

Conservation with working horses

“Using Shire horses is a sustainable way to manage parkland. Not only are they offering a much-loved service to London’s landscapes, the figures stack up and it totally makes sense environmentally and economically.”

Adam Curtis, Assistant Park Manager, Richmond Park

What we do

Whether you have a small wildflower meadow or large woodland, we can help you manage it with our horses. We work primarily in and around London, demonstrating that working horses do have a place in urban settings. A range of our work is described below, but there are many other tasks we can complete – from watering flower displays to collecting recycling.

Benefits in conservation

Working horses have an important role to play in modern conservation management. Horses can work efficiently alongside engine-powered machinery, such as traversing otherwise inaccessible woodland slopes in **timber extraction**. Innovative horse-drawn machinery can provide solutions to modern conservation challenges, such as helping **control bracken** in sensitive acid grassland habitats. At other times, a habitat may benefit from traditional land management practices, such as **cutting hay** in regenerating wildflower meadows. At Operation Centaur, we employ all these approaches.



Working horses have additional benefits in conservation, offering **low noise disturbance to wildlife**, as well as **lower soil compaction** and **impact on flora**, when compared to heavier machinery. Horses also have **a low carbon footprint**. While working, we often design community outreach, publicity, or an educational element into our work, to allow our partner organisations to make the most of our presence.

Historic Royal Palaces and The Royal Parks have worked with us for the past 25 years, where we help deliver conservation estate management and heritage experiences.

Case study: Conservation in Richmond Park

Richmond Park, National Nature Reserve with SSSI designation, is the largest area of lowland acid grassland habitat in Greater London. Acid grassland supports a sensitive community of flora and fauna species, including wildflowers, birds and invertebrates.

Our role in this habitat is four-fold. Where large areas of grassland are being lost to bracken, we undertake **bracken control**, allowing grassland species to recover. Working with the horses has proved the most effective method of the many that have been trialled. It also helps limit soil compaction, and impact on rare flora.



Areas of the park are **cut for hay** in the late summer, to help reduce soil fertility, and allow acid grassland to return. We work alongside tractor contractors with a horse-drawn hay-cutter. In winter, we return to these hay-cut areas, where we **harrow**, helping aerate the ground and loosen dead vegetation.

Our amenity estate work includes **mowing** the grass verges with gang mowers, to help discourage wildlife away from road edges, particularly Red and Fallow Deer fawns.

For more on our conservation work including: grassland management, bracken control, forestry, reed bed management, transportation, outreach and fundraising, visit:

www.operationcentaur.com/conservation

About Operation Centaur

Operation Centaur promotes the relevance of the horse as a contemporary working animal in partnership with humans, through conservation, heritage, wellbeing and community projects.

While some of our work is commercial, a number of projects are charitable and free at the point of delivery.

Contact us to discuss how we may be able to work with you:

andreas@operationcentaur.com

www.operationcentaur.com

Operation Centaur, King's Chase Lodge, Hampton Court KT8 9BZ

