

Heathrow Airport Biodiversity management
London Heathrow Airport, Hillingdon, London
 Heathrow Airport Ltd

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Client Award*

Project overview

Heathrow Airport manages approximately 170 ha of land across 13 sites for nature conservation purposes. This is roughly 14% of the entire airport footprint. These sites are a mixture of operational areas and public access amenity sites. This biodiversity enchantment has been in process for over 20 years.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The biodiversity management at Heathrow is spread across 13 sites that provide natural connectivity across the landscape. Some of the sites relate to land associated with previous planning permissions, such as for T5, or are simply land acquired by the airport for operational purposes, such as Princes lakes. Some of these landholdings form part of the surface water treatment process at the airport where we combine surface water treatment with ecological enhancement. Heathrow has a proven record of biodiversity enhancement as is shown by our continuous retention of the Biodiversity Benchmark Award which we have held for over 12 years.

What were the reasons behind this project?

Heathrow recognised the potential for managing its landholdings for biodiversity enhancement nearly 20 years ago. This has been consolidated into structured and effective biodiversity management that ensures Heathrow meets its commitments of both conservation legacies as well as ensuring Heathrow is able to meet future environmental challenges. To ensure the biodiversity management continues to deliver outcomes beyond normal business practice Heathrow has developed key policy commitments. These are found within the Energy and Environment Policy and the Heathrow 2.0 strategy. This ambitious strategy sets targets across the sustainability agenda and includes ensuring biodiversity protection and enhancement during development as well as maintaining the effective site Biodiversity Site management currently in place.



Map of the Heathrow Biodiversity Sites showing how they provide connectivity across the landscape.



Heathrow 2.0; an ambitious sustainability agenda.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The habitat management of the Heathrow Biodiversity Sites consists of a variety of techniques. The management prescription of each site is created to provide a bespoke set of management actions best designed to benefit the flora and fauna of the site.

Like most of the habitats in the UK, those found at Heathrow would naturally revert to woodland if left un-managed, which would result in a loss of the diversity of habitats we have at Heathrow. That is why we actively manage our sites to maintain the diversity of habitats and species. Management actions used include:

- Coppicing – traditional woodland management technique.
- Grazing- using local livestock to enhance habitats, working with Surrey Wildlife Trust
- Grassland Cut and Collects- traditional hay meadow management to enhance grasslands.
- Planting / seeding- sourcing local provenance seeds and plants
- Hedgerow management- including traditional hedge-laying techniques.
- Invasive species- control and eradicating invasive non-native species
- Habitat creation and restoration- we created large and small habitats including reedbeds, wetlands and grasslands.

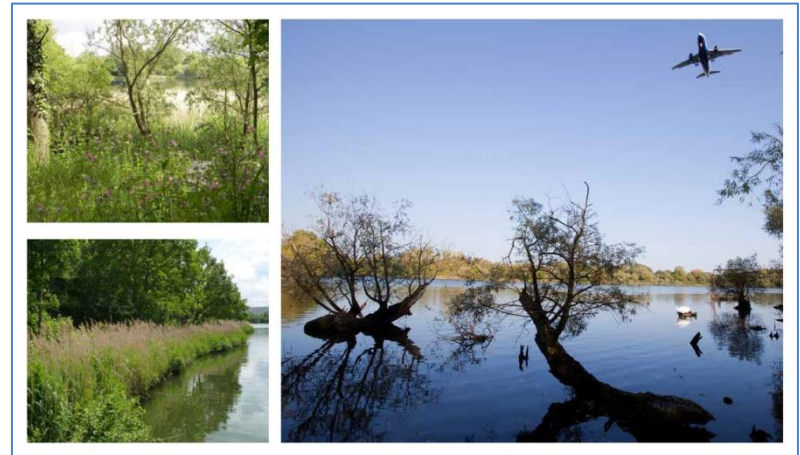
We carry out extensive ecological surveys of our landholdings. This includes employing local specialists to help identify species on site as well as using our in-house biodiversity manager. We have recorded a number of rare species including a species of Fungus new to science.

To manage potential impacts of projects on biodiversity we have developed a bespoke impact assessment process. This is imbedded into the formal gateway process that all capital projects go through. We are also implementing the DEFRA Biodiversity Net Gain matrix and work closely with a wide range of stakeholders at Heathrow to ensure biodiversity enhancement.

We work closely with the local community engaging with schools and groups. We are also active with local biodiversity partnership organisations. This helps to ensure our biodiversity management complements what is going on in the local area.



Photos showing examples of the varied management on the biodiversity sites. Including grazing, habitat managements, coppicing, honey bees and example of water treatment infrastructure sitting alongside wildlife habitats.



An example of the ecologically important habitats found on the Heathrow biodiversity sites; open water, woodland and reedbeds (Causeway Nature Reserve pictured).



Further information

The biodiversity management at Heathrow is replicable. The management centres around effective management objectives and targets are in place, which are driven by clear and concise policy commitments that form a framework for the biodiversity management. To ensure effective management, Heathrow has engaged biodiversity professionals to oversee the management, as well as working closely with local stakeholders. Looking ahead at new incentives has also been key; drawing on expertise from a range of environmental sectors has been beneficial and helps to ensure management is following current best practice.

When implementing a new initiative or project such as habitat creation we follow the same broad steps. Setting objectives of the project; what are we trying to achieve; baseline surveys; what is currently there; relevant legislation and policies; research best practice; what has worked on other projects; implementation; following agreed methodology/best practice; post implementation monitoring; ensure original targets are met; remedial action as necessary.

We regularly review progress towards our management targets and objectives and share information on our management with our partners. We continuously meet our policy commitments regarding biodiversity management, even during the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The legacy of this management is that Heathrow has created and manages habitats of a high ecological value that provides a benefit to local and regional wildlife, and complements regional Biodiversity Action Plans. Heathrow is also able to demonstrate that a large infrastructure company can also manage its landholdings for biodiversity enhancement.

Project Team

- Heathrow Airport Ltd
- Ecology & Habitat management Ltd
- Green Corridor – local volunteer groups

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

The motivation of the biodiversity management was the belief and dedication from Heathrow Airport Ltd that they could implement long-term and effective biodiversity management. The drive for the biodiversity management comes from a range of people from the Chief Executive and the Engineering Team to the dedicated staff conducting the habitat management on the ground. We have developed a strong commitment to biodiversity management that will endure for many years.



Showing different management in action; volunteers helping with habitat management, tree planting post project, cattle grazing near T5 and engagement activities with local school children.



These picture provide an excellent example of a public access site providing an important green space for the local community. This allows members of the public access to nature within an urban area and may help improve their mental health as well as well as having environmental benefits (Oaks Road pictured):