

Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

A year in view 2010 - 2011



The KSCP conserves, enhances and promotes the countryside and urban green space of the Stour Valley. It is one of nine countryside/coastal partnerships in Kent and covers the largest area. In 2010/11 the Partnership carried out hundreds of projects from Lenham in the west, to Richborough in the east, to Whitstable in the north, and Bonnington to the south. It is grateful to its core supporters - Ashford Borough Council, Canterbury City Council, Environment Agency and Kent County Council, without which it could not operate. The Partnership works to a Business Plan and Annual Action Plan that are closely aligned to the objectives of its core supporters. The KSCP would like to **thank** all those involved with the Partnership, and especially the volunteers, for making a real difference to the landscape, wildlife and communities of this part of Kent.

Working with local communities

We supported **18 site based community groups** with practical help managing land for wildlife. We also helped with **seven school/community nature/play areas**. At Brook Primary School we did funding applications, ran volunteer tasks and co-ordinated contractors to create a new wildlife area. We continued to support No Man's Orchard Management Committee with pruning, planting and general management of the community orchard between Chartham Hatch & Harbledown.



Volunteers taking a break at No Man's Orchard



Brook School pupils enjoying their new nature area

Advising on land management



Creating one of the ponds (top) and a scrape (bottom) in Kingsnorth, Ashford

Barn Owls
How you can help them

ABOUT BARN OWLS

The classic image of a barn owl is of a large, ghostly white bird flying over open countryside at dusk. Indeed the Latin name, *Tyto alba*, means 'white owl'. Barn owls are not actually white at all, but have mottled buff upper parts mottled with grey. At close range will reveal the distinctive, heart-shaped white face, with black eyes. The tail is short and the wings rounded. From head to tail they are approximately 20 cm long (7.7"), with a wingspan of 85 cm (33.1").

Barn owls are 'vocal' - this means they are particularly active at dawn and dusk. They can also hear at night, thanks to their special hearing, but when feeding young they are sometimes seen swooshing food in broad daylight. The other reason for the barn owl to 'swoosh' is from its long, drawn out swooshing call - an unsettling sound to hear in the darkness, but a clear sign that barn owls are in the area.

To hear a barn owl call, go to www.rspb.org.uk/ukBirds/Birdguides/barnowls/barnowlsindex.asp

SIGNS OF BARN OWLS

You don't have to see or hear a barn owl to know that they are about - you may find signs of their presence in the form of pellets, droppings and feathers.

Old pellets are the regurgitated remains of their prey - the bits they cannot digest, such as fur and bones. Generally, fresh barn owl pellets are black and glossy, moist and soft to the touch, sausage shaped and anything from thumb-sized to whole mouse size. However, they do vary in shape the extent of their fall before on a hard surface they will be flattened on one side) and, as they age, become matt, grey and dry. They can take years to fully decompose, depending on where they fall.

Barn owl droppings appear as white splashes or patches on walls, fence posts, and on the floors, walls and roof timbers of barn buildings. They are not easily distinguished from the droppings of other birds, but if made a building can be an initial indication that it is being used by barn owls.

Adult barn owls moult their distinctive feathers from May to November. Wing feathers are the largest and most noticeable. Feathers shed white buff (downy) material with no spots) and this can be a sign of a nesting pair, as can a layer of pellets.

Feeding

Barn owls are predators, feeding mainly on small mammals, particularly field voles but occasionally taking birds and insects. They hunt over rough ground where small mammal numbers are high. Their hunting range extends to about 1 km from the nest site in the breeding season. A 6.5 km in winter when prey is harder to find. A good supply of food is vital to successful breeding.

Breeding and nesting

Barn owls will use a range of buildings as nesting and nesting sites, as well as hollow trees and other natural sites (see 'Habitat Management'). Unlike many birds, they can breed all year round, but eggs are usually laid in April and May. Eggs, usually 2 to 7, are laid one at a time in three days apart. Incubation begins immediately, and the egg laid first will hatch first (incubation takes 21 days). The birds in a brood begin at different rates, and later, smaller nestlings may have not yet hatched when the first three chicks will survive. Chicks fledge after about nine weeks, and may return to the nest but are usually accompanied by 14 weeks.

Barn owl guide

We carried out **ten initial advisory visits** in addition to advice and support on existing sites. We advised and delivered on the creation of six new ponds and three scrapes (shallow depressions, wet in the winter) in Kingsnorth, Ashford. A guide was produced on barn owls for landowners in the Stour Valley. We worked with approximately 75 farmers and woodland owners giving advice, writing recommendations, carrying out surveys and countryside management.

Riverside

We carried out enhancement projects at Chartham, Godinton Park and in the Ashford Green Corridor. Volunteers installed an otter holt alongside the river in Canterbury. We continued with the control of Himalayan balsam.



Ragged robin in a wetland area of the Ashford Green Corridor created from amenity grassland



Working on the otter holt, Canterbury

Supporting volunteers

1043 work days!

We ran 100 volunteer mid week tasks. Volunteers erected barn owl pole, bat and bird boxes, cleared scrub from 12 sites, and 15 days were spent clearing invasive plants from wildlife sites.



Carrying out bank protection work in Chartham

Landscape Enhancement Partnership Scheme

With help from Interreg (European) funding the LEPS scheme delivered work at **ten sites** to improve landscape quality and wildlife habitat, costing £25,898.



New pond created at Bonnington Cherry Orchard, near the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Surveys, monitoring and plans



Surveying the Swalecliffe Brook

Working for the River Stour Internal Drainage Board we surveyed 30kms of drainage channels with the aim of improving them for biodiversity as part of the IDB Biodiversity Action Plan. We produced recommendations for Southern Water for the Swalecliffe Brook and Old Park Pond, Canterbury. We wrote a management plan for Buxford Meadow Local Wildlife Site and High Halden churchyard. A major study was completed on the likely impacts of the growth of population in Ashford on the river and its wildlife with recommendations for improvements. We monitored 45 barn owl boxes.

Our European partnership

We worked on the third year of four, of an Interreg scheme with partners including Parc naturel regional des Caps et Marais d'Opale in Nord Pas De Calais. Funding was spent on LEPS, urban wildlife habitats, woodland habitats, and exchanges with French groups.



Les Blongios, a French volunteer group working at Wraik Hill Local Nature Reserve, Whitstable, with KSCP volunteers



Tarmacing completed near Blean church on the Crab & Winkle Way



Construction of a bridge over the river, part of the Great Stour Way

Opening up access

After 18 years of negotiation, fundraising and planning, work was completed on the 5km Canterbury to Chartham riverside shared use path, the Great Stour Way. On the Crab and Winkle Way we co-ordinated £40,000 of surfacing work. Volunteers constructed steps, installed gates and waymarkers at many locations.

Prioritising 'designated' sites

We worked on **19 sites in the Kent Downs AONB**. We maintained Savannah wood, 2 ha of new woodland planting in Brabourne, for the benefit of dormice. Planted hedges on Bilting Grange Downs and reverted 2 ha of arable land to wild-flower meadow in Adisham.



Dormouse, the hopeful beneficiary of Savannah Wood

We completed a Higher Level Stewardship agreement for Blean Pasture

We worked on **17 Local Wildlife Sites** with management recommendations at another two sites.



We worked on **4 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)**. At Charing Beech Hangers SSSI we completed the removal of 900 stems of invasive sycamore to improve the biodiversity of the wood.



Sycamore felling at Charing Beech Hangers

Interpretation, events and guided walks

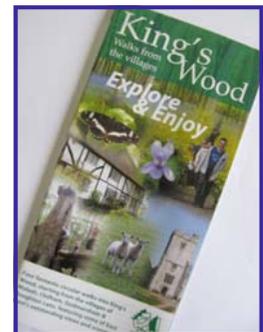
We ran a summer programme of events in the Ashford Green Corridor and events for, amongst others, Canterbury Festival, Charing Alderbed Meadow Community Group, Friends of King's Wood, Swadelands School and Givaudan. In **total 600** adults and young people were directly involved in these activities. We worked with the Friends of King's Wood to produce Explore & Enjoy, a leaflet promoting four circular walks from villages around King's Wood.



Orchard Extravaganza day in Frog orchard, Ashford, run by local group, Swanneg, with help from KSCP



Beavers enjoying pond dipping at Givaudan



The King's Wood Explore & Enjoy leaflet

Work with local companies

We continued our good working relationship with **Brett, Viridor Credits and Givaudan**. We launched Savannah Wood a woodland creation project with **Balfour Beatty Mott McDonald**. We benefited from the sponsorship by **Network Rail** of the Kent Free Tree Scheme. distributing 7,000 trees. We produced reports for **Southern Water**.



A spring bonnet winner at the launch of Savannah Wood

Raising our profile



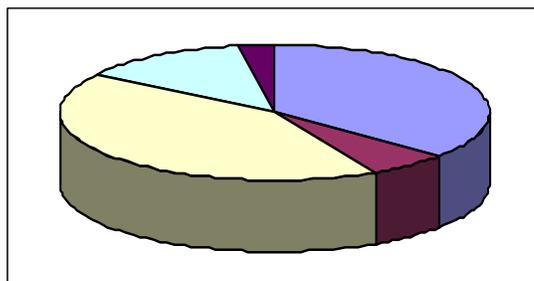
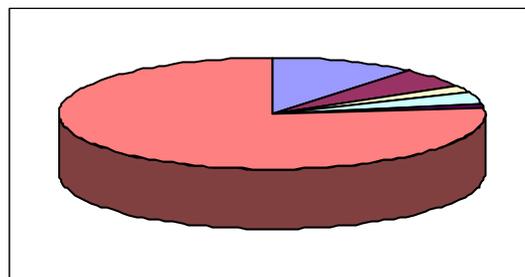
BBC Inside Out filming KSCP, Canterbury

The Partnership continued to maintain a high profile locally with various press items, our web sites, and touring of the display boards. We helped the BBC, Inside Out Programme with filming concerning otters in Kent.

Partnership finances 1/4/10 to 31/3/11

Income	09/10	10/11
Kent County Council (inc. in kind)	36,000	36,000
Environment Agency	10,000	18,000
Canterbury City Council	10,692	8,000
Ashford Borough Council	10,628	10,796
Robert Brett & Sons	3,000	3,000
Project income (capital & revenue)	297,466	250,607
Total	367,786	326,403

Expenditure	09/10	10/11
Running costs	124,053	118,005
KCC costs	20,000	20,000
Project costs	108,805	137,469
Project income carry forward	106,928	41,929
Replacement/contingency fund	8,000	9,000
Total	367,786	326,403



The KSCP is **highly cost effective** multiplying the contribution from Ashford Borough Council, Canterbury City Council and the Environment Agency many times over.

The year ahead - ten key activities for KSCP

Great Stour Way

Promote through organising a launch, producing a leaflet and interpretive panels. Continue erosion/habitat enhancement at Chartham. Provide bespoke seating with local community.



Blean Access and Interpretive Plan

Implement some of the actions in this plan including the production of interpretive panels and, working with the Kent Wildlife Trust, the Big Blean Walking Route.

Woodland Biodiversity

Complete the four year woodland biodiversity and access project with work in Denge and Clowes Wood.

Ashford Green Corridor

Seek funding to implement the actions in its report to improve the river corridor for people and wildlife and in the Buxford Meadow Management Plan.

River Stour Internal Drainage Board (IDB) Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

Start the second year of surveys of drainage channels with biodiversity recommendations for improvements.

Landscape Enhancement Partnership Scheme (LEPS)

Promote this scheme in 2011 and establish new funding for 2012.

Westgate Parklands

Support Canterbury City Council's Heritage Lottery application for Westgate Parklands.

A new European Partnership

Working with our partners at Kent Downs AONB establish a new European partner and apply for funds for works in the Stour Valley through the 2 seas programme.

Volunteers

Continue the mid-week volunteer programme and establish a Friends of Kentish Stour Group.

Swalecliffe Brook

Deliver some of the biodiversity and interpretive actions proposed in the report to Southern Water.

Chairman of Steering Group

Stuart Gibbons

Staff

Jon Shelton - Partnership Manager

Debbie Adams - Countryside Officer, Ashford

Carol Donaldson - Countryside Officer, Canterbury and Wantsum

Diane Comley - Project Officer (PT)

Mark Hudson - CO, Ashford (covering maternity leave) (PT)

Dan Salter - CO, Ashford (covering maternity leave) (PT)

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European Regional

