

Countryside Volunteer bulletin

March 2023



Winter work on Arbrook Common

Arbrook Common is approximately 100 acres of mixed woodland adjacent to Claygate. It's bounded on the East and South by open fields and to the west by Copsem Lane with the main access from Claremont Road, Arbrook Lane and Birchwood Lane.

The woods include oaks, elm, beech, sweet chestnut and aspen plus ponds, bridleways and the Rythe which meanders its way through the woods from Arbrook Farm down to Arbrook Lane and then out to the Thames.

Over time however, invasive non-native species such as Snowberry and Laurel have begun to dominate the understory at the expense of the native ground flora which insects rely upon. The spread of these invasive species also hinders natural regeneration of a variety of native woodland shrub and tree species. Also holly, whilst a native tree and an important element of woodland, has begun to smother the understorey by getting far too dominant, cloaking it in darkness and smothering ground flora and hindering regeneration of other woodland species.

As you may have noticed the footpaths have become narrower and darker as the Holly and Laurel have encroached.

Over the past 6 months countryside volunteers have been working under the direction of the Elmbridge Borough Council Countryside Team to manage the woods in two main areas; The Rythe and the Eastern boundary.



Winter work on Arbrook Common...ctd

The Rythe near Arbrook Farm had become completely overgrown by Holly which had reached a height of over 50 feet.

In some areas Snowberry had taken hold, dominated the woodland floor and suppressed the native wildflowers from flourishing. Snowberry is an invasive species introduced from America by the Victorians in the 1800s'. If left unchecked, it will continue to spread via its vigorous root system. The only way to get rid of it is to pull it up by the roots. Hard work but very satisfying!

Work started to open "windows" through the undergrowth and selectively cutting back the Holly from the footpaths to let the light in. The effect has been dramatic and has increased the amenity value of the woods enormously. Many of the local dogwalkers have commented how much less oppressive the woods are as a result of these works.

You may have noticed that some of the Holly has been layered to re-establish the Holly hedge that bounded the cottage that once stood at the Arbrook Lane end of the woods.

The removal of the Snowberry has revealed pretty drifts of snowdrops and it is hoped that over time native wildflowers such as bluebell, primrose, lesser celandines and stitchwort will return. This in turn will encourage insects and birdlife back onto the woodland floor and shrub layer.

Log piles and free-standing brash piles have been built with the cut material to increase the range of habitats for wildlife including dunnocks, wrens, newts, and frogs.

New volunteers needed!

We are in need of more volunteers to help with other work around the Elmbridge Countryside sites so if you're working from home and fancy a couple of hours break or are retired and keen to help improve your local environment, then this is for you!

The volunteers are a friendly bunch and come from all walks of life and ages. No experience is necessary as our friendly countryside ranger will provide all the guidance and tools you need. This isn't a long-term commitment, so just come along when you can.

For more information, visit elmbridge.gov.uk/countryside or email countryside@elmbridge.gov.uk to register your interest and a countryside ranger will be in touch.

We look forward to seeing you in the woods soon!

