through woods to emerge suddenly in open glades, then enter the woods again where mysterious mounds hide among the trees. Streams cut tiny ravines through the yellow gravelly soil, spanned by wooden footbridges. To the south east, adjacent to Wood Lane, is Stanmore Little Common, a delightful wooded haven complete with picnic tables ideally placed for viewing the ancient ponds and the variety of wildfowl that inhabit or visit them.

Both Commons are open all year round and welcome all visitors. They can be explored on their own but also form part of the Bentley Priory Circular Walk, a guide leaflet for which can be obtained by post from the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum or downloaded from our website. All that we ask of visitors is that you treat the site with respect: that includes not dropping litter, not picking flowers or fungi, not lighting fires, not damaging trees or fences, and keeping dogs under control. A bridle path runs along the north and east perimeters of the common for the benefit of riders. Horse riding is not allowed elsewhere on the Commons.

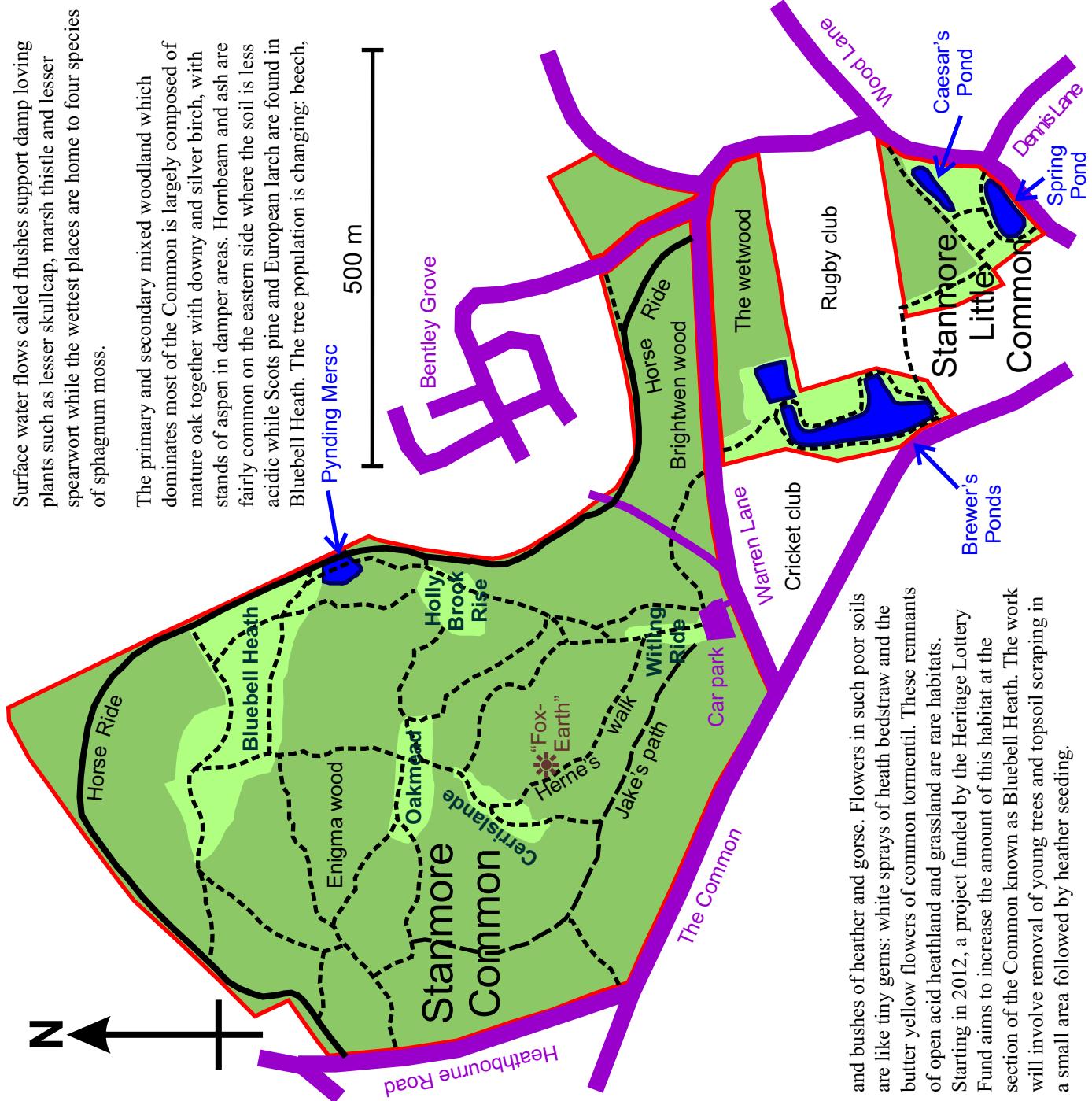
Natural History

Below the two Commons lie the rounded stones of the Pebble Gravels, underlain by the relatively well-drained Claygate beds. Many streams rise on Stanmore Common and flow north and east to meet at the marshy Pynding Mersc, while springs feed the ponds on the Little Common. The pebbles create quick drainage which has leached out nutrients, generating acid soils, so that the Common is home to plants not seen in the rest of Harrow, including heather and heath spotted orchid.

The site was formerly a woodland used for pig husbandry by local "commoners", but many trees were removed by the 17th century. These areas remained open heathland grazed by sheep until the end of the 19th century, when livestock numbers fell and secondary woodland appeared. The remaining open clearings are complex mosaics of grasses, both tall and short, mixed with young tree saplings, bracken,

Surface water flows called flushes support damp loving plants such as lesser skullcap, marsh thistle and lesser spearwort while the wettest places are home to four species of sphagnum moss.

The primary and secondary mixed woodland which dominates most of the Common is largely composed of mature oak together with downy and silver birch, with stands of aspen in damper areas. Hornbeam and ash are fairly common on the eastern side where the soil is less acidic while Scots pine and European larch are found in Bluebell Heath. The tree population is changing: beech,



and bushes of heather and gorse. Flowers in such poor soils are like tiny gems: white sprays of heath bedstraw and the butter yellow flowers of common tormentil. These remnants of open acid heathland and grassland are rare habitats. Starting in 2012, a project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund aims to increase the amount of this habitat at the section of the Common known as Bluebell Heath. The work will involve removal of young trees and topsoil scraping in a small area followed by heather seeding.

Short trail 1 Walk down Witling Ride past the picnic tables. Woodland rides introduce important diversity to the woodland habitat, letting light into the adjacent woodland and supporting some very different plants and invertebrates. In 2012 volunteers from The Conservation Volunteers felled young trees to preserve this open ride. Look out for post 2 directing you to the left.

Short trail 2 From here you can see two mature oaks. You passed one a few yards back up the ride, and there is one a few yards further down the ride to your right. These two oaks grew while the land was open meadow and contrast with all the surrounding trees, which are much younger. Framing the path ahead are three silver birches, about 50 years old, but all the younger trees about are oak and beech. As you follow the path into the woodland notice that almost all the fallen trees are birch. Birch is one of the first trees to colonize open ground, since it has tiny, fine seeds with twin outgrowths that act as sails that are blown far on the wind. However birch is short lived and cannot compete with the slower growing but sturdier oak and beech. Descend to the bridge over Holly Brook and then continue to post 3.

Short trail 3 This is Fox Earth mound, built as an artificial rabbit warren. Rabbits were brought to England by the Normans as a food source and kept in artificial hillocks surrounded by a fence. Rabbits are a Mediterranean species and had difficulty adapting to the harsh British winters. The rabbits were looked after by warreners. This is not the only man-made warren on the Common, but this is the best defined and the most accessible. Most warrens were long structures so this round form is unusual.

Short trail 4 This open meadow is Cerrislande. The vegetation is a rich mix of grasses, bracken, scrub and wild flowers including the yellow creeping buttercup. The tall woody stems are willows. Identifying willow to species is difficult especially since the various species hybridise freely. The plants here have oval leaves with paler green below and an intricate vein network, suggesting goat willow *Salix caprea*, however grey willow *Salix cinerea* can look almost identical. Whatever they are, they need to be controlled: if volunteers did not cut the willow and other woody plants on rotation this area would rapidly revert to willow scrub then woodland.

Short trail 5 This large tree is a Turkey oak, *Quercus cerris*. It comes from Turkey, Greece, and the Balkans. It was introduced into the UK in the 1700's. One can identify it by the deeply indented leaves and the hairs that surround its buds and acorn cups. It does not have as great a range of invertebrates as our two native oaks; pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, the commonest native oak on the reserve, and sessile oak *Quercus petraea* which is only found in the far north west edge of Stanmore Common. We do weed out turkey oak saplings but we keep the magnificent large trees.

Turn right and follow the path downhill. In summer notice the green bottlebrushes of great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*. Horsetails contain a lot of silica in their cell walls and this makes the stems very hard and tough. Horsetails used to be used as pot scourers and in burnishing silver.

Short trail 6 The young oak tree ahead and to the left has masses of small twigs growing out of the trunk and side branches producing shaggy clusters known as witches' brooms. Witches' brooms are formed by many species of trees in response to a wide variety of stress events; it might be a gall-forming insect or mite, aphids or bacterial/fungal colonisation or even mistletoe which sets it off.

Tykes Water lies a few steps ahead. This is the major stream of the reserve and in early spring is full of young stonefly larvae, an indicator of good water quality. The larvae are nevertheless hard to see because they hide under stones and amongst debris. The adults are poor fliers and stay close to the water.

Short trail 7 This open area is Oakmead, named after the huge multistemmed pendunculate oak which dominates the open area. The question can be posed; is this one tree that was coppiced at a much earlier date and then each shoot left to grow? If so it is old indeed, at least 200-300 hundred years. However it may be a group of trees, perhaps from a cache of nuts left by a squirrel or jay.

In late summer look for the blue pom-pom flowers of devils-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* (image below).



Above: devils-bit scabious. Image by Steve Bolsover

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Scattered among the grass are clumps of heather (ling) *Calluna vulgaris* (see image on leaflet front). Heather is native to Stanmore Common and is precious. It is a characteristic component of lowland acid grassland and heathland, a habitat that is increasingly rare due to loss to farming and building.

The woodland ahead is open and light and supports a good ground flora. In late summer look for the green flower spikes of wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia* (see image at right), a relative of dead-nettle that is characteristic of acidic soils.

Right: wood sage.

Image

by Steve Bolsover



Short trail 8 Behind you on the left is a magnificent pedunculate oak that lost a major limb during a storm. Trees are tough and can survive damage like this as long as the roots are intact.

Looking to the right through a gap between a holly on the right and a beech on the left you see an old tree with a stem that divides into multiple branches about 2 metres from the ground. This is an ancient hawthorn, probably over 200 years old and likely to be one of the oldest in southeast England. Go a few metres back on the path to get a better look.

Short trail 9 On the left is a line of old oaks, much older than the young trees all around. These may once have marked the edge of a track used by commoners to remove gravel, timber or other materials.

Short trail 10 The open area ahead and to the right is Bluebell Heath. Although one of the largest open areas on the Common, it had by 2010 been almost completely overgrown by scrub and young woodland, and we were in danger of losing all the plants of open grassland and heath together with the butterflies and other invertebrates that depend on them. In the winter of 2012-2013 much of the young trees and scrub were removed in a project supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The ground cover was allowed to regenerate naturally. Now the clearing is far more open yet still full of life.

Walk up the hill to post 1 of the return trail.

Return trail 1 The area to the left of the path you will follow is New Scrape. Here in the winter of 2012-2013 the secondary woodland was not only cleared of trees but the leaf litter and forest soil was scraped away to leave the bare Stanmore Gravel. By doing this we allow the growth of acid grassland and heathland plants that thrive in nutrient poor quick draining soil.

The path beside New Scrape is edged with lovely grasses. Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* you can identify by the soft white downy hairs all down the stem, creeping soft grass *Holcus mollis* by the hairy "knees" or swellings at the nodes (the places on the stem where leaves emerge) and wavy hair grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* by its very tall tussocks bearing blazing red flower spikes or panicles. From late spring to late summer look for the yellow flowers of hawkweeds *Crepis spp.*, relatives of dandelions. Hawkweeds are very important nectar sources since each flower head bears up to 50 individual florets and each has a nectar gland.

To your right are tall conifers. The one with fine reddish scaled bark is Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* and the dark green thin needle leaved tree with thick vertical bark cracks is larch *Larix decidua*.

Return trail 2 In June through September this is a good place to look for the pretty yellow flowers of tormentil *Potentilla erecta* growing at the base of the bracken and other plants. Tormentil is a characteristic plant of acid grassland. Like cinquefoil and strawberry it is a member of the rose family, but unlike its relatives its flowers have four, not five, petals.

The trail descends through Bluebell Heath, passing to the left of a bench - but this is a good spot to rest for a while. Butterflies abound here: red admiral, small tortoiseshell, comma, peacock, meadow brown, speckled wood and ringlet can all be seen along with the small, Essex and large skippers.

Look up from the bench to the left of the path you came on for an ancient wild apple tree that is covered in blossom in April and May. We are working to propagate it from seed and to clone the existing tree by layering.

Return trail 3 The small tree beside the post, and several nearby, is aspen, a damp loving tree. The latin name *Populus tremula* refers to the trembling of the circular leaves (image at right) in the slightest of breezes. This is because the leaf stalk or petiole is a flat strip that easily twists; this habit has produced the saying "To shake like an aspen". Aspen is home to some of the reserve's rarest insects. Because of this aspen is very rarely felled on the Common.

13 paces ahead on the left look in summer for the small buttercup flowers of lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*.

Return trail 4 This is Pynding Mersc. A dam that carries the horse ride has created a wetland delta used by many animals including dragonflies, damselflies, frogs, toads, newts, water beetles, herons, mandarin and mallard ducks as well as Daubenton's and soprano pipistrelle bats. Plants in the water include float grass, water and wood forget-me-not and gipsywort. Immediately in front of the number roundel look for narrow leaved water plantain *Alisma lanceolatum* with its large spear shaped leaves, bearing pretty white flowers in June through August (image below).



Left: Narrow-leaved water plantain.

© Liam Rooney.
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As you leave the boardwalk and begin climbing the slope look on the right in spring for wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*. The leaves have three independent leaves, like clover, and the very pretty white flowers appear in April and May (image below).



Above: wood-sorrel. Image by Steve Bolsover

Return trail 5 This clearing is called Hollybrook Rise after the stream that flows to its west. Like the other open areas on the reserve it is cut by hand to create a complex mix of low and high vegetation including small miniclearings which will catch the sun but are shielded from the wind by a sparse covering of bracken and taller uncut vegetation. Look in particular for the acid grassland specialist heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* with its sprays of tiny white flowers, and heath wood-rush *Luzula multiflora* with flowering heads like bulbous brown balls.

Return trail 6 This open space under four great trees is Witling Glade. To the left of the post is a dead oak tree, while the living tree to the right is a beech. Notice the dramatically different bark; oaks have rough bark, resembling poorly laid cobblestones, while beeches, even mature ones like this, are smooth.

Return trail 7 Turn left uphill for the final stretch back to the car park. Many of the plants found on this stretch are indicators of high nutrient levels such as greater plantain *Plantago major*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, stinging nettle *Urtica dioica* and the tough wiry perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne* with its double row of oval florets going up the stem. The high nutrients come primarily from dog waste. The delicate wild flowers seen elsewhere on the Common would be crowded out by these ranker plants if nutrient levels rose; this is another reason, in addition to considerations of public health and unsightliness, why dog waste must be bagged and placed in waste bins or removed from the site.

You have come to the end of the nature trail - we hope you enjoyed it. Please send any comments, photographs, and notes about interesting species seen to admin@harrownfcf.org.



Left: Aspen leaves.
Image by Steve Bolsover

EVALUATION OF THE RESTORATION OF BLUEBELL HEATH

Simon Braidman, Voluntary Warden, Stanmore Common

Before the restoration Bluebell Heath was only remnant grassland with masses of young trees, particularly Downy Birch, Pendunculate and Turkey Oak, Grey Willow and Bracken dominating the open area.

The openness of the clearing has been vastly improved with clear sightlines produced with a corresponding large reduction in the scrub element. All the major scrub blocks have been reduced bar the far eastern area which was outside the original zone of clearance.

One large additional area has been cleared and two smaller areas to the northeast and west of Bluebell Heath.

The ground cover vegetation is now in good condition with stands of tussocky Purple Moor Grass, and carpets of Creeping Soft Grass. There is plenty of the target species such as Tormentil, Heath bedstraw and Heath Wood-Rush, Devils Bit Scabious Autumnal and Savoy Hawkweed. Damper areas hold the rare Pill Sedge. The woodland flowers have also benefited with lots of Bluebells and Foxgloves and increasing numbers of Common Dog Violet and Wood Anemone.

The scrape done in the northwest corner has been a brilliant success. The original vegetation was secondary woodland dominated by Downy Birch and now there is a fast developing acid grassland/heathland habitat.

Top soil removal has allowed plants long considered extinct to re-appear. The best find has been Heath Rush which has been only recorded at one other site in the whole of Greater London. The rare Pill Sedge and the uncommon Green Ribbed Sedge have also appeared.

The scrape was sown with Heather from a previous lottery project scrape and we have had excellent Heather re-growth.