

# 'Uncovering Ham Hill's past for its future'

## Ham Hill Heritage Fund project

## Newsletter June 2023

Welcome to the first quarterly newsletter; keeping you up to date with the progress of the Ham Hill Heritage Fund project.

### Visitor Centre

Over the last 3 months, we have been busy procuring contractors who will lead on the construction phases of this project. This includes building the new visitor centre, creating a new highway path, improving the layout of the car parks and creating a safer road for motorists and visitors.

It is hoped that work on site will begin in autumn 2023 with an anticipated opening for the Visitor Centre in spring 2025.

We have also been liaising with Historic England to ensure that the construction is sensitive to the Scheduled Monument and in line with the consents given by HE.

### Staff

We have recently appointed Geoff Rowland to the position of Assistant Countryside Ranger on a three year contract funded by the Heritage Fund. Geoff's geological knowledge and dry stone walling expertise will help the team complete the practical activities and tasks of this three year project.

Later this year we will be recruiting for an engagement ranger who will lead on the people-focused part of this project, delivering activities and sessions to community groups, visitors and schools to help tell the story of Ham Hill.



Ham Hill Rangers: Paul McNeill, James Boyland and Geoff Rowland



### Bumblebee Conservation Trust Training Day

We are working in partnership with BBCT on their Save Our Shrills (S.O.S) Somerset project to protect and improve habitat for the rare shrill carder bee. Jo Chesworth from BBCT and her volunteers delivered a bumblebee ecology and identification training day for the rangers and volunteer wildlife surveyors.

The aim is to set up more bee transects so that BBCT can monitor the population spread of the shrill carder and we can keep an eye on the health of our populations of more common bumblebees.



### Traffic Regulation Order

The countryside team at Somerset Council have successfully applied for a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to reduce the speed limit on the road across Ham Hill from 60mph to 40mph. The new speed limit will come into force in the next 12 months once the new signage is in place.

This is just the start of a number of measures the team will implement as part of the Heritage Fund project to make the highway safer for all road users and visitors to Ham Hill.



### Partnership working

The delivery of this large Heritage Fund project cannot be achieved by the Countryside Team alone and we are very grateful to be working alongside some fantastic organisations to deliver the outcomes that the project seeks.

The Friends of Ham Hill have been instrumental in securing additional funding through the Banister Trust for work to restore the field margins and create inspiring interpretation for our visitors.

The project continues to evolve and we are in the early stages of developing a project with the South West Heritage Trust for Arts Council funding which will showcase the amazing finds of Ham Hill that are distributed across museums in the south west.



## Wildlife surveys

The rangers have been carrying out a variety of wildlife surveys over the spring, to help monitor the effects of their winter habitat management works and also to provide a baseline set of data, to record against at the end of the project. This will be used as evidence of the degree of success of landscape and habitat management works during the life of the Heritage Fund project.

24 skylarks were recorded in April across the flat fields. This equates to 12 nesting pairs and as skylarks are an IUCN Red List Species due to their declining populations, it is important that this ground nesting bird is protected from disturbance by dogs.

Signs of the presence of water voles have been discovered in the Medieval pond and stream at Witcombe Valley. The water vole is a European protected species and it is important that vegetation in their habitat is managed to provide a food source and cover for these rare mammals.

Orchid surveys have been taking place across the site and whilst the flat fields host thousands of the five varieties found on site (common spotted, pyramidal, southern marsh, early purple and bee) it is the Northern Spur that has delighted the rangers this year. In 2017 the first singular bee orchid was recorded on the Northern Spur, in a restored quarried area from 2013. This year the rangers recorded 30!



Photo on left: Bee orchid  
Photo on right: Skylark



## Volunteers

Geoff and his team of dedicated volunteers have been instrumental in repairing the dry stone walls in the flat fields, one of the priority landscape tasks of the Heritage Fund project.

We have welcomed more volunteer wildlife surveyors to the team over the last year, who are helping to record and monitor our butterfly populations. It has been a slow start to the season, with such a cold spring but the marbled whites and meadow browns are now in abundance across the site.

This year the team have launched their Roaming Rangers scheme across Ham Hill, with two volunteers signed up so far. The Roaming Rangers are another presence on site, providing advice and help to visitors and reporting any issues to the rangers.



## Activities and events

We are delighted to announce that Stanchester School's Drama students have been writing their own play about Ham Hill's history and they will be performing in the stone circle on Wednesday 28th - Friday 30th June from 6-7pm. You can get tickets from Stanchester School Office at £3 per person.

Look out for forthcoming events at Ham Hill over the summer holidays on our website & Facebook page (details below).



## Get involved!

You can get involved in this project in a variety of ways:

Volunteer with us, book a bespoke activity for your group or just keep up to date with the project by following us on Facebook or Instagram 'Ham Hill Country Park' or visit our website <https://www.visitsouthsomerset.com/listings/countryside-nature-and-wildlife/ham-hill-country-park.htm>.

We are offering a free guided walk for stakeholders in September so please get in touch on [countryside@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:countryside@somerset.gov.uk) if you would be interested in attending. If you have questions about the project so far, please get in touch on the email address above.