

Conservation and Wildlife Report for Year to May 2023 for

Burrow Hill Nature Reserve

General.

For future reference this report will be stored at [Home | Keaver Drive Management Company](#)

As owners and guardians of Ancient Woodlands, we are working on a 10 year management plan with the Forestry Commission which is an important step forward and raises awareness of our woodlands and its importance. We are now in our second year of creating the plan and it becomes official only after the Forestry Commission approve it. More details to follow in subsequent reports.

The newly installed wildlife pond continues to attract mammals and birds to use it for its purpose as a watering hole. Small pond life is also continuing to thrive. The area around is maintained by John (#36) on a regular basis so the animals are able to access the pond.

New tree planting and building of bee homes continues. We have planted sycamore, sweet chestnut, goat willow and rowan (mountain ash) trees in areas where they are able to get sun and rain on the woodlands margins. We have also managed to build the first bee home in the woodlands using recycled materials alongside a newly seeded wildflower area. It's in the clearing at the top of Keaver Drive on the right hand side by the palisade gates. It was fun to build with local children recently, so thank you to those who helped. A second bee/pollinator home is due to be built later in the year.

The disruption to nature caused by the Esso pipeline work is evident in our woods and certainly down in the SANGS, more on this later.

Birds.

This time of year our summer visitors are still arriving and setting up their territories and nest sites. We have a new breeding species, established themselves quite early on in April, the green woodpecker. The pair are nesting behind #30 KD in an abandoned great spotted woodpecker hole. Keep a look out for them on your lawns as their main food is ants and they will be prospecting all the time. It's also a good reason not to kill ants in the lawns of our gardens. You may have heard them as their song is called a yaffle and sounds like someone laughing hysterically.



Figure 1 - Green Woodpecker (stock image)

Our population of firecrests have increased this year. 3 territories with singing males have been located throughout the woodlands. This is most likely caused by the Esso pipeline work which has destroyed an area where they nested over the past years in the far corner of the SANGS. At least one of these pairs has nested in an area near the woodland path. As these breeding birds are Schedule 1 species, it's important we keep the locations to ourselves although they have been reported to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO).

This tiny restless jewel of a bird vies with the goldcrest for the title of the UK's smallest bird. Compared to the goldcrest, the firecrest is brighter, more colourful with a distinctive black and white eye stripe. They also have a yellow and black stripe on their heads which has a bright orange centre in males. Like goldcrests they move rapidly through trees and bushes in search of insects. The firecrest inhabits more evergreen woodlands, like our holly, a reason why we have them here. The UK population of under 2000 territories is boosted in winter by migrants from the continent.



Figure 2 - Firecrest (stock image)

These birds are notoriously difficult to photograph, but the following photos have been captured on our nature reserve in the past few months.



Figure 3 - Male firecrest in birdbath (Dan #24)



Figure 4 - Female firecrest in birdbath (Dan #24)



Figure 5 - Male firecrest in holly along woodland path (Paul #32)

More information, including breeding records for this year will be included in the next nature reserve report.

We have increased the nature reserve count by 1 bird in the past year when a male Reed Bunting decided to drop into trees on a windy day back in March. That bird was our 80th species recorded in or over our reserve and we increased breeding species to 25.

We have found a number of dead birds in the woods in recent months, most have been scavenged by the red foxes, but 2 wood pigeons and 1 magpie were found as complete birds. This is very unusual and is most likely the results of bird flu which is killing birds throughout the country. Please do not touch the dead bird. If anyone finds dead birds in gardens or around the estate, please inform Paul who will collect the bird and report the finding to DEFRA and the BTO.

Mammals

Our badger population seems to have dramatically reduced in the past year. Several factors may be at play here, but it is sad to note that sightings of badgers are few and far between at the moment and only ever singular, maybe 2 at a time. During the last survey it was also noted that very few entrances had evidence of recent activity, only 3 were found compared to 11 last year. Also very sad to note that a badger was found dead in our nature reserve at the rear of houses in Carisbrooke. Although the animal had been dead for some time, evidence showed that it was a traumatic death. Photo evidence was taken and sent to the Badger Trust and my own West Surrey Badger Group (WSBG) who both agreed that the likely cause was poisoning. This is most likely from attempted rat poisoning by a resident which had been ingested by the badger.

Badgers are intuitive and easily displaced if situations make it difficult for them to stay in their sett. A clan will move completely if the matriarch of the clan decides to do so. With the current destructive Esso pipeline work cutting off the SANGS foraging grounds and the threat mentioned above, it is very likely that our clan has moved away for the time being. This is a cyclic event with badgers, intelligent animals which are only trying to survive as they have for thousands of years. They'll be

back but when is anyone's guess. We really hope we find evidence of cubs in May but until then we assume we are down to very few animals right now. An update as of Monday 22nd May, a report received from Ian (#42) of a sighting of 2 adults and 1 cub in the sett directly behind his house. Great news!

As Paul is the Camberley area Field Officer for WSBG, please report any sightings or concerns to him directly, or through the WSBG office number on 07726 929681.

Red foxes continue to do quite well, new families of cubs have been recently seen this spring with at least 3 lactating vixens and several adult pairs are resident in our reserve. We have counted 8 cubs together so far. Our fox population are generally in good condition, although one small fox has fur missing from its tail. It looks like its suffering from mange, but like the large male last year it's not and will recover its fur in due course. **Foxes and badgers are our top predators and ensure that species like grey squirrel, wood mouse and brown rat are naturally controlled keeping numbers down so there is no need for us to get involved with trying to eradicate so called pests which are in fact an important part of the natural food chain.**



Figure 6 – Confiding male Red Fox in our woods (Paul #32)

Other Animal and Flora News

We haven't quite made it to 1000 species in the past year although we are getting very close. Our total species for all flora and fauna now stands at 976, broken down as follows;

Total species recorded	976
Flora (including fungi)	233
Fauna (including all insects)	743

This is an increase of 58 species made up of 19 new moths, 1 bird, 4 bees, 2 dragonflies, 5 other insects, 11 plants and 16 new fungii without any specific surveys being done. We use species specific identification apps on phones to identify species for insects, flora and fungi. This is an important part of managing our nature reserve, enabling us to plan for work to manage the environment for the benefit of its inhabitants.

Nature Reserve Update

Overall the nature reserve is not in great health. With loss of trees, including the 2 beautiful ash trees at the bottom of the steps, the loss of oak, sweet chestnut and mature holly, the woodlands itself is suffering. This spring the trees look healthy, although a little late in emerging from a cold early spring. We hope for a more stable couple of years for the trees and woods to recover recent events. More on trees works from Simon.

The ash trees have been cut and sliced into useful tree pieces, suitable for gardens. If anyone want any for their plant pot stands, patios or even wood for pizza ovens or woodpit fires, let Paul know. Ash will burn immediately and well being a dry wood, so a useful resource.

We provide sanctuary to many species in the woodland nature reserve, there exists a good fertile ecology for plant and trees (if they are given a chance) and also an established fauna food chain with our top predators only able to survive here because of the chain from the very bottom, including insects. Fingers crossed the badgers haven't completely abandoned Burrow Hill, given they've been here for 100s of years.

In recent discussion, the West Surrey Badger Group chairman and Paul talked over the possibility of trying to get the animal observation hide planning application resurrected. WSBG are very keen to establish hides around Surrey for the purpose of observation and education of badgers. They have completed one in Farnham Heath in partnership with the RSPB, have another in their plans in the Fleet area and are very interested in our proposal for one here on Burrow Hill. Subject to redesign, answering all of the ecology questions posed by Surrey Wildlife Trust and the Tree Officer in SHBC and with the support of WSBG, the KDFMCL board propose we restart the application.

Useful Information

The Esso contractors are behind their stated schedule by a long way, St Catherine's is still closed and the SANGS will take several years to recover. Latest is the road might be open by the end of July, but there is no news on the removal of the very damaging depot.

As for this report, all future nature reports will be placed onto the KDFMCL website for all residents to access at [Home | Keaver Drive Management Company](#). Also if you have any photos of the local environment or wildlife and would like them on the website, please send them to Paul to upload. If you do not access the website or know of residents who don't access the internet, then a paper copy can be provided. Any help required on our environment, the woodlands as well as wildlife in your gardens, please contact Paul at thecolletts@btinternet.com or on 07979 708207.