

Project Update



Lower Mole Countryside Management Project

Volume 8, Issue 2

Volunteers Hard at Work Conserving the Countryside

As usual over the summer period the Lower Mole Project volunteers have been very busy particularly with jobs in the workshop making a total of nine benches and at least fourteen signposts and then going out on site to put them in the ground. As ever, many thanks to all the volunteers who have contributed to a superb 630 volunteer days this season.

A couple of the benches were installed at Fetcham Splash and a couple more along the Hogsmill in Ewell, but most were installed at Stokes Field, including a memorial bench for Liz Thurston, a volunteer who worked with the Project for seventeen years. The signposts were installed along Kingston Rights of Way and the London Loop, which included some tough holes!

In April we started the preparation for the extension of the grazing area on Epsom Common out towards the Rye Brook and Ashted Com-



mon. A huge amount of work was involved installing four pedestrian squeezes and laying a massive 300m of pipe to feed the water trough and then we discovered that there was a leak! The problem was solved after much head scratching and hard digging. There are now five cows happily grazing this area.

In early May we repaired a short flight of steps at Oxshott Heath and erected stock fencing at River Lane Meadows in preparation for stock grazing in the future.

We spent a total of three weeks at Watercut Copse in May and June laying the groundwork to allow coppice management of the site. We repaired the fence beside Polyapes Scout Camp to create a safe storage area for coppice products and installed three culvert bridges to allow vehicle access through the site. For the Engineers from Headley Court the culvert construction was definitely a busman's holiday, and in no time at all it was nearly finished!

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Living Woodlands

The Living Woodlands Initiative has continued to expand with the work at Watercut Copse funded by the Trust and other new areas of woodland being included in the scheme. A coppice worker is due to start coppicing here this autumn and the Project volunteers will be assisting by widening rides and clearing invasive sycamore.

Volunteers will also be starting work at two new Living Woodlands sites

this year: Abbots Copse and Sherwood Grove, which both involve converting amenity planting into coppice.

Behind the scenes a new volunteer, Jon Whitehead, has started working with the Project and has written a business plan which will be used as the basis for grant applications to support the sustainable management of woodlands for nature conservation.



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Welcome to Project Update

This is the fifteenth edition of Project Update, which is intended to keep you up to date with the work that the Project's volunteers have been doing in the previous six months.

The mainstay of the Lower Mole Project's work is the volunteer task programme. This enables volunteers from the local community to help with practical conservation and access work across the Project area. Each year about 7,500 volunteer hours are achieved.

During the 25 years that the Project has been running over 200,000 volunteer hours have been achieved.

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The Project is funded by Surrey County Council, Elmbridge Borough Council, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, Mole Valley District Council, Royal Borough of Kingston, City of London and Natural England.



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The Lower Mole Project

The Lower Mole Project was set up in 1983 and now covers an area of 143 square kilometres.

The aim of the Project 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

Volunteers Hard at Work continued

This backbreaking work involved filling sandbags and smashing the rubble back-fill before a level surface was punned and the surfacing laid.

The sun shone as we worked by the Mole to install a motorcycle barrier at the end of footpath 9 in Molesey. Though the digging was hard, lunchtimes were relaxing, watching swans drift down the river.

July began with two weeks working on signs for the newly up-graded footpath along the Bonesgate Stream in Ewell, with a week spent at Headley Warren in between. Three days were spent on the slopes of Stainton's and Flying Bomb fields clearing mostly hawthorn and blackthorn from the chalk grassland with the vast majority of stumps being treated with herbicide. Giant piles of cut scrub were left all over the site to be burnt this winter as a testament to the enormous amount of work done. A big 'Thank you' from Gail Jeffcoate of Butterfly Conservation to all those who put in such a huge effort that week!

The access improvements at Castle Hill in the first week of August involved installing a vehicle gate and moving and re-building the existing kissing gate. The following week was spent coppicing at Prince's Coverts – a volunteer's favourite! Many of the large Turkey oaks had to be felled to reduce shading for the

coppice re-growth and Pamela single-handedly winched out a large hung-up tree!

The final task in August was our first working with the National Trust volunteers at Box Hill. We spent two days on the steep slopes of Juniper Bottom clearing scrub and small trees to help restore the chalk grassland. Sheep will graze this area and help to maintain the open grassland. The Trust volunteers will come and help us with coppicing at Norbury Park later in the year.

September began with two tasks to carry out ride-side management, the first at Stokes Field and the second at The Warren where we also put in a couple of vehicle barriers. At Shadbolt Park we cleared scrub from the old concrete pond and laid a new pond liner with the help of the Friends of Shadbolt Park and the Surrey Wildlife Trust.

It was our final year of work on Ditton Common golf course where we have spent nine years clearing scrub and lifting the crowns on larger trees to help regenerate the lowland heath and acid grassland habitat which is vital for reptiles and invertebrates.

As well as all of this we attended four shows, held eight guided walks and had valuable volunteer help in the office.