

Gatwick Airport Biodiversity Action Plan
Gatwick Airport, West Sussex
Gatwick Airport Ltd

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Client Award

Project overview

Gatwick's Biodiversity Action Plan covers an area of 75 hectares including woodland, grassland and wetlands adjacent to Gatwick Airport.

This is an ongoing project in its fourth year with the objective to improve the condition of the key habitats. To develop the plans we have undertaken extensive ecological surveys and sought wide input from local and independent experts to ensure we are following best practice.

We have a full time ecologist and a part time ranger working on the project. In 2015 over 280 volunteers worked on the site. It is a collaborative project working closely with conservation organisations, local experts and encouraging volunteering and community involvement.

The project is managed as part of Gatwick's ISO14001 standard and we have also achieved certification to the Wildlife Trust Biodiversity Benchmark Award.

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

Prior to the development of the Action Plans the grasslands were dominated by scrub and dense birch. The woodlands were unmanaged coppice with densely shaded ponds and outgrown hedgerows.

Since the commencement of the Plans the areas have become more diverse with dynamic systems of open areas and restored habitats.

Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

Within Gatwick's Sustainability Strategy there is a commitment to have our biodiversity management externally recognised which has led to us achieving the Wildlife Trust Biodiversity Benchmark Award.



River Mole wildflower rich grasslands , north of the runway

The ecological management of a portion of these areas is linked to planning conditions, for example the wild flower seeding of the flood alleviation scheme which is designed to protect the airport and downstream communities from 1 in 100 year flood risks. For much of the area there are no specific legal conditions but Gatwick recognises the value of our green assets and we have gone above and beyond any legal requirements.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

An ecological baseline review was initially conducted which helped us to develop the objectives for our key habitats. The management plan covers an initial 5 year period with the intention of renewing after this period. We work closely with the Wildlife Trust to align our work with the conservation aims for the wider area. The process is well documented via trackers to ensure that it is replicable. Gatwick has committed that any future development of a second runway will result in a biodiversity net gain and maintaining our Biodiversity Benchmark.

The project sought extensive external input from local conservation groups and experts. Innovative actions include the introduction of a sentinel apiary feeding into a national project to detect foreign diseases in honey bees. Also, the use of social networking and the 'Gatwick Biodiversity blog' to communicate our biodiversity work.

Created habitats include floodplain meadow, additional wildflower habitat and reptile and insect refugia. Enhanced habitats include willow carr, restored amphibian ponds and reintroduction of ancient woodland coppicing. Grassland and wetland botanical species have increased in particular pollinating insects such as butterflies and bees.

Habitat creation has involved the reuse of materials from projects including felled wood, grass cuttings and excavated soil to create beetle and solitary bee habitats.

We encourage volunteers from all airport companies. In 2015 we had over 280 volunteers. We fund a part time ranger from the Wildlife Trust who leads community work within our biodiversity areas.



Volunteer group undertaking woodland management in Upper Picketts Wood

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

We promote the use of our areas for educational purposes including student placements, research projects, forest schools and training including bumblebee identification and harvest mice monitoring

We have held regular wildlife recording events to engage the community and generate biodiversity data. The notable species that have been identified have included Long-horned bee, Brown hair streaked butterfly and Bechsteins bats.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

The project involved an initial review of the ecological value of the airport green spaces followed by the establishment of objectives and specific targets and actions. These were developed in partnership with local wildlife group. Our action plan includes up to 25 annual surveys and over 250 conservation actions have been completed to date. The plan runs from 2012 to 2017. Habitat condition surveys were undertaken at the start of the project and will be repeated in 2017. Initial results show that our objectives are being met with an increase quality of habitat condition and use of the habitats by protected species. This has included the reduction in invasive species and return of breeding Great Crested Newts.

One challenge has been enhancing the biodiversity whilst meeting the critical requirements around aerodrome safeguarding and the need to minimise the risk of bird strike to aircraft. This has involved close communication within the airport, resulting in both safeguarding and biodiversity aims being met.

For similar projects Gatwick would recommend establishing close links with local individuals and conservation groups to tap into local knowledge from the beginning of the project. Communicating by social media has been useful to develop contacts, link into wider projects and promote our project here at Gatwick.



Nationally scarce Long-horned Bee on clay environmental slope overlooking the taxiway

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

Gatwick Airport appreciates that our green spaces are highly valued by the airport's local community. These areas are one of our assets and we have a duty to manage them following best practice. It has been rewarding to see the benefits of this proactive management to both people and wildlife.