

MOLE MATTERS



Promoting
Countryside
Management

Autumn 2025

From the Chairman

Rod Shaw

Welcome to the autumn edition of Mole Matters. At the start of each season of the year our senses are heightened to the changes that occur to the environment around us. After the hot, dry summer many of us will welcome the change to cooler conditions; others will dread the wet and cold that winter brings. Change is often unsettling. It was way back in 1964 that Bob Dylan penned the lyrics of his song *'The Times They Are A-Changing'*. Even further back in history Heraclitus (c.500 BC) wrote: *'The only constant is change.'* But there is a sense that the rate of change is more rapid than at any time in human history.

We are also conscious of change to global climate. This summer was the warmest on record for the UK and Ireland. All the evidence points to greenhouse gas emissions as the likely cause. The Met Office is working with the Wildlife Trusts to gain a better understanding of the impact on species and ecosystems in the UK. An article in this edition of Mole Matters by one of our trustees, Dave Page, provides a fascinating, local insight into the impact of climate change on species and habitats.

All over Surrey, in urban parks, our river and wildlife corridors, nature reserves and so on, volunteers are working with their neighbours, local authorities, private sector businesses, Wildlife Trust, Surrey Hills National Landscape etc. etc. to deliver positive change. Some of the responses show real creativity and imagination – see Sarah Clayton's article in this edition of Mole Matters on the *'Library of Things'*. These initiatives are the embodiment of Mahatma Gandhi's words: *'Be the change that you wish to see in the world'* and of Socrates' idea of *'building on the new'*.

Trust Directors



Dawn Fielding - Director, Alan Sherren - Director,
Dave Page - Director, Helen Cocker - Director,
Rod Shaw - Chairman, Martin Owen - Treasurer,
Sarah Clayton - Company Secretary (not in photo)

The Trust needs your help!

This newsletter is produced every six months to keep our members up to date with what projects the Trust has supported with grants and the work that the primary group we support, The Lower Mole Partnership, have been carrying out, as well as other news from across our area.

Could you be our new editor? The role involves requesting articles (we agree suggestions to follow up at a Trust Board meeting), chasing the authors (!) and then putting all the articles, plus the regular bits of information, into a document for circulation.

Contact us on email:
LowerMoleTrust@outlook.com
If you are interested

2025 Weather Report: Climate Change and how it could impact the Natural Environment

Dave Page, Trustee

Spring 2025 wasn't just warm in the UK, it was the warmest and sunniest spring on record, combined with exceptionally low rainfall. The season accelerated recent warming trends, eight of the ten warmest springs have occurred since 2000.

In fact, meteorological history was made, presenting a unique combination of warmth, sunshine, and dryness during the spring months of March, April and May. Figures released in June were quite striking. The Met Office declared the season the warmest spring for the UK since records began in 1884. This sustained warmth was a consistent feature across all three months, leading to an early emergence of plant life and a distinct shift in the overall feel of the season. The mean temperature for the UK this spring was 9.51°C, which is 1.44°C above the 1991-2020 long-term average. Spring 2025 also claimed the title of the sunniest spring on record, with 653.3 hours of sunshine, 43% above average. Clear skies contributed to the overall warmth and had a noticeable effect on landscapes and human activity. March and April were particularly notable for their sunshine hours.

However, this picture of warmth and light was set against a backdrop of significant dryness. While not record-breaking for all areas, the season ranked as the sixth driest spring overall for the UK since that series began in 1836. With just 128.2mm of rainfall, it was approximately 56% of the average for the UK (1991-2020). For England, it was the second driest spring on record, with just 75.8mm of rain. May 2025, in particular, continued this theme of warmth and sunshine, amplifying the trends established earlier in the spring.

The weather of Spring 2025 provided several key points for reflection:

Record Warmth: The season was officially the warmest spring for the UK since records began in 1884.

Unprecedented Sunshine: It also claimed the title of the sunniest spring on record for the UK.

Significant Dryness: The season was the sixth driest overall, with England experiencing its second driest spring.

Widespread Impacts: The unique weather combination affected agriculture, water resources, natural landscapes, and daily activities.

Summer 2025

The Met Office confirmed that summer 2025 was officially the hottest on record for the United Kingdom. Provisional statistics show that the mean temperature across the country - which includes overnight lows as well as daytime highs - was 16.10C (60.98F). This is 1.51C (2.72F) above the long-term average and well ahead of 2018, the previous warmest summer, which had a mean temperature of 15.76C (60.37F).

It is in line with evidence that UK summers are getting hotter and drier; Met Office climate scientists have found that a summer as hot or hotter than 2025 is now 70 times more likely than it would have been in a "natural" climate, with no human-induced greenhouse gas emissions. 2025 has also pushed the famous summer of 1976 out of the UK top-five, meaning the five hottest summers have all occurred since 2000. Central, eastern and southern parts of England have been exceptionally dry.

Freshwater environments

The effects of extreme weather events are also being felt in freshwater environments. High temperatures lead to a significant drop in oxygen levels in rivers and water bodies, resulting in fish deaths and distress among aquatic life in the South East. The Environment Agency have been responding by aerating rivers to restore oxygen levels, highlighting the growing need for climate-responsive water management strategies. Zoe Channon, Director of Business Development & Partnerships at Surrey Wildlife Trust was quoted: "I'm more concerned than ever that our sensitive river systems, which have been placed under unprecedented pressure thanks to human activity, are now being pushed to the brink. Warmer, unreplenished rivers such as the Thames, Wey and Mole quickly suffer from oxygen depletion, negatively impacting invertebrates and fish including minnows, brown trout and pike. Increased pollution and algal blooms also reduce oxygen levels, which could mean kingfishers struggle to breed successfully, while the restoration of water vole and otter populations will also be doubly challenging in these conditions."

Butterfly populations

Butterfly Conservation reported that all except three of Surrey's butterflies (excluding hibernators, migrants and irregulars) emerged earlier in 2025 than the mean date of the previous decade. These included Grizzled Skipper in March, Large Skipper in April, Silver-studded Blue & Dark Green Fritillary in mid-May, Brown Hairstreak in June. I was stunned to see a Silver-studded Blue on Fairmile Common this early (May 19). When I started working on Fairmile Common in 1991 they would emerge at the very end of June, then earlier and earlier until we got to the end of May about seven years ago.

2025 Weather Report: Climate Change and how it could impact the Natural Environment

Dave Page, Trustee

'The False Autumn'

Autumn leaf fall is primarily triggered by day length, which is consistent year after year. No matter how warm, wet, or dry the summer has been, trees "know" when autumn is coming by how much daylight they receive. This means the golden colours of autumn are not arriving earlier this year in the traditional sense.

What we have seen, however, is trees under stress from the challenging weather conditions of 2025. With below-average rainfall and repeated spells of hot, windy weather, soils in many areas remained dry for weeks. Wind compounds the problem by drawing moisture from leaf surfaces, forcing trees to work harder to replace the water they lose. To cope, some species started to shed leaves early. Leaves turning yellow or brown in late summer are part of the tree's survival strategy: by reducing leaf area, the tree lowers the amount of water it loses through transpiration. In essence, the tree is regulating its own water use in response to drought.

Silver birch showed the most visible signs of stress in our area. With shallow root systems and a preference for light, free-draining soils, birches are poorly equipped to withstand prolonged dry spells. Many are displaying smaller leaves that have already turned yellow and dropped, reflecting the dryness of the top 50cm of soil where their roots feed.

'Bumper Crops'

2025's abundant apple and orchard fruit harvests are actually rooted in the previous year's rain. Trees were in good health when they began to make their flower buds in late summer 2024. This was followed by a dry and sunny spring resulting in abundant flowers being pollinated by insects and forming fruit. Lots of sun over the summer was then been ideal for ripening the fruit.

'2025 is a 'Mast Year'

One of the main theories for this behaviour in trees is 'predator satiation'. If we take oak and beech as the prime example, animals such as squirrels, jays, mice and badgers feed on the acorns and beech nuts. When the trees produce smaller crops for a few consecutive years, the populations of these animals are kept in check. During a mast year, the trees produce more food than the animals can possibly eat. This abundance causes a boom in populations of small mammals like mice. More importantly, it guarantees some seed will be left over to survive and grow into new trees. Mast years therefore have a major evolutionary advantage for the tree. Producing nuts is costly work and slightly stunts the tree's growth, but as it tends to happen every 5-10 years, it's worth the payoff for some of the crop to germinate into new saplings.

'Prepare for Weather Extremes'

What is certain is that future weather patterns are now uncertain as a result of a record rise of Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere during 2024. In October independent climate advisers the Climate Change Committee wrote in a letter to Government that the UK should be prepared to cope with weather extremes as a result of at least 2C of global warming by 2050. They are concerned that this country has not yet adapted to worsening weather extremes already occurring at current levels of warming, let alone what is expected to come. They advised that the UK should prepare for climate change beyond the long-term temperature goal set out in the Paris Agreement.

A recent IPCC report indicated that species across Europe are shifting their ranges northward in response to warming temperatures. This trend is particularly evident here in the UK, where naturalists have observed species moving both north and uphill over recent decades. Birds, insects and other wildlife are adapting to new climates, with some southern European species now establishing themselves in Britain. The 2008 Climatic Atlas of European Breeding Birds projected that the average bird species' range would shift 550km northeast by the century's end, with significant reductions in range size and overlap with current habitats. These projections are increasingly being realized. Species like the little egret, once rare in the UK, have now become common across much of the country. Other herons, such as the great white egret and cattle egret, are following suit. Insects have also shown dramatic range expansions.

As climate change continues to reshape the UK's natural environment, it is vital that we work with nature rather than against it. By integrating climate science into conservation planning, we can build resilience into our ecosystems and ensure that wildlife has the best chance of adapting to the challenges ahead.

Preventative action and preparedness will prove to be a lot cheaper to achieve than any remedial action in the future. Politicians and businessmen take note! In our area, let us hope that our cherished wildlife can survive these extremes. Some will win, others will disappear, to be replaced by species moving north from the continent. Change in the natural world happens quicker than we are led to believe, and the decades ahead will be the proof of this.

Grants

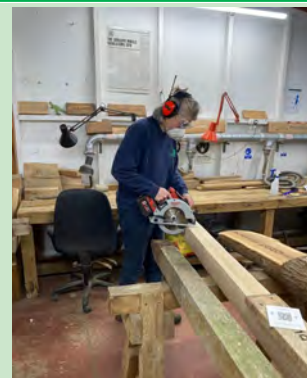
Brushcutter training for volunteers

The Trust has recently approved a grant application from the Lower Mole Partnership to provide training for their volunteers to use brush cutters on site. These tools are essential for countryside management tasks, but can only be operated by those with training. The number of Lower Mole volunteers trained to use them has decreased in recent years, so this grant will enable them to carry out more management work with qualified operators.



Battery powered sander and circular saw

The Lower Mole Partnership successfully applied for a grant to purchase a battery powered circular saw and sander. This will help them in their spring and summer task programmes. Both tools will be used to help construct benches, signs and finger posts. By having battery powered tools they will be able to use them easily when out on site as well as in the workshop.



Radiodetection Cable Avoidance Tool

A grant was awarded to the Lower Mole Partnership for the purchase of a Radiodetection CAT4+ Cable avoidance Tool with depth function, plus a Genny 4 signal generator and carry bag. The Partnership staff recently attended a CAT and Genny training course, at which it was suggested that we should update our equipment. This will make it much safer to dig holes for putting in signs, benches, fences etc.



News in Brief

19th Green Flag for Epsom Common

Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve has been awarded the coveted Green Flag Award and officially recognised as one of the country's best green spaces.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is celebrating receiving the prestigious Green Flag Award – the international quality mark for parks and green spaces - for a 19th consecutive year, for Epsom Common Local Nature Reserve (LNR). It is a true testament to the hard work and dedication of the council's staff, volunteers and partners, including the Epsom Common Association, the Lower Mole Partnership and Natural England.

The Green Flag Award scheme, managed by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy under licence from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of green spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world. Awards are given on an annual basis and winners must apply each year to renew their Green Flag Award status.

Epsom & Ewell Library of Things

Many other boroughs have a "Library of Things" (LoT) which is a way in which people can borrow, at no cost (or minimal cost) items such as power tools, jet washers and carpet cleaners - and so do not need to buy their own individual one. Many of us have these sorts of items that we only use once or twice per year.

Borrowing them from the Library of Things, instead of everyone buying their own, saves people money, effort and storage space - and also saves resources, because it is pointless for everybody to have tools, equipment etc that they rarely use. The LoT can help reduce our environmental impact.

A new local group, the Epsom & Ewell Climate Action Network (CAN) are setting up a Library of Things, for the borough, to be based at Bourne Hall library. It has the support of the local Council and the Library service. But - of course - the LoT needs to have the things to lend out. If you have any nearly new "occasional use" items you could donate, of the sorts of things people might want to borrow, that would be greatly appreciated. (Some examples might be party gazebos, bread makers, leaf blowers, hedge trimmer, document shredders, jet washers, DIY tools - in good condition ... the list is endless). If you can help, contact eeclimateactionnetwork@gmail.com and the LoT volunteers can assess if the item would be useful, and arrange collection.

Water Voles in the Upper Hogsmill

Sarah Clift

Once extinct in Surrey, water voles return to the upper Hogsmill River in major rewilding milestone. The much-loved water vole has made an historic return to the upper Hogsmill in Epsom & Ewell. This milestone is the result of a pioneering wetland restoration project led by the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) and reintroduction project by rewilding organisation Citizen Zoo, with support from the Wildwood Trust, Natural England Species Recovery Programme, Thames Water and Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.

Around 50 water voles were released onto the Hogsmill River and Chamber Mead wetland on 30th July 2025. This was the culmination of many years of work by the South East Rivers Trust, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and partners to restore the river and create the new wetland habitat. The return of this endangered species marks a major milestone for Surrey's biodiversity and one of the most exciting rewilding projects in the region.

"Water voles were once a familiar sight on the Hogsmill, but due to habitat loss and invasive predators, they died out. Now, after years of dedicated river restoration work, and the creation of the flagship wetland at Chamber Mead, as well as extensive monitoring by a band of dedicated local volunteers, we're thrilled to have brought them back to the upper Hogsmill in Surrey," said Dr Bella Davies, CEO of the South East Rivers Trust.



Water Vole

The Wildwood Trust, based in Kent and Devon, is one of the UK's leading centres for conservation breeding, and bred 50 water voles through its expert captive breeding programme for release on the upper Hogsmill river. Wildwood has played a key role in restoring water vole populations across the UK.

Citizen Zoo, a rewilding organisation that has delivered a previous successful water vole release along the Hogsmill further downstream in Kingston, led on the reintroduction. The team is now calling for local volunteers to support ongoing monitoring of the population. For more information please visit <https://www.citizenzoo.org/our-work/water-voles/>

"We are deeply committed to protecting and nurturing habitats that help biodiversity flourish, and we are honoured that the Upper Hogsmill River in our borough has been chosen as the second release site for the reintroduction of water voles," said Councillor Liz Frost, Chair of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Environment Committee. "They will be the first water voles living in the wild in Surrey for over 20 years. This milestone reflects

the strength of our partnerships to create the right conditions for these once-extinct animals to thrive and reflects our borough's dedication to managing biodiversity and creating resilient ecosystems that play a role in tackling climate change."



Chamber Mead wetland

Water voles—made famous as Ratty in *The Wind in the Willows*—are one of the UK's fastest-declining mammals, having disappeared from 94% of their former range. Their return to Surrey is both a symbolic and ecological milestone.

Lower Mole Partnership Task Update

Freya Prince, Senior Partnership Officer

This summer has been very busy for the Moles; they have been doing some amazing work across the boroughs from path surfacing to chestnut splitting. As we have now finished the summer season work and are firmly into autumn scrub clearing, we would like to say thank you to all the volunteers and their hard work.

April started off in the normal way with the regular task on Epsom Common helping the Epsom team to get ready for the arrival of the cattle to the common for their summer grazing. We spent the rest of April working in and around the workshops, this included installing the new art sculptures in Horton Country Park, visiting Castle Hill and starting on the large job of making new way markers and finger posts for the Royal Borough of Kingston. So far over the spring and summer over 500 volunteer hours have been spent on making and installing the signs!

We swiftly moved into May where we visited Norbury Park at the start and end of the month. During the first visit we installed some deer fencing around previously coppiced areas to protect regrowth from browsing. The second visit was to revisit the chestnut splitting task, which was so popular last year we decided it should become a regular addition to the programme. In the middle of May we returned to Arbrook Common where we dismantled a rotten bridge on the route of a bridleway and rebuilt it using freshly milled chestnut.

In June we visited Epsom Common, where we completed some path repairs and some excellent ditching work to prevent the path being eroded. As the weather continued to blaze down on us, we moved into invasive species control. We spent a week at The Ledges pulling balsam where we cleared 2500m² then a week in and along the Hogsmill where we cleared 900m of the river banks.

July saw our summer day out with a visit to Knepp Rewilding Estate in Sussex. Everyone had a great day exploring the estate. Then it was back to work, spending two weeks at Ashtead Park where we laid over 100m of path along the lake edge. Despite record breaking temperatures, we completed our annual summer visit to Headly Warren to start off the ragwort pulling season. This continued to Nonsuch Park where a massive 8000m² was pulled to allow for the annual hay cut. We finished the month with some more surfacing at Oxshott Heath where we surfaced from the car park to the war memorial.

Towards the end of the summer, our workshop roof was replaced which meant that the whole building was covered in scaffolding, making logistics for the summer slightly more tricky than usual. However, it was all worth it as we now have a watertight roof which I think everyone will appreciate as we head into winter!

August saw all the staff disappear on holiday at some point, so tasks were kept to ones that could be led by one staff member. We had another week in the workshops doing more Kingston signs. This was followed by a new task at Ashtead Park, where Mole Valley DC asked us to plant up part of the lakeside to encourage bank vegetation. This consisted of coir rolls and mats pre-planted with lake plants. It was a great task to get everyone's brains working to solve some of the problems that come with a new task. We finished the month with our third visit to Norbury Park to do some more splitting and then using some of those products to extend the fencing near the sawmill that we installed in 2024.

Installing Kingston signposts

As the summer came to an end we started to add some scrub clearance to the programme. We spent a week at Milton Heath where we cleared 2000m² of scrub with the aim to restore the heath and views in the future. We then had a split week where John and two volunteers spent the week using an excavator and dumper trucks restoring Bramble Walk Pond on Epsom Common, while the rest of the volunteers spent the week installing landmark posts and painting the workshop (making the most of the scaffolding that was up for the new roof). We ended September with a visit to Juniper Hill to clear part of the chalk grassland to stop the woodland from encroaching and the final week was spent at Esher Common. Here, we finally made it on to the islands (we were stopped by rain and high-water levels last year) to clear all the birch trees, restoring the habitat for the rare sundew.

Overall, we had a massively busy spring and summer with over 3800 volunteer hours, so I just wanted to say another thank you for all the volunteers hard work over the last 6 months and I hope we can have a just as good autumn and winter.



Lakeside work at Ashtead Park



Support us with membership, donation or a legacy

If you are not a member or if you know anyone who would like to support our valuable work in the countryside, we would be delighted to receive your application via our website, or email us at lowermole.wordpress.com

The Lower Mole Countryside Trust

The Lower Mole Countryside Trust supports the provision of a high quality countryside management service for north Surrey and Kingston upon Thames for the benefit of landscape, wildlife and people.

The Trust supports the work of the Lower Mole Partnership and other community groups and organisations.

The Lower Mole area covers the Boroughs of Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell and northern Mole Valley District in Surrey and the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.

The Aims of the Trust are to:

Educate – to help the public learn about the countryside and its management through talks, walks, leaflets and on-site information.

Conserve – to promote the conservation, restoration and the management of the countryside, wildlife habitats and characteristic landscapes.

Involve – to encourage the participation of the public in practical countryside management work.

Access – to improve public access to the countryside for informal recreation through publicising walking, riding and cycling routes and by promoting the establishment of new routes.

Get in touch

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The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Directors of the Trust.