

Hampstead Heath Survey Section AGM 2025



Agenda

1. Welcome and apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the last AGM (14/11/2024)
3. Election of Committee for 2026
 - a) Officers: Liz Andrew (Chair), Jeff Waage (Secretary), XXXX (Representative to Council)
 - b) Ordinary members: Jeff Duckett, Pete Mantle, Jo Maddox, Noel Brock, Monica Dawes, Clive Herbert, Katie Hanlon
4. Chair's Annual Report – 2025
5. Any other business
6. Date of next meeting



HAMPSTEAD HEATH SURVEY SECTION LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Hampstead Heath Survey Section held on 14th November 2024, at 18:30, virtually via Zoom.

Present: Liz Andrew, Kat Duke, Jeff Waage, Ben Gibb, Pete Mantle, Noel Brock, Jo Maddox and about 40 other members of the Society and visitors at the start of the meeting.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Jeff Duckett and Monica Dawes.

2. Minutes of the last AGM – 9 November 2023

The minutes of the last AGM were approved without amendment. Proposed by Kat Duke, seconded by Pete Mantle, and adopted unanimously.

3. Chair's Annual Report – 2023-2024

Liz Andrew presented a summary of the past year's activities and achievements. Seven field meetings were held, as well as a bioblitz on Sandy Heath. Because meetings on birds and fungi had attracted awkwardly large numbers, a new booking system for field meetings was piloted, limiting numbers to 20 per meeting.

Regarding new species, a new rush, *Carex binervus*, which is rare in London, was recorded in a recently cleared wetland area at Kenwood. A survey of Hampstead streams and ponds by Derek Coleman of the LNHS revealed a stonefly *Nemoura cinerea*, recommending further investigations. A new slime mold, *Trichia scabra*, and spider, *Araniella inconspicua* were recorded. Yellow Loosestrife Bee, *Macropis europaea*, has now colonized populations of that plant established during the Ponds Project a decade ago, and the presence of the spreading Brown Hairstreak butterfly was established through discovery of eggs on its Blackthorn host plant. A survey of willows, a difficult group, was undertaken on Pryors Field by Irina Belyaeva of RBS Kew and Bettina Metcalfe of LNHS.

Work on the Milliennial Flora Project Update, funded by LNHS in 2021. Particularly rare species in the 1997-2003 survey were revisited and spread was observed with some. Detailed National Vegetation Surveys were made to better characterize a number of meadow and other plant communities across the Heath, with the assistance of Brian Ferry of Royal Holloway College London, and transects were established to measure changing plant phenology as part of the national Nature's Calendar project, which will continue. Overall, more than 730 species of plants are now recorded from the Heath, including 90 species of bryophyte. Over 350 species of fungi are also recorded, and about 50 lichen species.

4. Election of Officers for 2024

Liz Andrew was nominated as Chair, Jeff Waage as Secretary and Kat Duke as Council Representative, and elected by online poll.

5. Election of Committee for 2024



Jeff Duckett, Jo Maddox, Pete Mantle, Ben Gibb, Monica Dawes and Noel Brock were nominated as ordinary members of the committee and elected by online poll.

6. Any other business

There was no other business.

7. Date of next meeting

The next Sectional AGM was provisionally set for early November 2025, the precise date to be confirmed. The meeting closed at 18:56.

8. Presentation to the AGM

At 19:00, 81 online participants enjoyed a presentation by Noel Brock entitled “Urban Garden Wildlife: Culture & Practice. Noel is a member of the LNHS HHSS, and has operated for many years a gardening company in the Hampstead area which develops private and public gardens with a particular focus on improving biodiversity. He holds senior positions in several national gardening associations and promotes nature-friendly gardening in these and in local initiatives in schools and other public spaces.

After a general introduction, Noel introduced the audience to the importance and challenge of developing local ponds in gardens. Ponds, even very small ones, are rapidly colonized by wildlife, starting with species like water hog louse, *Asellus aquaticus*, which performs the important function of breaking down fallen leaves, and species of Gammarus, Daphnia and Cyclops, and potentially Ramshorn Snail, various odonates, frogs and newts. Putting ponds in public spaces has some challenges. Noel identified vandalism as a particular problem and the ease with which PVC linings could be damaged in this way. His solution has been to set the pond in a strong plastic basin or to use a PVC lining carefully protected with a covering layer of paving slabs and concrete. Laying brush across ponds also reduces vandalism and emergent vegetation planted, like reeds and rushes, can easily grow up under these branches, until they are established. Wildlife can be better protected by ensuring one edge of the pond is not accessible to people. Ponds can develop weeds, including duckweed and blanket weed, which should simply be removed rather than treated with the many useless products that can be found on the market.

Noel then moved on to a number of other topics regarding urban gardening for wildlife touching on a number of his other initiatives. In a discussion of creating wildflower meadows, he observed that these need not only involve strictly native species. Carefully selected naturalized species, like *Gladiolus illyricus* can provide large amounts of nectar and pollen to native pollinators over conveniently long flowering seasons, while also being attractive garden features. He observed that homeowners and managers of public spaces often have difficulty with the fact that wildflower meadows and other natural vegetation has periods of the year when they simply look untidy, and the temptation is to mow them. His solution is to put up a sign at these times, explaining the habitat and its wildlife and the importance of these periods.

As part of his support to biodiversity in gardens, Noel also points out the harm that some well-meaning gardening practices can cause. This includes the widespread use of pesticides and herbicides, and even the placement of tree irrigation pipes which, if flush with the ground, can serve as pitfall traps, trapping and killing many ground dwelling invertebrates.

Noel has a particular interest in encouraging hedgehogs in local neighbourhoods and described his efforts with local homeowners and communities to create hedgehog highways to allow movement through fences between gardens. Another newly urban mammal which Noel is strongly promoting is the beaver, which is being established in several parts of London. He has taken garden industry colleagues to the beaver colony



in Paradise Fields near Wembley to see how the engineering of waterways by these animals rapidly creates excellent and diverse habitats for wildlife. In discussion, the value of beavers relative to nutria, another large aquatic mammal introduced from South America and then deliberately exterminated in a long campaign, was discussed. While nutria undermined water way banks, threatening nature-rich marshland in Eastern England, beavers, by being dam builders and tree managers, enhance wetland habitats where they are introduced.

Given that such a large proportion of London's green spaces are private and public gardens, it was clear that restoring London's biodiversity requires a considerable effort in these areas often through management for quite different purposes. Noel's talk showed us all how this management can be attractively and intelligently repurposed to support urban nature recovery, allowing gardens to contribute to the creation of biodiversity-rich corridors across London.