Ring Common Allotments

Bioblitz 11 May 2025

Bath Natural History Society

Report by Mike Williams and Alan Feest (facilitator)

Background

On 11 May 2025, members of Bath Natural History Society and allotment plot holders undertook a bioblitz at Ring Common Allotments in Bath. This followed a preliminary visit by Mike Williams and Alvan White on 28 April 2025.

All species were identified by Mike Williams (Bath Natural History Society)

Site History

Little is known of the history of the site prior to the 18th Century, but it was likely common land for many centuries prior to this. The north of the site is bounded by Weston Lane, a possible Roman Road. In 1985, four large buried stones were detected, two of which bore marks suggesting that a standing portion had been deliberately broken. The stones lay below 17th Century depositions, but nothing more is known about them.[1]

The site is named 'Middle Common' on Thomas Thorpe's 'Plan of the Parish of Walcot' in 1740 and noted to be in possession of the Freemen of Bath. This land parcel extended further to the west than the current western boundary. Cow Lane, bordering the south of the allotments, was not yet in existence, but Weston Road to the north is shown. Shortly afterwards, in 1742 Thorpe produced a map entitled 'An Actual Survey of the City of Bath in the County of Somerset, and of Five Miles Round' showing a roughly circular feature in the field, labelled 'ye Ring'. John Wood the Elder, architect and antiquary of Bath, gave a description of the site the following year:

The first place appropriated for taking the Air and Exercise, in Coaches or on Horseback, is a small ring in Imitation of the Ring in Hide-Park, near London; it is six hundred yards in circumference, almost upon a Level, upon a gravelly Soil, highly situated, defended from the Winds, is a Part of the Town-Common, and the Field out of which it is taken is called Hide-Park.[2]

The Tithe Map and schedule of 1841 records it in its current form as one of a number of land parcels in the possession of Bath Freemen, occupied by George Vowles, under the name of 'The Lower Common now the Royal Victoria Park', and the land-use is recorded as pasture.

Ring Common became an allotment site in October 1940, during World War II[3], and has remained an allotment site ever since.

Site Description

The site is largely composed of well-tended allotments, with areas of grassland. The northern, western and southern boundaries have a variety of trees, with some ground flora typical of woodlands and hedgerows below. The eastern boundary is the curtilages of the dwellings of Marlborough Buildings.

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[1] Pryke, J. & Oswin, J. (2020) *Royal Victoria Park, Bath, west of the Royal Crescent, geophysical surveys between November 2016 and May 2019*. BACAS

[2] Wood, J. (1743) *An Essay Towards a Description of Bath* (part 3). Bath: Thomas Boddely, p91

[3] Hitchcock, M. (2007) Bath's Municipal Allotments Part 2. *The Survey of Bath and District*, 22: 55-63

Methods

The bioblitz event consisted largely of a walkover of the site, with all species being recorded by members of Bath Natural History Society, frequently stopping to show and talk about species of note to attendees. Species noted on the preliminary visit on 28 April are also included in this report. All identifications were undertaken in the field, specimens were not taken on this occasion.

Results

Plants

36 species of plant were recorded (not included cultivated plants on the allotment plots). They represent a moderate diversity on site, and a more intensive botanical survey will likely yield a much greater number of species. The interesting areas are generally around the edges of the site, especially in and around the hedgerows, and the uncultivated grassland areas.

It's likely that some of these species have been either planted/seeded or escaped from local gardens and allotment plots.

No rare plant species were noted. Cherry Laurel is often considered to be a species of low ecological value, and is potentially invasive if not appropriately managed. Spread of this species would be to the detriment of more ecologically valuable species.

Invertebrates

32 species were found on the allotments. The species recorded are likely to represent only a small fraction of the total number present, and a more intensive study would likely record many more species.

No rare species were found. Slender Groundhopper was an unusual find, as it tends to inhabit damper ground than that observed at Ring Common. However, the author also frequently finds them on his allotment plot at Bath City Farm, so this is not without precedent.

The other species recorded were fairly typical of urban parks and gardens and allotment sites.

Lily Beetle is a non-native species and is notorious for causing severe damage to cultivated plants in the lily family.

Landhopper is a non-native species originating from Australia, and has likely spread via garden centres. However, it is not currently considered to be detrimental to wildlife or cultivation as it is largely a detritivore, feeding on decaying leaves. In fact, they probably help to speed up the process of creating compost. Some of our local Robins have been recorded eating them, and Landhoppers might be a valuable source of food for ground-feeding birds, especially in the winter.[4]

[4] Williams, M. (2022) On the predation of Landhoppers, Myriapods and Isopods by European Robins. *British Myriapods & Isopods Group Newsletter*, 45, p9-10

Harlequin Ladybird is an invasive species from Asia, first found in the UK in 2004 (first recorded in Bath and North-east Somerset in 2006) and is now one of the most common ladybirds in Britain. They are so well-established that there is little point in trying to control them.

Birds

Nine species of birds were recorded, which is a reasonable number for an urban site where birds were not the main focus. No rare species were recorded. A fledgling Dunnock was spotted in a Cherry Laurel on the western site boundary, with several more heard calling in the hedgerow, suggesting that this species recently bred on or near the allotments.

Further Study

The number of species recorded in this survey represents only a small proportion of the total species present. Many further species will be more apparent at other times of the year, and more abundant in other years.

An intensive invertebrate survey would likely produce records of several hundred additional species, however such survey work is extremely time-consuming and requires specialist knowledge. It would, however pick up any rarities present and contribute a considerable amount of data to various recording schemes and record centres.

Casual surveying by non-specialists would also increase the number of species recorded. It is recommended that a database of records is kept and maintained, with records sent to recording schemes and the local environmental records centre. Mobile phone applications with image recognition software have their uses, but also limitations. For serious recording efforts, consult the relevant standard identification work.

Suggestions for Enhancements

- Plant a range of native wildflowers in the less interesting and uncultivated areas of the site. Some suggestions include: Wild Marjoram, Field Scabious, Wild Angelica, Kidney Vetch, Common Knapweed, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Devil's-bit Scabious, Wild Basil, Ladies Bedstraw, Harebell and Spiny Restharrow. These are all plants typical of the more interesting sites in the Bath area, and will attract a much wider range of invertebrates than are presently found on the site.
- Create a pond. Any planting should include a selection of native species.
- Install more bird boxes in the trees
- Dead wood piles and under the trees will create habitat for a range of invertebrate species, as well as refugia for any reptiles or amphibians present.

Disclaimer

This report is intended for the use of the Bath Allotments Association for education purposes and to aid conservation efforts at the site. It is not intended to be used to inform any current or future planning application.

Species List: Plants

Scientific Name	Common Name	28 April	11 May
Acer platanoides	Norway Maple		*
Anthriscus sylvestris	Cow Parsley	*	*
Arum maculatum	Lords-and-ladies		*
Bellis perennis	Daisy	*	*
Brachypodium sylvaticum	False Brome		*
Carex pendula	Pendulous Sedge	*	*
Carpinus betulus	Hornbeam		*
Calystegia sepium	Hedge Bindweed		*
Corylus avellana	Hazel		*
Cymbalaria muralis	Ivy-leaved Toadflax		*
Fagus sylvatica	Beech		*
Fragaria vesca	Wild Strawberry	*	
Galium aparine	Cleavers	*	*
Geranium robertianum	Herb Robert	*	
Geum urbanum	Wood Avens	*	*
Hyacinthoides × massartiana	Hybrid Bluebell		*
Ilex aquifolium	Holly		*
Jacobaea vulgaris	Common Ragwort		*
Leucanthemum vulgare	Ox-eye Daisy		*
Lonicera periclymenum	Honeysuckle		*
Medicago lupulina	Black Medick		*
Pentaglottis sempervirens	Green Alkanet		*
Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort Plantain	*	*
Potentilla reptans	Creeping Cinquefoil		*
Primula veris	Cowslip	*	*
Primula vulgaris	Primrose	*	
Prunus laurocerasus	Cherry Laurel		*
Quercus robur	Pedunculate Oak		*
Ranunculus bulbosus	Bulbous Buttercup	*	
Ranunculus repens	Creeping Buttercup		*
Symphytum officinale	Common Comfrey	*	*
Trifolium repens	White Clover		*
Urtica dioica	Common Nettle		*

Veronica hederifolia	Ivy-leaved Speedwell		*
Vicia sativa	Common Vetch		*
Vicia sepium	Bush Vetch		*
TOTAL (36 species)			

Species List: Invertebrates

Scientific Name	**Common Name**	**28 April**	**11 May**
Odonata (Dragonflies & Damselflies)			
Calopteryx virgo	Beautiful Demoiselle		*
Orthoptera (Grasshoppers & Crickets)			
Tetrix subulata	Slender Groundhopper		*
Hemiptera (True Bugs)			
Coreus marginatus	Dock Bug	*	
Corizus hyoscyami	Cinnamon Bug	*	
Dolycoris baccarum	Hairy Shieldbug	*	
Eurydema oleracea	Brassica Bug	*	
Lepidoptera (Butterflies & Moths)			
Gonepteryx rhamni	Brimstone	*	
Pararge aegeria	Speckled Wood	*	
Pieris napi	Green-veined White	*	
Pyrausta aurata	Mint Moth	*	
Diptera (True Flies)			
Euleia heraclei	Celery Fly		*
Helophilus pendulus	Common Tiger Hoverfly		*
Merodon equestris	Narcissus Bulb-fly		*
Myathropa florea	Batman Hoverfly		*
Hymenoptera (Ants, Bees, Wasps etc.)			
Anthophora plumipes	Hairy-footed Flower Bee	*	*
Apis mellifera	Honey Bee		*
Bombus pascuorum	Common Carder Bee		*
Bombus pratorum	Early Bumblebee		*
Lasius cf. *niger*	Black Ant		*

Coleoptera (Beetles)			
Coccinella septempunctata	7-spot Ladybird		*
Harmonia axyridis	Harlequin Ladybird	*	*
Lilioceris lilii	Lily Beetle		*
Oedemera nobilis	Thick-legged Flower Beetle		*
Propylea quatuordecimpunctata	14-spot Ladybird		*
Stenurella melanura	Black-striped Longhorn Beetle		*
Amphipoda (Freshwater Shrimps etc.)			
Arcitalitrus sylvaticus	Landhopper		*
Chilopoda (Centipedes)			
Cryptops parisi	a centipede		*
Isopoda (Woodlice)			
Armadillidium vulgare	Common Pill Woodlouse	*	
Oniscus asellus	Shiny Woodlouse	*	
Porcellio scaber	Rough Woodlouse	*	
Stylommatophora (Slugs and Snails)			
Cornu aspersum	Garden Snail	*	
Arachnidae: Araneae (Spiders)			
Salticus cf. *scenicus*	Zebra Spider		*
TOTAL (32 species)			

Species List: Birds

Scientific Name	**Common Name**	**28 April**	**11 May**
Apus apus	Swift		*
Columba palumbus	Wood Pigeon	*	*
Corvus corone	Carrion Crow	*	*
Erithacus rubecula	Robin	*	*
Parus major	Great Tit		*
Pica pica	Magpie	*	
Prunella modularis	Dunnock		*
Troglodytes troglodytes	Wren		*
Turdus merula	Blackbird	*	*
TOTAL (9 species)			

Photos

Photo 1: Dunnock fledgling (Mike Williams)

Photo 2: Common Tiger Hoverfly (Mike Williams)

Photo 3: Lily Beetle (Mike Williams)

Photo 4: Brassica Bug (Mike Williams)

Photo 5: Cinnamon Bug (Mike Williams)

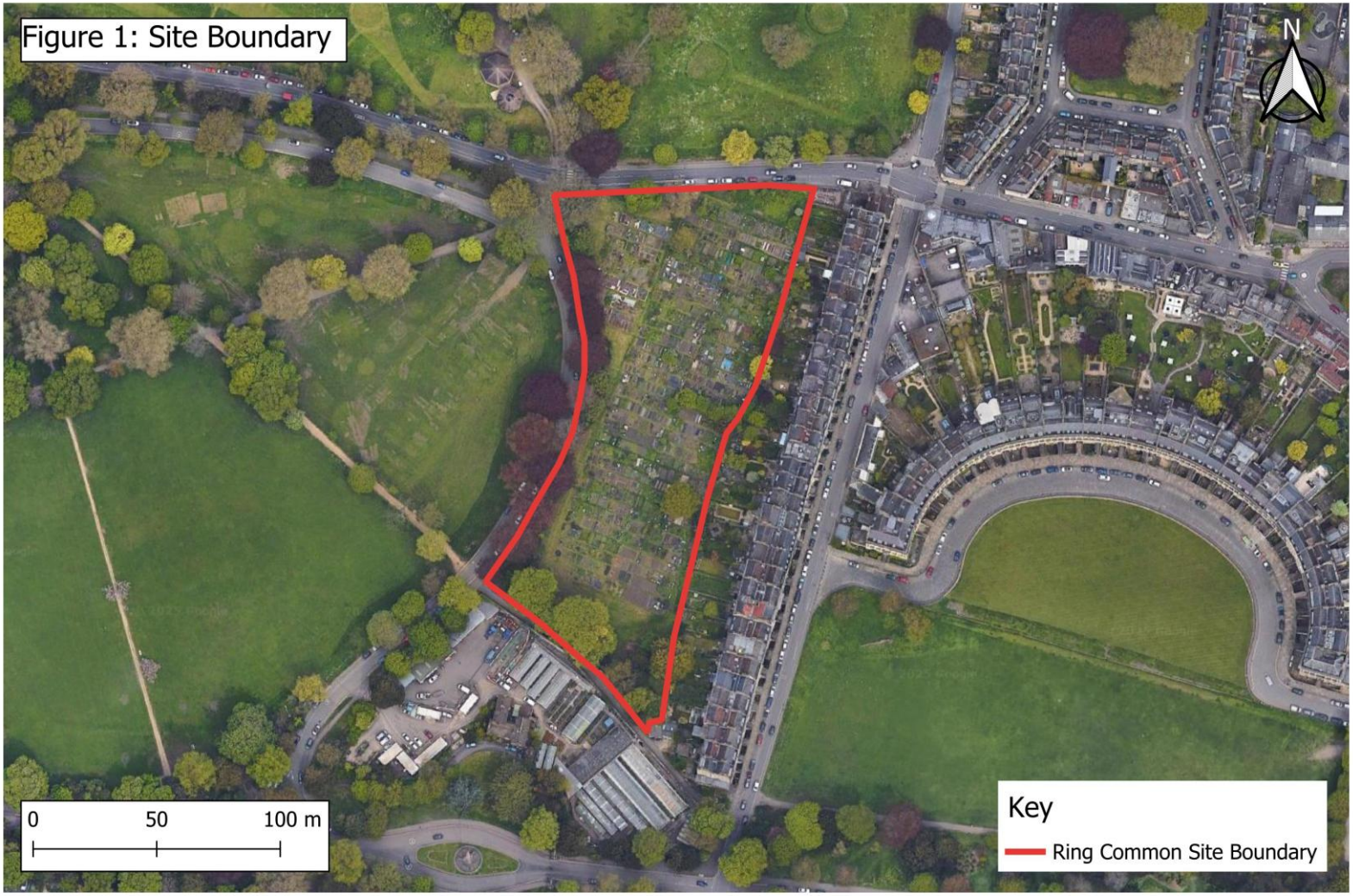
Figure 1: Site Boundary
N
0
50
100 m
Key
Ring Common Site Boundary