

Barnes Horticultural and Allotment Society Biodiversity report 2025

Rachel Walker, Biodiversity Officer | June 2025

It's been a busy first year as we work towards some of the aims of our biodiversity action plan, which has included carrying out surveys of priority species and building on our relationships with partners.

1. **Mapping.** Over the two years I have been working towards mapping all the plots across our five allotment sites. This has been a big project and firstly I want to thank all the site reps and especially Helen Lawrence who spent several hours walking the sites with me to do this. These maps are now available for the committee to use, Jo Rodgers our allotment officer at Richmond Council and partner organisations we work with so that it's much easier to carry out maintenance repairs and inspections. I've also used it as an opportunity to record environmental data such as sites that flood and where ponds are located.
2. **Reptile survey.** In Spring last year, I completed a reptile survey where 19 survey mats were put out across plots at our five allotment sites. Thanks to plot holders recording sightings and a monthly check I did under the mats we recorded Slow Worms at one plot at The Triangle, and 9 plots across Hertford and Priory. This included juveniles, which shows they are breeding and is excellent news. A couple of Grass Snakes have also been observed at Priory and The Triangle. These records have been submitted to Record Pool, which is a national database for amphibian and reptile records, and the information is used for local and national conservation projects.
3. **Amphibian and pond survey.** In spring this year, I was able to survey around 30 ponds across our allotment sites thanks to permission from plot holders. The results showed that we have good populations of Smooth Newts and Common Frogs, which are both breeding on Hertford and Priory. Unfortunately, I didn't see any Common Toads, so if anyone does see them, please do take a photo and let me know. The condition of some of our ponds could be improved for biodiversity, especially with native plants, oxygenating weed and access ramps. The committee agreed at our last meeting to funds that I can spend on these improvements and so I'll be contacting plot holders over the next few weeks about individual plans to improve their pond for amphibians and freshwater invertebrates. I'm also pleased to say that over the last year, at least six new ponds have been created – including a large pond suitable for Common Toads to breed in at the Community Garden.
4. **Resources.** Following on from the AGM last year I have added to resources we have online a list of native plants which are good for pollinators, in addition to how to deal with plot waste.
5. **Richmond Biodiversity Partnership.** Last year I was elected as a deputy for BRAG, which is the Borough of Richmond Allotment Group. As part of my role, I also attend quarterly Richmond Biodiversity Partnership meetings with friends of groups and conservation charities across the Borough. This aim of this is to increase the profile of allotments and work towards an allotment's habitat action plan where the value of biodiversity at allotments is recognised in the Borough.
6. **Woody waste.** I'm pleased to report that after some difficulties we've had with getting woody waste removed, we now have an arrangement with the conservation team at the Barnes Common charity where we can have our woody waste chipped on site a few times a year. This reduces the build-up of waste between collections, the environmental impact of taking material off site and allows us to generate our own chip material. In addition to this we have now cordoned off the back of the log bay as it's an important habitat for the Lesser Stag Beetle.

7. **UKBMS butterfly transect.** This year I have started what we hope will be an annual butterfly transect with the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme and Barnes Common charity, which runs through Priory and Hertford allotment sites and Palewell Common. This is carried out from April to September each week and so far, we have recorded 15 different butterfly species. It is one of the first butterfly transects nationally to include an allotment. The survey is important because butterflies are environmental indicators, reflecting changes in climate, habitat and biodiversity.

Looking forwards over the next year:

- A. **Species list.** We are now collaborating with the conservation team at Barnes Common charity to create a species list for the allotment sites, and the data will be sent to GIGL, which is Greenspace Information for Greater London. This organisation stores all the biodiversity record data for London's green spaces. I will be asking plot holders to help contribute to this list with a shared iNaturalist account where we can all record any species we find on our plot.
- B. **Beverley Brook.** The conservation team at Barnes Common charity have received a small grant to do some additional work on Beverley Brook to restore in channel flow and create new habitats for freshwater biodiversity. I'll be sending out a newsletter with advanced notice on this to plot holders soon. I've also been doing more testing in the Brook for water quality and have written a report that has been sent to our local Councillors as we look for help in how we can tackle the high levels of raw sewage (nitrates) entering the Brook.

I would be grateful for your help in managing the issue of green waste being put down the banks along Hertford and Priory at the back of plots. We are thankful to all the plot holders who over the last 18 months have moved their compost bins, dismantled old sheds and are dealing with their waste to protect the river from phosphates that leach from rotting vegetation. But this is still a problem at some plots, so please do talk to your neighbours about not putting anything down the banks or in the 1m area at the top of the bank. This is something that the Council have asked us to manage.

- C. **Community Bluescapes funding.** With the help of fellow plot holder Tanja James, we have applied for a grant from the Community Bluescapes flood and climate resilience fund to pay for the materials and installation of new water butts for plot holders. As this spring has shown, conserving water in any way we can really help to minimise our use of main waters during drought periods. We are currently waiting on the outcome of this but if we are successful, we will be looking for plot holders interested.

Finally, I would like to thank you for all your enthusiasm and support with these projects in helping to raise the profile of how important allotments are for biodiversity in our urban areas.