



The Common

The newsletter from the Horsell Common Preservation Society

Volume 24

Spring 2024



Lichen and Matchstick Lichen *Photo by Rupert Millican*

Many of the “gems” of Horsell Common are small and go unnoticed but are part of the rich ecosystem of varied and sometimes rare flora and fauna. What a delight when they are discovered! Conservation volunteers removing yet more scrub pine (which would very quickly cover the whole area) whilst working on the Triangle, spotted these beautiful lichens and matchstick lichen. The winter’s conservation work is described in this newsletter along with details of guided walks, a bit of history, winter visitors and nature red in tooth and claw. Wishing you many hours of happy walking on the Common, always being mindful of our special ground nesting birds that we must take care not to disturb.

Caroline Hughes (Editor)

Save the date: Wednesday 9th October at 7pm—Horsell Common Preservation Society Annual General Meeting with guest speaker Michael Jones, Education Officer of Thames Basin Heaths Partnership.

Out and about

Estate Manager's Report

Over the winter months we have carried out some forestry work in two locations, at the Danewell Gutter and in the Sandpit.

Some pine trees at the top of the Danewell Gutter were removed to link two areas of dwarf shrub heath. Over time we will manage the regrowth to promote heathland species like heather and gorse. Dwarf shrub heath is one of the rarest habitats in the UK and we are lucky to have so much of it around the Thames Basin area. Some species which rely on this habitat like Dartford Warblers and Silver Studded Blue butterflies will not fly through pine woodland, so by strategically removing some stands of pine we can extend this scarce habitat and create corridors for rare and threatened species to move around. We have no intention of felling all the pine woodlands as although they are largely devoid of wildlife, they are wonderful places to walk through, especially in hot summer months for shaded walks. Heathland restoration also provides a great carbon sink so there are many good reasons to 'nibble away at the edges'.

We have also been working at the Sandpit, made famous by HG Wells in his book "The War of The Worlds". Much of the birch and willow which were removed will re-coppice into healthy young plants and all of the oaks which were becoming outcompeted, have been retained. The oaks will now have room to grow into large well-formed trees which will provide a habitat for many species of invertebrates, hopefully for hundreds of years to come. The willows will re-coppice and grow back providing young shoots and leaves that are palatable to a wide range of moth larvae. By exposing more bare ground and sandy banks at the edge of the Sandpit to sunlight, we are also benefiting many insects including solitary bees, wasps and ants. Some of the brambles will be allowed to regrow into clumps to provide nectar and fruit in the autumn.

This type of work is needed to prevent the Common from scrubbing over too much. Without the pressure from grazing livestock, the Sandpit and other areas of heathland would quickly become inaccessible and eventually revert to woodland, losing nearly all of the habitat value. The open areas of heath remain only because we actively manage it using volunteers and contractors. Sometimes

this requires heavy machinery, but we will always try to minimize this wherever possible. The decisions around management of the Common are discussed and agreed by the estate management subcommittee with input from myself and our senior ranger. All work is in general guided by our higher tier countryside stewardship agreement that we have with Natural England and our woodland management plan which has been agreed by the Forestry Commission.



Removing Scots pine in Danewell Gutter

Other winter works have included more mowing of the older stands of heather and removal of leggy overgrown gorse. This will help support our wildfire management objectives and regenerate heathland plants to provide more varied habitat. Silver-studded blue butterflies rely on young heather plants. An increased network connecting areas of young heather should help their populations expand around the Common.

We have been working with a local flood resilience group to improve the flow of surface water away from local properties. A potential block in the drainage system was identified where a resident had culverted an open ditch to provide access from his gate to the Common. Working with the blessing of the homeowner, we removed the culvert and replaced it with a bridge. While on site with a digger, we also took the opportunity to clear the ditch of silt, leaves and even a few sofa cushions!

Although Max enjoys walking around Heather Farm with me while emptying the dog bins, we have now employed the services of Pet Waste Solutions to empty the 24 dog bins we have around the Common. This is largely paid for by the income from our dog wash and frees up our time to focus on other aspects of management.

Jeremy Dalton

Senior Ranger's Report

Tree-planting on Wheatsheaf Common

Our Tuesday volunteers have continued with the ongoing project to plant native trees on Wheatsheaf Common. Once these establish, the woodland will become more resilient to climate change with boosted biodiversity and attract a wider range of wildlife species. In February 2023, our volunteers worked in partnership with Surrey County Council to plant over 3500 native trees on the Wheatsheaf common. This winter a further 1,600 small trees were planted, some as a margin along the A320. All of these species are native woodland trees which will provide nectar, pollen and fruit, helping to enrich the habitat for insects and birds alike.

- ◆ Wild Service Tree – *Sorbus torminalis*
- ◆ Dog Rose – *Rosa canina*
- ◆ Hazel – *Corylus avellana*
- ◆ Common Dogwood – *Cornus sanguinea*
- ◆ Field Maple – *Acer campestre*
- ◆ Spindle – *Euonymus europaeus*
- ◆ Common Whitebeam – *Sorbus aria*
- ◆ Mountain Ash—*Sorbus aucuparia*
- ◆ Common Alder—*Alnus glutinosa*



Saplings on Wheatsheaf Common

These trees were donated to us by the Woodland Trust as part of their nationwide tree planting initiative.

Reptile surveys

SARG (Surrey Amphibian & Reptile Group) have designed a site-wide reptile survey, with around 20 approximate locations for refugia tins identified. These will be further

fine-tuned on installation, to ensure they are in the very best places to monitor presence of species, and to minimise the likelihood of their disturbance by people and dogs. Refugia locations will be entered on the SARG database, and we hope regular surveying will start in 2024. Grass snakes and adders have already been seen in various places on the common, and common lizards on the large scrape created towards Anthonys a year ago. Along with the Annexe 1 bird and invertebrate surveys already in place, this is part of a drive to widen the evidence base of species present on the Common, supporting its case to remain an SPA and SSSI.

Protecting footpaths from flooding on Wheatsheaf Common

Flora and fauna have started to reclaim areas of Wheatsheaf Common now that ground works are complete. We have already identified a section of footpath susceptible to flooding at times of heavy rainfall and have alleviated the problem by constructing a small boardwalk to keep it passable for walkers and other access users. We will no doubt find other sections similarly susceptible to water ingress in the future, and we will tackle the problem using similar techniques.



Repair work on Wheatsheaf Common

Leaky dams in the Danewell gutter

The Danewell gutter contains an area of wet and acidic lowland heath and is a conservation priority for the unique populations of plants and invertebrates it supports. To protect them in the future, its existing pools of standing water and damp environment must be maintained. In recent years, this issue has become more acute due to hotter summers with lower rainfall. We are investigating the possibility of installing a system of 'leaky dams' to shore up and keep the water table high in this area. In

December we will identify the most effective locations for the dams and install them in 2024.

Drinks kiosk at Heather Farm

The Heather Farm café has installed a mobile drinks kiosk just outside our office. Their aim is to separate drinks and food sales, thus reducing queuing times in the café for placing food orders. The kiosk is a converted and discreet horse box painted green and can be towed to other locations as required.

Rupert Millican



Photo supplied by Barons Pubs Ltd

Winter visitors

As spring and summer approach we start to look out for birds that migrate to the UK. Swifts, swallows, cuckoos and nightjars were all heard or seen over the Common last year. Other UK summer visitors include a variety of terns and waders, and most of the warblers. Our very own Dartford warblers are one of only two warbler species to overwinter in the UK.

There are also birds that migrate to the UK in winter, either because they need a new source of food, or because our climate is more temperate than the arctic and sub arctic regions, and Northern Europe.

These include geese, ducks and waders, that breed in arctic areas in summer when there is plenty of food and long hours of daylight, but overwinter in our warmer coastal wetlands in search of food. However, there are also various species of thrushes and finches that move south in winter, arriving from late November onwards and sometimes staying as late as mid-March. The numbers vary each year, but most years we can see some of these

birds in and around Horsell Common.

Two of the most frequently seen are some very lovely winter thrushes, relatives of our Song Thrushes, Mistle Thrushes and Blackbirds. The smaller is the Redwing, rather like a small Song Thrush, but with a bold white supercilium (a stripe across the face above the eye) and rusty red underwings and sides. At the other end of the size scale is the Fieldfare, with a grey head, neck and rump contrasting with a brown back and heavily spotted chest. Both of these thrushes move south away from Scandinavia and Northern European, and on the Common we can see them feasting first on rowan, holly and ivy berries and later foraging for bugs and worms in the surrounding fields.



Fieldfare

Harder to see but a real delight are two small finches that will move south overwinter, often joined by migrants from Scandinavia. The first is the Redpoll, a small brown streaky finch with a raspberry coloured crown and a pinkish flush on the chest. They move in active groups through birch and alder trees.

The other is the Siskin, a little larger, and streaked yellow and green, again frequently seen in groups, hanging from the smallest branches of the trees to feed, often upside

down. The numbers of these vary a lot from year to year; last year they were scarce, this winter they have been seen on many of the Surrey commons, including Horsell.

There are also some birds you can see on the Common in winter that you might not realise could be migrants. The populations of birds such as Blackbirds, Song Thrushes and even Robins are increased in winter by birds migrating from Northern Europe. Most surprising of all is the diminutive Goldcrest. This is our smallest European bird, weighing no more than a 20p piece, and yet large numbers brave the journey across the North Sea in the autumn to join our resident population.

By mid-March, these winter visitors will be heading back to their breeding grounds in the north, but as they leave we will be getting ready to welcome the first of the summer visitors.

Margo Scott



Redwing



Goldcrest



Redpoll



Siskin

We are most grateful to Jon Mullin for providing these wonderful photographs of birds.

Caroline Hughes (Ed)

Horsell Common Conservation Management

The Horsell Common Preservation Society (HCPS) owns about 1000 acres of heathland, woodland and meadow land. This is "greenspace on our doorstep" - but did you know that this is a haven for rare wildlife?

The geology and climate are perfect for lowland heath, which supports rare and endangered wildlife. But this is itself a fragile landscape which is now rarer than rain forest, and whose continued existence has been under threat as towns and roads have developed. The heathland is now legally protected and it's the ground-nesting birds that give the land its legal protection.

Mimbridge Meadow, Bourne Fields and McLaren Park.

Lush grasses mown for haylage in late summer allowing seed to fall and regrow the following year. Maintained footpaths.

- ✓ Rich variety of flowers including, purple loosestrife, toadflax, vetch, meadow geranium, comfrey. All good for pollinating insects with many varieties of insect, butterflies and birds. Ground nesting skylarks in McLaren meadows.

Wetlands

Managed cutting back of willow and reeds. Sheep graze grasses and scrub. Easy access footpaths and board walk with benches. Bird hide with bird spotter chart.

- ✓ Reed warblers, waterfowl, amphibians, dragonflies, abundance of wild flowers.

Grasslands

2015: area scraped, new heather and gorse kept short with regular mowing. Scraped areas warm up quickly. Cattle graze scrub and grasses that would outcompete the heathers.

- ✓ Ideal habitat for ground nesting woodlark and silver-studded blue butterfly. Other bird species including chiffchaff, tits and thrushes. Reptiles bask in warm scrapes.

Safeguard nests - stay on the paths and keep your dog out of vegetation.



Triangle and Forge Common

2012: large areas cleared of pine and silver birch. Scrub removed and gorse thinned. Heather mown to give varied structure.

- ✓ Regeneration of heather, lichens and rare matches.

Horsell Birch and Warren Pond

Removal of gorse and scrub. Clearing of Warren Pond. Cattle as part of the conservation plan.

- ✓ Regeneration of heather. Also broom. Dartford warbler, nuthatch.



HCPS aims to preserve this special habitat for wildlife and for recreation. Conservation work is carried out following consultation and guidance from Natural England and specialist conservation groups.

Here we describe how each area is managed to improve the habitat for the many birds, insects, reptiles and plants that thrive here. The reappearance of the woodlark, the annual arrival of the nightjar in May and the growing numbers of silver-studded blue butterflies plus the rich variety of flora and fauna are testament to the success of the conservation work.



Heathlands & Anthony's

Heathland kept open by removing scrub with perches and young gorse left with margin of tall trees.

- ✓ Ideal for ground nesting nightjars, Dartford warbler and stonechat.

The Sandpit

Willow coppiced and densely overgrown area of trees thinned, opening up sandy areas to light and warmth. Easy access footpath from car park to sandpit.

- ✓ Ideal habitat for solitary wasps and bees, some of which are rare, and reptiles.

Danewell Gutter

Removal of large pine, silver birch and scrub create open "corridor" from one section of heathland to another.

- ✓ Birds, reptiles and insects can move over a greater area. Open, acidic bog supports rare mosses and lichens, sundew, bog asphodel, cross-leaved heath and fungi.

Chertsey Road scrape

Around 2015: area scraped, allowing new heather to grow. Regular mowing keeps heather growth short, woodland surround.

- ✓ Ideal for nightjar, woodcock and woodlark.

Woodham Common (Bedser Trail and Peace Garden)

General maintenance of Peace Garden and Bronze Age tumuli. Cutting back of scrub pine and silver birch and in summer, invasive rhododendron. Easy access footpath.

- ✓ Regeneration of heather and ideal habitat for Dartford warbler.

Wheatsheaf Common

2023: completion of flood alleviation scheme. Improved efficiency of Rive Ditch and better drainage for neighbouring areas. Planting of 4,500 native British shrubs and trees. Creation of footpaths.

- ✓ Flowering and fruiting trees will boost insect and also bird numbers. Lakes ideal for amphibians and insects with hibernacula of heaped earth and roots providing shelter for insects and reptiles.

Grasslands and the Woodlark

The Woodlark, Silver-studded blue butterfly and Grasslands

Grasslands looks quite different from other areas of the Common. Instead of brown, shaggy clumps of heather, it has a smoothly mown, almost park like appearance. This is an example of heathland that has been managed in a special way to create the ideal habitat for the Woodlark and the Silver-studded blue butterfly. In summer, the yellow gorse and purple heather create a woven carpet effect. But we must not be beguiled into thinking this is a mown lawn to wander all over.

Because the Woodlark makes its nest on the ground, it is important that dogs are kept on a lead during the nesting season (March to August).

The small well camouflaged Woodlark builds its equally well camouflaged rough nest on the ground and is almost impossible to see. There may already be nests and young birds and breeding continues until late summer.

Please help us to protect this pretty bird and its fledglings so their numbers can increase and so they are not frightened off by paws and curious dogs, or hooves or human feet stumbling across them. Please stay on the paths.



Grasslands in spring



Grasslands in autumn



Woodlark chicks



Woodlark

Common knowledge

Horsell Birch and The Cricketers

Imagine the days when the railway and canal had not been built and today's Woking did not exist. Horsell was equidistant from Old Woking and Chobham with clusters of cottages here and there where the heath or "waste" met farmland. One such cluster was in the part of Horsell known as Horsell Birch and along Bullbeggars Lane (where you had to beware of the evil goblins). Birch Cottage, Birch House, Birch Farm House and The Cricketers all date back to the 16th and 17th centuries, when they would have been very modest timber-framed buildings, probably thatched and only one storey. The local residents or commoners would have grazed their livestock on the common land. At one time it was possible to see the spire of Chobham church from Horsell and it was not until the custom of grazing stopped that the silver birch started to grow in profusion and block the view of the spire. In the later 19th century, it became more profitable to have nursery land as produce could be transported quickly to London by train. Generations of the same families became associated with important aspects of Horsell Birch life. The Collyers had a big nursery where Squires now stands, an easy walk from The Cricketers. The local brewers Stedman owned The Cricketers into the 20th century and the Steer family lived in Birch House, Birch Cottage and later they became publicans and residents of The Cricketers. Carpenters and builders originally, they built a windmill down Horsell Birch. Whilst many windmills were used to grind wheat, this windmill provided power for the carpenters' saw.



Over the years, buildings were extended, the windmill was demolished and Horsell grew. Fortunately, some original

aspects of the old houses can still be appreciated with their old brickwork, oak beams and charming architecture. There is still a feeling of being "on the edge" of the village with the Common on their doorstep. Some have "gone up in the world" from their lowly origins but one building continues to do the same business it has been doing for probably 200 years.

The Cricketers is one of three pubs on the Common and it was already a "beer house" before the census of 1851. Previously it had various roles in Horsell's history having been a small cottage, a general store, a poor house, a school and the village lockup in earlier days. The oldest part of the building is 16th century, but this timber framed part of the building is now encased in brick probably when the new front was added in the eighteenth century. It is easy to spot the oldest part of the building. The old beams are so low that many people have to duck down to avoid bumping their head on the broad, heavy and dark stained beams. Women using the toilets have to pass through this oldest section of the original cottage.

In the detailed return of Fully licensed Houses and Beer Houses in February 1892, The Cricketers is listed as being fully licensed and owned by John Stedman with the licensee being William Steer. It is listed as being for "the labouring classes" with no accommodation or refreshment other than drink and without stabling for horses. A similar report for 1903 tells us that The Cricketers now had one room to accommodate travellers and two horses could be stabled. William Steer was still the licensee, a post he held until 1913. A wider range of refreshments was available with coffee, tea, food and minerals on offer. The facilities were not mentioned in the 1892 report but in 1903 we know that a WC and a urinal were available!!!

There used to be a bowling green and maybe cricket was played on the green in front of the Cricketers. Certainly in 1905 there was a match captained by the landlords of The Crown and The Cricketers. The law always seems to get involved with pubs and drinking and so there were reports of the publican being fined for opening during prohibited hours (licensing hours were very strictly limited and regulated until 1980s) and customers being fined for being drunk and disorderly. Today's pub has been extended and modernised and might be unrecognisable to the customers of 1850 but the same tradition of "coming together" over a pint flows on, even if publicans have not always matched the image of "mine genial host". My brother-in-law was over from Australia in 1977, after an absence of 13 years from the UK. He was keen to have a

traditional pint and went off at lunch time with high hopes to The Cricketers. Even as he opened the door, the publican shouted, “No shorts!”. “No worries, mate, I just want a beer”. The landlord thought he was trying to be a smart ass and yelled again, “No shorts!”. Well, my brother-in-law was wearing smart Australian shorts but he still had to leave the pub and without getting his beer. Fortunately, things have changed. Barons Pub Company took over the lease for the pub in 2005 and there is always a welcoming reception and it continues to play a tremendous role in village life and to support the Woking and Sam Beare Hospice. In the autumn of 2007, The Cricketers hosted the first Pedal4Charity Bike Ride in aid of the Woking Hospice culminating with an ad hoc BBQ and live entertainment on the Green in front of the pub.

So successful was the first event, the team of local volunteers led by former HCPS trustee, Ron Neale were emboldened to set more ambitious targets, to include a barn dance under a large marquee attended each year by over 200 people and hosted other local activities for a whole week preceding the Sunday ride.

Over a period of 5 years approximately £250,000 was raised for the Hospice by Pedal For Charity.

The Cricketers continues to support the Hospice, via its Tuesday night quiz nights, the annual mulled wine stall at the Village Christmas Fair (£4000 last year) and its sponsorship of, and participation in the Annual Dragon Boat Race on Goldsworth Park Lake. In total The Cricketers have raised £29904 for the Hospice through these events.



The green, which is part of Horsell Common, is still used for local events and it seems so appropriate that Horsell residents can enjoy “Picnic on the Green” with live music in summer with The Cricketers serving Pimms. The Wednesday walkers and groups of runners always meet on the green and enjoy coffee or beer on their return. The

tradition of the “public” house for all lives on.

The Cricketers is one of three pubs on the Common. The Plough and The Gosling will feature in the autumn copy of The Common.

My thanks to Richard Christophers, Sarah Thorp at The Cricketers and Ron Neale for helping to provide this information.

The late Phillip Arnold compiled a thorough piece of work on Horsell Birch, with emphasis on The Cricketers, which he placed on the HRA website at

horsellresidents.com/Media/History/Horsell%20Birch.pdf

Did you know...?

- ◆ Cattle go on to Grasslands from 1st April to 30th September.
- ◆ Cattle can graze on the Orchid Field in March and October ‘only’.
- ◆ Around 5000 trees have been planted on Wheatsheaf Common so far.
- ◆ £16000 + VAT per annum to empty dog bins.
- ◆ Two very solid and comfortable benches have been placed in the Wetlands area at Heather Farm.
- ◆ Have you come across the Champion family? The family grave is a large cross in St Mary's churchyard. Frederick Champion and his brothers explored Horsell Common in the early 1900s and recorded moths, beetles, snakes, wasps and birds and Freddy took, in June 1910, the earliest known photograph of a nightjar, taken on Horsell Common.
- ◆ You can access Newsletters from Spring 2022 onwards by going to the web site of Horsell Common Preservation Society at horsellcommon.org.uk
By scrolling down on the Home page “Welcome to Horsell Common” you will reach “Quick Links” and can click onto “Newsletters”.
- ◆ Are you keen to learn more about local wildlife and heathlands? There’s lots of information and photos on the HCPS website as well as the Thames Basin Heaths Partnership and Surrey Wildlife Trust websites.

Guided walks

Monthly guided walks on Horsell Common

“No one will protect what they don’t care about: and no one will care about what they have never experienced.” Michael Jones of TBHP has used this quotation in his enthusiastic article about the Common and its wildlife.

“You might not think of the busy south-east of England as a hot spot for rare wildlife, but it really is. It has the perfect geology and climate for a very special wildlife habitat: lowland heathland. Much probably goes unnoticed, but a closer look reveals a magical world inhabited by iridescent beetles, weird looking wasps, rare and beautiful butterflies, shy reptiles, carnivorous plants and some very rare birds. “ (Discover the magic of the Thames Basin Heaths)

Guided walks organised by Horsell Common Preservation Society (**HCPS**) and Thames Basin Heaths Partnership (**TBHP**). Learn more about conservation and the wildlife supported by this special heathland habitat.

Before booking please note :

- ◆ **Be prepared for quite a long walk on footpaths which can be rough and muddy underfoot. Walks will last for two hours minimum.**
- ◆ **Please note that guided walks are not suitable for dogs, very young children or those with mobility difficulties. All details supplied once a booking has been confirmed.**

HCPS Guided Walks

- ◆ **Book now for 10th April and 15th May.**
- ◆ **Bookings for September and October walks start August 19th.**
- ◆ **Contact: caroline.hughes@horsellcommon.org.uk to book your place. Include contact details and name(s) and age of children. Please, maximum 4 people per booking.**

| Date and start time | Walk and leader (HCPS Booking) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Wednesday 10th April 10am Max. 20 | “Conservation Safari” finding out how HCPS conservation practises benefit the habitat for wildlife, with Senior Ranger Rupert Millican |
| Wednesday 15th May 5.30am Max .15 | “Dawn Chorus” with bird enthusiast, Margo Scott |
| Thursday 19th September, 10.30 Max. 20 | Discover Horsell Common with HCPS Estate Manager, Jeremy Dalton |
| Saturday, 5th October 10am Max. 20 | UK Fungus Day. “Fungi on Horsell Common” with mycologist, Richard Alder |

TBHP Guided Walks

Bookings with Thames Basin Heaths partnership: <https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/events/>

| Date and start time | Walk and leader (TBHP Booking) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tuesday 4th June 10am | “Discover Heathland with your Phone” with TBHP Education Officer, Michael Jones |
| Tuesday, 30th July 2pm | Incredible Insects on Horsell Common with Entomologist, Andrew Halstead |
| Thursday, 1st August 2pm | Incredible Insects on Horsell Common with Entomologist, Andrew Halstead |
| Monday 29th July to Sunday 4th August | Thames Basin Heaths Week of events and activities. Check TBHP website for details and booking |

Thames Basin Heaths Partnership



Sharing nature

I love being outside and part of nature. I love listening to the birds chatting away. I often wonder what they're saying to each other. I love lying on sandy tracks in summer and watching solitary bees and wasps engaged in their daily routines. If you haven't done it, please do. It's a soap opera, with lots of thievery and parasitism, but also a lot of sun-charged whizzing, copious amounts of pollen collection and so much digging! You'll quickly get used to people staring at you lying on the floor across a heathland path... and you might even persuade someone to stop for a while and take a look with you.

These moments of being able to connect people with nature are so rewarding. Encouraging people to slow down, to look, to listen, to sense, to introduce them to the wonders of the wildlife around them is so important. If we want to look after our planet, we must all do it together... and to do this, we must have a connection with the plants and animals we share it with. We must value it.

As Education Officer for the wonderful Thames Basin Heaths Partnership, I am incredibly fortunate to have a job that means I can share the wonders of nature with others every single day. I think it was David Attenborough who said, "No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced" and in my own little way, I am helping to connect people with nature.

Schools and the Heath

Over the past few years, I have been creating an education programme – Our Amazing Heathlands. It has been challenging, but things are evolving nicely and lots of local schools have been joining in. Together we can all fall in love with our local wildlife and the heathlands on our doorsteps. We can learn what we can all do to help protect them and children can often be far more persuasive to their parents in encouraging responsible behaviour on the heaths!

Children have been taking action to protect their local heathlands – from designing posters that help protect our brilliant ground-nesting birds, to raising awareness about wildfires, and creating amazing, illustrated poems based on the fabulous Lost Words book.

Our Amazing Heathlands

My exploits as Thames Basin Heaths Partnership's Education Officer in 2023 saw record numbers of children engaging with their local heathlands. Lots of schools got involved in helping to spread the word about how we can all look after our amazing heathlands. I delivered assemblies, in-class sessions and arranged visits to wonderful places like Horsell Common.

Children loved learning about fabulous ground-nesting birds, brilliant butterflies and solitary bees and wasps that can often be found on no other habitat. They were excited by a rare landscape on their doorsteps and helped people to **#BeWildfireAware**. I am grateful to local children and their teachers for their enthusiasm. I would also like to thank Horsell Common Preservation Society for allowing me to use Horsell Common as an inspirational outdoor classroom. It has been inspiring to see so many children benefiting from spending time outside connecting with nature near to their homes and schools.

It has been great to see local communities coming together to look after our favourite places. Here's to more heathland adventures in 2024!



Get involved!

If you'd like to connect your children (or yourself!) with local heathlands, please get in touch. We offer a variety of free, fun sessions for schools and community groups – both inside and out on the heath.

If you need any persuading to join in, one of my favourite quotes from a teacher this year was 'You have definitely inspired a new generation of children to listen, look and respect our natural wildlife and habitats'. This is exactly what it's all about!

Michael Jones (Education Officer—TBHP)

tbhschools@naturalengland.org.uk

www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/schools