



BLACKNEST FIELDS



2025 ANNUAL REPORT





# Thanks and acknowledgements



Binsted Parish Council, alongside the trustees of the Holt Pound Oval Charitable Trust that owns the site, is indebted to many organisations and individuals for their amazing support, without which this year's progress at Blacknest Fields would have been impossible. Particular thanks to:

## **Local wildlife volunteers:**

- ★ Chris Piper, Daniel Banks and Cathy Wilson for organising July's visits by The Alton Natural History Society;
- ★ Keith and Carol Shepherd, for gifting black poplars and leading honeysuckle planting activities;
- ★ David Ibbotson, for setting up the rainwater collection system (generously donated by Lee Turk) and for leading other woodwork projects;
- ★ Alan Melvin and David Ibbotson from the Binsted Parish Rights of Way team, who improved the fencing along the Bridleway;
- ★ Alex Potts, for her wonderful photographs, which are invaluable for verifying wildlife sightings - several are included in this Annual Report;
- ★ Daniel Banks, for bird ringing sessions run in collaboration with the British Trust for Ornithology;
- ★ Peter Stephens, for helping ensure there was fresh water and winter food in the Bird Feeding Area; and
- ★ Volunteer wildlife recorders: Cathy Wilson (botany and bats); Chris Piper, Martin Angel and Myung-hye Chun (moths); Pete Gillatt and Pete West of HIWARG (amphibians and reptiles); Sarah Womersley (butterflies and bumblebees); Mark Elsoffer (birds and dragonflies); Darren Hill (spiders); Alan Cox (birds); Keith and Carol Shepherd (butterflies); Erica and Juliet Evans at Hive Helpers, along with Professor Sharon Brookes and their other volunteers (bees and pollinators); and Ben Hamlin (trees).

## **Professional wildlife advisors:**

- ★ We have been very lucky to have had practical help, funding and advice from the South Downs Rangers team (especially Paul Bushell), without which we could not have tackled larger projects;
- ★ Fiona Scully (Butterfly Conservation); Hannah Graves, Karima Smith, Emily Roberts and Joel Miller (Hampshire County Council) and Izzy Radford and her team at Derek Gow Consultancy.

## **Local businesses:**

Various local companies and individuals kindly donated materials (and rescued us on occasion!):

- ★ Blaber Enterprises, for righting and repositioning our Field Shelter and harrowing the Back Field;
- ★ Rob Knight and Callum Kilby (Hampshire Tree and Garden Ltd) for donating wood chip for hedge mulching and habitat improvement; and to Callum for lending climbers to check our bird boxes;
- ★ Rachel and Nigel Walter & James Dineen (Farm and Garden Supplies) for end-of-line posts; and
- ★ Marie-Anne Phillips (The Land Trust) for donating pre-loved tree guards and stakes.

## **All who provided help in other ways, including:**

- ★ Grants from: Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (for wildlife surveying and recording kit); South Downs National Park Trust (Beelines II project '*Boosting Pollinators on Wet Meadows*'); District Councillor Philip Davies (for the pond's lifebuoy); and the Rowledge Village Fayre (for contributing towards the purchase of the field shelter).
- ★ Two local households, who kindly donated garden chairs and a table; and
- ★ 'Friends of Blacknest Fields', who participated in community events and assisted in many practical ways, including donating bird food for the bird feeding station, and food for our work parties.

# Executive Summary

Blacknest Fields is a 7 acre site in Blacknest, Hampshire, which borders the Alice Holt Forest in one of the areas of the South Downs National Park with the darkest skies.

Our overall goal is for Blacknest Fields to be a community asset that is enjoyed by both wildlife and the local community. Since 2021, when Binsted Parish Council decided to open the site to the public and manage it for wildlife, the Fields have been significantly improved and are visited by an expanding range of people and wildlife. By December 2024, Blacknest Fields had achieved many of the plans contained in its first Management Plan (2021-24). Updated objectives were therefore set out in a new Management Plan for 2025-301, which continue the original direction of travel:

- **Increasing the diversity and abundance of the site's flora and fauna;**
- **Creating a welcoming public space and an active volunteer community; and**
- **Strong governance, partnerships and communication**

This report highlights the progress made towards these goals in 2025 and illustrates how the year's extraordinary seasons unfolded. 2025 saw dramatic swings in weather. Described as a year 'bookended by storms', it began with a mild winter, which shifted rapidly into the warmest and sunniest spring on record, and then the hottest summer ever recorded. Severe drought affected southeast England, before autumn and winter brought renewed rain, storms and flooding.

Experts are warning that these successions of weather extremes make nature vulnerable, so it is more important than ever to take action to improve habitats. Efforts are needed at scale, but it is nevertheless heartening to see signs of nature reclaiming our little site, with hedges awash with spring flowers and autumn berries - and it illustrates what a small group of 'lay' volunteers can achieve. The South Downs National Park Trust were also pleased to see the progress made at the site, so much so that they commissioned a short video about the work being done at the fields through their Beelines grant, and the improvements being seen as a result. The video can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LXdq7Hvy34>.

For humans too, our need to spend time in nature has never been more urgent. The UK is regularly reported to be one of the world's most nature-disconnected societies and remains one of the most nature-depleted nations in Europe<sup>2</sup>. Feeling connected to nature is recognised to improve people's mood and wellbeing - and participating in citizen science projects encourages us to spend more time outdoors.

We go into 2026 excited by what lies ahead and with a resolve to welcome even more nature - and more people - to Blacknest Fields this coming year. Our plans for the year ahead are outlined on pages 14-15.



<sup>1</sup> The Blacknest Fields Site Management Plan is published at [www.binstedparishcouncil.org.uk](http://www.binstedparishcouncil.org.uk).

<sup>2</sup> Swami et al., 2024.

# Diversity: 628 species now recorded

Britain has a long history of wildlife recording by ordinary citizens. The work of Reverend Gilbert White (1720-93) - a pioneering amateur naturalist who lived within 10 miles of Blacknest Fields - transformed how people view the natural world. Observations made by White and the many naturalists who followed in his footsteps have enabled ecologists to track changes in numbers and distribution of wildlife over time, throwing light not only on the importance of specific sites, but also on the effects of climate and habitat changes.



**How we record:** Modern ‘on-the-go’ recording apps, and other innovations that help the identification of wildlife, make it easy to describe sightings, draw on experts to verify these sightings, and to integrate the submitted records into useful datasets. We largely use iRecord and iNaturalist to report at Blacknest Fields. This links to a growing set of specialist apps, for example covering bees, ladybirds and butterflies. Once verified through the Apps, our flora and fauna records are then shared with the

Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC).

**Our current wildlife records:** In the past 4 years, Blacknest Fields’ volunteer wildlife recorders have built up an impressive pan species record, with 628 species recorded at the Fields by the end of 2025 (162 flora, 423 fauna and 43 bryophytes, fungi and lichens). These include: 31 butterfly species<sup>3</sup>; 198 moth species; 34 bee and wasp species; 49 species of bird; plus grass snakes, common lizards, slow worms and toads.

Wildlife records (cumulative totals)				
	By Dec 2022	By Dec 2023	By Dec 2024	By Dec 2025
<b>Total wildlife species recorded</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>584</b>	<b>628</b>
<b>Butterfly species</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Total rare fauna</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Birds ringed under BTO scheme</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>258</b>

**New this year:** A total of 44 new species were recorded at site in 2025, including the nationally scarce Angular Orb Weaver and the Dark Crimson Underwing moth which is a UK BAP Priority and Red Data Book species due to its rarity. The special ‘recording weekend’ run with the Alton Natural History Society described on page 9 below boosted site records by 28 species.

## What does this tell us about what’s special about Blacknest Fields?

Apart from being an exceptional site for butterflies, the site has recorded 45 species of fauna that are notable for their rarity at a national or county level, as listed on the next page. These include the Barbastelle bat, the Downy Emerald dragonfly and the Long-horned bee. The Fields are examples of unimproved grassland, with even the grazed Front Field retaining plants that are indicator species of unimproved wet hay meadows.

<sup>3</sup> Of the 58 butterfly species regularly recorded in the UK, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight are home to 46 species (<https://www.hantsiow-butterflies.org.uk/>) and 33 species are regularly recorded in Binsted Parish.

**Amongst 423 species of fauna recorded on site by Dec 2025,  
45 species are rare or scarce at a national or county level:**

Species	Designations	Species	Designations
White Admiral butterfly ( <i>Limenitis Camilla</i> )	BC-HP, SPI	Small Heath ( <i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i> )	BC-HP, SPI
Dark Green Fritillary butterfly ( <i>Speyeria aglaja</i> )	BC-HP, SPI	Dingy Skipper butterfly ( <i>Erynnis tages</i> )	BC-HP, SPI
Brown Hairstreak butterfly ( <i>Thecla betulae</i> )	BC-HP, SPI	Long horned bee ( <i>Eucera longicornis</i> )	FALK
Sharp-angled carpet moth ( <i>Euphyia unangulata</i> )	CS-H	Green-brindled crescent moth ( <i>Allophyes oxycanthae</i> )	CS-NH, SPI
Dwarf pug moth ( <i>Eupithecia tantillaria</i> )	CS-NH	Beet moth ( <i>Scrobipalpa ocellatella</i> )	NS
Double kidney moth ( <i>Ipimorpha retusa</i> )	CS-NH	Dark spectacle moth ( <i>Abrostola triplasia</i> )	CS-H
<i>Ypsolopha horridella</i> micromoth	CR-H	Dusky Thorn moth ( <i>Ennomos fuscantaria</i> )	CS-NH, SPI
Oak Lutestring moth ( <i>Cymatophorina diluta</i> )	CS-NH, SPI	Figure of eight moth ( <i>Diloba caeruleocephala</i> )	CS-H, SPI
Feathered Gothic moth ( <i>Tholera decimalis</i> )	CS-H, SPI	Light Crimson Underwing moth ( <i>Catocala promissa</i> )	HP-BAP
Marbled Pug moth ( <i>Eupithecia irraguata</i> )	NS	Dotted Chestnut moth ( <i>Conistra rubiginea</i> )	NS
Dark Crimson Underwing (( <i>Catocala sponsa</i> )	RED-V, HP-BAP	Angular Orb Weaver spider ( <i>Araneus angulatus</i> )	NS
Orb Weaver spider ( <i>Cercidia prominens</i> )	NS	Oak jumping spider ( <i>Ballus chalybeius</i> )	NS
Marsh Tit ( <i>Parus palustris</i> )	RED, SPI	House Martin ( <i>Delichon urbicum</i> )	RED
Starling ( <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> )	RED, SPI	Mistle Thrush ( <i>Turdus viscivorus</i> )	RED
Dunnock ( <i>Prunella modularis</i> )	RED, SPI	Spotted flycatcher ( <i>Muscicapa striata</i> )	RED
Woodcock ( <i>Scolopax rusticola</i> )	RED, WCA	Downy Emerald (dragonfly) ( <i>Cordulia aenea</i> )	VLD
Common Lizard ( <i>Zootaca vivipara</i> )	WCA, SPI	Slow-worm ( <i>Anguis fragilis</i> )	WCA, SPI
Grass snake ( <i>Natrix Natrix</i> )	WCA, SPI	Common toad ( <i>Bufo bufo</i> )	WCA, SPI
European Hedgehog ( <i>Erinaceus europaeus</i> )	WCA, HP-BAP, IUCN-V	Serotine bat ( <i>Eptesicus serotinus</i> )	WCA, EPA, RED-V
Soprano pipistrelle bat ( <i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i> )	WCA, SPI	Natterer's bat ( <i>Myotis nattereri</i> )	WCA, EPA.
Barbastelle bat ( <i>Barbastella barbastellus</i> )	WCA, HP-BAP, EPA, RED-V	Noctule bat ( <i>Nyctalus noctula</i> )	WCA, HP-BAP, EPA
Alcathoe bat ( <i>Myotis alcathoe</i> )	WCA, EPA.	Common pipistrelle bat ( <i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i> )	WCA, SPI
Harvest Mouse ( <i>Micromys minutus</i> )	HP-BAP		

**Key:** BC-HP Butterfly Conservation 'High Priority' species for Binsted Parish  
 HP-BAP 'High Priority' under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework.  
 SPI A Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006  
 CR-H County Rare for Hampshire  
 CS-H County Scarce for Hampshire  
 CS-NH County Scarce for North Hampshire  
 FALK Listed as a Notable Species in Falk's (1991) paper 'A review of the scarce and threatened bees, wasps and Ants of Great Britain' and a Priority Species in the 2007 UK Biodiversity Action Plan for Terrestrial Invertebrate Species.  
 NS Nationally Scarce  
 RED Included on the Birds of Conservation Concern 5 'Red List' published in 2021 (the "Red List")<sup>4</sup>  
 RED-V Listed as Vulnerable to extinction on GB Red List  
 WCA A protected species under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (the "WCA")  
 EPA European Protected Species under Annex IV of the European Habitats Directive  
 IUCN-NT Near Threatened on the global IUN Red List of Threatened Species  
 VLD Very Limited Distribution in UK – reliant on woodland ponds

# Our community: what a lovely bunch!

One of the absolute joys of undertaking projects at Blacknest Fields is spending time with the volunteers. There is a diverse bunch of volunteers, but they are united by a shared love of nature, practical conservation, and being outdoors, which has led to a real sense of shared ownership in the site's progress.

The 'core group' is actually very small. The nature recording work takes place when the individuals involved can fit it into their busy lives. Similarly, the photographers in the group somehow manage to capture amazing shots in their odd moments, which they generously share on the Blacknest Fields Community Facebook group.

Conservation work parties are organised according to the work needed. Occasionally projects have needed many people (e.g. when new hedges were being planted). More usually the work parties consist of 3 - 6 volunteers coming together for a morning, to get specific tasks done (e.g. to plant honeysuckle into the hedges). The team also enjoyed hosting the South Downs conservation volunteers again in 2025, who good-humouredly moved mountains of woodchip to mulch the hedges; and the Hive Helpers youth club, who kindly varnished Blacknest Fields' sculpture and bench.

Welcoming new volunteers and visitors to the Fields is an important way to maintain impetus and absorb new ideas. We are a friendly bunch: do join us if you can.

## The new field shelter

The unpredictable British weather - with its ability to see-saw from drought to downpour - is a real problem when organising outdoor volunteer work parties, school visits and community social events. The volunteers are hardy types, but several past events have been dampened (in the most literal sense) by having no dry space under which to shelter from sudden showers of torrential rain.

So, the team were thrilled, in December 2024, to acquire a field shelter to provide a dry space for volunteers and their bags, and for storing essentials like our first aid kit.

Less fortunately, Storm Darragh rolled across the prairie on the very day Binsted Parish Council took ownership of the shelter. Like a scene from the Wizard of Oz, Darragh flipped the shelter onto the top of a nearby hedge! Amazingly, the shelter was unscathed. Later, Aly Blaber's team managed to skilfully flip the shelter back over and subsequently pulled it to a new location, manoeuvring it through the fence gap with just 2 cm to spare.

The site is now host to a marvellous dry space - and improvements made to the shelter during 2025 are already paying dividends. Adding rainwater harvesting proved a godsend in the summer drought, enabling volunteers to water new trees around the pond. Donations of extra tables and chairs mean we can now host work parties and events without participants risking cold showers!



# Site Visitors

## Enjoying the bird hide

Since the bird hide was built in 2024, this corner of the copse has become a much-loved area of tranquillity from which to watch and photograph woodland birds at close range. Binsted Parish Council undertook some safety felling in this area, to remove a couple of dead trees which have been repurposed on site. This has increased light levels on the woodland floor and will hopefully encourage a greater diversity of flora.



## Alton Natural History Society

In July, the Alton Natural History Society organised a fun and well-attended evening of wildlife recording at the Fields, continuing the next morning to watch Daniel Banks ring birds and Chris Piper and Martin Angel release moths. 28 species of flora and fauna were recorded that were new to the site, keeping bird ringers and moth trappers busy.

**Moths:** Chris caught 132 moths of 55 species; Martin's catch was smaller, due to technical difficulties with his trap. 18 were new species to the site, including the rare Dark Crimson Underwing (UK BAP Priority Species and Red Data Book), the huge Oak Eggar, the Diamond-back, the Cloaked Carpet and Apotomis betuletana.

**Bird ringing:** Daniel had a brilliant morning, ringing over 30 birds, including a Great Spotted Woodpecker, a Goldcrest, a Chiffchaff, several blackbirds and, excitingly, a Reed Warbler - a new species for the site, which must have been just passing through.



**Other species** were also identified that were new to the site including a large and nationally scarce Angular Orbweaver spider (which required courage to photograph!)



## Bee-PLUS visit

In August, we were delighted to host a visit by Farnham's Bee-PLUS group run by Hive Helpers CIC. By happy chance, this visit coincided with the arrival of three hedgehogs to release at the site, following their rehabilitation by the HART Wildlife Hospital.

Unexpected outcomes from the visit included a very kind gift of tree spirals and Myung-Hye Chun's discovery of Phalangium opilio, a common harvestman, with parasitic red phoretic mites attached to its body (photographed below). Apparently the mites use the harvestman as a means of transport.



# Governance: updated management plans

**2025-30 Site Management Plan.** By the end of 2024, Blacknest Fields had completed its first phase of transformation and had achieved most of the plans and projects set out in its first, 2021-25 Site Management Plan. A new 2025-30 Site Management Plan has therefore been agreed<sup>5</sup> for the site's next phase, with updated objectives that continue the original direction of travel. A fundamental principle underlying both iterations of the Site Management Plan is to ensure the site is well-governed, with a clear and strong relationship between the charity that owns the site and Binsted Parish Council which is responsible for its management.

**New charity constitution.** In 2021, the parish council's correspondence with The Charity Commission, undertaken as part of the council's 'due diligence' research about the charitable status of Blacknest Fields, confirmed that Blacknest Fields and Holt Pound Oval form part of a single Charitable Trust, registered as charity # 301743. During 2025, a new constitution for the Holt Pound Oval and Blacknest Fields charity was agreed. The constitution covers both the Blacknest Fields and Holt Pound Oval sites, so care was taken to ensure that its provisions will work for both sites. The constitution was approved by the charity following detailed discussions with Binsted Parish Council and is intended to provide a clearer, more robust and transparent governance document for the charity whilst retaining at its heart the purposes for which the land at Blacknest Fields and the Holt Pound Oval were gifted to the parish of Binsted - for exercise and recreation.

**New Management Agreement.** Alongside the new constitution, a new Management Agreement has been entered into between Binsted Parish Council and the charity, setting out the duties of the council (as manager) and the charity (as owner), again covering both sites. This continues the arrangements and roles as they have been historically and since Blacknest Fields' 2021 opening to the public. The Council's duties include: the sites' financial management; legal conformity and site safety; managing maintenance work; and procurement of all insurance policies necessary for the sites. 'Friends of Blacknest Fields' volunteers assist the council in the organisation of work parties and events; lead on wildlife recording and the organisation of volunteers; and run the Blacknest Fields Community Facebook page. The Management Agreement will be further reviewed when the Charity Commission formally approves the charity's new constitution and a proposed conversion of the charitable trust into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

**Finance.** In 2025, we were fortunate to win four further grants, generous support from several local businesses, and we are also benefitting from charitable fund-raising routes not previously used. In total, the value of grants and donated goods received since 2022 (including bridleway resurfacing grants) has now topped £64,000.

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<sup>5</sup> The new Site Management Plan is published at [www.binstedparishcouncil.org.uk](http://www.binstedparishcouncil.org.uk).

## Partnership working.

Another fundamental way in which Blacknest Fields is managed has been to develop effective partnerships with as wide a range of relevant organisations and individuals as possible, to build on their knowledge and ideas. During 2025 we have enjoyed both advice and practical help from the South Downs National Park ranger team, without which many projects would never have got off the ground. We have also very much appreciated the various wildlife recording items that we were able to buy using a small grant from the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, and the help of wildlife experts at organisations including Alton Natural History Society, Hive Helpers CIC, Butterfly Conservation and Hampshire County Council's Nature Recovery team. Many thanks to all involved.

## Safeguarding the site in perpetuity



**Can we secure a SINC designation?** We would like to secure a nature conservation designation for the site, as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). Sites with this status are recognised as being of substantive nature conservation value, and the designation helps ensure biodiversity is given due consideration in land use planning.

In 2025, we were fortunate to secure SDNP funding to cover the necessary site survey assessment, which was carried out by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre's ecologists in August. The Front Field attracted particular interest from the surveyor, for plants that are indicator species of unimproved wet hay meadows, which have survived despite the field's

historical use as a parish cricket pitch and World War II charcoal-making site.

The ecologists' report will be finished by April 2026, and a decision reached by the authorities by the end of 2026 on whether the site will be awarded SINC status.

**South Downs' Local Green Space Review.** We also, as part of the South Downs Planning Authority's preparations for its Local Plan 'Regulation 19' public consultation, asked the planning authority if the Blacknest Fields site<sup>6</sup> - or any of its parts - should be designated as Local Green Space. Although the assessors described the site as being "*demonstrably special in terms of its recreation, tranquillity and wildlife*" and of "*inherent ecological value*" (noting its current evaluation as a SINC), the site (even excluding the Front Field) was considered to be too extensive a tract of land in comparison to the existing population of Blacknest to meet the criteria for designation as Local Green Space.

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<sup>6</sup> The assessment for Blacknest Fields (site LGS25-029) is set out on page 36 in <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Local-Green-Space-Assessment-2026-Final-incl-Maps.pdf>

# Winter splendour

Winter can be tough for people and wildlife, but the season has a beauty all of its own, and it's an important time for getting conservation jobs done. Volunteer work parties were run at the site nearly every week, meaning our volunteers spent quite a lot of time in the 'crisp' winter air ...



## Fine tuning our new wildlife pond in 'Willow Corner' was a key task



The SDNP rangers worked with site volunteers to fine tune the contours of the pond, to make it as beneficial as possible for wildlife. Shrubs were planted around the pond and a lifebuoy added, funded by a District Councillor grant. Our pond and wetland scrapes are small - and may or may not manage to hold water through the whole year (water was lost this summer in the drought). Nevertheless, we are proud to be 'doing our bit' to reduce flood risk, assist water quality, and lessen heat extremes.

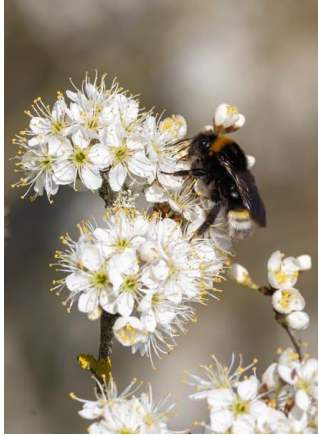
**Hedges** Deer browsing damage has been a problem for our new hedges, but action taken to protect the new hedges with a wire mesh 'sandwich' seems to have worked. With further weeding and mulching 'TLC', all hedges survived the summer drought remarkably well - we lost a few young plants, but nothing too serious.

We are keenly aware that minor changes in the way we manage our hedges make profound differences to wildlife. One success story being that the rare and notoriously picky Brown Hairstreak butterfly - which relies on young blackthorn as its forage plant - is clearly appreciating us cutting less young blackthorn in our hedge-trimming.

**Winter birds.** In winter, many small birds rove the woodland in large mixed species foraging parties, and overseas visitors arrive, such as redwings (pictured) and fieldfares. Only a few redwings (and no fieldfares) have so far been recorded on site - we are hopeful this will change as the site's hedgerows improve and start to bear more winter berries.



# An exceptional Spring



Trees that blossom before their leaves unfurl are amongst nature's most stunning sights. This year's absence of late frost and strong winds, combined with a sunny spring, created an exceptional display. The Fields' hedges also produced more flower, responding to the lighter hedge-cutting regime's retention of more second year growth, on which flowers form. Our fruit trees were also covered in beautiful blossom, many flowering for the first time. It was the UK's warmest, sunniest spring on record. For southeast England it was also the driest recorded.



**Wildlife breeding successes** A highlight of the year was witnessing wildlife using the fields to breed and raise their young. The kestrel box was used again, with a further brood of very fluffy young kestrels ringed and fledged this year. The new tit nestboxes added by Dan were also very popular - the photo on the right shows the contents of a single box while they were being ringed: two boxes each had an amazing 11 chicks!



Eggs and caterpillars of Orange Tip butterflies were discovered, munching Cuckoo flowers (*Cardamine pratensis*) in the Front Field. Thanks to Alex Potts for her amazing photos.



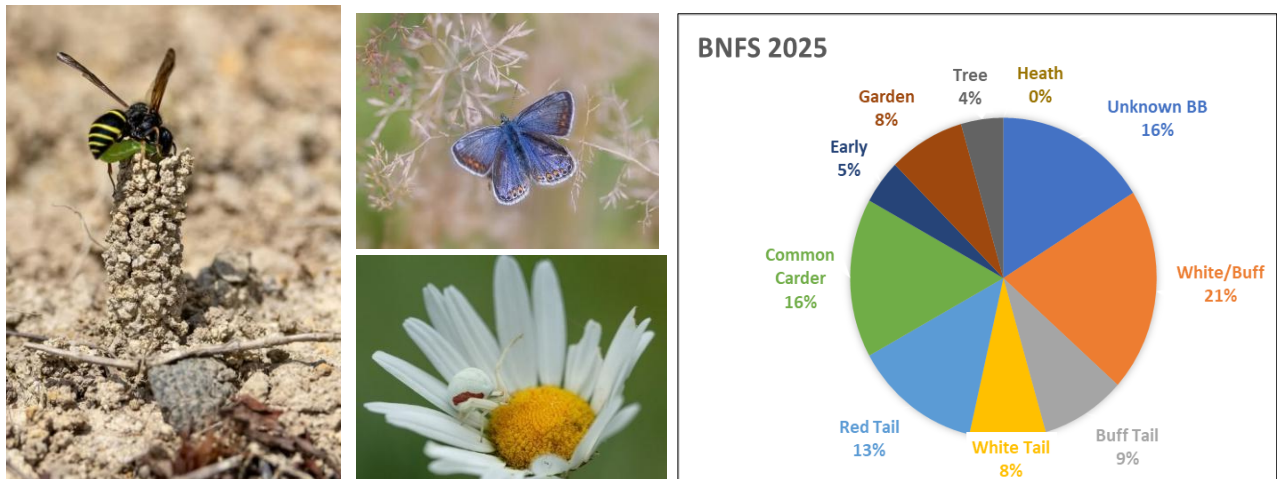
**2025 Bird Ringing activities** Numerous bird ringing sessions took place on site throughout 2025 – freezing toes in the winter and warming faces with sunrises in the summer months. 97 birds were ringed in total, across a wide range of species. Most prolific were the chatty Great Tit - with 40 ringed this year alone. Highlights were the ringing of three kestrel fledglings (pictured left), a surprise visit from a Reed Warbler, and the second Marsh Tit ringed on site. Daniel Banks, a qualified bird ringer, kindly continued to record and ring birds in his spare time. And, as a Citizen Science Officer at the Surrey Wildlife Trust, he is always a mine of information.



# The hottest summer on record

Summer 2025 was notable for its four separate heatwaves and for being - officially - the hottest on record in the UK. It started with an early June heatwave. The mercury then climbed again later in June, in July and in August - often accompanied by blue skies and above-average amounts of sunshine. After the dry spring, summer drought soon became a concern across southeast England. Total rainfall, from March to August (meteorological spring and summer combined) was less than half the normal amount. Our site's damper, heavy soils mean that its trees and grasses are somewhat protected from water stress and drought impacts, but nevertheless drought can easily kill young trees, and cause reduced tree growth, crown dieback and Summer Branch Drop in mature trees, as well as increased risks of wildfire and of pest and disease outbreaks.

**A much better year for pollinators** After 2024's disastrous year for pollinators<sup>7</sup>, it was a huge relief to witness insect populations bouncing back in 2025's sunshine. Blacknest Fields' sheltered meadows are an important nectaring spot and breeding place for meadow and woodland butterflies, moths and other pollinators. The site demonstrates that pollinators can really thrive on plots that aren't stereotypical chalk wildflower meadows.



**Bumblebee Transect results.** In 2025, bumblebee recording at the Fields was much more eventful, thanks to the fine weather, with several new species added to site records, including the Forest Cuckoo Bumblebee and Garden Bumblebee. Surveys were undertaken every month between March and October. The full list of species recorded at the site in 2025, and the frequency of their appearances during Bumblebee Surveys relative to other species, can be found in the pie chart (above). This was compiled by Prof Sharon Brookes of Hive Helpers CIC, to whom we are indebted for its help in setting up and undertaking the monthly surveys with our volunteers. In spring, bumblebees particularly loved the Spurge found near the entrance to the Oak Tree Meadow and the blossom of the blackthorn and brambles.

<sup>7</sup> In 2024, UK insect records were very low: <https://insideecology.com/2024/09/24/uk-2024-was-the-year-without-a-butterfly/>

# Autumn fruitfulness

Autumn rains brought out a dazzling display of fungi, providing

opportunities to discover more about the species present at Blacknest Fields. Thanks to Erica Evans' patient ID work, we added 5 fungi to our species records.



## Native honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*)

was planted on site, thanks to a grant received from HCC's Pollinator Network. Honeysuckle is the sole food plant for larvae of the site's visiting and rarely seen White Admiral butterflies. Honeysuckle flowers also attract the Elephant Hawkmoth (pictured right) and the Earl Grey moth.



**Glow worms.** Across the UK, wildlife groups are increasingly undertaking native species reintroductions: from beavers and water voles to pine martens and glow worms. The idea is simple - if an animal was lost from a landscape, but the reasons for its disappearance have been addressed, returning it is a positive sign that the habitat is healing and can again provide the cover, food and connectivity for the species to thrive. After South Downs rangers decided Blacknest Fields' grassy woodland edges were suitable for glow worms, it didn't take the Blacknest Fields' team long to agree to support a reintroduction. We're now on a journey to see if glow worms can make themselves at home in our dark night skies area. The beetle larvae (bottom picture) feed exclusively on snails, in woodland edges. If all goes well, in two years, mature females will climb grass stems and use their bioluminescence to attract a mate!



# Plans for 2026: actions for wildlife

## We will continue to enrich the site for pollinators

We are delighted to have secured Beelines funding from SDNPA for a follow-on pollinators project to help us restore the Back Field as a wildflower meadow open to the public.



**A Landowner Workshop will be organised** as part of our Beelines project, to demonstrate machines and techniques available for managing grassland and hay cutting on small sites.



**Improving our pond and wet habitats** We will continue to fine-tune 'Willow Corner's' wetland edge, adding scrapes to provide shallow ephemeral ponds which help retain more water on-site. Damp, tangled woodlands - especially those rich in willow, hawthorn, hazel and elder - are important for our existing marsh tits and poplar hawk moths, and for other species we would like to encourage at the site, from the small sawfly mining bee to amphibians, bats and wetland plants. We will be carrying out pondlife surveys to establish what is already on site. We will also investigate if any additional work is needed to the pond itself, to help it to hold onto its water in the summer and make it as beneficial as possible for wildlife.

**Thicker hedges** We will continue to mulch our new hedges and those we have rejuvenated, to encourage their development into thick hedge 'fortresses', with wide hedge bottoms that provide safe wildlife corridors for hedgehogs and other species.

**Wildlife recording** We will continue bee transects, moth trapping and bird ringing. We will continue to fill information gaps for species currently under-recorded:

**Spiders** - We are excited that Simon Moore, a renowned spider expert, has agreed to lead a spider survey at the Fields in September.

**Mammals** - We plan to do more small mammal surveying. We will be training new wildlife recorders and welcome new volunteers to help with this.



**Sharing wildlife observations** We will continue to share our discoveries formally via online wildlife recording databases, and informally via social media.

## Site designation

**By the end of 2026** we hope to hear the outcome of the designation surveys undertaken in 2025 by Hampshire County Council in relation to a possible SINC designation.

# Plans for our community greenspace

**Dawn Chorus Day.** We plan to wake early on Monday May 4<sup>th</sup> to celebrate Dawn Chorus Day and have breakfast at the Fields. We will also use social media to encourage people to identify birdsong using apps such as Cornell University's 'Merlin' app.

**The Circular Butterfly Walk** we developed with Butterfly Conservation has proved a big success and continues to be enjoyed by walkers. We plan to work with local groups to make it better known, perhaps involving our newly re-opened local pub, The Barn Owl. A guide for the walk is available on Binsted Parish Council's website: <https://binstedparishcouncil.org.uk/parish-council/blacknest-fields>.

**Working with schools and young people.** Getting outdoors is vital for young people's mental health. We want to introduce the site to more young people. We will continue to support visits by schools and Duke of Edinburgh students.



**Making it easier for new people to join our conservation work parties.** We welcome people who can only occasionally join conservation work parties. Good communications are crucial as each work party is different, and the weather can cause last minute changes in plans. Our small core volunteer team is experimenting with ways of encouraging new volunteers in ways that preserve our much-needed flexibility.

**Site Safety** We will continue our tree safety checks, under our rolling 5-year programme. We will 'dead wood' larger-diameter oak branches considered unsafe.

**Site history** We aim to secure funding for improved site interpretation signage, to share information about the site's history, and possibly to run a 'detectorist' event.

## Fundraising

**We are encouraging our supporters to sign-up to 'Easy Fundraising'**

through which 7,000 online brands donate to our charity with no cost to the shopper. During 2025 this contributed a very useful £120 to our fundraising efforts, more than enough to keep our bird feeders topped up throughout the winter. We aim to double the amount raised in 2026.

Blacknest Fields is now registered with Easy Fundraising to raise funds for our conservation work!

[www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/blacknest-fields](https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/blacknest-fields)

Register using the website or QR code to get raising money for Blacknest Fields every time you shop online without costing yourself a penny!

easyfundraising You shop, brands donate to us

Every penny raised through this brilliant tool will be spent on our conservation work.



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Blacknest Fields is owned by  
the 'Blacknest Fields and Holt Pound Oval Charitable Trust'  
This a registered charity, Charity Number 301743  
The site is managed by Binsted Parish Council with the help of volunteers

Further information about Blacknest Fields:  
Follow us on Facebook: Blacknest Fields Community Page  
Website: <https://binstedparishcouncil.org.uk/parish-council/blacknest-fields>  
Email: [BNF@binstedparishcouncil.org.uk](mailto:BNF@binstedparishcouncil.org.uk)

Our grateful thanks to  
the many organisations who have assisted Blacknest Fields in 2025, including:

