



**Surrey**  
Wildlife Trust

# Beyond the Birdie



***Driving towards  
greener golf in Surrey***



**Surrey's golf courses are renowned for their beauty, and with the support of Surrey Wildlife Trust, many clubs are also developing a reputation for investing in habitats and wildlife.**

Golf clubs are often the custodians of much more than their greens, with a range of habitats including ancient woodland, chalk grassland and heathland as well as wetland habitats such as ponds, ditches and rivers found on the courses. With so much land used to play golf in the UK, the potential for supporting wildlife is significant.

### **We're already in the game**

Surrey Wildlife Trust have been working with golf clubs for many years and, since 2021, the SWT Nature-based Solutions (NbS) team have been further developing this work. As of 2024, we have engaged with over 20 clubs across the county to identify opportunities for habitat enhancement on the 'out of play' areas of the course.

*Golf courses account for c.4% of Surrey's land*





## Golf clubs are often the custodians of much more than their greens



### A win-win for business & nature

**It's clear that golf clubs are becoming more aware of the benefits of the habitats they manage, and the need to invest in them.**

This is reflected by golf industry bodies leading on this through sustainability incentives, accreditation and best practice.

However, most clubs do not currently have any ecological baselining or accurate mapping of existing habitats. Ecological surveys are vital to any landowner and

manager in order to gain a better understanding of the whole site, how it functions within the wider landscape and how it could best be managed for biodiversity.

Many clubs are also investing more into water resource management such as reservoirs and water extraction, which could require statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

Having an accurate habitat baseline can help inform better long-term management and planning of a golf course, whilst ensuring that the most environmentally sensitive areas are protected and other habitats enhanced.



## **NbS Manager Ben Habgood has taken the lead on engaging with golf courses in Surrey**

*We increasingly find that course greenkeepers, club managers, committees and members all recognise the value of their land to wildlife and the local community. They want to make longer-term plans to benefit both, often as part of an overall drive for sustainability. This means developing new skills, exploring new funding opportunities, and basing decisions on evidence and best practice. We can help with all three.*

## **What we can do for you**

### **We offer a range of services to help you define your business vision and land aspirations:**

- Face to face/online meeting or consultation
- Online mapping & data searches
- Full review of landholdings
- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (through SWT Ecology Services)
- River Condition Assessment
- Highlight environmental enhancements & connectivity opportunities

*Please note that depending on your requirements, our services may incur a charge. We will provide a quote where this is the case.*

# Case studies

## The NEIRF 2 Project

Much of our collaboration with clubs was piecemeal until 2022, when we successfully bid for a grant from the second round of the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF2). This enabled us to support six landowners, including West Surrey and Woking Golf Clubs, to develop nature restoration projects based on natural capital investment plans.

NEIRF projects are funded by Defra and the Environment Agency. The funding aims to support the development stage of nature restoration projects to get them to a point where they can attract investment. We worked with six very different businesses through the project, and understanding more about the challenges they face was invaluable.

Key outputs for both golf clubs included baseline ecological surveys, carried out by SWT Ecology Services; a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment and 10-year management plan for the habitats on site. These provided bespoke advice on how to manage the 'out of play' areas for wildlife and all



Survey, Matthew Roberts

the benefits this brings. We leave the management considerations for all in-play areas (tees, fairways, roughs and greens) to the golf course management team, but through our input we aim to have a positive impact for nature on the management techniques delivered across the whole estate.

As a result of this project, both clubs now have a 10-year vision for the site which has been formed through robust information as well as best practice guidance.

They were also provided with environmental stewardship and private finance opportunities, and a clear plan which will help them to budget, as well as engage with the general public and their members on this subject.

# Bespoke management plans were created for each golf course



Marbled White, Vaughn Matthews

## Woking and West Surrey Golf Clubs

West Surrey Golf Club is set within the beautiful Surrey Hills countryside and boasts fairways lined by broadleaved woodland.

Woking Golf Club is surrounded by lowland heathland, with areas of broadleaved and coniferous woodland, grassland, and open water.

SWT worked with both clubs and helped them to create achievable plans for managing their courses for wildlife, covering a total of 144 hectares.

Bespoke management plans were created for each course, which incorporate the existing habitats

and identify opportunities to improve these to achieve the clubs' environmental aspirations.

Through the management plans, each habitat was assessed through a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) lens to assess the current conditions, and recommendations were made regarding potential realistic improvements that would result in the uplift of habitats on site.

Part of the work undertaken to write the management plans involved carrying out species and habitat designation searches to identify any significant areas or species on the site.

Through these searches, the importance of the sites within the living landscape and the significant role that golf courses can play in nature's recovery became evident.



## Example recommendations

Woodland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thinning of specific trees</li><li>• Standing dead wood &amp; log piles</li><li>• Installation of bat &amp; bird boxes</li><li>• Establishment of veteran tree features</li></ul>
Heathland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rotational turf stripping to create bare ground</li><li>• Mowing regime for structural diversity</li><li>• Creation of fire &amp; fuel breaks</li></ul>
Grassland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adapted rotational mowing</li><li>• Using arisings for compost heaps for reptiles</li></ul>
Open water & ditches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Removal of non-native &amp; invasive species</li><li>• Rotational ditch clearance</li><li>• Installation of leaky dams &amp; pond creation</li></ul>
Ecological surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reptile &amp; amphibian surveys</li><li>• River condition assessments</li><li>• eDNA surveys for protected species</li></ul>

## Get in touch

### **We offer a range of services to help you define your business vision and land aspirations**

Surrey Wildlife Trust have been working with golf clubs for many years and, since 2021, the SWT Nature-based Solutions (NbS) team have been further developing this work.

If you are interested in working with the Nature-based Solutions team at Surrey Wildlife Trust, or would like to find out more, please get in touch:

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**Registered Charity No. 208123**

Cover image: Stonechat, Ben Hall/2020VISION



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