

# THE LONDON TREE AND WOODLAND AWARDS 2018

## CASE STUDY - THE COMMUNITY WOODLAND AWARD

### WINNER – THE WOODCHIP CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS



The London Tree and Woodland Awards celebrate the work of individuals, communities and professionals to protect, improve and expand the capital's tree and woodland cover.

The Community Woodland Award is for a woodland project that has been inspired, driven, and delivered by local community groups. Winners of the 2018 award, which is sponsored by The Woodland Trust, were the WoodChip Conservation Volunteers.

#### **WoodChip Conservation Volunteers:**

The WoodChip Conservation Volunteers dedicate three days every week to enhance Banstead Wood and Stagbury Downs, undertaking a range of activities. Last year they provided 2,305 hours of voluntary work, carrying out practical work such as coppicing, scrub clearance and litter picking. In addition, they conduct monitoring work to assess the success of their habitat management which benefits important species like white letter hairstreak butterfly.

#### **Activities:**

Banstead Wood is a 110 hectare ancient woodland, parts of which have been heavily modified, particularly in the Victorian era. It is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The woodland and adjacent chalk grassland is owned by Reigate & Banstead Borough Council. In 2006, a small group of volunteers approached the Council with a proposal to help manage the site. Once approval was given, the WoodChip Conservation Volunteers were formed.



An initial management meeting with the Council's Countryside Officer led to a list of suggested tasks including invasive species reduction, litter collection and maintaining public open access. Later this was expanded to include coppicing areas of over-stood hazel, scrub reduction and renovation of the Knoll, a large copse with walnut and other fruit trees in the Chipstead Valley.

Although the group's activities are primarily for conservation, they also bring many benefits for other users of Banstead Woods and Stagbury Downs.

They are continually logging the species that use the woodland and aim to enhance biodiversity through improving the structure and composition of the woodland. The group also provide maintenance work to the rides and deal with 'smaller' fallen trees that block paths.

Invasive and exotic species of flora abound on the site, and these are monitored and targeted for eradication. Himalayan Balsam plucking is carried out annually and the Woodchips also contribute to the eradication of rhododendron, by finding and removing the small areas of regrowth and targeting remaining stumps with herbicide.

In some areas of the woodland, sycamore has become a monoculture, casting dense shadow on the woodland floor. In two target areas, the volunteers have felled the sycamore and replanted with native trees which will support more ground flora. The felled timber was stacked as 'habitat piles' to provide food, shelter and wildlife 'highways'. Ongoing work in these areas, including removing sycamore seedlings, is allowing bluebells to flourish.



### Outcomes:

Entrants to the award had to demonstrate the project provided demonstrable community gains, active management or planting of new woodland and evidence of long term management and co-operation to ensure a resilient woodland.

The project has benefited the public by keeping paths and tracks clear and the coppicing and felling work has brought improvements to ground flora and led to increases in invertebrate species.



The group's thorough approach in continually carrying out surveys of target species, such as the white-letter hairstreak butterfly and then instigating work to support their habitats, has brought positive results. Once the butterflies were identified, the volunteers carried out work to the small population of elm found on site to enhance its ability to support a larger population.

Several hectares of over-stood hazel coppice have been re-coppiced and the timber used for building habitat piles and dead hedges. Newly arrived buzzards and a sparrowhawk make good use of the dead hedge as an observation post while hunting in the now open woodland. It is hoped that the hazel, now regenerating, will be used as a crop for hurdle making or other forestry products.

There are two closely linked old orchards at the edge of the woods, which have benefited from ground cover management to control Himalayan Balsam, bracken and Rosebay Willow herb. Removal of these invasive species has benefited the slow-worms, toads and common lizards in this area and recent investigation of the old habitat piles of herbage resulted in the discovery of nationally rare beetle species.

Much of the work carried out has been targeted at improving the woodland habitat for the benefit of wildlife. Areas which had low productivity of invertebrate species are now recovering and the group's policy of identifying and recording the wildlife led to the site being declared a Local Nature Reserve in 2017.

Speaking at the awards presentation, Andy Keay, one of the volunteers, said that he was proud to work with a group of committed individuals, who have made such a difference to this important area of woodland.

In nominating the group for the award, Vincenzo de Iacovo, who worked with them while at Reigate & Banstead Council said: "Their invertebrate and avian knowledge is second to none and their work is a joy to watch. They are happy to share their knowledge and also have a brilliant newsletter, with annual photo competitions, and photos of species and their habitat work."



For more information on the WoodChip Conservation Volunteers, visit their Facebook page (Woodchip Conservation Volunteers) or email [woodchips1@btinternet.com](mailto:woodchips1@btinternet.com). The group also



produces a newsletter several times a year which reports on the local wildlife, volunteer tasks and the regular butterfly and other surveys.

### 2018 Awards ceremony:

The London Tree and Woodland Awards were presented at a ceremony hosted at City Hall on 10 July. The Community Woodland Award was sponsored by The Woodland Trust and Chairman Baroness Young presented the award to the WoodChip Conservation Volunteers.



The photo shows (left to right) Richard Beveridge, Baroness Young, Richard Carter, Sir Harry Studholme (Forestry Commission Chair), Brian Gardner, Graham Harris, Geoff Hasler, Andy Keay, Roger Vey, Graham Kenward, Martin DeFreitas, Shirley Rodrigues, Deputy Mayor for Environment & Energy. The award was sponsored by the Woodland Trust.



Further photos from the awards are available on the Forestry Commission [Flickr page](#)

### The 2018 Award Sponsors:

The 2018 London Tree and Woodland Awards were kindly sponsored by:



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