

ScrubsWatch: Interim Report

September 2023



Adult male Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*)

Author

Kate McVay MSc



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SUMMARY

A series of ecological surveys are currently being undertaken in 2023 by Kate McVay supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Idverde UK colleagues and members of public where appropriate. The surveys follow standard methodology outlined in previously commissioned reports from the London Wildlife Trust (2016 to 2018) to allow for comparison of results. This report summarises the findings of the surveys completed thus far as well as verified species record submissions from site users.

A more detailed report will be generated at the end of the year to provide additional information such as methodology, limitations, and assessment of survey findings.

EXTENDED PHASE 1 HABITAT SURVEY

An Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey of the Scrubs was conducted over two days in June and July. The survey followed standard methodology, using the UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) system to produce a map with relevant habitat codes, which will be included in the final report.

General description

Wormwood Scrubs is the largest open space in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (LBHF) at 76.8 ha. The Site is situated in the northern part of the borough (postcode W12) nearby White City, East Acton and Kensal Green. A significant portion of the site is designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) - Borough Grade I. Most woodland habitat on Site is designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

Habitats identified on site are described below using UKHab definitions and habitat codes:

Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (w1f)

Most of the woodland habitat exists around the perimeter of the Site, with an additional copse in the centre referred to as the Central Copse.

Woodland habitat is largely even aged with dense canopy layers due to close planting in the 1980s. The edge of woodland habitat is dense scrub comprised of Cherry *Prunus sp.*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*. Structural diversity is poor with limited understory and field layer for the vast majority of woodland. Dominant canopy species include Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Oak *Quercus sp.*, Poplar *Populus sp.*, Willow *Salix sp.* and London Plane *Platanus hispanica* with less abundant Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, Lime *Tilia sp.*, Elm *Ulmus sp.*, Birch *Betula sp.* and Maple *Acer sp.* Common understory species include Hawthorn, Field Maple *Acer campestre*, Cherry and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*.

Modified grassland (g4)

Modified, previously known as amenity, grassland occupies the eastern half of the Site, which is regularly mown to maintain a short sward for sport pitches. The grassland is dominated by Perennial Rye-Grass *Lolium perenne* and White Clover *Trifolium repens*, with occasional Daisy *Bellis perennis*, Greater Plantain *Plantago major* and Dandelion *Taraxacum sp.*

Neutral grassland (g3c)

Neutral grassland, previously described as semi-improved neutral grassland, has been allowed to develop on Site in recent years due to a relaxed mowing regime. The largest expanse of this habitat occupies the 'wildlife meadow' area on the western half of the Site.

The 'meadow area' grassland is rough and tussocky with a range of common grass species including Cock's-Foot *Dactylis glomerata*, Meadow Foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, False-Oat Grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, Timothy *Phleum pratense*, Wall Barley *Hordeum murinum*, Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* and Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera*. Frequently observed wildflower species include Hogweed *Heracleum sphodylium*, Creeping Thistle *Cirsium arvense*, Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum* and Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*. More localised species include Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*, Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Field Bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis*, Autumn Hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis*, Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Mugwort *Artemisia vulgaris*, Michaelmas-daisy *Aster amellus* and Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*.

Additional neutral grassland habitat exists around the edges of sports pitches and woodland. These areas contain a similar mix of grass species listed above and are interspersed with common wildflower species such as White Clover, Dandelion, Autumn Hawkbit, Greater Plantain, Knotgrass *Polygonum aviculare* and Pineapple Mayweed *Matricaria discoidea*.

Dense scrub (h3)

A significant portion of the 'meadow area' in the western half of the site is occupied by a mixture of Bramble, Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Dog Rose and Cherry ranging from dense to scattered. Dense scrub habitat provides excellent nesting opportunities for breeding bird species, provides a vital winter food source and acts as overwintering habitat for a wide range of species.

Hedgerow (h2a)

The eastern and southern edge of the 'meadow area' are bordered by hedgerows planted around 15 years ago primarily comprised of the scrub species mentioned above. Most species within the hedgerow are berry-bearing and provide vital overwintering food for birds and mammals. Hedgerow habitat also provides protection, cover and corridors for wildlife.

The eastern section is marginally older and more diverse than the southern section with occasional English Oak and Guelder Rose *Viburnum opulus* present. Hedgelaying was completed for the eastern section in winter 2021 – 2022 and approximately half of the southern section during winter 2022 – 2023.

Developed land (u1b)

This habitat classification refers to developments, such as Linford Christie Stadium, and areas of hardstanding, which includes paths around the southern boundary of the Site. There is also an area of disused tarmac in the northwest corner, which has become colonised by vegetation. This area likely provides good basking opportunities for reptiles, which have been recorded in the surrounding area.

BIRDS

Winter Bird Surveys

Two winter bird surveys were conducted in February and March along a predefined transect route covering the entire site (Map 1).

Map 1. Transect route followed for bird surveys.



Each survey lasted approximately 90-minutes with a combined 23 species observed:

- Black Headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
- Blackbird *Turdus merula*
- Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*
- Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*
- Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

- Dunnock *Prunella modularis*
- Feral Pigeon *Columba livia domestica*
- Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
- Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
- Great Tit *Parus major*
- Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*
- Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*
- House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
- Long Tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*
- Magpie *Pica pica*
- Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
- Redwing *Turdus iliacus*
- Ring Necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*
- Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
- Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
- Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
- Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*
- Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Additional Winter Bird Surveys are scheduled for December 2023.

Parakeet roost count

To monitor the Ring Necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* roost in the Scrubs Lane wood, a roost count was carried out in February. Parakeets depart from the roost site at dawn and fly off in groups both east and west. Two observers stood east and west of the roost site and estimated numbers of parakeets departing, with the total number summed after all parakeets had left the roost site. A total of **3990** parakeets were estimated to be inhabiting the Scrubs Lane roost site.

An additional roost emergence count is planned for October 2023.

Breeding Bird Surveys

Three breeding bird surveys were conducted in April, May and June following the same transect route as the winter bird surveys. The surveys aimed to determine breeding status (possible, probable or confirmed) of all species heard or observed. Each category of breeding status was determined using the criteria below:

Confirmed breeding	Probable breeding	Possible breeding
Nest observed with at least 1 adult present or eggs or nestlings Adults observed carrying nesting material Adults observed carrying food Nestlings heard when adult approached Presence of juvenile birds	Male birds singing on at least 3 visits Adults showing display activity Adults showing territorial behaviours Adults observed mating	Male birds singing on less than 3 visits Pair of birds observed in suitable habitat

A total of 26 species were observed displaying one or more breeding behaviours, with 16 confirmed breeding, 5 probably breeding and 5 possibly breeding on site:

- **Confirmed Breeding**
 - Blackbird *Turdus merula*
 - Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
 - Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*
 - Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*
 - Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*
 - Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*
 - Great Tit *Parus major*
 - Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*
 - Long Tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*
 - Magpie *Pica pica*
 - Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
 - Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
 - Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
 - Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*
 - Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*
 - Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
- **Probable breeding**
 - Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
 - Dunnock *Prunella modularis*
 - House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
 - Linnet *Linaria cannabina*
 - Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
- **Possible breeding**
 - Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
 - Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*
 - Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
 - Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*
 - Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
 - Ring Necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

Local birder submissions and incidental records

A group of dedicated and knowledgeable bird watchers frequent the Scrubs and document notable species and where they spot them within the 'ScrubHub' WhatsApp group. This information is verified and added to a master spreadsheet containing all species records on site. Using a combination of formal survey data, incidental sightings and submissions from the local birding community, a total of **59** species have been documented on or over the Scrubs in 2023 so far. The list below is colour coded to reflect the current listing of each species according to the latest UK Birds of Conservation Concern report (**Green = no concern**, **Amber = moderate concern**, **Red = highest concern**, * = introduced):

1. **Black Headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
2. **Blackbird** *Turdus merula*
3. **Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*
4. **Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus*
5. **Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*
6. **Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis* *
7. **Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone*
8. **Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*
9. **Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*
10. **Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*
11. **Dunnock** *Prunella modularis*
12. **Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia domestica*
13. **Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin*
14. **Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*
15. **Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major*
16. **Great Tit** *Parus major*

17. Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*
18. Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*
19. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
20. Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
21. Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*
22. House Martin *Delichon urbicum*
23. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
24. Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
25. Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
26. Lesser Black Backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
27. Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*
28. Linnet *Linaria cannabina*
29. Long Tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*
30. Magpie *Pica pica*
31. Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
32. Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*
33. Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*
34. Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*
35. Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*
36. Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*
37. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
38. Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
39. Red Kite *Milvus milvus*
40. Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

- 41. Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*
- 42. Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*
- 43. Ring Necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* *
- 44. Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
- 45. Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*
- 46. Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*
- 47. Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
- 48. Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*
- 49. Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
- 50. Stock Dove *Columba oenas*
- 51. Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*
- 52. Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
- 53. Swift *Apus apus*
- 54. Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*
- 55. Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*
- 56. Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*
- 57. Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*
- 58. Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*
- 59. Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

BATS

Three dusk transect surveys took place from July to September, with a final survey planned for October. Members of the public were invited to participate using Magenta 4 bat detectors provided by *idverde* UK and LBHF's Ecology department. An Echometer Touch 2 was also utilised to record calls and sonograms. To date, 53 individuals have participated in survey efforts.

Each survey followed a predefined transect route, lasting approximately 2-hours. A total of 3 bat species were recorded: **Common Pipistrelle** *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, **Soprano Pipistrelle** *Pipistrellus pygmaeus* and **Noctule** *Nyctalus noctula*.

In addition to dusk transect surveys, an AudioMoth, a type of passive acoustic recorder, was placed in the northeast corner of the Site as part of Bat Conservation Trust's British Bat Survey (BBatS) initiative. The device was recently returned to Bat Conservation Trust, and the results are currently being analysed.

REPTILES

A total of 7 reptile surveys were undertaken from April through September. Surveys followed a set transect route with 22 roofing felts, which act as reptile refugia and basking areas, across the site.

Despite reports of Slow Worm *Anguis fragilis* in the northwest corner of the Site, which was inaccessible at the time of surveys, the only species recorded was the **Common Lizard** *Zootoca vivipara*.

In total, 38 species records were logged across the Site on formal surveys, with an additional 8 noted during other surveys and submitted by members of the public.

HEDGEHOGS

A camera trap survey was conducted over 2 weeks in April to assess the Site for Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* occupancy. In total, 24 camera traps were provided by the London HogWatch team from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and deployed by a group of 16 volunteers across the Site. Images from the camera traps are still being analysed by London HogWatch, with a complete report set to be delivered at the end of the year. The report will include information on all species detected on camera traps thanks to additional funding secured by the LBHF Ecology team.

BUTTERFLIES

Butterfly surveys followed a set transect route (Map 2) every Friday from the first week of April to the end of September. Members of the public were invited to participate in surveys, with a total of 43 individuals participating throughout the season.

Map 2. Butterfly survey transect route.



We recorded a total of **23** species along the transect this year, an increase of 3 species from the 2022 survey season. The table below shows the species and number of encounters during 2023 surveys:

Common name	Scientific name	# of records
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	11
Brown hairstreak	<i>Thecla betulae</i>	1
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	1
Common blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	5
Essex skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineola</i>	359
Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	119
Green-veined white	<i>Pieris napi</i>	7
Holly blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	36
Large skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>	15
Large white	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	50
Marbled white	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>	34
Meadow brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	211
Orange tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	2
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>	6
Purple hairstreak	<i>Favonius quercus</i>	4
Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	13
Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	18
Small copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	3
Small heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	82
Small skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>	334
Small tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	2
Small white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	70
Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	80