

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:

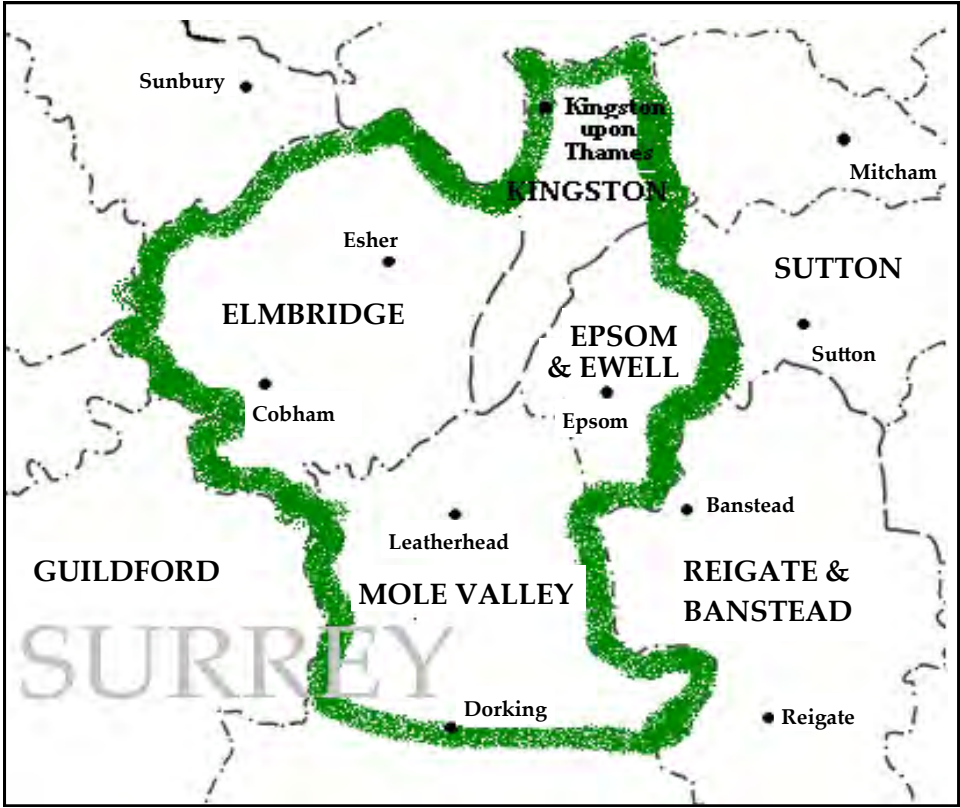
- Improving public access to the countryside for informal recreation.
- Conserving landscape features and enhancing the natural beauty of the countryside.
- Increasing public knowledge and understanding of the countryside.
- Encouraging greater community involvement in the countryside.

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
Vacant - Treasurer
Pamela Harwood - Director
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:

01372 743783

or write to: The Lower Mole Countryside Trust

2 West Park Farmhouse, Horton Country Park, Horton Lane, Epsom, Surrey, KT19 8PL

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

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

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

or e-mail the Partnership at mole.project@surreycc.gov.uk

MOLE MATTERS



Autumn 2023

In this issue:
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The Future of the Hogsmill River

Pamela Harwood

The Hogsmill river is a chalk stream, one of only 220 known worldwide and as such is of extreme environmental importance. It flows from Ewell in Surrey through Old Malden, New Malden and Berrylands to the River Thames and is approximately seven miles long. It provides valuable habitat for wildlife and a green haven for people to enjoy its tranquil surroundings.

Pre-Raphaelite painters used the river as background in some of their most famous paintings.

It has a long commercial history, its waters having been used to power mills ranging from corn, through gunpowder and paper to (very surprisingly) coconut. The river course was channelled and diverted to make use of the power of the water but due to abstraction the flow became too low to make these enterprises viable and the mills fell into disrepair, leaving weirs and concrete banks that prevent the passage of wildlife.

The Lower Mole Partnership (LMP) and its volunteers have a long history of working in the river and along its banks.

- Reversing the earlier channeling they joined the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) in installing berms and weirs made from wood, the natural way to slow rivers and deepen the water to allow fish to breed
- Took part in Hogsmill Safaris to identify outfalls that might be responsible for pollution
- Tackled invasive Himalayan Balsam along the banks
- Laid paths to allow for access
- Took part in Riverfly training by the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) to use invertebrate numbers to provide an indicator as to the health of the river.

These checks continue monthly and highlight a known problem with the Green Lanes Stream (GLS), the first to enter the Hogsmill. The stream has many problems including sewage spills from the Epsom Storm Drain during heavy rain and road run-off as it travels through Epsom.

The Hogsmill Catchment Partnership, a group comprising all those organisations concerned in the health of the river, drew up a scheme to divert the GLS where it arrives at Cham-



Photos: top shows LMP vols installing berms, above shows Riverfly training, and right shows tackling invasive species

What makes it special?

- **The Hogsmill is home to a variety of fish species including dace, chub, eel and gudgeon as well as invertebrates that rely on the river for all or part of their life cycle such as mayflies, and damselflies**
- **The surrounding Hogsmill Open Space has a mix of scrub, meadow and woodland habitats that support 26 species of butterfly, four species of bat and more than 100 species of bird.**
- **Along its length, it is joined by five tributaries as it flows northwards before reaching the Thames at Kingston.**

The Future of the Hogsmill River

ber Mead before it flows into the river thereby creating a wetland.

Wetlands are a nature-based solution to improving water quality, capturing polluted soil and gradually filtering water as it flows through reed beds and green plants before releasing it back into the river. They also provide multiple benefits by sequestering carbon, providing flood storage, mitigating the impacts of droughts by storing water in the landscape, and boosting biodiversity.

The Covid pandemic delayed the scheme's implementation and the resulting raised costs brought fears that it would not go ahead but a recent grant to SERT from Natural England (NE) has ensured work has now started. It is scheduled to take 8 – 10 weeks depending on the vagaries of the weather. (photo of machinery in action)

NE's Species Recovery Programme Capital Grant Scheme is part of the drive to halt and reverse declines in populations of England's most threatened species. On 14 September NE's Chair, Dr Tony Juniper CBE, joined organisations and volunteers involved in improving the health of the Hogsmill for the launch and photo opportunities.

The programme for the Hogsmill will be targeted at restoring populations of water vole, eel and trout, species that were once common along the river but have now largely or entirely disappeared.

The grant of almost £400k will fund a second release of water voles and major habitat improvements, removal of the last downstream concrete weir to allow for access for the target species from the Thames, creation of a mammal tunnel under the A3, new projects focused on the instream habitat and completion of the two major projects in the pipeline: Chamber Mead wetlands and Enriching Elmbridge Meadows.

Recently LMP volunteers braved the heat for 3 days in Elmbridge Meadows, using traditional methods to clear scrub in the area where a new backwater is planned.



The future of the Hogsmill is looking brighter but there is so much more to do.

Sadly the UK's rivers are in a parlous state, beset by sewage spills, agricultural run-off, commercial and domestic over abstraction, misconnections of household appliances, heavy metal from road runoff, micro plastic that gets into the guts of wildlife and of course the threat of climate change bringing drought and flooding.

There is so much more to do to secure their future.



Photos: top shows works at Chamber Mead, above shows species recovery scheme launch at the Stepping Stones, immediately above shows clearance at Elmbridge Mead-

Welcome...

to the Autumn 2023 edition of Mole Matters.

In this issue we catch up on what has been happening along the Hogsmill River and look back at the wonderful wildlife spotted over the summer.

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 one of Conor's last task with the LMP, building a rain-water harvester at Brockham

Farewell Conor

Conor has been with the Lower Mole Partnership since 1993! Originally as a Project Officer and then as Senior Partnership Officer since 2014. We loaned him out a couple of times during that period to the National Rivers Authority (now Environment Agency) and the Gatwick Greenspace Project. After so many years he has built up a wealth of knowledge about the sites that the LMP works on and has managed to successfully juggle the competing needs of all the different aspects of the work, from finance to property issues at the office, and from ensuring the health and safety of the team to volunteer social events. He has been a valuable member of the team for so long that not having him around will take some adjusting to. We wish him all the best for his retirement.



News in Brief

Moles turn 40

October marks the 40th anniversary of the LMP's first ever volunteer task on Epsom Common. To celebrate, everyone is invited to join the past and present staff and volunteers for another scrub bashing task and BBQ lunch to celebrate. The celebration task will be held on Epsom Common, on Tuesday 31st October. Please let us know if you are planning to attend

Exciting find along the Hogsmill

A Mesolithic flint axe head, about 15 cm long has just been handed in to Bourne Hall Museum. It was found in mud by the stepping stones by an experienced mudlark. This takes the history of people working on the banks of the Hogsmill back to at least 5,000BC



SCP forum

The Surrey Countryside Partnership (SCP) senior staff hosted the team's inaugural Forum at Surrey County Council's Woodhatch Place on the afternoon of 14 September. This marked the 40th anniversary of the SCP's countryside management service.

This was the first event of this kind for the team, with invited guests joining in person and also online. Despite some unexpected and unfortunate technical issues, we have received some lovely positive feedback about the event content and presentations. In particular the Volunteer Views section, where three of our regular volunteers presented about their own volunteering experiences with our conservation crews, was highly praised.

Firewood Update

Some may be aware of the new regulations that have recently been introduced for the sale of firewood in England. You can only supply or sell wood fuel in volumes of less than 2 cubic metres if it is certified as 'Ready to Burn'. This confirms it has a moisture content of 20% or less.

The Lower Mole Partnership has now been approved to sell firewood again! This is really good news, and although there are new procedures for storing and checking the moisture content of the logs, they are ready to sell firewood again. The income generated from the sale of this by product will go back to supporting the LMP to carry out local conservation work.

Welcome Freya

The LMP would like to say a warm welcome to Freya Prince, who will be taking over as the Senior Countryside Partnership Officer at the LMP. Freya has had lots of experience of practical countryside management working for the Kent County Council Ranger Service, and more recently at the Environment Agency. Many of our regular volunteers will have already met her out on site, as she was keen to get stuck in straight away.



Lower Mole Partnership Volunteer Task Update

It's been another busy summer, with the usual variety of tasks including step repairs, sign manufacture and installation, path surfacing, fencing, invasive species removal and pond creation. The volunteer team have once again achieved a huge amount of work on the ground, with hundreds of hours recorded. As we look towards the season of scrub clearance and bonfires, we would like to say thanks for all your efforts and keep up the good work.

April saw the usual retreat to workshops for some spring cleaning and preparation for the forthcoming construction tasks. Volunteers were kept busy mowing the countryside garden and weeding the tree nursery, in addition to some re-organisation work in the firewood stores to help us comply with the new regulations. We had return visits to the workshop during May and June, preparing the posts and rails for the Claygate Common barriers and constructing 12 welcome signs, that we would later be installing on the Local Nature Reserves sites in Kingston.

Our first trip out from workshops was onto Epsom Common to help the Epsom Countryside Team make sure that all the gates and squeezes were ready for the arrival of the cattle for their summer grazing.

During May we were out on Claygate Common, installing the horse barriers that we had been preparing during the workshop tasks. We also installed a sign and bench at Hogsmill Wood, a new site for us and mowed the meadow at Castle Hill.

With June came soaring temperatures, and the beginning of the annual fight against invasive species. The first to come up is Himalayan Balsam, and we spent a couple of weeks pulling this up at Cowey Sale and along the Bonesgate Stream in Ewell. A new task for us was the construction of a rainwater harvester at Brockham Limeworks, where there is no



Team from Phillips helping to pull ragwort at Nonsuch Park

water supply. Working under the supervision of the Grazing Team, we constructed this during two visits in June and July to enable the site to be grazed (see front cover photo).

Also in July we spent a week pulling ragwort and 'tree popping' small scrub at Headley Warren. The goats were on site and enjoyed grazing on the piles of scrub that we were leaving!

August was a busy month with the completion of all the summer construction tasks. Firstly we were on Epsom Common topping up surfacing and installing drainage pipes. This was followed by a two week task digging a brand new pond at Hollymoor Grove in Horton Country Park. After this we returned to Oxshott Heath for step repairs and to The Ledges, where we



Step repairs on Oxshott Heath

completed repairs on the boardwalk. Our final week was spent digging some very challenging holes for the installation of the Local Nature Reserve signs on several of the Kingston sites. There are a few left to install which we are planning to do in the autumn once the ground is hopefully a bit softer!

Although we were experiencing another heatwave, September saw the return of our autumnal tasks. Firstly some scrub clearance at Elmbridge Meadows in preparation for the proposed new wetland. Next, a return visit to Norbury Park for coppicing, and scrub clearance at Ashted Park, both of which again provided more fodder for the giraffes at Chessington.

As always we would like to say a huge thankyou to all of our volunteers for all you hard work!



Excavating new pond at Hollymoor Grove, HCP



New Local Nature Reserve sign in Kingston

Butterflies

Scientists have now proved that volunteering in the environment has a beneficial effect both mental and physical - but of course we already knew that. Having access to beautiful woodlands, heathland, rivers and chalk grassland lifts the spirits and provides close encounters of a wildlife kind that we might never otherwise see. Here are just a few from this summer.



Photos clockwise from top left : Brown Haistreak (P. Harwood), Marbled White (J. Armitage), Small Copper (J. Armitage), Speckled Wood (P. Harwood), Common Blue (J. Armitage), Brown Argus (J. Armitage), Silver Washed Fritillary (J.Armitage)

GRANTS GRANTS GRANTS GRANTS GRANTS

River Mole Watch

River Mole River Watch aims to restore the river to a healthy condition for people and for wildlife. Key to this is developing a website as a valuable resource for information about the River Mole, including pollution, wildlife, history and geology and producing display materials and leaflets for use at events, with artwork and web-site design done by volunteers.

A grant was given to the River Mole River Trust to pay for printed display materials, leaflets, and a year of website hosting to help them fulfil these aims.



River Mole River Watch

Claygate Common

The Claygate Gardening Society very generously gave the Trust a donation to be used on work within the Claygate area. The money was used on a task carried out by LMP on Claygate Common to install or replace horse barriers to ensure scarce heathland vegetation thrived undisturbed while allowing continued public access. Members of the Society visited the site to see the work underway.

New tools for the LMP

With the approach of winter tasks, mainly coppicing and scrub clearance, the Lower Mole Partnership (LMP) applied for a grant for new tools (bowsaws, loppers and mini tree poppers). The tools are much needed by the volunteers, as many of the old ones are nearing the end of their useful life. As LMP often work near rivers and ponds there was also a request for buoyancy aids to ensure volunteers safety. A grant was awarded to ensure that the much appreciated work of the LMP volunteers could continue in the future.



Grant in Kind

Some years ago the Trust funded LMP to purchase a charcoal kiln for the Warren at Langley Vale. The kiln is now unused and the Trustees decided to donate it to the coppice worker at Sixty Acre Wood in Chessington. 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, including hazel, sweet chestnut, guelder rose and other native trees that provide a much needed habitat for wildlife. The kiln will replace his one that is no longer fit for use.

Chainsaw training for the Epsom Common Association

The Epsom Common Association's conservation volunteer arm, the EcoVols, undertake conservation tasks with volunteers on Epsom Common SSSI in consultation with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council (the owners), Lower Mole Partnership and Natural England. The common is about 450 acres and has a 100 year management plan. Part of the work involves scrub clearance and small tree felling. They also make charcoal utilising all of the timber felled as part of the management plan. In order to carry out the work they need licensed chainsaw operators, as the council will only permit NPTC or equivalent qualification on the site.

The grant paid for a volunteer to attend a certified course which was successfully completed and will allow for the valuable work to continue.

