

# Coleshill Common

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November 2019-November 2023

## Introduction

The project with Rough Around the Edges was started in 2019 by members of Coleshill Management Committee (CMC). CMC is a group of experienced and knowledgeable local volunteers supported by Coleshill Parish Council to oversee and advise on the management of the Common and other greenspaces in Coleshill. The group was set up some time ago after their founder, Ann Trotman set out an initial management plan for the Common in 1994 and started running work parties there. The Committee members are all wildlife enthusiasts and had been involved in a previous Commons project with Chilterns Conservation Board. As they were looking for advice about multiple sites, including the open and woodland areas of the Common, and the village pond, they then contacted the Rough Around the Edges Project Officer. Key objectives for the Common are stated in their 2013 management plan:

“To protect and conserve the unenclosed character and naturalness of the site for the benefit of the flora, fauna and other wildlife and for its quiet enjoyment by the public on foot and for the enhancement of its natural beauty through positive and sensitive management.”



Coleshill Common

Coleshill Common is a 6.2 hectare area of land, bordered by roads and a small number of private residences. Most of the Common is now scrub and woodland with the centre remaining as grassland. The site has several small ponds, and a small streamlet from one of these running from north to south and ending in a

## Rough Around the Edges Case Study

sink hole. The Common has a fairly complex topography, overlain by extensive use by villagers over several centuries, giving it a rich cultural significance.

The remaining open grassland area of about half a hectare was the main focus of this project. The grassland soils are largely damp acidic with a small patch of yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudocorus*), and several patches of common comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*). Towards the middle of the grassland there is a large patch of Devil's-bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), and the remaining grassland to the south is largely rabbit grazed with frequent meadow ant hills.

## Project Summary

The main objectives of this project were:

- to improve community understanding of and engagement with Coleshill Common, and to encourage more local volunteers to join the existing Coleshill Management Committee (CMC)
- to alter the management of the open grass area of the common to prevent nutrient enrichment changing the species composition and encroachment by bramble

These objectives were largely achieved through a number of public engagement activities and with the provision of an updated mowing regime, supported by a new Preliminary Ecological Assessment. The group now has 16 volunteers on their work party list, and local families have asked for more activities on the Common after the success of the Wildlife Explorer Day.

## Summary of actions

### Budget

- £480 on events and engagement activities
- £535 on survey activities

### Outputs

- Over 15 work parties, attended by up to 12 volunteers at a time
- Over 310 volunteer work hours
- Wildlife Explorer Day with over 70 people attending from local families
- Engagement with local school and families to encourage attendance at the Wildlife Explorer Day
- Butterfly identification training and walk for CMC and volunteers from other community groups
- Engagement with other conservation groups including the Mammal Society, Buckinghamshire Amphibian and Reptile Group, Prestwood Nature, Chiltern Rangers
- Amphibian and mammal surveys on site
- Attendance by CMC volunteers at community group training – basic surveying, leading work parties, planning events and activities, grafting
- Work parties led by Chiltern Rangers
- Use of wildlife information posters on the site
- Common survey and management plan for mowing
- Expression of interest from local volunteers to help organise a Wildlife Explorer Day in 2024
- Installation of new bench, as well as boardwalk and footpath work from TCV



Children attending the Wildlife Explorer day and learning about aquatic wildlife with Agni Arampoglou from Buckinghamshire Amphibian and Reptile Group. Credit: Penny Ware

## Impact on people and wildlife

While there have been challenges (notably Covid-19), the group feel there has been a positive impact locally. They have had positive feedback from families who attended the Wildlife Explorer Day, and there was a village wide survey of the greenspaces and overall the responses were positive about the work CMC has been doing. They feel the numbers of people visiting the Common seem to be higher, in particular dog walkers, and they are finding more dens in the woods – which is fine as it means children are using the site. Some members have realised that they take more notice of wildlife, and there was a clear benefit of being able to visit the Common during the pandemic. CMC think that might be why more local people now use it more. As a group they also agree that they enjoy both the work and the social aspect of working with other people on the Common.

With regard to the Rough Around the Edges project specifically, while CMC generally knew what to do but found it helpful to have support and advice when necessary, particularly from advice from people who can put together a management plan. They also found that it is important to have some naturalists supporting or in the group to inform the work.

Although there haven't been significant changes in the wildlife seen on the site, CMC members have noticed possibly more muntjac deer on and around the site, and there have been grass snake sightings. There has also been considerable attention given to preserving the anthills on the Common. This includes an article for the Parish magazine, and extensive conversations with the Parish Council.

## Challenges

The site has lots of different users and over the long term, the management has had to be adjusted. This means that sometimes there are opposing voices as people have different opinions about how to manage the site. However, CMC have regular discussions with the Parish Council, and with the provision of the site survey and management recommendations, hopefully it will be easier to manage it.

As the village is small, it has been difficult to recruit more, and younger, volunteers, so the group has needed to bring in other groups – for example the Trust for Conservation Volunteers and Chiltern Rangers – to carry out bigger tasks. This approach works and they need to continue to plan tasks for themselves and those for others. The challenge partly with this is that there is an associated cost, which it is hoped can be included in the annual budget for the site.

The leaky pond is a much more costly and complex job than can be covered in a small project, so they haven't been able to carry out work on it.

CMC also couldn't easily implement their original ideas for a Forest School site on the Common as it required having a provider who wished to use it and/or a school that needed it. The local primary school have good existing outdoor provision.

## Future plans

CMC would like to have more villagers 'owning' the Common and want to engender more interest in and work on the site. There is more maintenance to do, and they would also like to make the camera trap images that they have available for people to see, perhaps on the village website. They will continue to look for support and advice on:

- Volunteer recruitment for work parties
- Advice on managing ponds and aquatic ecology
- Sharing knowledge and skills with other groups looking after Commons
- Having livestock on site
- Engaging the next generation