



## Biodiversity Working Group

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023 2:00-4:00pm @ Surrey Hills Estate Office, NT Warren Farm Barns, Headley Lane, Mickleham, Dorking, RH5 6DG

### Minutes:

1.	<p><b>Present:</b> Lisa Creaye-Griffin (SNP); Molly Easton (NE); Beth Stacey (NCP); Bridget Fox (WT); Dave Page (EBC); Stewart Cocker (EEBC); Helen Cocker (SCC Countryside Partnerships); Ross Baker/Lynn Whitfield (SBG); Andi Roy (SpBC); Andrew Jamison (SWT); Simon Elson (Ind.); Alistair Kirk (SBIC); Dave Williams (SDG); Bronwen Chinien (SHBC); Rachel Coburn (SCC); Mark Dawson (National Trust); David Webb (MVDC); Will Maiden (FC); Fran Prince (LMP); Sarah Cliff (EEBC); Helen Miller (FE); Laura Richardson (SBC); Tom Childs (SANGS-GBC);</p> <p><b>Chair:</b> Mike Waite (SWT); <b>Admin:</b> Zoe Williams (SNP)</p> <p><b>New member introductions;</b> Ann Bailey, Senior Ecologist, Surrey County Council</p>	
	<p><b>Apologies:</b> Bill Downey (BCS); Ann Sankey (SBS); Christa Emmett (SH); Susan Medcalf (SBS); Helen Wilson (RBC); Hendryk Jurk (GBC); Vivienne Greenough (SCC)</p>	
2.	<p>The minutes of the meeting of 10/05/2023 have been agreed.</p>	
3.	<p><b>Matters Arising:</b></p> <p><b>ME</b> - action carried forward.</p> <p><b>MW</b> - The Irreplaceable/Old Grasslands Inventory project has been proceeding this summer, using the field-season to visit prioritised sites identified from the desk survey.) MW covered a section of the county in the south-west. Several new cSNCI/local wildlife sites identified. A fresh iteration of the working-register will reflect these changes.</p> <p><b>AK (for SLSP)</b> - Local Wildlife Sites; the selection criteria review has slipped since June, due to work constraints. When Clare Gibbs (SWT contractor) provided her finished draft document, we were into the summer holiday period. VG/AK agreed to postpone the consultation whilst everyone was away. It has been agreed that it will be picked up from now. We will come back with a timetable for the SLSP consultation on the draft review soon, to be followed by a full SLSP sites selection meeting. AK/VG due to meet next week.</p> <p><b>SE</b> - concerned that this has becoming increasingly protracted. While we continue to delay on SNCI update reviews, the world isn't waiting. LPA development plans are proceeding with their cycling schedule, and we have sites that are being missing the opportunity for adoption as a result. I feel this is a serious priority.</p> <p><b>AK</b> - Most of the sites awaiting selection decisions are re-surveyed existing SNCI's; there are only a handful of candidate SNCIs. The eventual SLSP meeting agenda will include a wider review of where we are, to incorporate a call for additional sites from D&amp;B's in a strategic way.</p> <p><b>MW</b> - Agreed that this must now be afforded priority. To sign-off the reviewed criteria, and then deal with the list, however short, of candidate SNCI's. We shall anticipate your proposed timetable. <b>ZW</b> has kindly offered to support these meeting with administration.</p> <p><b>LCG</b> - Organisation of the 2024 Biodiversity Planning Conference will begin very soon. Task group are meeting end of September.</p> <p><b>MW</b> - Update on bidding to the NE Species Recovery Fund; the outcome was announced end of July. South-East Rivers Trust (SERT) bid was successful for their proposed project on the Hogsmill. Surrey Wildlife Trust's (for three priority invertebrates) wasn't successful. Hopefully some of this project will be picked up anyway under the <b>Heathland Connections</b> (Landscape Recovery) project. <b>ME</b> - new NE species project officer started in the Thames Solent Team; could introduce her to this group. Her role is fairly flexible to work on species recovery.</p> <p><b>RB</b> - Re. M25 J10 Improvement Scheme. Former San Domenico site bat interest query? To be taken back to VG/SCC for an updates to SBG.</p>	<p>Action: Irreplaceable habitats explanation to be sent round by <b>ME</b> (NE)</p> <p>Action: <b>ME</b> to make introduction with Jess? Thames Solent Species Project Officer</p> <p>Action: San Domenico updates to be followed up by <b>VG</b>.</p>



<p>4.</p>	<p><b>Local Nature Recovery Strategy:</b> Part 1: ‘Description of the strategy area’ element of the LNRS and introduction to the species guidance. Progress update &amp; feedback opportunity. <b>Molly Easton</b> LNRS Senior Advisor (Natural England)  <b>Presentation and LNRS guidance on species in zip folder attached</b>          I am here to give an update on the LNRS, past the baseline map. We have been working with SNP on the stakeholder engagement plan. We are working well in Surrey with the support of Mike we have the State of Surrey’s Nature 2017 report, which is really useful. If we could also ensure access to the SNCI criteria review, and the findings of the Old/Irreplaceable Grasslands Inventory in time for the 1<sup>st</sup> (consultation) draft of the LNRS, that would be really useful. Meanwhile, SCC/NE have been interviewing for the dedicated LNRS project manager post, and will have an offer accepted by the chosen candidate in the next two weeks.          Data Nature Recovery Data Viewer, <a href="#">click here</a>.</p> <p><b>WM</b> - (FC) Hampton Estate Woodland. We have managed to recommend the reduction of Woodland cover, to increase the variety of habitats, water, permissive access It is a great case study to use in the LNRS.  <b>ME</b> – Paul Davey has produced a <b>draft description document for the River Wey</b>, to be circulated, with questions. Describing the river Wey and the nature recovery opportunities.  <b>MW</b>- Are you suggesting creation of a working sub-group for species on the LNRS Steering Group? <b>LCG</b> -Yes, in terms of for the purpose of short-listing species to act variously as flagships, indicators, as specific recovery milestones etc.</p>	<p>Action: <b>ZW</b> to arrange a meeting involving LCG AK MK ME, to feed into the species section on LNRS.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p><b>Newt Conservation Partnership:</b> Current projects. <del><b>Beth Stacey</b>, Surrey Project Officer, Newt Conservation Partnership</del></p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p><b>Woodland Trust:</b> Trees and woods at the heart of nature recovery. <b>Bridget Fox</b> Regional External Affairs Officer - South East  <b>Presentation in zip folder attached.</b>          Ancient trees beyond ancient woodland are not formally mapped; WT hold maps for this researched via citizen science. We are seeking more local ancient trees inventory recorders.  <b>MK – Re.</b> the ancient woodland inventory, In Surrey we have the ongoing inventory undertaken by Dick Alder and Brian Spooner (both mycologists). <b>AK</b>- Unlikely that these have joined into any national effort. We at SBIC have asked previously for this. I am sure we could ask; I could put them in contact with your BF.  <b>BF</b> – Re. planning practice around buffers to ancient woodland/trees, WT has a planner’s manual for ancient woodland. <a href="#">Click here</a>  <b>BF</b> - WT Ancient Tree Inventory. Website is here <a href="https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/">https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/</a> and open data is here <a href="https://opendata-woodlandtrust.hub.arcgis.com/">https://opendata-woodlandtrust.hub.arcgis.com/</a>.</p>	<p>Action:  <b>AK</b> to speak to Brian Spooner and Dick to share their information on Ancient Trees.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p><b>Draft manual on Mandatory BNG: recommended operational practice for Surrey</b> – discussion and sign-off. <b>Mike Waite</b>, Chair.          [Discussion draft circulated prior to meeting].  <b>MW</b> - have already received some comments/suggestions, so thanks for those, As background, this document was requested at our January meeting; that SyNP develops some local guidance for our planning sector, to aid their preparation for the introduction of Mandatory BNG. It has become ever-more important in the ongoing absence of intended 2ndary legislation and national guidance from DEFRA, yet we are only two months away. Important therefore to get this out as soon as possible.          Discussion involved useful comments from planners, both strategic and development managers, biodiversity specialist advisers to planners, and others. <b>MW</b> took away all these considerations for his final draft, to then be circulated prior to issuing as a SyNP advice document. <u>Not long after this meeting, the introduction date was delayed by Govt., to January 2024. This has then necessitated further re-drafting.</u></p>	



8. **Partner Updates:**

**AJ (SWT) Space 4 Nature:** Coming to the end of Year 1, have had our first season on ground-truthing to inform the AI predictive tech. (covered by UoSy). Citizen science assisting ground-truthing; involving training volunteers. Our PHD student Ben Siggery has been doing work on Chobham Common, he is about to publish the paper on the role of paleoecology in conservation management.

**DW (SDG):** We continue to monitor all the woodlands where we have installed dormouse boxes. A steep decline in numbers has been noticed across all of the sites. We do try to do some management to enhance the habitat, but our resources are limited. We have discussed this trend with the National Dormouse Monitoring Scheme at PTES, but it is not clear why this sharp decline. Consensus is the weather patterns influenced by climate change. We are doing habitat restoration where we can, limited resources to do very much really, working with the Woodland Trust on this.

WSBG continues to monitor planning applications where badgers are involved. The A3/M25 J10 works continue with little regard for the badgers setts impacted. Despite being assured that an very old main sett would be closed during the works and then re-opened, it has now been obliterated completely.

**LW/RB (SBG):** Work over the summer had resulted in identification of current Surrey maternity roosts of two vulnerable/rare species, Serotine and Leisler's Bat. Full details in Appendix A (report produced for the SBG newsletter).

The Alcaholic Bat (*Myotis alcathoe*) was recorded during autumn swarming surveys at Westhumble mine in late august – the first time the species has been recorded here.

Revised editions of 'industry standard' national Bat Survey Guidelines, Bat Mitigation Guidelines and Bats & Lighting Guidance have all been issued in recent months.

Links below: <https://www.bats.org.uk/news/2023/09/bat-surveys-for--ecologists-good-practice-guidelines-4th-edition-launched>

<https://cieem.net/i-am/current-projects/bat-mitigation-guidance/>

<https://www.bats.org.uk/news/2023/08/bats-and-artificial-lighting-at-night-ilp-guidance-note-update-released>

Concerns were raised regarding the public right of way through Betchworth limekilns not being currently mapped. (This footpath is used to access both Betchworth and Brockham limekilns, which are important bat hibernation and swarming sites.)

**DP (EBC):** We had CABI's release of South American Weevils into the Old Mole channel at Molesey Heath at the end of July. They are part of a trial to determine their effectiveness in biocontrol of *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* (Floating Pennywort). The larvae feed in the stems and hopefully will control the pennywort. I will report back on the results of the trial.

An exceptionally robust specimen of Starfruit *Damasonium alisma* emerged at Halfpenny Pond this season (see photo on back page.) First on West End Common for several years. Only other Surrey site is Headley Heath. Rough count of seedheads gives 2304 seeds @12 seeds each star. Classed as Critically Endangered/Schedule 8 WCA.

Also, our Adder translocation at Esher Commons has gone as well as we could have hoped, with no problems with the public noted, and most individuals observed this year, including a newborn in late August. More habitat/refugia work is being undertaken this winter.

**SC/SC<sup>2</sup> (EEBC):**

The South East Rivers Trust on behalf of the Hogsmill Catchment Partnership have commenced construction of a new wetland in the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve at Chamber Mead and should be complete by the end of October/early November 2023.

Hosted by the South East Rivers Trust and with the back drop of the wetland creation taking place, Natural England launched their national Species Recovery Capital Grant Fund on the Hogsmill LNR on 14th September.



Discussions with Natural England are ongoing regarding the possible creation of a new landscape scale ('Super') National Nature Reserve, built on existing Ashted Common NNR, currently being called the Thames To Downs NNR.

A moth species *Colepohora conspicuella* described as extinct in Surrey for 100 years was found during the EEBC Countryside Teams annual moth watch with Paul Wheeler. The discovery was made on an EEBC open space called Manor Open Space which is one of five sites being proposed for inclusion in the Thames To Downs NNR.

After many years Hay making has returned to Nonsuch Park thanks to the sterling efforts of Sarah Clift!

The Lower Mole Partnership created a new pond in Horton Country LNR during summer 2023.

The Newt Conservation Trust look set to create a series of ponds on Horton Country Park LNR and possibly Epsom Common LNR in connection with District Level Licensing.

Further research into the presence of a Black Hairstreak colony in Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley (Ashted Common) and Reigate & Banstead (Banstead Common) has been carried out over summer 2023 with a second Black Hairstreak article ('An evaluation of different UV wavelengths and instar') submitted by Dr Gareth Tilley to the Journal of Insect Conservation and awaiting peer review.

**BC (SHBC):** on the planning side Surrey Heath BC focusing on preparing for BNG, has commissioned three site survey/evaluations (two grasslands and a woodland). If we get positive results from these, we would then look into establish their potential as biodiversity credits and launch them with the soon to be launched Surrey-wide register.

We will be doing some new web information on BNG and the BOAs, the BOAs are now available to the SCC interactive maps. May want to link this on your sites for planning application people.

Noted there was something new on BNG from the Field Studies Council; BNG for reviewers, which is online. We are going to focus on getting our sites through first.

**AK (SBIC):** Business as usual for most of our SBIC stuff. Re. the Conservation Verges re-vamped project, we are looking at where we are in terms of the old verge habitat action plan, which has now been taken on by SCC (being main Highways Authority), we are working with VG to take forward implementation (with SWT and SBIC). Report not yet formally published by SCC.

The Surrey Rare Plant Register, we are doing this with SBS and SBIC we are looking at a Christmas publication date for this.

SNCI, DEFRA have confirmed that the single data list indicator will be collected again this year. I will be in contact with the usual suspects to do our annual data collection for this.

**SE (Ind.):** June issue of [British Wildlife volume 34 issue 7](#) includes an interesting article on dogs impacts on biodiversity (also inc. MW's article on the autecology of the Great Fox-spider.

**RC (SCC Minerals planning):** New mineral site just started up in Spelthorne – 'Watersplash'. Is to be worked and restored over a period of 6 years. Partly going back to agriculture, partly to nature conservation - flooded meadows, reedbeds and open water.

Hersham Bird Ringers on the land West of Queen Mary Reservoir SNCI (in Spelthorne) have reported a highly successful breeding season for resident and migrant birds. Reflects all the new reedbed creation going on there.

Molesey Reservoirs – newly-formed management steering group has now met (as others have reported) - involves some members of SyNP which is great. Will help oversee implementation of the long-term Management Plan.

**ME (NE):** LNRS amendment to 2ndary legislation was passed, the official wording is that "planners will have to take LNRS into account for all aspects of planning and policy." Sophie Sykes (left NE) role has yet to be replaced. So no NE SSSI spokesperson currently and others have covered her work in the meantime.



**TC (GBC):** Burpham Court Farm, Slyfield. Has been involved in fish pass on River Wey, with the EA. On matters BNG, GBC is looking to set up own habitat banks. Potential policy clash with Thames Water on one site where they need to place a pipeline, corporate position is for 10% BNG, whereas GBC has its bespoke policy of 20%.

**AB (SCC):** I am looking forward to learning and getting more involved to support Viv and help find the answer and prompt. If there is anything you think I should be aware of please speak to me.

**MD (NT):** At Box Hill, extensive surveys ongoing over this summer to inform a proposed Section 106 agreement to compensate for recreational impacts to the SAC from a large housing development at Pixham. At Headley Heath, Nightjars have been lost, probably from recreational disturbance. Also assumed Dartford warbler. At Box Hill, Straw Belle moth has had a good year on numbers (national responsibility for this species). The population appears to be expanding its local distribution on BxH.

**DW (MVDC):** Mole Valley draft Local Plan last year was submitted including a policy requiring minimum 20% BNG, passed its PI examination last year. Adoption being held up by recent comments on Greenbelt by Michael Gove – (possibly impacting MV's proposed allocation GB releases).

**Forestry Commission:** Two local woodland officers are looking at Countryside Stewardship applications cases before the Christmas deadline.

At the start of 2023, Felling licence offences had their fines increased from x2 value of the timber to an unlimited sum. Officers also looking at potential Surrey based offenders to forward to CPS. Staffing still growing (we are very lucky!)

**HM:** Business as usual juggling conservation, forestry, and recreation across our forests.

### **Helen Cocker (SCC)**

Update from the Surrey Countryside Partnerships:

The **Surrey Heathland Partnership** Project Officer, Tasha Feddery, will be launching the new volunteer task programme from October onwards working on Guildford BC and Woking BC heathland sites.

The **Downlands Partnership** has a new Senior Partnership Officer (Jo Porter), who started in July, following the retirement of Alan Brown. Downlands Grazing team, having made successful use of Nofence collars on cattle, are now using them on their goats and sheep as well. They are also providing cattle for grazing at Tices Meadow, Farnham.

The **Lower Mole Partnership** has a new Senior Partnership Officer, Freya Prince, who started in September, following the retirement of Conor Morrow. Most of the volunteer activity over the spring/summer is focused on public access improvements, except for a week or so spent pulling Himalayan balsam, with target sites this year at Pirbright Common, Cowey Sale and Earlswood Common.

In absentia updates:

### **Bill Downey (BCS)**

- 2023 has been a good year for butterflies – numerically – and the fears for a crash post the drought in 2022 have not materialised. Grassland species have by and large done well. Some of the habitat specialists however have not – and concerns remain for these e.g. Adonis Blue.
- BC's Regional Conservation Manager for South East England – Paul Tinsley Marshall – has moved on to another post. He will be replaced by Stephen Lofting – formerly Ecology Officer in LB Bromley.
- Richard Austin will also join BC as landscape Officer for Surrey and Sussex – and will manage the reserve at Oaken Wood.
- This winter the branch will be developing plans for the identified important landscapes for butterflies and moths in our area (VC17) – these being the North Downs, Thames Basin Heaths, West Weald and London.
- There are discussions started with Waverley and the National Trust for possible re-introductions of Silver-studded Blues. And a possible project to re-introduce Straw Belle moths to a second site in Surrey.

### **Christa Emmett (SHS)**



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommencing tree popping, mainly with the Hampton Estate near Puttenham and Banstead Commons Conservators. Involves engaging groups such as Butterfly Conservation, Surrey Choices, SCC Employees, refugees supported by Surrey Community Action and Leatherhead Youth Project.</li> <li>• Liaising with Surrey Hills farmers/landowners to support volunteers for further hedge planting from November onwards.</li> <li>• In process of putting in a bid to National Heritage Lottery Fund focused around reducing barriers and increasing participation in conservation volunteering for three minority groups - those with learning disabilities, those from ethnic minority groups and those with physical and invisible disabilities. Encouraging feedback on project enquiry form and now have been encouraged to submit a full application.</li> <li>• Completed National Dormouse Footprint Tunnel Survey at Woodcote Farm in West Horsley but no evidence of prints.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ann Sankey (SBS)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Irreplaceable/Unimproved/Old Grasslands Inventory</b> for Surrey: A small number of us have continued to record grassland areas that fall under the above categories and some interesting sites have been discovered. These range from a series of riverside fields at West End, Esher to some areas in the Weald southeast of Redhill, to some at South Holmwood, Holmwood Common itself, round to west of Cranleigh and some more fields at Hampton Park in the west.</li> <li>• If anyone knows of any areas supporting a good range of grassland species please let me know. These can be those managed by Local Authorities or not. It is the latter that may be the most vulnerable.</li> </ul> <p><b>Lara Beattie (WoBC)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An updated draft of the council's new <b>climate change strategy – Woking Net Zero</b> - has been developed incorporating feedback from public and stakeholder consultation held during the summer. At its meeting on 18 Sept 2023, the council's Greener Woking Working Group recommended that the strategy be considered for adoption at a future meeting of the Executive pending some further work to ensure its commitments are deliverable in the context of wider council savings and its Medium-Term Financial Strategy.</li> <li>• A final draft of the <b>Planet Woking Wildlife Gardening Guide</b> has been prepared incorporating feedback from recent public consultation. The guide offers advice on turning gardens into wildlife havens and enhancing local biodiversity. At its meeting on 18 Sept 2023, the Greener Woking Working Group approved the guide for online publication.</li> <li>• A final draft of the council's <b>Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document</b> has been developed incorporating feedback from public and stakeholder consultation. This is due to be considered for adoption by the Local Development Framework Working Group and the Executive in November 2023.</li> <li>• A Biodiversity Report for Woking borough is being prepared by WBC officers in line with future monitoring requirements of Section 102 of the Environment Act 2021 and the strengthened legal duty on public authorities with regards biodiversity.</li> <li>• WBC Planning Policy officers are preparing a detailed technical advice note for developers, council officers, Planning Committee members and other interested parties with regards to implementing Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) ahead of its statutory commencement in November 2023.</li> <li>• The <b>Woking Peregrine Project</b> enjoyed a successful breeding season in 2023, raising three chicks, a male and two females, who fledged from mid-June. Sadly, officers and volunteers were alerted to a dead bird of prey on the road in Woking this summer. The leg ring was retrieved, and this was later confirmed to be one of Woking's juvenile female Peregrines.</li> <li>• Climate change and biodiversity focused communications continue through the Planet Woking programme. Happy to promote local green initiatives via the website and social media – drop us a line at <a href="mailto:green@woking.gov.uk">green@woking.gov.uk</a></li> </ul>	
6.	<p><b>AOB:</b> - Reminder for the 31<sup>st</sup> October Biodiversity Net Gain Workshop at Royal Holloway College. <a href="#">click here</a> to book.</p>	



<b>DoNM; Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023 Location: Surrey County Council, Woodhatch, Reigate, RH2 8EF</b>	
<b>Abbreviata</b> Butterfly Conservation Surrey BCS ; BNG – Biodiversity Net Gain; EEBC ; Epsom & Ewell; EBC ; Elmbridge; FE ; Forest England; GBC ; Guildford; GCN – Great Crested Newt; MVDC ; Mole Valley; RBBC; Reigate & Banstead; RuBC ; Runnymede; SBC ; Spelthorne; WoBC ; Woking; SCC ; Surrey County; NFM ; Natural Flood Management; NNIS – Non;Native Invasive Species; NR ; Nature Reserve; NE ; Natural England; NT ; National Trust; RAWI ; Revised Ancient Woodland Survey; SANGS ; Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space; SLSP ; Surrey Local Sites Partnership; SPA – Special Protection Area; TW Thames Water.	



Monster Starfruit, *Damasonium alisma* at Halfpenny Pond.  
Photographed by Dave Page.