



**Wilder
Horsham
District**

Annual Report 2024-25

Delivering a
Nature Recovery Network
for Horsham District

A partnership between:



**Horsham
District
Council**



Sussex
Wildlife Trust

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Introduction



Wilder Horsham District (WHD) is a partnership between Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Horsham District Council (HDC), working to deliver the Horsham District Nature Recovery Network (HDNRN).

WHD commenced in September 2020 and was initially funded for five years. Following a review, and a report produced by engagement consultants, Wayforward, HDC agreed to extend the project for a further two-and-a-half years until the end of March 2028.

The project works closely with local communities and landowners to help reverse the decline in species and habitats and enrich the natural environment for all residents and visitors. This report summarises WHD's achievements for the financial year dated 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025.

Project team

After a few months without a Project Support Officer, we were delighted to welcome Louisa Jones to the team on 1st October 2024. She joined us from the heritage sector, bringing considerable experience in community engagement and volunteer co-ordination, and a love for spreadsheets as well as wildlife.



2024/25 in figures

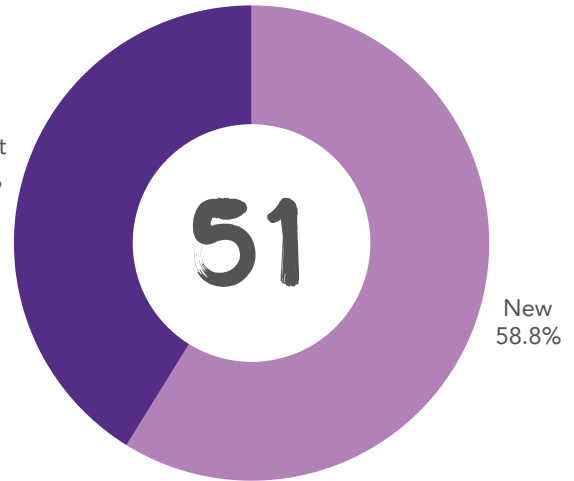
Landowner engagement



890
hectares

Area influenced

Repeat
41.2%



Land managers advised

Horsham District Council sites visited

Warnham Nature Reserve **Henfield Common**
Bramber Brooks Nature Reserve

Collaborations

Knepp Wildland Foundation
National Trust
Natural England
Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust
RSPB
South Downs National Park Authority
Sussex Local Nature Partnership
Upper Adur Farm Cluster
Western Sussex Rivers Trust
Woodland Trust

Partnerships

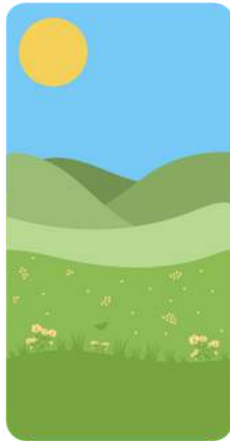
Adur River Recovery Project
Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Lost Woods of the Low Weald
Operation Turtle Dove
Scrubland Superheroes
Weald to Waves

Natural succession

62

hectares

assigned to
naturalistic
grazing



11

hectares

assigned to
regeneration

440



Trees planted

157



Orchard trees planted

13



Sites cleared of invasive species

Cotoneaster
Floating Pennywort
Himalayan Balsam
Holm Oak

Rhododendron
Sycamore
Turkey Oak

Natural succession is the process of change in the structure and species composition of habitats over time. An example is a meadow turning into scrub and then woodland. This creates opportunities for many different species, especially when there is a battle between vegetation trying to grow versus grazing and browsing animals suppressing it.

Wetland habitat improvement



2

Ponds & scrapes built

12



Leaky dams built

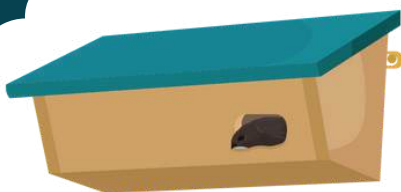
Nature Recovery Award

Up to £5,000 per applicant for practical works to improve natural habitats



Homes for nature

223



Bird boxes

House Martin, Kestrel, Owl, Swallow and Swift



27

Bug hotels

Community links



2 Parish councils



5 Community groups

Work parties



£ 26,540

In-kind volunteer contribution

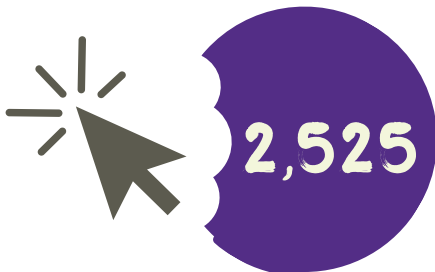
1,304

Volunteer hours contributed

30

Work parties

Communications



Website views



New social media followers

Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn



Magazine articles

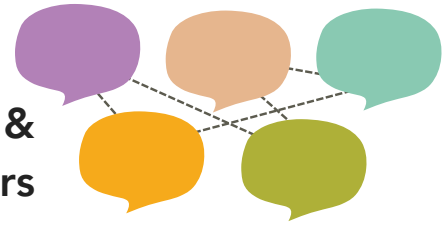
At Horsham District Council...



2 Council member briefings

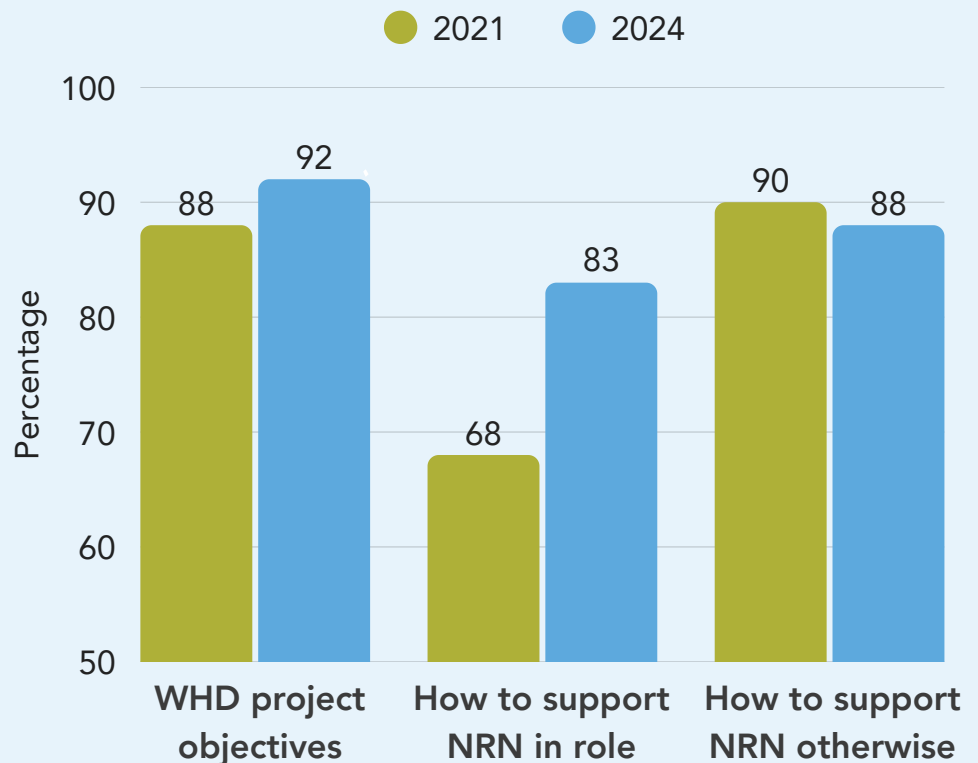


5 hours' training for staff & Council members



Percentage of staff who have **at least limited understanding** of the Horsham Nature Recovery Network

Horsham District Council Staff Survey, 2021 & 2024



12

hectares

Covered by Wildways project on District land in Horsham town and other villages

26,398

volunteer hours

Contributed on the HDC estate including by Horsham Green Gym, Friends of Horsham Park, Friends of Warnham Nature Reserve & Gatwick Greenspace Partnership



6

Collaborations between WHD & HDC Parks & Countryside teams



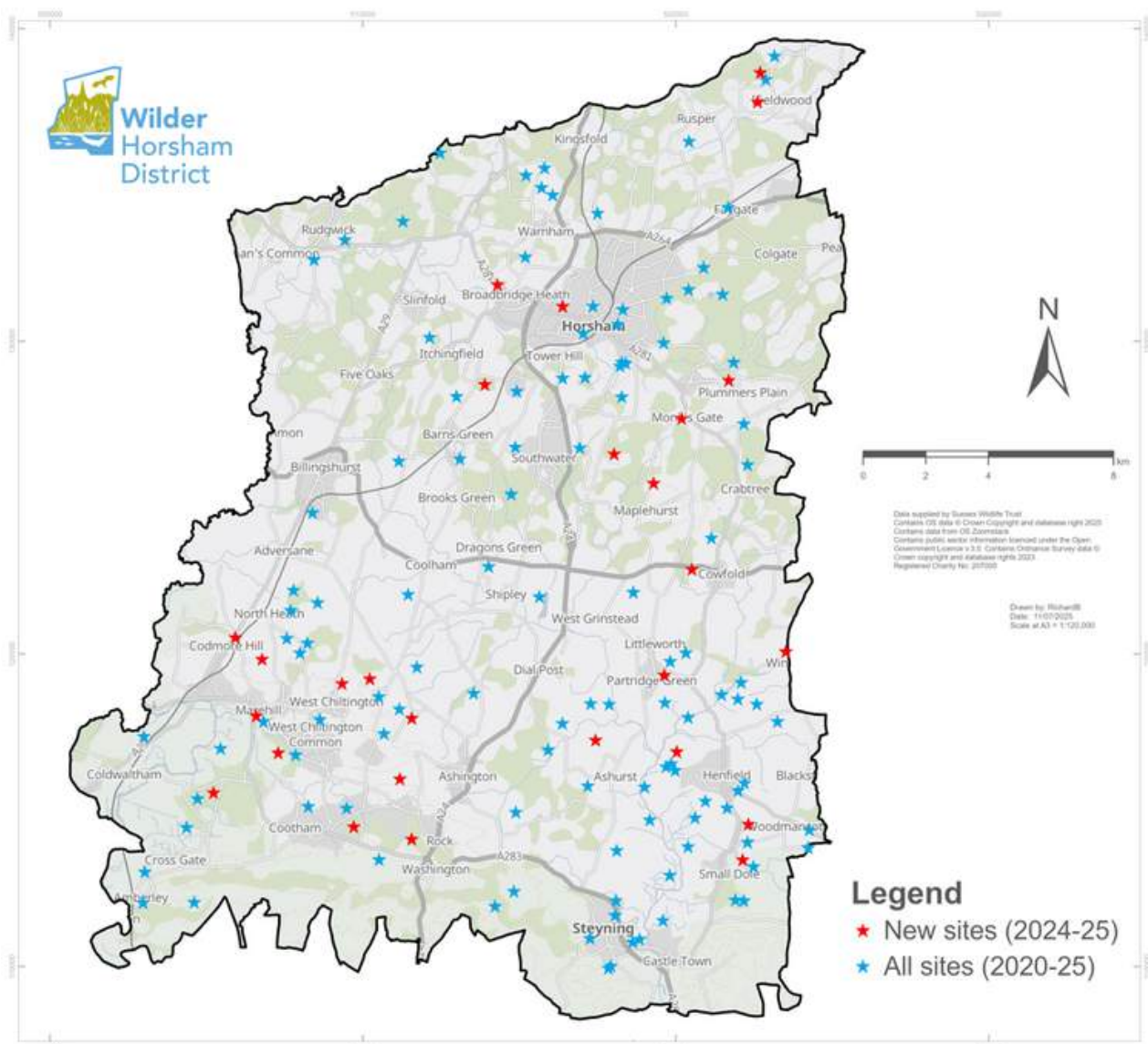
2

Actions completed from Greenspaces Strategy

2024/25 in detail

Landscape Resilience

As in previous years, we have been delighted by the level of support and interest in the project from land managers and owners of all types and sizes of landholdings. Land of any size can be critical when it comes to landscape connectivity and none of this change can be achieved without the goodwill and effort of land managers.



Horsham District landholdings engaged for the first time this year, and over the duration of the project.

Wet habitat creation

Following on from the success of the wet habitat creation at Mayes Park last year, we were keen to support more large-scale wetland projects in the District. Water is critical for wildlife and Natural Flood Management (NFM) brings benefits for both nature and people.



An opportunity arose through our work with landowner, Ben Leathers, and Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust (OART) at Homelands Farm Stables near Partridge Green.

*Left: Homelands Farm Stables after WHD-funded scrape enhancement works.
(Photo: OART)*

Ben has devoted a portion of his land to creating several substantial scrapes, designed by OART, and we were pleased to be able to contribute a significant amount of funding (£15,000) to help make this a reality. Together with funding from the Adur Adaptation Project, this enabled diggers to be onsite at the end of Summer 2024 to enhance what was already there, creating a large wetland.



We frequently conduct joint site visits with land advisors from other organisations and the resultant discussions are very productive. For example, we are working with Natural England (NE) and OART to develop a similar rewetting project at Little Thakeham Farm, near Ashington. This site is located along the Storrington-to-Pulborough corridor, within which the project is helping to develop landscape connectivity.



Click below to read more about WHD's water-based interventions.

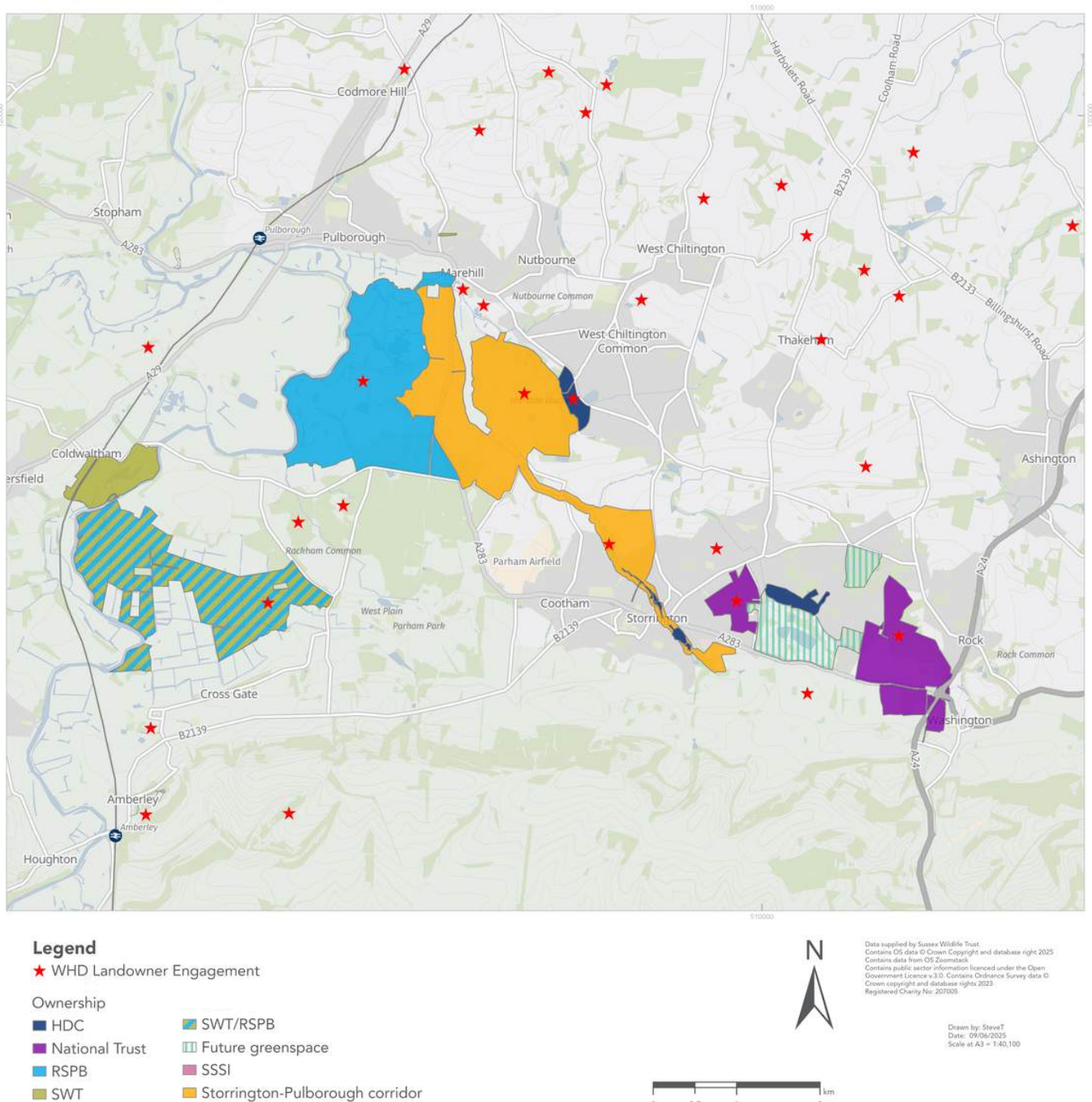


Left: Senior Land Advisor, Rich Black, discussing habitat improvement at Little Thakeham Farm with Tom Francis (NE) and Tara Dawson (OART).

Geographical focus areas

Storrington to Pulborough

We are continuing to work with wildlife-friendly landowners to connect the dots between land owned by HDC, SWT and other organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and National Trust (NT), with the aim of building a resilient wildlife corridor through this area.



*Landholdings building nature connectivity in the Pulborough and Storrington corridor.
 Rough locations of private landholdings working with WHD are indicated by stars.*

This year, WHD was approached to provide an experienced sounding board for ideas and theories in transforming Nyetimber's newly proposed rewilding project at Danhill, near Thakeham. They are using animals, in this case cattle and pigs, to mimic the natural processes of grazing and succession on site.



Left: Pigs serving as a proxy for Wild Boar, once a keystone species in the English landscape. Right: A historic farmland pond with fallen timber at Danhill, Nyetimber.

We have developed a relationship with the NT to provide funding and volunteer time on two NT properties forming vital links in the HDNRN. At Sullington Warren, we helped create habitat for the Sussex Tiger — not a local version of the beast of Bodmin but rather a large yellow-and-black striped Crane fly that was discovered at Sullington Warren, hence its scientific name of *Nephrotoma sullingtoniensis*, and still only known from three sites, all of which are in Sussex.



*Left: At Sullington Warren with NT Lead Ranger, Lee Walther (far right).
Right: The Sussex Tiger crane fly (Photo: anatoltolana (CC-BY-NC)).*

Warnham to St Leonard's Forest

Another site with heathland potential, as might be guessed from the name, is Mannings Heath Golf Club, which is a key site in our northern focus area running from Warnham, through Horsham town to St Leonard's Forest.



At Mannings Heath Golf Club, wet woodlands and former heathland surround the fairways.



"Loving the anthills at Mannings Heath Golf Club!"

The Golf Club already has some good habitats, including an unimproved meadow full of anthills, but there is a lot of potential for more and, especially, for joining them up. The club has big ambitions to create space for wildlife alongside the golf business and we have been assisting them with the design.



Left: Meeting the Golf Club's Managing Director, Barry Anderson (left), Head Greens Keeper, Giulio Vezza (right) and Fiona Williams from Nuthurst Parish Carbon Busters (second left) over maps. Right: Wet woodland in Winter.

Horsham town has also been a focus for HDC's contribution to the project, including that of its Parks & Countryside team.

River Adur

Rivers make natural corridors for wildlife, and we have been involved in the initial two-year phase of the Adur River Recovery Project (ARRP). This is one of the Government's Landscape Recovery Trials. The project has been led by Weald to Waves and ARRP Project Officer Mel Sanders, but WHD has assisted OART with visits to the various landowners and writing site reports.



Project Officer, Mel Sanders (centre right), with landowners involved in ARRP.



There are 27 landholdings signed up to the project, including Sussex Wildlife Trust's Woods Mill Nature Reserve and Horsham District Council's Bramber Brooks Nature Reserve. A proposal detailing the project's intentions to reconnect the river with its floodplain will be submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in June 2025.

Monitoring forms an essential component of the ARRP, with the aim of providing a baseline against which to measure future interventions. At Woods Mill we hosted a workshop to train volunteers in Riverfly monitoring, a key indicator of the health of a river, and helped to select sites where the monitoring could begin.

Right: Indoor and outdoor components of the Riverfly monitoring workshop.



Partnership working

Partnerships are very important for the success of the WHD project. While the relationship between SWT and HDC is critical, so is working with other organisations.



This year, we have continued to work with the Scrubland Superheroes strand of the Weald to Waves partnership, coordinated by Knepp Wildland Foundation, using our work parties to help deliver habitat improvements benefiting both projects. HDC and SWT are both Weald to Waves partners, as are many of the landowners we work with.

Left: Watch our volunteers hard at work planting up deer-proof exclosures with the Scrubland Superheroes.

One of these landowners is the Wiston Estate, where we are helping new Estate Ecologist, Penny Green, to improve habitats such as rare chalk streams and chalk grassland, which are of global importance.

We led two conservation work parties on the South Downs at Washington Pits, creating space for rare plants. Chalk grassland can have up to 45 species of flowering plants in a single square metre, the sort of diversity more usually associated with tropical rainforest. Our Land Advisor, Steve Tillman, having spent 25 years looking after chalk downland sites for SWT, was in his element.



Top: Steve getting stuck in burning scrub cleared from the chalk downland.

Bottom: Rich planning a work party with ecologist, Penny Green, at Washington Pits.

Volunteering

It has been another busy season for work parties. As always, we would like to give a huge vote of thanks to all our volunteers. They give an enormous amount of support, time and passion to the project and allow us to exponentially increase our conservation impact.

Sometimes this has been conservation by subtraction, as we have tackled invasive species such as *Rhododendron ponticum* and Himalayan Balsam, both of which can swamp native habitats and turn large areas into ecological deserts with little value for British fauna.

Some of our rarest habitats need work to be maintained. The owners of Rackham Cottages, near Pulborough, are committed to restoring part of their land back to heathland. They had previously received a Nature Recovery Award grant for fencing to exclude deer. This intervention was so successful that this year we brought in the WHD volunteer workforce to remove birch and pine saplings, which also interfere with heathland regeneration.



Right, top to bottom: Debbie wades into a stand of Himalayan Balsam; Mick and Claire tackle some chunky Rhododendron; volunteers use tree poppers to control regenerating birch.

Left: All that work is worth it: a thriving heathland at Rackham Cottages.



Influence and outreach



Rich and Steve joined an LNRS meeting in Shoreham-by-Sea in September.

WHD has been working on Nature Recovery Networks since the start, and has been asked by Sussex Local Nature Partnership to contribute to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) process, alongside other members of the local conservation community.

In October, we supported an event for farmers, attended by members of the Upper Adur and Arun to Adur Farmers Groups, which explained the needs of farmland birds and associated habitats. It included a talk by the RSPB Turtle Dove Advisor, Shivani Thevar.



Rich loves talking about farmland birds...

Following the talks, we were hosted by John Ford at Prior's Byne Farm for a walk round the fields and hedgerows. His Turtle Doves had already left for the long migration back to Africa but we were able to look at the habitats that helped them thrive over the Spring and Summer.



After suffering a catastrophic decline, conservation work has led to a 40% increase in numbers of Turtle Dove in Western Europe since 2021. Sussex, and indeed Horsham District, remains one of the few places in England where you can still hear the distinctive purring of the males, making it one of the potential launch points for the bird's UK recovery.

...But looking at successful habitats is even better.

Nature Recovery Award

The Nature Recovery Award is our grant fund that supports landowners and community groups to implement practical schemes that improve and connect habitats for wildlife in the Horsham District. Funding of up to £5,000 is available per project, helping to ensure that citizen-led nature recovery initiatives are not limited by lack of access to funds.

Across the four rounds run this financial year, we are thrilled to have agreed funding for eleven successful applicants for a total value of £39,797. As detailed in the table below, the project ideas vary greatly in scale, location with the District and habitat & species impact, but all contribute towards the creation of the HDNRN.



Click below for our blog explaining the Nature Recovery Award application process.



Working together to help nature thrive



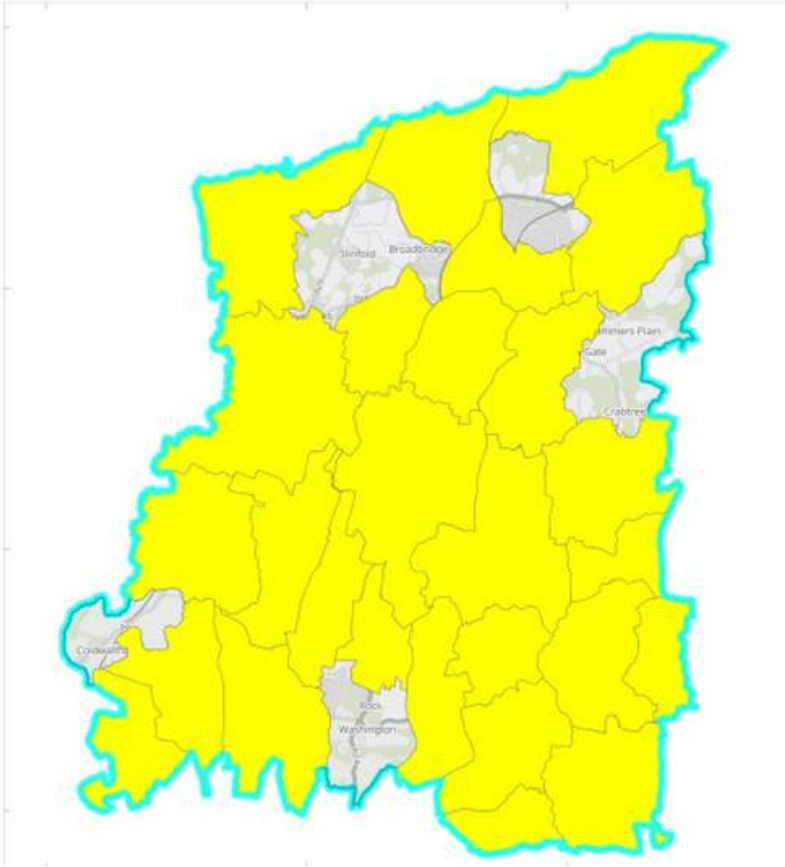
Property name	Parish	Project description	Funding approved
Well Cottage	Shermanbury	Pond restoration and installation. Purchase of wet-loving plants and wildflower seed.	£5,000
Durfold Wood	Warnham	Fencing of woodland to allow cattle grazing and development of woodland pasture.	£4,989
The Pools	Henfield	Creation of scrapes, meanders and wildflower meadow.	£4,600
Badger's Hollow	Pulborough	Creation of five scrapes.	£4,435
Advent Wood	Rusper	Removal of conifer plantation, re-establishment of woodland pasture.	£4,182
Dyke Farm	Pulborough	Purchase and installation of Kingfisher, House Martin and Tawny Owl nesting boxes.	£4,030
Warren Hill (National Trust)	Storrington	Creation of a mosaic of habitats including a native orchard, scrub and hedgerow.	£3,837
Amberley Museum	Amberley	Purchase of tools for invasive species and general habitat management.	£3,319
Rackham Cottages	Pulborough	Removal of conifers; site restoration with native broadleaf trees and shrubs.	£3,000
Raylands Country Park	Southwater	Purchase of nest boxes and wildflower seed mixes.	£2,055
1 st St Leonard's Scouts	Colgate	Purchase of materials to build bug boxes.	£350

Community Resilience

Horsham District is fortunate to have a very active set of community groups working for wildlife and nature's recovery. As a project, we look to support each individual group in the way(s) that best suits their needs. This has included site visits, project and site management advice, funding through our Nature Recovery Award, giving talks on the project at events, sharing resources and signposting to key contacts.

Parish Councils

One of WHD's project objectives is to work with Parish Councils. To date we have engaged with 29 (83% of those in the District). This year we have helped West Grinstead Parish Council to enhance the King George V Playing Fields, including their pond, and advised Colgate Parish Council on how they could contribute to the HDNRN.



Map of Parish Councils engaged by WHD over the project's lifetime (shown in yellow).

Community groups

We have continued our support of Swifts across the District, working with local expert, Paul Stevens, to provide nest boxes in Shipley village and at West Sussex Golf Club.



Swifts swirl around Shipley Church; the rest of us have to look up but Paul is tall enough to look down.

We've also engaged with Wild About Warnham, whose Pollinator Corridor project forms a key part of the HDNRN around Horsham Town. In combination with Sussex Butterfly Conservation, we also ran a day at Woods Mill to train volunteers in identifying butterflies and conducting butterfly transects.



Above: Steve with David Bridges of Wild About Warnham. Below: Steve sets the scene at butterfly transect training.

WHD aims to leave a legacy so that our work will be continued long after the end of the project. Community groups can play a crucial role in this by providing local support and the benefit of experience gained while working with WHD. For example, we are supporting Nuthurst Parish Carbon Busters, a local environmental group, to develop relations with Mannings Heath Golf Club and potentially help take forward its biodiversity vision.

Young people

We are very aware of the importance of engaging young people in nature conservation and in this case we are frequently pushing at an open door. This year, we have worked with the SWT Communities Team to run a work party at Woods Mill for students from Worthing High School.

We have also supported the SWT Communities Team with running practical tasks, involving coppicing, tree planting and leaky dam building for the Fledgling Rangers (teenagers from across Sussex who are working towards their Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award).



wilderhorshamdistrict 🌟 This is #BritishScienceWeek with a TWIST! 🦋

We've been outdoors revitalising woodland with young people taking their @DofEUK Bronze Award. The smiles on these girls' face after their first session of serious coppicing was just joyous. 🦋

We learnt about:

- Life cycles of trees, birds and mammals
 - Hydrology (how water flows through a landscape)
 - Levers, pivots and weights (through use of hand tools)
- Bring on April, when we'll use this coppiced material to dam a stream at the work site!

@SussexWildlifeTrust @HorshamDC @KneppWildlandFdn
@WealdToWaves #OutdoorLearning #LearningThroughDoing
#WildLearning

15 w



dofeuk 🌟 Amazing! ❤️

14 w Reply

Watch Fledgling Rangers tackle a coppice stool, guided by SWT Communities staff member, Barry Wildish.

At Horsham District Council

HDC has worked with volunteers via Gatwick Greenspace Partnership to create leaky dams at Owlbeech and Leechpool Woods. At St Leonards Forest, this collaboration created leaky dams and restored areas of heathland.

HDC (and often, WHD) staff attend quarterly meetings with Horsham Green Spaces, which involves numerous local groups with an interest in nature recovery. The Council also works with the "friends of" groups associated with its countryside sites at Chesworth Farm and Warnham Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

Organisational Resilience

Collaborations with the WHD team

This year, we've collaborated with HDC's Parks & Countryside (P&C) team on two joint work parties with WHD volunteers. One was at newly purchased Bramber Brooks and the other at Henfield Common. The latter involved rewetting parts of the reedbed and woodland through the creation of leaky dams.



The volunteers build leaky dams while staff pose for a picture at Henfield Common.

Separately, our two Land Advisors held a workshop with the wider P&C team at Southwater Country Park to explain the WHD project and to carry out an exercise on how its principles could be incorporated into their various roles.

Ash die-back



HDC is continuing to remove diseased trees on its land. The presence of bats is always considered prior to commencing any work. Tree works and felling allows the replanting with climate-resilient trees, improves the age diversity of the woodland stand and opens the canopy, which allows for natural regeneration.

Woodland regeneration is an example of natural succession, one of the natural processes the WHD project is seeking to encourage.

HDC Greenspaces Strategy

Two actions have been completed: reviews of the HDC's use of both peat and pesticides in its operations. Peat is only used where plants are supplied by an external organisation, and this is gradually being phased out. Pesticide use is minimal and has been halved over the last five years. It is only used where absolutely necessary.



Brimstone butterfly

Warnham Local Nature Reserve

It was a busy winter at Warnham LNR, as work continued to improve the woodland rides for butterflies and other invertebrates. This included widening to allow better connectivity, as well as planting of Dog Violet plugs and Alder Buckthorn trees as food plants for Brimstone and Silver-washed Fritillary butterflies. The rides form part of the pollinator highway from Warnham village.

Wildways Project

In 2024, HDC amended the mowing regime in selected areas at 21 sites across Horsham town, in order to encourage biodiversity. Instead of cutting the grass regularly, it was left to grow throughout the summer and then cut-and-collected in late August/early September with the arisings (grass clippings) being removed and composted. Overall, the first year of the trial was a success, with some residents asking for new Wildways zones to be created in their local area.



Species highlights resulting from HDC's amended mowing regime (L-R): Rough Chervil; Six-Spotted Burnet moth on Pyramidal Orchid (credit: Barry Yates); Fleabane (credit: Roger Wilmshurst).

Acknowledgements



Richard Black (Senior Land Advisor)

Steve Tillman (Land Advisor)

Louisa Jones (Project Support Officer, current)

Chloe Harrison (Project Support Officer, previously)



www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/get-involved/community-projects/wilder-horsham



wilderhorshamdistrict@sussexwt.org.uk

With thanks to our counterparts at Horsham District Council:

Helen Peacock (Head of Sustainability and Green Spaces)

Jacob Everitt (Ecology and Countryside Manager)

Pete Crawford (Parks and Countryside Manager)



www.horsham.gov.uk/climate-and-environment/climate-action-across-the-district/wilder-horsham-district

