

The Lower Mole Partnership

The Partnership (formerly Project) was set up in 1983 and now covers an area of 264 square kilometres. The aim of the Partnership is to carry out countryside improvements for the benefit of people and wildlife, by:

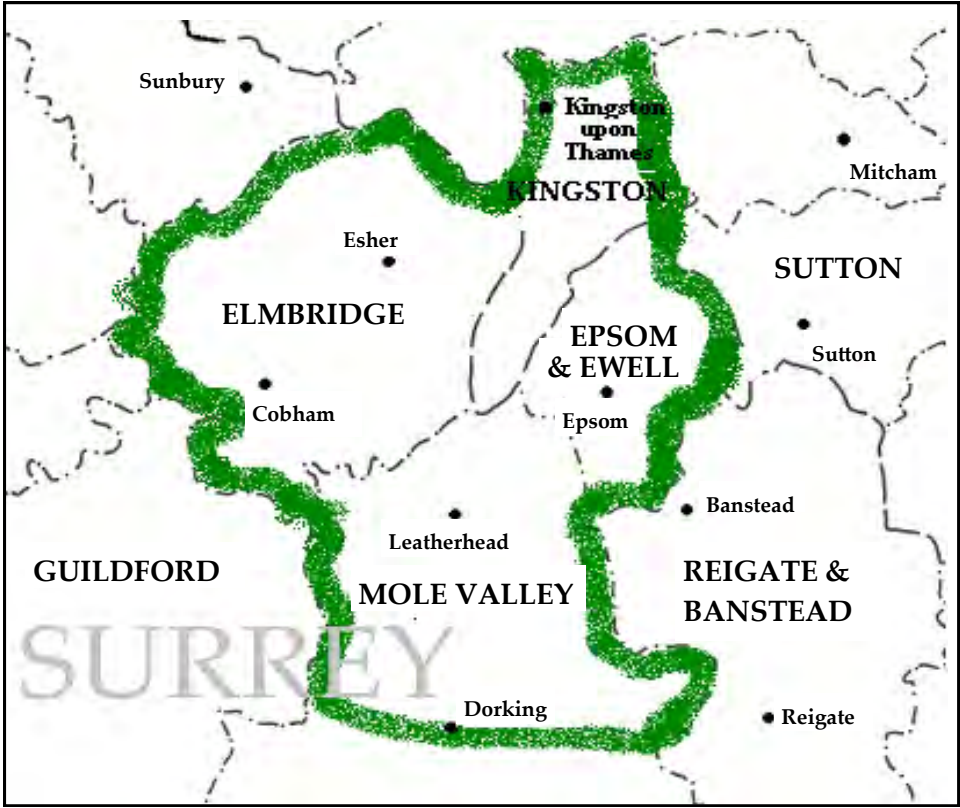
- Improving public access to the countryside for informal recreation.
- Conserving landscape features and enhancing the natural beauty of the countryside.
- Increasing public knowledge and understanding of the countryside.
- Encouraging greater community involvement in the countryside.

Partnership Staff

Helen Cocker - Operations Manager
Debbie Hescott -Partnership Development Officer
Freya Prince - Senior Countryside Partnership Officer
Louise Wilford - Partnership Officer
John Armitage - Partnership Officer

Trust Directors

Rod Shaw - Chairman
Sarah Clayton - Company Secretary
Martin Owen - Treasurer
Alan Sherren - Director
Patrick Oven - Director
Dawn Fielding—Director
Helen Cocker - Director



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.

If you would like to become a member and/or a volunteer please contact us at the address below.

The Lower Mole Countryside Trust is a limited company. Registered Charity No. 1095771

Registered in Cardiff. Company No. 4454401. Registered office as below.

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

For further information on the work of the Trust or Partnership contact us on:

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or write to: The Lower Mole Countryside Trust

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or visit the Partnership website: www.lowermoleproject.org.uk

Or the Trust website: www.lowermolecountryside.org.uk

or e-mail the Trust at LowerMoleTrust@outlook.com

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Promoting
Countryside
Management

Spring 2024

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The Building of Young Street

Pamela Harwood

On the north-west corner of the Givons Grove roundabout a stone cairn records the work done by the 2nd Road Construction Company of the Canadian Royal Engineers during the Second World War in order to complete the western extension of the Leatherhead bypass. This was necessary since the narrow roads of Leatherhead were causing congestion to military traffic.



Lieutenant Leslie Herbert Browne, Royal Canadian Engineers, playing his David Glen bagpipes aboard a ship en route to France on D-Day, 6 June 1944

The Company had arrived in England from Toronto in June 1940 and started work on what was to become Young Street at the end of the year. Their headquarters were at Oxshott where the brickworks site was used as a workshop and equipment dump. Most of the large houses in the area, including Stoke D'Abernon and Cobham, were requisitioned for accommodation. The building of Young Street was no easy task. It involved removing 145,000 cubic metres of chalk and flint to form the cutting up to Hawks Hill wide enough for a dual carriageway, (though it was built and remained a single roadway), enlarging and strengthening the railway tunnel, bridging the river, and transporting the excavated material across the river to form the approaches to the bridge. The bridge itself had concrete abutments and wooden piers to support a wooden deck on steel girders across the 79 ft. gap. It was made stronger than would have been necessary for ordinary traffic in order to carry the weight of the heavy military equip-

ment. West of the bridge, the tunnel under the Leatherhead to Dorking railway (originally serving only a country lane) needed major reconstruction without causing interruption to the trains. This entailed lowering the roadway and underpinning the brickwork of the 1867 archway. The road remained a single carriage-way and so needed lights to regulate the traffic.

The road was opened on 25th May 1941 by Mackenzie King, the Canadian Prime Minister.

The bridge and the tunnel under the railway remained in use until 1978, although a new bridge had been built in 1976 which was not, however, connected to the road so that during the drought of that year there was a bridge with no road over a river with no water! The rebuilt road, undertaken by Surrey County Council engineers, was opened on 20th January 1978 by Paul Martin, the High Commissioner for Canada.

After completing Young Street, the 2nd Road Construction

Company carried out many civil engineering tasks in Britain between 1941 and 1944, including building the runway to Dunsfold airfield. They then went to France soon after D-day and gave support to the Allied armies. Following the unit's disbandment in July 1945 the Oxshott brickworks site reverted to its former use. It finally ceased production in the 1950s and was sold for housing. The claypit became flooded and is now an attractive nature reserve.

2024 marks the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings in June 1944 and it is timely that we acknowledge the debt we owe to all of those who served and those who continue to serve.

In the early 2000's the section known as Young Street Verge, originally excavated but not incorporated into the road, was cleared of scrub with the intention of maintaining chalk grassland. However, the planned management did not occur, and the scrub returned. In 2017 the scrub was cleared by the Lower Mole Partnership (LMP) with funding from the Lower Mole Countryside Trust (LMCT) and Surrey County Council and the area was mown in the autumn and this management has continued with funding from the Trust. As a result, the scrub has not returned, and



Bee Orchid at Young Street verge



Cowslips at Young Street verge after scrub clearance in recent years

an area of chalk grassland has been established. LMP also built the flint and brick seat/cairn at the top of Young Street

In 2023 LMCT paid for a survey of the site by Pete Howarth, Ecologist with impressive results. The site was surveyed on 4 occasions throughout the flowering season.

The surveys found the site contained 56 species of flowering plant. This included four species of Orchid; Common Spotted Orchid, Fragrant Orchid, Bee Orchid and Pyramidal Orchid. The last species was very abundant with over 150 plants recorded. Other notable species included Common Gromwell and Common Broomrape. The proportion of herbs to grass was very high with 5% grass to 95% herbs. Generally, the species found were well distributed in terms of overall abundance, however over the survey period there were abundant displays of Cowslips, then Ox-eye Daisy and finally Wild Carrot. The main negative indicator plant found was Canadian Goldenrod, this plant has found to be invasion and a negative issue in chalk grassland areas. At the time of the survey, it was present in low abundance. In spite of the frequency of cutting there were a number of scrub species found, with young Dogwood in the grassland. The protected species the Roman Snail was found on site. Although a

formal survey was not carried out the species seemed to be only present on site in low densities.

The method chosen to evaluate the site was to use the Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SNCI) designation criteria. One of the criteria for grassland to be of a standard to be designated as an SNCI is species richness. This is based on the presence for more than 15 species of plant set out in a list of indicator species including at least 2 of the more important species. Young Street Verge contained 25 of the indicator species and included 4 of the higher-level species, Common Spotted Orchid, Common Gromwell, Fragrant Orchid and Grass Vetchling. Therefore, Young Street Verge is easily of the quality to qualify to be designated as an SNCI and it has now been put forward for consideration by the Local Sites Partnership.

The account of Young Street is based on The History of the Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers by Col. A. J. Kerry and Maj. W. A. McDill, and on information supplied by Mr & Mrs J. C. Elliott of Stoke D'Abernon.

Photo: Lieutenant Leslie Herbert Browne, Royal Canadian Engineers, playing his David Glen bagpipes aboard a ship en route to France on D-Day, 6 June 1944.

Survey data extracts from the report by Pete Howarth, Ecologist, 2023

LMCT receives generous fundraiser donation from Ringway Surrey

The Surrey Countryside Partnerships are very pleased to be developing a great corporate partnership with Ringway Surrey, who have a ten year contract with our host authority Surrey County Council, looking after highways maintenance. Ringway operates a policy that staff get involved with corporate volunteering and teams of employees have joined in on task sessions with the Lower Mole and Surrey Heathland Partnerships since January 2023, most recently in March with the Moles at Hersham Riverside.

In 2023, Ringway Surrey nominated the Lower Mole Countryside Trust as one of the charities to receive a portion of their marketing merchandise budget. Rather than the company purchasing more merchandise to give away at events, which often means creating plastic items that end up in people's cupboards or in landfill, staff were instead asked to vote on where a financial donation should be made. Votes were collected on the various charities nominated - the voting device was notably a fun small, squishy traffic cone! - and LMCT kindly received 25% of the votes and received a lovely donation of £375.00 in January 2024.

Our many thanks to Ringway Surrey for this generous donation and for their ongoing support of our partnerships and in turn, the LMCT too.



Ringway Volunteers helping out on a Surrey Heathland site.

Welcome...

to the Spring 2024 edition of Mole Matters.

As the days are lengthening and the weather is becoming warmer, Spring doesn't feel too far away.

In this issue we learn about the effects of climate change on UK birds, and the building of Young Street.

In addition you will find the usual items to keep you up to date with the work of the Partnership and its volunteers, as well as an update on the grants the Trust has awarded.

Front cover shows the donated charcoal kiln being delivered to 60 Acre Wood.

Chamber Mead Wetlands

On Saturday 20 April hundreds of people attended the Chamber Mead wetlands open day and enjoyed guided walks, children's scavenger hunts and marvelled at the creatures caught by kick searching in the Hogsmill River.

Egrets and ducks were already enjoying the wetlands as crowds gathered to hear Dr Bella Davies, Co-CEO of the South East Rivers Trust (SERT), explain the reasons for creating the wetlands in partnership with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, which owns and manages the nature reserve.

The 2000m2 series of wetlands has been created to divert pollutants, coming from the Green Lanes stream, away from the globally rare chalk stream and will increase the numbers and types of wildlife across the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve. On 1 May the last of the 10,000 plants needed for the successful implementation of the scheme were installed, right on schedule. The quality of the water in the River Hogsmill downstream of where the water flows from the wetlands will be monitored as part of the monthly river invertebrate monitoring scheme.

News in Brief

Trust AGM update

The Twenty First Annual General Meeting of the Lower Mole Country-side Trust that covers the period 1st September 2022 to 31st August 2023 was held at the offices of City of London Ashted Common (COLAC) on Wednesday 20 March 2024 at 7pm.

Rod Shaw, the Trust Chairman, thanked COLAC for their hospitality and gave an outline of the work of the Trust over the year and priorities for the future. These included:

- Augmenting the size of the Board by attracting new trustees
- Increasing the level of funding that can be offered for conservation projects and in particular to provide a level of more long term funding by entering into an agreement with a business partner.

The Board will also look at further ways to improve its administration. The financial summary of the accounts for the year were accepted by the members.

There were changes to the Trustees with Pamela Harwood retiring after many years. She was thanked for all the work she had done. A warm welcome was given to Martin Owen who joins as Treasurer, a post that has been vacant for several years. Martin gave an outline of his background in finance and his hopes for his future involvement as a trustee.

After a short break for refreshments there was a fascinating presentation by ZuZa Featherstone on surveying and monitoring Ashted Common National Nature Reserve. The Trust and the Lower Mole Partnership (LMP) have a long and happy relationship with the Common and its staff and the talk gave an insight into the surveying and research that goes into preserving the veteran trees and the rare creatures that exist in their dead wood. It led to lively audience partition that ranged over what angle to cut branches, the different types of halo release and how to collect bat droppings! Zuza was thanked for giving members an insight into the amount of work that goes into balancing the differing needs of such an important ecosystem.



The Big Butterfly Count is a UK-wide survey aimed at helping assess the health of our environment simply by counting the amount and type of butterflies (and some day-flying moths) we see. Visit the website: bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org for all the information on how to get involved.

Between **Friday 12th July** and **Sunday 4th August** choose a place to spot butterflies and moths. Watch for **15 minutes**. Then record which species you see. You can download an ID chart or a free app to help identify and record the butterflies that you spot.



The Epsom Common Association (ECA) are celebrating their 50th Anniversary this year, and will be marking the event with Epsom Common Discovery Day on **Sunday 7th July**. The event will be based at Stew Ponds Meadow with free walks about the wildlife and history of Epsom Common.

For more information on their celebrations, or how to get involved with the ECA, or their practical volunteers the ECOVOLS have a look at their website: epsomcommon.org.uk

Lower Mole Partnership Volunteer task Update

The Lower Mole Partnership have been busy out on site, battling the scrub over the winter season and we are looking forward to our spring/summer tasks. Despite being an unusually wet and windy winter, it has been a productive six months, working on the usual variety of sites. Tasks have including a return visit to Dukes Warren on Coldharbour Common, and re-laying a hedge on the Bonesgate Open Space. As always we would like to say a huge thanks to all our volunteers for their hard work, and we look forward to being out on site with everyone during 2024.

The season began with scrub clearance on Oxshott Heath and Brockham Quarry, a new favourite with the volunteers. This was followed by a two week visit to the western edge of Ashted Common. This task was part of the agreed works with the City of London which they had funded through a grant applied for by the Trust. Lots of volunteers and some help from a team from Atkins meant that we managed to clear a huge area of scrub to help with their climate resilience work. At the very end of the month, the Moles celebrated their 40th Anniversary with a mega scrub bash and BBQ on Epsom Common, the site of their first task.

In November, we continued with the scrub clearance at Cowey Sale, Dukes Warren and Hogsmill Wood. A second week was spent coppicing in Norbury Park, where we built a dead hedge to protect the regrowth.

December meant some more scrub clearance, this time on Littleworth Common, one of the Elmbridge Commons where we were clearing the holly, handy for Christmas wreaths! The final task of the year, as always was in Horton Country Park, coppicing in Sherwood Grove. Stakes and binders were collected for the Epsom & Ewell team hedgelaying just along



Hedgelaying by the Bonesgate

the track, and we also collected some for our own hedgelaying task after the Christmas break.

2024 started with our regular joint task with the Ashted volunteer team, Epsom Countryside Team, and the Ecovols. The first week was spent clearing young birch scrub, and collecting firewood and birch tops for dead hedging elsewhere on the common. During the second week we returned to the Epsom Common side of Bridleway 38, clearing rideside scrub as we have done on the Ashted side in recent years. Next, we were off to the hedge on The Bonesgate Open Space to re-lay the hedge which borders the



Tree popping on Chatley Heath

site, then to Ashted Park for some halo release of the veteran trees.

In February it seemed the rain never stopped! We carried on as best we could, clearing scrub on Chatley Heath, Fetcham Splash and 6 Acre Meadow.

March remained extremely wet for our final scrub/path clearance tasks of the season at Headley Warren, Bridleway 26 in Kingston, Teazel Wood and Hersham Riverside, where we were joined by a team from Ringway.

As always, we couldn't do it without the hard working volunteer team, so thanks for all your efforts over the last six months.



40th Anniversary scrub bash on Epsom Common

The Effect of Climate Change on UK Birds

Pamela Harwood

A great deal of research is being carried out as to the effect of climate change on the UK bird population. The complexity of the subject means that resulting reports are contradictory but one message is clear: we will lose some birds and gain others.

Winners

Bee-eaters have started to breed on the Isle of Wight, Scops Owls have been regular visitors, mostly in the south of England and wading birds such as Black-winged Stilts are becoming more numerous.

Losers

Breeding seabirds and upland breeding birds are the two groups most vulnerable to climate change. Fourteen seabird species are regarded as being at risk of negative climate change impacts. These include Puffin, for which a population decline across Britain and Ireland of 89% is projected by 2050.

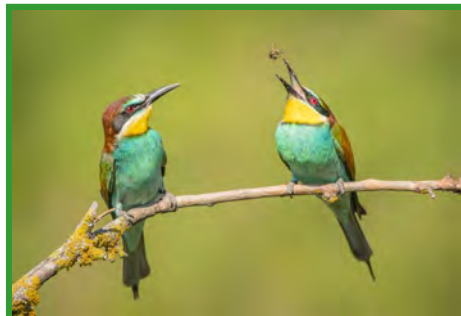
It is feared that Cuckoos too will be badly affected by the lack of food during their strenuous journey back over the Sahara to over-winter in Africa. This might lead to their calls being completely absent from the UK at some time in the future.

Research projects

One bird that has been widely researched is the Blackcap, a small warbler with a distinctive song. The male has the black cap after which they are named and the female's cap is a rusty brown.

Blackcaps typically visit Britain and Ireland during the spring and summer months to breed before migrating south to wintering areas in the Mediterranean. But a study from Oxford University, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Max Planck Institute, has found some European Blackcaps have expanded their wintering range northward and are now frequently found in Britain and Ireland in the winter months.

The study reveals that these birds are not breeders but overwhelmingly originate from breeding locations across Europe and are undertaking a highly atypical north-westward migration to our shores in autumn.



Bee-eaters (Photo from RSPB)

However nothing in nature is that simple and this may not be due to climate change alone.

Research has shown that the provision of bird food in gardens during cold weather has not only contributed to the large numbers that now migrate to Britain and Ireland for the winter but also to evolutionary change. Adult Blackcaps which frequented gardens were able to carry smaller fat stores because they know where their next meal will come from. This reduced weight makes them more agile and better able to escape from predators.

The researchers even found that gardens may be influencing Blackcap anatomy: those in gardens had longer bills and more rounded wingtips, which may be linked to their more generalist diet and sedentary winter lifestyle



Blackcap (picture from RSPB)

Their presence in the UK has had another unforeseen effect; the increase in mistletoe that can be seen on the bare branches of trees during winter. The evergreen mistletoe is a parasite tapping for nutrients into the branches, most frequently of willow, poplar and apple. The best areas to see mistletoe are in the English West Country, the lower Severn Valley and around London, but in recent years, this strange plant has been increasing in numbers and in range.

Warmer winters could be favouring mistletoe which is more common in milder, southern England, but its spread seems to be linked to our habit of feeding the birds, particularly the Blackcaps that are now wintering in Britain.

Traditionally the mistletoe's sticky berries are eaten by Mistle Thrushes which guard their favourite clumps and chase off other hungry birds. They swallow the berries whole, then excrete the seeds in long sticky trails which fall to the ground or, with luck, stick onto branches. It's a bit hit-and-miss, but enough to produce new mistletoe plants. But Mistle Thrushes are in decline.

Enter the Blackcaps that also



Mistletoe (Photo from Britannica.com)



Cuckoo (Photo from RSPB)

like berries, especially mistletoe. Unlike the thrush, the smaller Blackcap wipes its bill on a branch to remove the sticky mistletoe seed, effectively giving it a head start by planting it in the right area and often on the right kind of tree. Instead of the Mistle Thrush's scatter-gun method, this is careful targeting and makes the Blackcap a better cultivator. More wintering Blackcaps mean more mistletoe plants and that is one of the reasons that surveys are showing a marked increase.

But again there are winners and losers. The mistletoe is the winner which seems like a plus for climate change. However reports from traditional orchards in Kent show that the weight of mistletoe on their ancient trees is killing them. Orchards such as these play an important role for a diverse range of wildlife that modern commercial orchards do not fulfil. So loss of these trees could badly affect local biodiversity.

A much more worrying line of research is highlighting the fact that climate change might mean that in the future birds do not need to migrate. However this will cause a problem for food supplies if they remain in their home areas. It could also have global implications as migrating birds are great fertilisers and seed sowers as they journey meaning large areas of the globe may become infertile.

Much more research is needed to show what the future may look like if we continue to allow temperatures to rise but the overwhelming message is that we must do everything we can to ensure the trend is curtailed.

GRANTS GRANTS GRANTS

Electric chainsaw for the LMP

A grant of £360 has been awarded to the LMP for the purchase of an electric chainsaw. Much of the winter work they carry out involves the use of chainsaws, from cutting scrub, removing stumps, felling trees and producing logs for sale. This new saw will allow them to continue their work and at the same time reduce carbon emissions, including pollutants from petrol and make a nicer working environment for our volunteers due to the decreased noise level that comes with battery chainsaws.

Ashtead Common Climate Resilience



In October the LMP completed the first year of work on the two year work plan, carrying out improvements on the common to widen fire-breaks making it more protected during the predicted hotter summers. Work was completed along the edge of the common close to Ashtead Gap. This follows on from a previous agreement and is supported by the City of London Corporation, via a grant made to the Lower Mole Trust.



Ashtead Common scrub clearance

Kiln delivered to 60 Acre Wood

The donation of the kiln to local coppice worker was reported on in the last edition of Mole Matters. It has now been successfully delivered to 60 Acre Wood in Chessington, and is ready to be put to good use this summer making local, sustainable charcoal. This small area of native woodland is a very important remnant of a much larger one as the name suggests and has been worked continually by the same coppice worker, who utilises all the wood cut and is the source of chestnut for bench legs and barriers for LMP tasks. His work has produced a mosaic of coppiced woodland that provide a much needed habitat for wildlife.



Kiln being delivered

Dormouse boxes

The LMT has agreed a grant of £200 for the LMP to make and install an additional 12 Dormouse boxes at Brockham Lime works. The Lower Mole Partnership successfully applied for a grant in 2018 to make and install dormouse nesting boxes on some of our work sites. 38 boxes in total have been located at Brockham Lime works, a site that the LMP have recently been working on. These were installed in 2022, and when surveyed in 2023, many of the boxes had dormice nesting in them. The additional boxes will take the total up to 50, meaning that it can be registered as an official dormouse site. The grant will cover the cost of the timber and fixings to make the boxes, and the costs for our volunteers to make them in our workshops and install them on site.