



Friends of Petersfield Heath (FoPH) Work Party Report 2021-22 Season

Our volunteers have been out volunteering once again this season, achieving an excellent amount of work. The season started out as usual with the continuation of our program of bracken control. This is an ongoing task, however a particularly gratifying one, with the bracken growth being less and less each consequent year, with our volunteers successfully completing the main area of the task in a record three sessions with the help of our new Scythe mower which was acquired towards the end of the last season.



Following on from the bracken control, the volunteer team then moved on to the task of sapling removal. This is a vital task as whilst we love trees, Petersfield Heath is and always has been a mosaic of habitats and controlling the spread of these trees allows us to better maintain the open habitats such as heathland and grassland, which in turn support a great number of both flora and fauna such as Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*).



In conjunction with this, our volunteers also spent a large amount of time this season on aiding the prosperity and spread of our heather growth. This included a variety of tasks, including the mowing of the area surrounding the heather clumps so as to remove competition for both nutrients and light from other more dominant species (mostly grass). Our volunteer teams also undertook the cutting back of overhanging (mostly degenerate) European Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) to prevent the overshadowing of the heather. This task also aids the species which rely on the gorse, as this provides a greater structural diversity for the gorse, and this in turn aids insects and nesting birds.

Another task which our volunteers partook in this season was the maintenance of the previously constructed deadhedge (or dry hedge) which runs along the length of the ditch to Heath Road East. Our volunteers used a large number of wooden stakes which they hammered into position to stabilise the structure. This is not only a benefit from a health and safety point of view (preventing the collapse of the dead hedge), but the deadhedge is also an excellent habitat for invertebrates, amphibians (such as Common Toads (*Bufo bufo*) (which have been seen multiple times within the deadhedge) and small mammals such as Wood mice which use the deadhedge as a habitat and as a corridor to safely traverse the site.

An additional task which our volunteer team carried out was the clearance of bramble along the edge of the woodland copse nearest to Music Hill. This has two benefits, firstly from an aesthetic point of view, the trimming back of this bramble gives the area a neater appearance and allows for a better view into the wooded area. The primary reason for the task however was once again to improve the conditions for the heather which is growing in this area, removing the bramble which would have been competing with the heather for space, nutrients, and light.

One final ongoing task which the team completed this season was the clearance of the ditch which runs from a culvert leading from the pond, all the way through to Heath Road East. This is a tremendous undertaking, with the ditch running for approximately 275 metres. The clearance of the ditch included the dredging and removal of excess silt from the ditch to allow a better flow of water and remove excess nutrients (all silt was left near the edge of the ditch so that any remaining invertebrates could crawl their way back into the water), the removal of debris from the ditch which was causing the ditch to block and the trimming back of any vegetation which was overshadowing the ditch. The reasoning behind this task is that not only does it aid in the prevention of flooding



and helps to keep the adjacent path dry and passable, but it also aids the plant and animal species which prefer a lotic (flowing) water habitat.

Our volunteers are at present partaking in our Spring/Summer program of bracken control, ensuring that the growth doesn't get out of control before the next season, and to continue hitting back the growth.



In total this work season, our team of 20 active volunteers completed an outstanding 630 person hours of volunteering on Petersfield Heath, working in all weathers, rain or shine. We would like to thank all of our volunteers for all of their hard work and look forward to the continuation of their dedicated work next season.

Jordan Bleach

FoPH Work Party Leader