



Biodiversity Working Group

Wednesday 13th May 2026 1.30 - 4.30pm

Hybrid - Runnymede Civic Centre, KT15 2AH

Minutes (Approved)

Present:

Mike Waite **MW** SWT – Chair, Sophie Holt **SH** (SNP) – Admin

Andi Roy **AR** (RBC), Ann Bailey **ABa** (SCC), Bill Downey **BD** (BC), George Frater **GF** (SCC), Helen Cocker **HC** (SCC), Sarah Clift **SCL** (EEBC), Stewart Cocker **SCo** (EEBC), Ross Baker **RB** and Lynn Whitfield **LW** (SBG)

Online:

Adam Brown **AB** (SCC), Bridget Fox **BF** (WT), Catherine Cosgrove **CC** (NE), Christopher Campbell **CCa** SARG, David Hatcher **DH** (BanCC), Dave Page **DP** (SARG), David Webb **DW** (MVDC), Hannah Roughley **HR** (SBC), Lorna Beck **LB** (RBBC) Lydia Pitcher **LP** (MVDC), Rob Hutchinson **RH** (EPAS SWT), Sam Manning **SMA** (EA), Sarah Birch **SB** (SCC), Simon Elson **SE** (Ind), Tom Childs **TC** (GBC), Zoe Belton **ZB** (RBBC)

Guests:

Roger Morris **RM**, Judith Ballinger **JB** (SWT), Rob Schwar **RB** (SWT)

Agenda Item	Action
1. Welcome and Apologies - Apologies received from Lisa Creaye-Griffin LCG (SNP), Alistair Kirk AK (SWT/SBIC), Isobel Girvan IG (SWT), Lucy Shea LS (BanCC), Sebastian Crichton SCh (FC), Vicky Hawkins VH (NE). 2. Announcements: - Mark Dawson has sadly passed away – a valued member of the group – our condolences go to his family, friends and colleagues. - Andrew Jamieson (SWT) has retired. - Anna Fjortoft has left Spelthorne, Hannah Roughley has joined in her place – welcome. - Yendle Barwise, West Horsley Place Trust has joined. - Sam Manning will be joining from EA – new Biodiversity Officer for the River Wey - Toneisha Williams has left Waverley BC.	
3. Minutes from 21/01/2026: The minutes are Approved. Matters Arising - Hogs Back Layby – Being discussed with Buglife next week. - Ecological Sweet Spot – SWT positioning statement – Rewilding Approach to Nature Conservation but consulting across. Draft is in progress – due end of the Month. Short internal consultation with SWT, then will go out for wider consultation. Update since meeting – expected Autumn 2026. - Crispin Scott Replacements– Joanne Hodgkins and Tom Harrison have been appointed National Trust Senior Ecologists. - Surrey Heathland Partnership – Action completed. - NT have also recruited a new nature recovery officer who will join the BWG.	



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roger Morris – Activating Recorders• Presentation Given – See Appendix 1• Roger is a Highly experienced specialist: Former entomologist with the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC), JNCC, and English Nature, later an independent consultant - bringing decades of professional experience in ecology and environmental science.• Active expert recorder and scientist: A scientific associate at the Natural History Museum and joint national recorder for hoverflies, heavily involved in multiple recording schemes and scientific research.• Combines practitioner and data-user perspective: Has both generated and used biological data throughout his career, giving him insight into how data is collected, analysed, and applied in conservation.• A respected Diptorist has recently sadly died. A world authority on fungus gnats, volunteer and highlighted how highly skilled scientists are often unpaid in this work. Specialists are rare and important. Raised immediate practical issues around preserving large biological collections, showing the vulnerabilities when specialists are lost.• In the course of donating specimens to the Natural History Museum some problems have become apparent – particularly with paper trails and evidence.• Invertebrates are quite low down on the ecology priorities and are often overlooked.• Data is showing Invertebrate populations are collapsing.• 2019 Nature Paper Co Author – Critical for bringing it to the government’s attention.• Few records exist 1900- 1975. Data sets start from the mid 1970’s. Activity remained flat until the early 2010’s. A huge spike has come via digital photography and social media. General public submitting photos being identified by specialists.• Species that are harder to identify are more likely to be recorded (as easy to identify species are less interesting).• 10 species comprise about 55% of the entire data set in Surrey. Unidentifiable Cheilosia are very helpful for records as they are an indicator species.• Models have a tendency to reflect data collection trends more than the real world.• The trend data recorded by specialists is fairly flat, there is a boom in generalist data. The data therefore from Citizen Science App statistics isn’t quite as pronounced as it looks on face value. Specialist advice is needed on the data in order to verifying it. Specialists can end up using a lot of time verifying photos rather than out in the field measuring real data.• Do we want more records or more targeted records? | |
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• We need to grow and maintain a pool of specialists. • Most records come from voluntary effort – difficult to see where the incentives are coming from to give people the desire to become a specialist or for current specialists to participate. There are very few jobs for specialists now. ISR Invertebrate Site Register – used to employ specialists. • Barriers to access are causing further issues – Administrative burden is enormous. Solutions Needed • What can we do in Surrey to streamline the system. ○ Recorders Pass- Body holder for people involved in Nature Recovery. ○ Opportunity to invigorate new recording in Surrey – Create a new Surrey Active NATS – 1 or 2 active groups nationally. ○ New model for the Surrey Atlas project ○ Expand range of organisms covered ○ Recruitment of a broader range of new and younger organisers ○ Specialist Events Q&A • MW Recommend Task Group – Map Landowners – Permissions Sought – Involve NE for Protected Sites. SWT approaches – if they are approached by recorders, they are interested in the data and request the output. Experience with NT/Box Hill concerns over the impression to the public. Recorders pass would be an agreement amongst the landowners – one organisation would oversee the partnership and management of the pass. Insurance may come through. • SBG – They are covered by Bats Conservation Trust PL Insurance for their recording. • BD – Administrative Burden is becoming greater and requirement for PL. • SC – Risk Assessment included as part of the pass? • MW - Meeting this issue head on is the only way. • CC – Protected Sites Team would need to connect with the task group. As long as the recording isn't going to negatively impact the protected species. • RM – Consistency with the PDO list. Timing of recording (e.g. Bird Breeding Season). • MW – Disturbance Issues need to be considered. • RM – Retention of species is becoming contentious. • CC - Approach by teams across the country. Surrey has a high level of disturbance on site anyway – so low concern over the disturbance. Action: Set up a task force (after Summer)	MW
4. Climate Change Adaptation – Sarah Birch SCC - Surrey's Changing Climate Presentation – See Appendix 2 • 2 Key Strategies – Climate Change Strategy (2020) and Adaptation Strategy. • Climate risk has been elevated to the Council's corporate risk register. • Climate Adaptation Strategy is closely linked to the LNRS with a strong nature-based solution and the teams have been restructured to work together.	



• Climate Change doesn't give Power to the Local Authorities – the Adapting Reporting Power is a legal framework. Implications for the Mayoral Strategic Authorities will report into it. • Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Tool – Visual Representation how Surreys climate is changing. Spatial tools are also available. • New website show Surrey Heat Maps + 2degrees and +4 degrees. Flooding risk view also available. Link is available to view (prior to publishing – not yet for sharing – finalising details – It is anticipated to launch in 4-8 weeks). Key Hazards: Extreme Heat, Surface Water Flooding and River Flooding are the key risks. Combines: Climate Data, Infrastructure and Land use, Natural Environment Layers. Key Insights: Flood risk already high across much of Surrey, Surrey Hills acts as a buffer zone for climate impacts, Urban areas more exposed to heat risks Tool can support • Spatial Planning - Spatial Development Strategy is being developed for Surrey. • Nature Recovery Actions • Future Initiatives MW – Thames River Flooding Risk? SB – EA data – NAFRA2 Data – There are some sections not yet available. AR – River Thames scheme – is currently paused. Mid project review to trim to the budget. The LGR has affected it because Runnymede and Elmbridge are going into two separate authorities. SC – What planning are you seeing with a 4degree rise? SB - From a Natural environment perspective – it's a resilience piece. Core Focus and we need to shift the focus to making what we do now to make it resilient to the future. E.g. Runaway Wildfires – will impact the ecosystem so quickly. Modelling will help make hard decisions. Piece of the puzzle is missing – lots of expert knowledge – how can we use this. Which ones are indicator species – which ones can we help and which ones can't we. More work to bolster the next iteration of the LNRS with Climate Change – to see how species and habitats will actually adapt. Connectivity and Movement Corridors are key with larger joined up landscapes. MW – Proportion Principle – assume the worse. Landscape Scale approach. Corridors for movement is key – bigger parcels of land. Anticipating the incoming. Action: Please do continue to share anything relevant that can be added to SyNP webpage.	ALL
5. Partner Updates In Person: BD - • Buglife Chalklines project is starting. NT chalk team, downlands Headley Warren, Simon Humphries. Discussing possible projects for connectivity across the downs. £250K in 2.5 years – so hopeful for positive outcomes. • Butterfly Conservation – project for more butterfly friendly councils. • Pledge to move to 5 principles	



○ Create a Biodiversity Plan ○ Improve and Create habitats for butterflies and moths ○ Greenspaces in 15 mins walk ○ Removal of pesticides towards pollinators ○ Moves for reducing light pollution • Lambeth Borough Council have signed up, Farnham Town Council interested • 1st Training Session on Epsom Common using UV Torches. New Dimension in monitoring species. Supporting national methodology. • MW – Dr Gareth Tilley – Has progressed with developing this technology and developing national methodology. • Season has been going quite well – good numbers - Holly Blue, Dingy and Grizzled Skipper. Large Tortoiseshell is declared as indigenous species in the UK – effect of Climate Change. • AR – Is it an assumption that they are migrating or that they may have been released? • BD – They are definitely breeding here. The Small tortoiseshell – 22 individuals recorded – very low count. Dutch university looking at a change in metals in the food supply. The Map and small Tortoiseshell have both suffered serious decline in Netherlands. • Joint project with Sussex – Wood White colony - rarest species does move cross border. Wildwood (Former golf course and country club) recorded – want to push for it getting proposed for SNCI designation. • Task is to remake the branch – there is a change in views. • Wotton Estate – Been taken back from NT by Bachelor Monkhouse. Seem to be more open to nature recovery. Action: BD to connect with MW. • HC – 31953 Volunteer Hours – 19 FTE staff – highly significant. Equates to £442,549 London Living Wage equivalent. East Downlands project. Continued grazing across sites – a couple of new sites. Tolworth Court Farm – part of The Lemons part of SCC Woodcote Estate in Sutton. Over 100 lambs – open farm Sunday beginning of June. Grazing in Kingston and Sutton - 160 Sheep 15 cattle 13 goats involved in the schemes. • Couple of sites in the heathland. Grazelands – sheets heath and smarts heath. NE Climate resilience to Prey heath and Smarts heath looking at adaptation in the future – mainly rewetting heathland. • Access improvement works while bird nesting is taking place – not much habitat work at the moment - not long before Balsam works restarts again. • Coppicing over the winter. Plus additional funding for new boxes for dormice and footprint tunnels. Talking to Surrey Dormouse group. Freya is leaving at the beginning of July - job will be advertised soon. Cattle have been sold to Kingston although they still graze and are looked after by the Surrey Downlands Partnership. • George is shadowing Helen - who is retiring at the end of July. Note: We wish Helen all the best for her retirement and thank her for her contribution to this group. • SCI -Stewardship Agreement fort Horton Country Park. Working to get Epsom ready for the end of this year. • Downs Conservators agreed to get grazing on Juniper Hill. Downlands Trust are giving money towards it. YFS is hopefully funding the rest. September is the aim for Sheep back on Epsom Downs. • Jockey Club – met with them to discuss biodiversity improvements and potential car parking as they were proposing using a sensitive are for	BD
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derby day parking. Proposed they made some biodiversity improvements to improve habitat for skylarks.

- 8th July – Hogsmill Recorder Day
- **BD** – Hobbledown have been in contact for support on conservation efforts. Will share with SC.
- **SCo** – Cattle back on Epsom Downs. Would be 30th Grazing season. Relies heavily on Volunteer checkers.
- Hogs Mill Recorders Day will be based at chamber Mead.
- 2 Water Voles recorded on the trail cam
- Had meeting with Beaver expert at Horton country park – too big an impact and cost too high to mitigate.
- District Level Licencing for Newts. 2 new ponds – 1 has held well. 3 new small ponds dug.
- Stewart also retiring in July.

Note: Our thanks to Stewart for his contributions to the group and we also wish him well in his retirement!

RB – Surrey Bat Group. May has been very cold at night for surveys, only 2 out of a possible 12 surveys completed. 1 at Nower Wood – female Alcahloe tagged and tracked to a small roost, and barbastelle recorded on detector. Okewood Hill – Alcahloe tagged and tracked to tree with 15 bats emerging.

- RB mentioned in UK Surrey and Sussex seem to be stronghold for Alcahloe bat. In response to question as to how much survey effort has gone into this nationwide, RB cited a large national survey over recent years which has shown few Alcahloe elsewhere. Prof. John Altringham originally found evidence in Yorkshire from some DNA samples from swarming sites, but no one has found further records in Yorkshire since.
- **ABa** – Since January – restructure – positive is they are hiring Ecologist (Strategic thinking/Policy). Most work from LGR and potential changes to legislation NPPF and species protection – looking at local policy focus. Getting Senior Consensus may be a challenge following the new election. Reducing Planning Burden would be an incentive to developers.
- **GF** – Increasing part of workload shadowing HC. Offsite BNG for the SCC. The Lemons – pre statutory BNG needs. 2 years set up phase. Overseeing and tree planting plus the 30 year plan. Downlands is a key delivery partner (grazing). No statutory Habitat Banks set up as yet. 2 sites are being taken back by the countryside team (East Surrey). West Surrey is more SSSI and common land. Looking at potential sites in West Surrey to supply BNG.

Online:

- **AR** – Cleared 2 woodlands of Cherry Laurel. 3 Peregrine chicks in Addlestone. Last year was terrible for Barn Owls. This year they have 3 owl boxes. AR has been promoted and recruiting a deputy.
- **SyNP** looking at how we can support recruitment in the sector.
- **JB/RS** – SLSP – Landowner contact and preparing resources for landowners on SNCI's. SIGI – contacting Landowners about the inventory. Dan Banks 5 target species – nightingale project mapping. Chalklines project – data download for their target species. ALERC – **Association of Local Environmental Records Centres & SBIC** part of a Data sharing working group – to get a better flow of data sharing. Push to



Ecological consultancies – to send in record. Protected species licences.

- If you need any data contact SBIC and they will be happy to help.
- **DH** – Good walk on the commons with CC (NE) for future management plans. Surrey Dormouse Group would be installing dormouse tunnels at Park Downs as part of their search for dormice in the Chipstead Downs SSSI. They know that there are dormice present near Mogador but I think that's the nearest location to Park Downs. **Addendum** post meeting: they have now installed 30 tunnels at Park Downs.
- Adders – Dave and Jamal and Rick Anstis. 35 different Adders so far. Last week they found a lethargic Adder who had just eaten!
- Cattle on Banstead Heath – Water Issues. Awaiting reply from Water Authority. Ash Die Back – Council £175,000 first quote. After the local election, 2 councillors attended the last public meetings.
- Chairman and one other member resigned. Advertising for new conservators.
- **TC** – Collab on Wildfire through SyNP. Collaborating on Water Vole. Laurel and Rhododendron removal. Meeting with Buglife to discuss Chalklines. Hosted Wey Landscape Partnership at Burpham Court Farm. Slyfield – White Storks. Chalford – Swifts first year might stay and fledge. New Sites – Landfill Sites for potential SANG. Connected Stumpersys.
- **CC**- Delivery of Countryside Stewardship – Higher Tier Agreements. Trying to workout the Downlands Partnership. Albury Estate. Taking EOI – (Expression of Interest) next FY (Financial Year). Condition Monitoring – Sheepleas. 1.5 people covering the area – the write ups are due. If anyone manages a chalk grassland site they should get the reports through soon.
- **AB** - Promoted and now permanent! Recruiting an officer – recruitment process has just finished and announcements to follow. LinkedIn proved best location for attracting candidates. LNRS has now been published and Defra Funding has been approved.
- SyNP key partners and going forward. New website is being developed. Eventually that Nature Recovery will move to the Strategic Authority.
- Recording All nature recovery action – working on a database solution to collate all that information to increase cross pollination. Core purpose of the SyNP and the new Board members.
- LNRS Launch Event – 2nd June Denbies 6-8.30pm. Networking and Chatting.
- Nature Community Recovery Grants – Successful first round last year. New round opening on the second round (going live at the launch event).
- **CCa** – SARG – Grants for Toad Fencing in the Drift Gold Club. Extend what National Highways have done at J10. 600m fencing and 3 tunnels. All installed in February in time for the first movement. Didn't put in stop channels initially -but eventually agreed and these have now gone in. Created a lot of Heathland and after a lot of disruption. The population of amphibians has really dropped. Found a healthy population of Great Crested Newts. Found 20 in 2 nights of recording. MD gave them 130 panels FOC. Can now do more just on the grant and they cover all the ground they wanted to. Engaging with Volunteers to get it installed.
- Wisley Airfield – Skylarks compensation land hasn't been put in place – legislation isn't working.
- **MW** – BTA used to question Skylark data as such a big population.
- **MW/RH** – Position Statement on Development in Surrey. Revisiting it as it has become outdated and red lines are being crossed.



• EPAS are professional advisory service. The SWT reserve the right to make a representation as an eNGO. Planning Application is a test case for SIGI – Copthorne meadows. SNCI and SIGI. Develop 2/3 of the land. Consultation closed recently. SWT objected. Tandridge asked for advice from EPAS. Best example of development planning in the wrong place. Scheme contradicting the LNRS guidance. Robust recommendation with a strong objection on species data and SNCI. Likely to go to appeal. By Email • Paul Davy - <i>Following water vole reintroductions to the South Wey near Haslemere last year, monitoring this spring has confirmed positive signs of water vole activity at all sites, with early evidence of dispersal beyond release areas. Mink control across the catchment continues to be highly effective, with large areas now appearing mink-free. Building on this success, plans are now underway to begin reintroductions to the North Wey at seven locations this year, with the first releases expected to start in June, supporting the longer-term aim of establishing a self-sustaining population across the catchment.</i>	
6. AOB – Field Day – Banstead downs Thursday July 2nd 10-12 noon. Banstead Heath is easiest for Parking. SyNP - Surrey Youth Climate Strategy Endorsed by SyNP	
Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 23 rd September 2026 1.30pm - Venue tbc	



Abbreviata

Organisations

BanCC – Banstead Common Conservators; **BC** Butterfly Conservation **EBC** Elmbridge Borough Council; **EEBC** Epsom & Ewell Borough Council; **FC** Forestry Commission; **FE** Forestry England; **EA** Environment Agency; **GBC** Guildford Borough Council; **Ind** Independent; **MVDC** Mole Valley District Council; **NE** Natural England; **NSE** Nature South East; **NT** National Trust; **RBBC**; Reigate & Banstead Borough Council; **RBC** Runnymede Borough Council; **RHS** Royal Horticultural Society; **RSPB** Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; **SARG** Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group; **SBC** Spelthorne Borough Council; **SBIC** Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre; **SBG** Surrey Bat Group; **SBS** Surrey Botanical Society; **SERT** South East Rivers Trust; **SCC** Surrey County Council; ***SDNPA** South Downs National Park Authority; **SHBC** Surrey Heath Borough Council; **SLSP** Surrey Local Sites Partnership; **SyNP** Surrey Nature Partnership; **SWT** Surrey Wildlife Trust; **SussexWT** Sussex Wildlife Trust; **TBHP** Thames Basin Heath Partnership; **TW** Thames Water; **WaBC** Waverley Borough Council; **WoBC** Woking Borough Council; **WHPT** West Horsley Place Trust; **WT** Woodland Trust;

Technical

BNG – Biodiversity Net Gain; **GCN** – Great Crested Newt; **LNP** Local Nature Partnership; **LNRS** Local Nature Recovery Strategy; **NFM** Natural Flood Management; **NNIS** – Non-Native Invasive Species; **NR** Nature Reserve; **RAWI** Revised Ancient Woodland Survey; **SANGS** Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space; **SPA** – Special Protection Area; **PDO** – Potential Damaging Operations