



## The Surrey Hills from the Sky

'Surrey from the Sky' is the theme for this year's Surrey Day, which will take place on Saturday 11 May. We decided that this would make an interesting topic for our Spring edition.

Surrey Day was launched in 2019 and is an opportunity to celebrate our beautiful county. Each year, BBC Radio Surrey features fascinating stories, music, and personalities associated with Surrey. They also produce a podcast on the chosen theme each year.

There are many stories to celebrate under this year's theme. In terms of altitude, the Mullard



Skylark space research rocket at UCL Mullard Space Science Lab. Photo: Ken Bare.

Space Science Laboratory tucked away in Holmbury St Mary has the furthest reach. This establishment hosts world-leading space research groups and has contributed to space missions to Venus, Mars, and Saturn. It has enabled some truly remarkable achievements!

Continuing with the satellite theme, Surrey Wildlife Trust, the University of Surrey, and Buglife have received People's Postcode Lottery funding for a project called 'Space4Nature.' This project combines innovative satellite technology and artificial intelligence to monitor and improve wildlife habitats.

Already 30 hectares of wildflower rich habitat has been created in the Surrey Hills.

Closer to the ground but still exploring the skies, the Surrey Hills and the wider county of Surrey have played a significant role in aviation history. In recent years, the Society has organised visits to Kenley Airfield, now home to Kenley Gliding Club, which showcases the rich history of Surrey airfields – see pages 3 and 6. There are also associations with several great aviators and inventors. Sir Thomas Sopwith CBE, the WWI flying ace who designed the Sopwith Camel and many other aircraft, set up the Sopwith School of Flying at Brooklands, Weybridge. Following WWI, with colleague and test pilot Harry Hawker, Sir Thomas set up Hawker Aircraft which later became Hawker-Siddeley. He even named one of his planes after his home in East Horsley – the 'Hawker Horsley'.



Dame Penelope Keith on Surrey Day 2023. Photo: Andy Newbold.

A more recent inventor associated with the Surrey Hills is Sir Martin Sweeting OBE, the founder of Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd (SSTL) in Guildford. He is known for his work in creating small satellites to make them more affordable. SSTL has delivered over 40 satellites to clients across the globe.

Much closer to the ground, Surrey Day will also celebrate our feathered friends with a feature on Birdworld, near Farnham, and a celebration of Surrey's bat population with Ross Baker from the Surrey Bat Group.

Be sure to tune in to BBC Radio Surrey (104.6FM and DAB) and enjoy Surrey Day on Saturday 11 May. Alternatively, you can join in with some of the day's competitions and activities. For more details go to the Visit Surrey website – [www.visitsurrey.com](http://www.visitsurrey.com)

Christine Howard DL



## Chairman's Views

### Embracing Nature, Diversity, and Mental Wellbeing

Firstly, I would like to thank Peter Arnold, who has retired from our Events Committee after many years. I was delighted to present him with an engraved glass in recognition of everything he has done for the Society. Peter is stepping back but will continue to lead walks and provide his excellent map reading training sessions.



Peter Arnold receiving his long service award

Over the past winter, we witnessed the power of working with the community as we joined forces with 280 dedicated volunteers to plant 3 kilometres of hedgerows across the Surrey Hills – beating last year's record! I'm delighted that we have received additional funding, which will enable us to expand our activities over the coming months.

We have received a generous grant from the Surrey County Council Mental Health Investment Fund enabling us to launch the East Surrey Care Farm Pilot Project. We are working in partnership with the Surrey Hills National Landscape and 'Growing Health



Katie Daw – Our new Care Farm Project Coordinator

Together' – a group formed to assist GP surgeries in East Surrey to identify health and wellbeing opportunities outside the health service, in collaboration with the community. The funding has paved the way for a transformative initiative. Individuals facing physical, mental, and emotional challenges will have the opportunity to experience therapeutic care by visiting local farms based in the Surrey Hills. Our newly appointed Project Officer, Katie Daw, will be working closely with farmers and potential beneficiaries to roll out the programme. Visits will be tailored to the needs of the individuals concerned – getting to know the animals, experiencing the countryside, and participating in various activities that will be designed to enhance wellbeing.

In addition, and thanks to the support of The National Heritage Lottery Fund, we are delighted to be able to launch another new project: 'Growing Together', which aims to promote inclusion and conservation in the countryside. This initiative will encourage individuals from minority backgrounds to engage in countryside activities. We will be working with Surrey Choices, who support adults with learning difficulties, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People and Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum to invite their members to join us on a journey of exploration, connection, and empowerment whilst encouraging them to embrace nature and diversity in the Surrey Hills. Whether people are interested in conservation efforts like hedge planting and tree popping, or prefer arts activities and health and wellbeing initiatives, "Growing Together" will offer something for everyone and will be co-designed to offer activities that meet participants' needs.

As we move forward, we remain committed to our goal of protecting and celebrating the Surrey Hills. Both these initiatives aim to show that by working together,

we can continue to make a positive impact on our community and ensure the Surrey Hills remains a place of beauty, inspiration, and enjoyment for all.

Gordon Jackson



## New Surrey Hills Society Trustee

**Karen Clark, Managing Director of PARC, an independent business network for performance and reward leaders, has recently become a member of the Society's Board. Karen has many years' experience as an HR professional. Here she explains why she volunteered to join us because of her love of the outdoors.**

"I grew up going on rambling and hiking adventures with my parents, even before I could walk the trails myself. I have early memories of being carried in a rudimentary carry pack, hoisted on my dad's shoulders, giving me a great view, but also testing his patience and navigation skills by covering his eyes and pulling his hair. We lived in Europe at the time, and I can see from old photos that we explored many a hill and mountain in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. When we moved back to England, I got my first pair of hiking boots, and my parents encouraged me to walk on my own. This love for the outdoors and exploring new places led me to adventure (and misadventure!)

across the UK, USA, Central America, Europe, and Asia, not just on trails, but also in cities. Even in my professional life in London, I've discovered some of my favourite spots through shunning the tube and following my curiosity for a new turning. Living in different places has also been enhanced by getting my boots on and exploring the local area, experiencing many hidden gems.

I love that some of my favourite walks in the world are in the Surrey Hills, which I've been enjoying for over 20 years. Here I have sought and found solace, freedom, energy, and balance, whether I'm walking alone or catching up with loved ones. My husband and I are walking the Cumbria Way in June, and the Surrey Hills are providing a beautiful training ground. With spring approaching, the paths are transforming, and it's a stunning time to explore the local Surrey habitat, as the bluebells emerge and the rhododendrons bloom."

Karen Clark



Karen Clark – Our new trustee

## Surrey Airfields and their Pioneering Role in Aviation



Redhill Aerodrome

The flatter areas surrounding the Surrey Hills have been the locations of airfields since the very early days of aviation. Some, such as Redhill, have survived as bases for private flying – plus numerous helicopters including those of the Air Ambulance and media organisations.

Kenley in the east of the county was home to the Royal Flying Corps in WW1 and played a major role in WW2 as one of the three main fighter stations responsible for the air defence of London during the Battle of Britain. Of all of Surrey's airfields, this is the only one still owned by the MoD who use it as a glider training base for Royal Air Force Air Cadets. Part of RAF Kenley is preserved as a tribute to the service personnel of the Commonwealth and Allied fighter squadrons, who shared the honours with the RAF.



Kenley Memorial

Brooklands was the birthplace of British aviation and, from 1908, had a long history of flying and manufacturing. In 1915 Vickers started producing aircraft there. The output of the Sopwith Aviation Company was even more prolific. Besides a large number of prototypes, numerous Camels, Snipes, Pups and Triplanes came off the production lines in nearby Kingston and were all test flown and delivered from Brooklands.

When war began again in September 1939, the Vickers-Armstrongs and Hawker aircraft companies had exclusive use of the Brooklands site for military aircraft production. The Wellington, one of the world's most advanced bomber aircraft at the start of WW2, was built here in large numbers. Post-war, the industry's attention turned to passenger aircraft. Then, in the early 1960s, the government rationalised the aircraft industry with Vickers-Armstrongs and others forming British Aircraft Corporation (BAC). But the 1960s also brought the Concorde project and design and manufacturing of this historic plane sustained Brooklands until closure in 1989.



Wisley airfield

Wisley was 'Vickers' own airfield' in Surrey. It opened in 1943 as a dispersal site for Wellingtons built at Brooklands, then from 1944 until 1972 the test programmes of the main Vickers types were all flown there – including the Viking, Viscount, Valiant, Vanguard, VC10 and finally the BAC One-Eleven. Many prototype aircraft were completed and tested at Wisley. These aircraft generally came from the experimental hangars at nearby Foxwarren, which had assembly hangars but no airfield. The semi-complete

aircraft were transported by road along the (then) single carriageway A3 to Wisley.

Another location with a fascinating history is Dunsfold. In 1942, Canadian engineers were charged with the construction of the airfield which they completed in just six months. Royal Canadian Air Force bombers were based here until 1944 when the RAF moved in. After the war the airfield was used by the RAF to repatriate prisoners of war, but then declared militarily inactive in 1946. Subsequently Dunsfold was used by Skyways Ltd, who became well-known for their part in the Berlin Airlift.



Douglas DC3 at Dunsfold (Wikimedia Commons)

In 1950, The Hawker Aircraft Company acquired the lease of the site and Dunsfold became famous for developing the Hunter jet fighter. Then, in 1960, came a development aircraft that led to the Hawker Siddeley Harrier, the first VTOL jet fighter bomber. Final assembly of the Harrier and the Hawk trainer aircraft took place there. Folland Gnat test flying and production also moved to Dunsfold in 1961. Hawker Siddeley became part of British Aerospace in 1977 and work continued until 1999 when they announced the closure as part of a restructuring.

Whilst air traffic over Surrey is now dominated by flights from Heathrow and Gatwick, the 20th century saw Surrey as a key location for the development and construction of numerous aircraft and the home of many of the industry's pioneers.

Ken Bare



Wellington at Brooklands

# From Chalk Downs to Heathlands

## A Bird's Eye View

*The Surrey Hills is a region of remarkable beauty and diversity. Join us on a virtual tour as we soar above this captivating area, uncovering its unique features and natural wonders that attract both resident and migratory birds.*



Chalk Downland at Boxhill

### **The Chalk Downs: Ancient History in a Patchwork**

As we rise above the Surrey Hills, the mesmerising sight of the chalk downs unfolds. Formed over millions of years, these ancient hills provide a habitat for a variety of birds. Majestic kestrels and buzzards and tuneful skylarks soar above the open grassland and scrubby slopes. The chalk downs are also home to rare flora and fauna, including the delicate chalk hill blue butterfly and 17 species of orchid.

### **Woodlands: A Symphony of Colour and Song**

Descending from the chalk downs, we enter the enchanting woodlands that cloak the Surrey Hills. Here, a symphony of colour and song awaits. Towering oak, beech, and yew trees provide shelter and nesting sites for woodland birds like the colourful great spotted woodpecker, the acrobatic treecreeper, and the secretive tawny owl. The understorey bursts with wildflowers, creating a magical environment for birds and nature enthusiasts alike. Exploring these ancient woodlands is like stepping into a time capsule where nature and history intertwine seamlessly.



Leith Hill tower in its woodland setting



Frensham Ponds

### Wetlands and Waterways: A Haven for Water Birds

As we glide further, the wetlands and waterways of the Surrey Hills come into view. These habitats, including lakes, ponds, and rivers, provide vital resources for numerous bird species, amphibians, and insects. Majestic herons wade in shallow waters, while dragonflies dart across the surface, showcasing their vibrant colours. Ducks, geese, and swans find solace in these wetlands, creating a tranquil and picturesque scene for visitors. Whether for birdwatching, photography, or simply enjoying the ambiance, the wetlands of the Surrey Hills offer a wonderful opportunity to connect with the environment.

### Heathlands: A Unique Biodiverse Landscape

Our aerial journey takes us to the heathlands, another distinctive feature of the Surrey Hills. These open, low-lying areas are adorned with heather, gorse, and hardy vegetation. The heathlands support a range of bird species, including the endangered Dartford warbler, nightjars, stonechats, and woodlarks. These birds have adapted to the heathland's unique conditions, creating a visually stunning and ecologically significant ecosystem. The heathlands offer a glimpse into the past, once used for grazing livestock and fuel extraction, resulting in the flourishing of heather while native trees were removed.



Puttenham's Iconic Heathland



Boxhill and Dorking

As our bird's eye view tour of the Surrey Hills concludes, we are left in awe of the diverse landscapes that unfold beneath us. From the chalk downs to the woodlands, wetlands, and heathlands, this region offers a remarkable array of habitats for birds and wildlife. The Surrey Hills not only provide a sanctuary for resident species but also serve as a crucial stopover for migratory birds on their journeys. Supported by a rich biodiverse ecosystem of amphibians, insects, and plants, these avian wonders thrive.

*Gordon Jackson*

## Taking to the Skies



© Tomas Castelazo Wikimedia Commons CC BY SA-3.0



Glider at Kenley



Drone – ©Jason Blackeye – Wikimedia Commons

**Whether you are eight or eighty, an adrenaline junky, looking for freedom and adventure, or simply wanting to enjoy peace and solitude above the clouds, there are plenty of choices for anyone wishing to take to the skies.**

Fairoaks Airport, near Woking, Dunsfold Park near Cranleigh and Redhill Aerodrome all offer a range of aviation activities including private flying lessons. More environmentally friendly, using the same currents that birds use to fly, gliding from RAF Kenley Aerodrome enables pilots and passengers to enjoy the serene tranquillity of the sky, whilst being closer to the ground and the sounds of nature.

Flying drones has become a popular hobby over the last few years. Drones can be used to create stunning aerial shots of the countryside as well as to track wildlife. Leith Hill, the highest point in Surrey, has become a favoured spot for drone flying.

## Postcards from the future

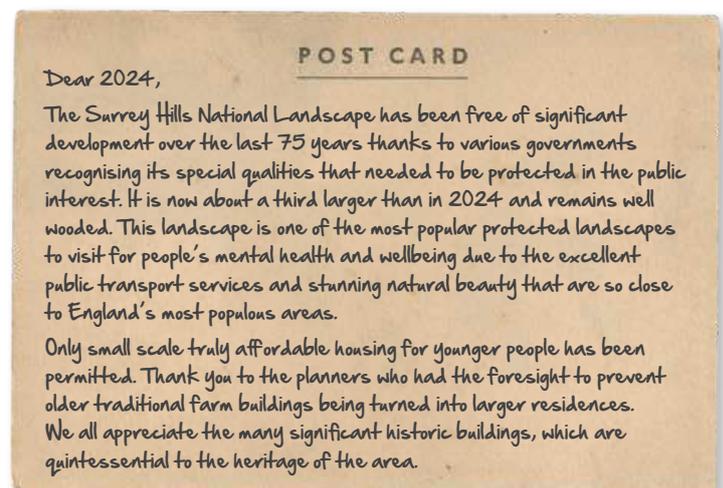
The Surrey Hills National Landscape Board is developing a positive 75-year vision for the Surrey Hills as a thriving National Landscape. This will set the policy framework for the new Surrey Hills Management Plan (2025 – 2030). As part of the development of the Management Plan, a public campaign is being launched entitled “Postcards from the Future” whereby the public and targeted communities will be invited to describe what a thriving National Landscape for nature and people will look and feel like in 75 years’ time – a 22nd century vision. This reflects the fact that many of our activities like planting trees and hedgerows, protecting veteran trees and heritage buildings, restoring heathland and downland will often be about gaining long term benefits.

**Opposite is a postcard from the future from Clive Smith, Surrey Hills National Landscape’s planning consultant:**

Those seeking an adrenaline rush could perhaps opt for the thrill of sky diving through the air at 120 miles an hour or soaring through the treetops 15 metres from the forest floor on a zip wire. Alternatively, balloon flights offer a more serene way to view the countryside. Flights launch from various locations including Farnham Park, Godalming, and Shalford Park giving passengers views of some of the most picturesque areas of Surrey. Helicopter rides are also popular as they literally hover over the countryside providing plenty of excitement along with spectacular aerial views.

Imagine looking down on the vivid blue water of Frensham Ponds, the tapestry of tree colours at Winkworth Arboretum or the breath-taking landscape of the Devil’s Punchbowl. Taking to the skies really does give a very different perception of the world around you.

*Susie Turner*



# Birds of Prey

## Aerial Predators of the Surrey Hills



Hobby in pursuit of prey © Jon Hawkins

Few birds are as awe-inspiring as birds of prey, their majestic presence ruling the skies of Surrey. Feeding on other vertebrates, such as small mammals, insects, reptiles, and other birds, they are often characterised by keen eyesight, hooked bills, and sharp talons.

One of the most famous birds of prey found in the Surrey Hills is the hobby, an acrobatic acrobat. These summer visitors migrate from their wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa, coinciding with peak abundance of their insect prey. This bird is known for its incredibly agile hunting ability, catching dragonflies on the wing, and transferring its catch from talon to mouth while in mid-air!

This unique behaviour is known as 'hawking', where hobbies actively seek for insect prey on the wing. A fantastic place to see this behaviour in action is at Thursley National Nature Reserve, a summer haven for hobbies and dragonflies alike!

Another common sight in the Surrey Hills is the gliding presence of the red kite. However, this wasn't always the case. In 1980 they were nearly hunted to extinction and one of three globally threatened species in the UK. However, thanks to highly successful reintroduction projects that started in 1990, the red kite started to breed in the wild from 1991 and has made a miraculous

comeback. They can now often be seen soaring along the tree line or scavenging for scraps along roadsides.

The mighty white-tailed eagle has now also been spotted in Surrey, thanks to successful reintroduction programmes from 2019 on the Isle of Wight. Whether this majestic bird becomes a regular visitor to the Surrey Hills remains uncertain, but it is exciting to know that populations of white-tailed eagles are starting to establish in the south of England.

Christa Emmett



Red Kite © Jon Hawkins

## Tiny Wonders of the Sky



Comma Butterfly



Demoiselle



Dragonfly



Small White Butterfly

Although often invisible to us, insects of the Surrey Hills are of huge importance and play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of our ecosystems. The Surrey Hills contains botanically rich habitats including chalk grassland and beautiful purple lowland heaths, which in turn support a whole range of flying insects including approximately 30 species of butterfly and 20 species of dragonfly.

However, these habitats need to be connected for our 'tiny wonders of the sky' to thrive. Over 97% of all flower-rich grasslands have been lost in England since the 1930s,

significantly reducing pollen and nectar sources. This has led to a serious decline in flying insects relying on wildflower habitat. Bug Life's 'B-Line' project aims to address this connectivity crisis by mapping a series of 3km wide 'insect pathways' across the UK, linking areas of high-quality habitat and identifying priority areas for nature restoration. Two of these B-Lines traverse the Surrey Hills.

The Society's conservation activities have aided connectivity across the Surrey Hills. Our volunteers have been involved in a range of restoration activities, such as scrub

clearance at RSPB Farnham Heath, tree popping at The Hampton Estate and Banstead Heath and the planting of 7.5km of native hedgerow across the Surrey Hills. We are also delighted to be working with The National Trust on a Surrey Hills wide signage project, identifying connectivity projects in the landscape, as well as attending their 'Close up on Invertebrates' event at Leith Hill Place on Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 June.

Christa Emmett

# Events programme April to August 2024

Below is a brief list of planned events we are running.

There is much more detail on our website and a link to a booking form which needs to be filled in whether an event is free or has a cost. Our free walk every first Sunday of the month still needs to be booked.

DATE	EVENT DETAIL
Tuesday 23 April 	<b>Guided tour of Knowle Park (am)</b> Join us on a visit to explore Knowle Park, a new 60-acre community parkland, nature reserve and event space in Cranleigh, which has a new wildlife lake and outdoor amphitheatre.
Sunday 5 May 	<b>Free walk – Explore Holmwood (am)</b> Holmwood Common is a hidden gem just south of Dorking with dappled woodland and beautiful countryside for walking, horse riding and cycling. The common is fairly flat and ideal for all to explore.
Sunday 12 May 	<b>Morning Birdsong Walk (am)</b> A guided walk with Mike Waite from Surrey Wildlife Trust through Shere Woodlands to enjoy the variety of birdsong.
Friday 17 May	<b>Wine tasting – Visit Albury Organic Vineyard with lunch (am/pm)</b> Taste the wonderful wines of one of Surrey's finest vineyards and then enjoy a buffet lunch and an optional wildlife walk.
Sunday 2 June 	<b>Free walk – Explore Titsey Estate and Coccolith (am)</b> Enjoy this short flat walk with stunning views over East Surrey, as well as visiting one of the new Surrey Hills Arts Sculptures.
Tuesday 11 June	<b>Riding for the Disabled (RDA) followed by The Grange (pm)</b> We will enjoy a visit to these two charities. The horses at RDA benefit the lives of over 20,000 disabled children and adults. The Grange offers skills training for people with physical and learning disabilities.
Saturday 22 June 	<b>Wey and Arun Canal boat trip with afternoon tea (pm)</b> The Loxwood canal borders Surrey and Sussex and is operated by volunteers. The Society has chartered a 40 seater boat to take us on a 1½ hour cruise through this attractive stretch of waterway.
Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 June 	<b>Drop in Event with National Trust: A close-up on invertebrates at Leith Hill Place (am/pm)</b> A variety of inspiring activities, expert talks, artwork, and hands-on conservation will help you discover the ingenious invertebrates that live at our feet.
Sunday 7 July 	<b>Free walk – Explore Walliswood, near Ewhurst (am)</b> Enjoy a 4 mile walk around this isolated area of the Surrey weald, passing the picturesque 13th century Okewood Church.
Thursday 18 July	<b>Horsley Towers with a talk on Tommy Sopwith (am/pm)</b> A visit to this special historic estate, once the home of Sir Thomas Sopwith CBE, designer of the Sopwith Camel. There will be a talk about him followed by a lunch and a tour of the gardens and grounds.
Sunday 4 August 	<b>Free walk – Beyond the Rim: The Devil's Punchbowl and Hindhead Commons (am)</b> A beautiful but demanding 6 mile walk that takes in the base of the Punchbowl, Gibbet Hill and The Temple of the Four Winds.



Family friendly



Dog friendly but kept on a short lead throughout the walk



Flagging other events

*When booking yourself on a walk please make sure that you are fit enough to cope with the category stipulated.*



Easy



Moderate



Challenging

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION** visit our website **OR EMAIL:** [info@surreyhillsociety.org](mailto:info@surreyhillsociety.org)

**OR PHONE:** 07530 949302 and leave a message



[www.surreyhillsociety.org](http://www.surreyhillsociety.org)

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