



February 2025



As regular users of the commons know well, it's all uphill to the Cockpit or the Cricket Ground, and downhill on the way back.

And it's all downhill for the rain that falls on the higher parts of the common as it travels through ditches, drains and along roads and paths.

But where does all the water go to?

There was bright sunshine and a blue sky when the photo above was taken, but we saw all kinds of weather in January! Sunshine, wind, snow and ice, and finally, towards the end of the month, the rain came, and water levels in the ponds began to rise.

These magpies were feasting on worms on the grass of Centre Common after a stormy night.



A Visit from South East Rivers Trust



We were delighted to be able to discuss the flow of water across the commons with Jonathon Stevens, Catchment Monitoring Officer with the South East Rivers Trust (SERT www.southeastriverstrust.org), who visited us recently after noticing

our pond water level monitoring data in the surveys section of our website
www.chislehurstcommons.uk/surveys

A catchment is the area of land that drains into one river. At times of high rainfall, Chislehurst Common's hilltop drainage ditches and linked former gravel pit ponds hold back water on the common, helping to slow excess runoff that in severe conditions can lead to local flash flooding. In turn, the ponds provide a haven for wildlife that is a feature of Chislehurst.

Importantly, when heavy rainfall persists for long periods, the ponds overflow via dedicated outflows into surface water drains and underground culverts that feed into the local waterways – beginning with sources of the Wyncham stream that flows into the River Shuttle and onwards to the River Cray and River Darent, forming the Darent and Cray catchment area, before finally flowing into the



Above left: Rush Pond outflow. Centre: overflow from Rush Pond entering inlet to Prickend Pond (via left pipe) and Right: Outflow from Prickend Pond.

Thames



Our management and monitoring of the area is therefore important beyond the boundaries of the common land, especially in times of increasing extremes of weather and potential pollution events affecting the wider local waterways and biodiversity.

We look forward to further meetings with SERT, to explore opportunities to help conserve and improve our 'patch' as one of the sources of the local catchment area.

Desirable Residences for our Birds

The list of byelaws governing the commons provides evidence that the bird life here has been valued and protected since at least Victorian times. Number 5 specifically forbids the trapping of birds or the removal of eggs from nests.

Our archives for 1904 note that,

“The Police caught some London lads taking birds’ eggs on St. Paul’s Cray Common, and a prosecution at Bromley resulted in a heavy fine.”



Today two volunteers, Ross Wearn and Chris Pond, continue this tradition of care by putting up and monitoring bird boxes. At this time of year, they are busy preparing for the nesting season by cleaning and repairing old boxes and constructing new ones. Some of this year’s creations are shown above.



The boxes are always well-used, mainly by blue tits and great tits.

We, and the birds, are grateful to Ross and Chris for all their time and effort - they certainly make the commons an attractive place to raise a family!

Our Wonderful Keepers and Volunteers

We're running out of time!

Winter is a relatively quiet time in the natural world when wildlife slows down and concentrates on finding food and shelter, but that gives us an opportunity to carry out work in habitats that will be buzzing with life in a month's time.

It is important not to disturb the animals that live there in the breeding season, which can run from March to September, and work on management and improvement of any habitat has to be done before they are active.

However, February is a short month, and we have lots to do!



For the next few weeks, we will be concentrating on the heathland, which is a rare and valuable habitat much depleted in the London area.

Restoration began on St. Paul's Cray Common about 30 years ago, and there is now an extended area which is a picture in purple in late summer, but needs careful tending to manage encroaching trees, gorse, bracken and bramble.

A healthy heathland needs some of these elements to attract a greater variety of wildlife, so any removal has to be done selectively to retain a balance.

This winter we plan to enlarge the area by removing some sections of silver birch at the edges, which will let in more light and enable the heather to spread. It will also create transition zones between the woodland and the heathland, used by many species for feeding and shelter.

The photo shows a stack of logs that will be used later to make log piles that act as refuges for wildlife.



Routine maintenance tasks include keeping surrounding foliage in check. This bank, which borders the bridle path, was formed from the earth that was removed when the heathland was restored. Heather flourishes on nutrient-poor soil, so the

area was scraped back to the original stony surface.



We are rewarded for this work in the warmer months when lizards, slow worms, toads, bats, butterflies, dragonflies, a host of other invertebrates and small mammals like this shrew are recorded here.



We are privileged here in Chislehurst to have such a precious resource as the Commons right on our doorstep.

The Act of Parliament that protects the 180 acres provides no funding, and we are dependent on our volunteers and the generosity of local people.

If you would like to support our work,

you can donate via our website www.chislehurstcommons.uk or via [PayPal Giving](#)

Thank you!

Bird Watching



A firecrest was spotted by one of our volunteers in January in trees near the Overflow Glade. Firecrests compete with goldcrests for the title of the UK's smallest bird. It is very difficult to take a photo because they are constantly on the move, and despite best efforts he only managed a tail view, with no sign of the magnificent orange crown. The photo above was downloaded free from the internet.

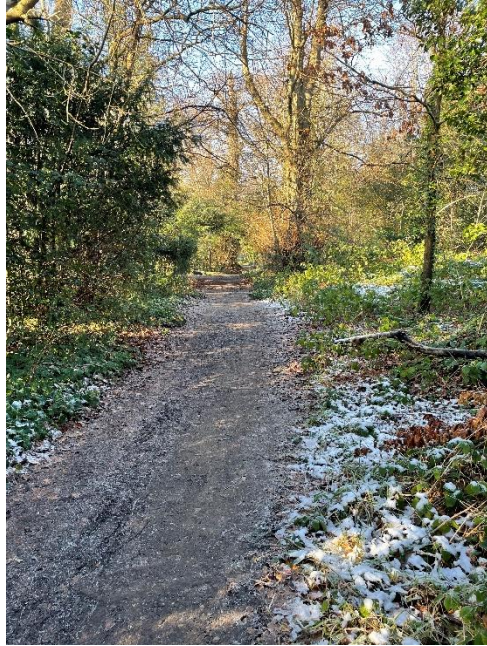
If you manage to take a photo of one, we would love you to share it with us.



Our Arctic visitors, the redwings, are still with us, hunting for any remaining berries.

Snowy Days on the Commons





The Overflow Pond was dry except for the covering of snow in the middle.

Spring is on the way



In our newsletters we aim to show you something of the features, history and biodiversity of our commons, and the work involved in managing and maintaining the 180 acres.

We will continue to do our best to preserve them for present and future generations.



We are sorry to report the recent death of David Calver, who served on the Board of Trustees of Chislehurst Commons for many years.

He was passionate about the importance of preserving the commons, and his knowledge and experience were invaluable.

He enjoyed getting involved in all the fundraising events and asked his family to make sure that a portion of any donations in his memory should go towards the maintenance of the commons.

If you would like to make a contribution, you can view details at:

<https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/obituaries/130752>

(Donations should be sent directly, via the link to the commons and not to the funeral directors.)



Get your bird food at Champion Wines!

We are grateful to Champion Wines for stocking packets of seed on our behalf. This food is healthier for the birds than bread or products made from flour.

All proceeds go to Chislehurst Commons.

**When the birds stop eating, please stop feeding!
Food left on the ground or floating on the water will attract rats!**

**Thanks for this month's photos to –Kevin Jennings, Chris Pond and Mary
Wheeler**

**Thanks also to the Editorial Team – Kevin Jennings, Christine Wearn, and Mary
Wheeler.**