

RANGER

THE MAGAZINE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

Issue 149 Winter 2025



**PROTECTING NATURE AND CONNECTING
PEOPLE: 6TH ERF CONGRESS, ROMANIA
RESTORING THE COCKSHUT
THE LEGACY OF JOHN TRACEY**

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SUBMISSIONS

We welcome submissions from members for inclusion in *Ranger*. These can include:

- case studies of successful management techniques/projects
- scientific articles on relevant countryside management topics
- news from your managed area or region
- letters about relevant topics
- opinions about current issues

PHOTOGRAPHS

We are always looking for good quality images to use to illustrate our articles or simply to showcase the variety of habitats, flora and fauna in our country. We also are interested in seeing images of countryside management staff doing their everyday jobs. If you are a keen photographer and are happy to share your pictures, please get in touch.

The deadline for the next issue is **31 January 2026**.

For more information and to submit your articles and photos, email Liz Bourne at ranger@countrysidemanagement.org.uk.

Opinions expressed in *Ranger* are not necessarily those of the Countryside Management Association.

Front cover image: ERC Congress, by Anton Marius.



COMMENT



Whilst the Board was somewhat despondent at needing to cancel Conference 2025, we have thanked the Conference organising group immensely for putting together what was due to be another corker of an event. Pretty quickly, however, we've moved on to finding a venue and planning Conference 2026, our 60th anniversary! It is very likely to be somewhere in the southeast as we haven't visited there in some time. I'm hard pushed to think of any ranger association on the planet that has celebrated its 60th anniversary so I believe this to be a first. I hope as many of you as possible can come together and celebrate this milestone; the Board plans to make this event a very special one indeed, possibly with a different format – watch this space...

I'd like to congratulate the two winners of CMA awards this year. Both have been won by different teams within the National Trust. The prestigious Gordon Miller Award was won by the Stablecroft Project at Moseley Old Hall in Wolverhampton whilst the new Woodland Magic Award donated by retired member and Honorary CMA Fellow George Mist has been swept away by the NT at Lydford Gorge in Devon.

Next year, there will also be a new shield to win for work within Ancient Woodland. Look out for details on the website and in e-bulletins soon.

Conference 2025 was to focus on 'people helping nature' and this theme is mirrored in many places in this *Ranger* edition. The European Ranger Federation Congress in Romania this autumn had exactly that as its theme. Members Charlotte Eley and Adam Hicks received bursaries to help them attend and both give accounts here of how much they learned and were inspired by so many rangers from across Europe coming together. A big thank you to all who sent donations for our twin ranger association in Georgia and a genuine thank you to Chloe Bradbrooke, your international coordinator, for ensuring the donations all made it to their destination.

The people and nature theme is continued through our patron Chris Baines recounting the amazing work of the Kingswood Centre and Wildside Activity Centre in Wolverhampton; the Wildlife Trusts have released Good Practice Guidance on ensuring everyone is welcomed to our open spaces; whilst Community Land Trusts are explained and working parents Flora and Tracey give tips on meshing family life and work demands together.

Our first three CMA Ambassadors are going great guns and I offer my thanks to them for promoting the CMA and membership benefits to all they come into contact with during their daily work. If anyone else fancies taking up that mantle, it's not onerous and we intend to have regular meet-ups to see how else we can all spread the word about the benefits of joining the CMA.

Two last mentions: the first is Josef Hanik's wonderful account of the legacy of John Tracey, ranger from the Wirral Country Park. I do remember John from when I was starting out in the mid 70s across the water in Knowsley. One of the most poignant phrases used was that John was "proud, committed and passionate", something that describes rangers to this day.

Lastly, the member survey that has been threatened for some time to help our bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund is at last ready to drop into your inboxes. All respondents will be entered into a draw for a year's free membership and every entry will see £5 donated to our partners at the Squirrel Accord. It will take around 30 minutes to complete and the Board thanks you hugely in advance.

Have a wonderful festive season, take care and see you on the other side,

Linda Nunn, Chairman

NEWS FROM THE FRONTLINE

SCOTTISH EV OFF-ROADER FOR WELSH RANGERS



Ranger Steve Williams with Morag the Munro.

Countryside rangers have been introduced to an off-road electric vehicle around Moel Famau in the Clwydian Range. Nicknamed Morag, the Scottish Munro Series-M M280 electric pick-up was funded by the Welsh Government's Energy Service and replaces an end-of-life fossil fuelled pick-up. The first of its kind to be used by a local authority anywhere in the UK, the Munro will be used by the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscapes rangers to help with daily duties on the hills and will be based at Loggerheads County Park.

The Munro was chosen for its ability to tackle the terrain of the Clwydians and other hilly sites, having been thoroughly tested back home in Scotland on all types of off-road situations and being able to handle gradients above 40 degrees.

Training has taken place for the rangers who will use Morag on the Clwydians, facilitated by Denbighshire County Council's Fleet department and joined by representatives from Munro who accompanied Morag in a similar vehicle.

The training took place on and around the Offas Dyke Path which will be regular routes the Munro will take to support the rangers.

The introduction of the Munro is part of Denbighshire County Council's ongoing effort to reduce fleet carbon emissions, improve air quality and lower long-term maintenance and service costs by replacing end-of-life vehicles with proven electric vehicle equivalents.

DONATIONS TO GEORGIA

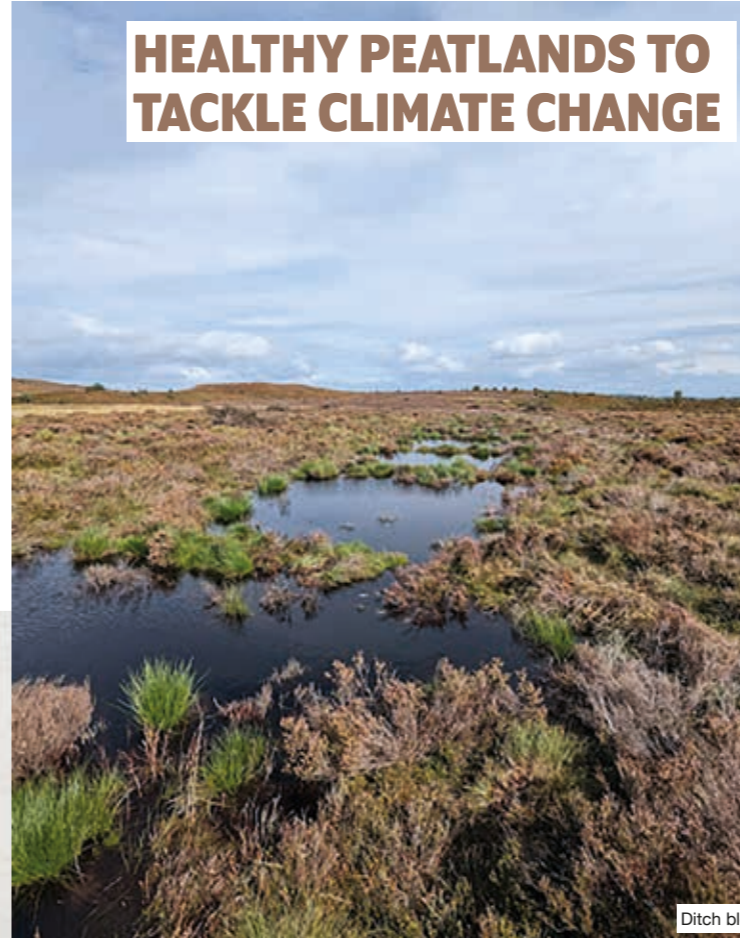


Tana and Tedzami Protected Landscape Management Department.



Earlier this year, we put out a callout for any redundant kit, such as binoculars, walkie talkies or boots, to be donated to the Georgian Ranger Association. We're delighted that many of you found some unwanted items and sent them in. In November, our Georgian colleagues were presented with the donations and were tremendously grateful for your efforts.

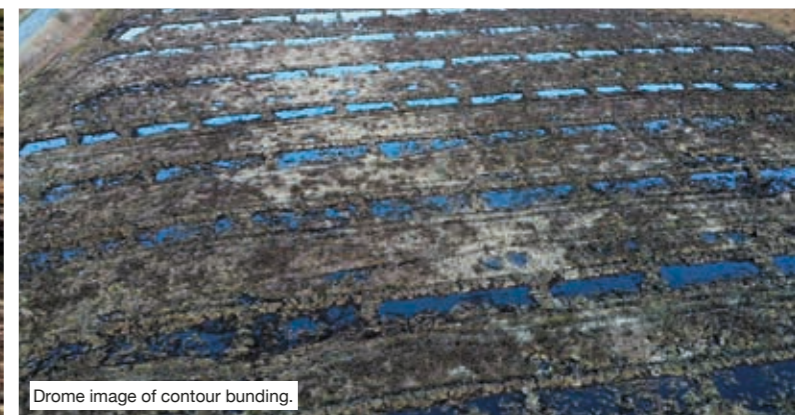
HEALTHY PEATLANDS TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE



Ditch blocking.



Contour bunding.



Drome image of contour bunding.

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape is working on a number of projects that help tackle climate change.

Our peatlands are vital ecosystems, and they act as significant carbon stores and havens for wildlife. However, much of the peat within the National Landscape has deteriorated and is currently releasing carbon. This is very often due to drainage issues, coniferous trees and erosion.

Working with landowners and farmers, we are restoring these vital habitats through funding from Natural Resources Wales' National Peatlands Action Programme.

We have made remarkable progress, particularly at Llandegla Moor Site of Special Scientific Interest.

- Since 2022, around 180 hectares of peat habitats have been restored to a more favourable condition.
- We installed contoured banches to catch water and prevent runoff.
- We're getting rid of non-native conifer trees, which allow native plants to thrive.

- This prevents carbon loss and protects wetland habitats.
- Key species such as black rug, curlew, geese, dragonflies and squirrels are already benefiting from this enhanced habitat.

Healthy peatlands are nature's unsung heroes. They act as carbon powerhouses, as they store huge amounts of carbon and prevent it from being released into the atmosphere, which helps Wales meet its climate change targets. In addition, peatlands are biodiversity-rich spaces, providing unique habitats for a wide variety of plants and animals, and serving as natural water regulators, slowly absorbing and releasing water as giant sponges, reducing the risk of flooding and ensuring cleaner water supplies.

By investing in these projects, the National Landscape ensures a healthier environment for future generations. As a result of our successes, we have secured further funding from the National Peatlands Action Programme to continue this ambitious work to restore degraded peatlands until 2028.

Chris Baines, in the middle, surrounded by children on the Tulse Hill Estate in Brixton, in 1981. "At the end of the Brixton riots, when everything was trashed, no one had touched the sunflowers that the children and I had grown on what was, by then, the Tulse Hill Nature Garden."



From our patron ... Chris Baines

Firm foundations

As CMA members, I guess most of us can trace our lifelong interest in nature and the great outdoors back to a parent, a teacher, a cub leader or some other individual who lit the flame. Certainly the magical 'feral' years between the ages of seven and 12 have shaped the rest of my own life, and I will be forever grateful.

In our business, we work with kids all the time in the hope that it will 'make a difference' to them in later life. Just occasionally, if we are lucky, we have some reassuring personal feedback, and that helps to keep our belief alive. Recently I was at

an event to celebrate the continuing success of the charity SEEd – Sustainability and Environmental Education – and their *Young Changemakers* programme. One of the other speakers was a mate of more than 40 years standing – someone who I first met when we were both working to bring nature into school grounds. He recounted a recent chance meeting with a very senior civil servant who astonished him by recalling his infectious knowledge and enthusiasm as an inspirational ranger all those years ago. Now a very successful opinion leader, she had never forgotten.

In my case, thanks to my books and broadcasting back in the 1980s, I am lucky enough to enjoy more than my fair share of positive feedback. One of the best examples is a middle-aged man who now runs a successful business as a wildlife garden contractor and podcaster. He likes to recall the occasion when he and his brother cut a hole in the door of the shed to make



Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash.

their own wildlife garden bird hide – “as recommended by Chris Baines”. They were about 12 at the time and their mum was not amused, but I was lucky enough to meet her a couple of years ago and I am pleased to say she seemed happy to forgive me.

For the past 30 years I have been involved with The Wildside Activity Centre – an unusual environmental education centre beside the canal in deepest, darkest Wolverhampton. The Centre has a long history of engaging very young children with nature on the doorstep. Their mud pie sessions for pre-school toddlers (and their mums) are particularly popular. At a recent conference I mentioned my link with the city, and at the end of the day a landscape architect ‘admitted’ that she had grown up there. When I asked if she knew Wildside she beamed, enthused about the hours and days she had spent there as a child and told me it was that experience that underpinned her chosen career.

That Wildside Activity Centre model echoes an even older Wolverhampton institution. The Kingswood Centre was established during the First World War to offer a residential edge-of-town retreat for mothers and infants. How visionary was that? The Kingswood Centre is still going strong more than a century later, and when I recently asked a local granny if she knew the place, she delighted me with an account of her own time spent there as a child in the 1960s, and the fact that she had just spent a nostalgic day there with her young granddaughter. These days parental paranoia combines with the screen-time syndrome to put a feral childhood out of bounds for many children. That makes the role of safe, inspiring champions of the great outdoors more important than ever. When funds are tight, and the suffocating health and safety culture conspires to cramp your style, take heart. Just occasionally in later life someone may well surprise you with a vote of thanks for the world you opened up and the memories that you helped to make.

RESTORING THE COCKSHUT

Globally there are around 280 recognised chalk streams and the vast majority of those are in the southeast of England. The River Ouse in Sussex has just one recognised chalk stream, the Lewes Winterbourne, however there are several streams which rise from the chalk aquifers of the South Downs which are overlooked or don't quite meet all the criteria to be designated. The Cockshut Stream is one of those forgotten gems in the landscape of the lower Ouse valley.

The stream has a long and vibrant history as an important working waterway and was used in the past to deliver goods into Lewes, including stone for the building of Lewes Priory which began around 1080 AD. In the seventeenth century,

water from the stream fed into Lewes' first pumped water supply. Centuries later, in the 1830s, the Cockshut was used to supply water for the first piped-water system to serve Lewes from the reservoir head opposite the Black Horse in Western Road. More recently it was again moved to accommodate the A27. This is a section of chalk water crying out for enhancement.

When the stream was first looked at by the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust in 2019 it was a long, straight channel enriched with nutrients and swamped by parrot's feather, a highly invasive non-native species which reduces light levels and oxygenation to the water and outcompeting native flora to the detriment of wildlife. There was little that could be done within the existing footprint to make it better and the Cockshut Project was born.

Led by the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, in partnership with Lewes District Council and supported by the South Downs National Park Authority, the project aimed to restore not only a 800m

section of the stream but also the surrounding, protected landscape of Lewes Brooks. The idea was to realign the stream, creating a meandering channel weaving through the neighbouring Lewes Brooks, and connect it to the landscape to create around 6ha of wetland. This approach would boost local biodiversity while providing resilience against both heavy rainfall and prolonged dry periods.

Over the next three years plans were drawn up and funding brought together from Lewes District Council, the South Downs National Park and Veolia Environmental Fund to deliver the scheme, and in June 2023 work began on the site. The first stage saw the topsoil removed and stockpiled for later use before the excavation of the new channel began. Once completed, the old channel was infilled, burying the parrot's feather and ensuring that no material has to leave the site, a very costly exercise. Wetland features such as shallow pools, ponds and ditches were created to provide a diverse mix of habitat, ensuring suitable space for a range of species. Finally, in August 2023 the banks were breached and water entered the new wetland for the first time and the site was opened to the public in May 2024.

Since its completion, the area has exploded with wildlife. Bird numbers have tripled with species such as kingfisher, osprey, white storks, spoonbills and swifts using the area. Dragonflies

have returned in abundance with 12 species now recorded on the site and grass snakes, slow worms and newts are regularly reported.

The project has won five awards including the South Downs Design Award and the Sussex Heritage Trust Eco Award. As part of the funding for the scheme a volunteer group has been formed to undertake routine monitoring and maintenance activities and is being coordinated through the Lewes Railway Lands Wildlife Trust, a local charity dedicated to the natural spaces in and around Lewes town.

Peter King, Director of the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust said: "We're delighted with the outcome of this project and the benefits it is bringing to both local wildlife and the local community. Restoring rivers and wetland is at the heart of what we do and this partnership has shown that we can, and should, think big about restoring our water environments as projects like this provide an instant boost to biodiversity but also provide resilience against the impacts of climate change."

Following the success of the project the partnership is currently working on a similar scheme at Landport Brooks on the northern side of Lewes, looking at the restoration of the Papermill Cut, another chalk-fed stream which could soon become another jewel in the wetland network of Sussex.



The old Cockshut Stream (on the left) was straight, overly wide and deep, and disconnected from the floodplain.



Halfway through, the new channel takes shape with pools and scrapes providing marginal wetland habitat.



Immediately after completion, the area filled with water, creating a network of habitats across the site.



Cockshut Stream now.

NEW GUIDE TO HELP LAND MANAGERS WELCOME VISITORS: A SPACE FOR EVERYONE

The Wildlife Trusts have published a new guide to help land managers across the UK improve outdoor places for visitors.

A Space for Everyone: A good practice guide, made possible thanks to players of People's Postcode Lottery, is aimed at anyone who looks after publicly accessible land such as nature reserves, walking trails, lakes and rivers – from local councils to recreational site managers and nature charities to university campuses.

It includes practical steps that can be taken to make places easier for people to visit and enjoy. It includes case studies and links to research and resources that show how other organisations have made their spaces more accessible.

The guidance includes:

- *Know before you go* information – such as the virtual tour provided by Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust's Gibraltar Point Nature Reserve.
- *Ensuring a warm welcome* – such as the guidance from Sport England to support the design and operation of safe and inclusive sports and leisure facilities.
- *Operating guided tours* and group visits – such as the resource provided by Sense to help plan and deliver an accessible sensory walk.

The Wildlife Trusts, a federation of 46 charities that welcome over 15 million people to their 2,600 nature reserves and visitor centres every year, have drawn on the expertise of many other organisations to create the guide, including Natural England, RSPB, Groundwork UK, Ramblers and Leeds University.

"We've published this guide because we want everyone to be able to enjoy being outdoors in wild places – and to be inspired to get involved in nature's recovery. Our research has uncovered many great examples of inclusive volunteering, staff training, partnership working, creating warm welcomes and site adaptations to support specific groups of people from all walks of life. We've included these in our new guide so that all land managers can benefit from these inspiring case studies and expertise," said Miriam Bentley-Rose, head of equality, diversity and inclusion at The Wildlife Trusts.



A Space for Everyone

A good practice guide full of advice and resources to help you improve accessibility at your site.

Read *A Space for Everyone: A good practice guide* here:
www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/A_Space_For_Everyone.pdf



Last updated: September 2025

Community Land Trusts – an alternative for nature conservation?

Most Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are concerned with the provision of affordable homes for rent or purchase, but some have a wider remit managing commons, village greens or other open spaces, or look after community enterprises, run village shops and pubs, organise shared food growing such as community orchards or provide work spaces for small businesses. This approach to community action started in the Black Rights movement in the USA, but has since spread worldwide and there are now 548 CLTs in England and Wales with a national network (www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk).

In south Shropshire a group of conservationists wanted a vehicle that would allow land to be purchased for nature conservation and held in trust on behalf of its members. Middle Marches CLT (MMCLT) was inaugurated and constituted as a Community Benefit Society in 2019 (middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk).

Readers may ask why MMCLT is needed when there are so many other organisations that can own and manage land for conservation. However, the established nature conservation organisations either have little money for land purchases or have different priorities, such as larger areas that could benefit from biodiversity net gain or carbon credit income. The sites acquired by MMCLT may be too small, or with insufficient wildlife interest, to interest larger organisations. MMCLT aims to add value to the sites and seeks to avoid duplication with other conservation organisations.

To date, MMCLT has become the owner of four sites. All have involved public appeals for funding. Currently an appeal is raising money to acquire a fifth site, a group of four small meadows totalling 5ha in White Grit, just into Wales on the Shropshire/Powys border (middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/white-grit-meadows-appeal). The table opposite shows the main features of MMCLT sites, and brief additional comments on each are given below.



Norbury Hill, bracken rolling. Credit: Richard Small.



Cudwell Meadow. Credit: Isabel Carter.

Cudwell Meadow is a wet meadow: in summer it sometimes dries out enough to take a hay crop, followed by aftermath grazing, but in wet years it is grazed only. In winter the brook that flows down one side often overflows and the meadow is largely flooded. A local community group asked MMCLT to become the site owner rather than take on the legal responsibilities of land ownership themselves.

Norbury Hill is situated mid-way between the Stiperstones and the Long Mynd. MMCLT manages the site directly, and has been very grateful for several awards from the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust (SHLT), mainly for bracken management. An ecological survey recorded about 200 plant species, 45 bird species and over 200 invertebrate species, but the last especially is likely to be an underestimate, being based on one year's surveying.

High Leasowes is a grassland site that had been managed organically for at least 25 years. A local group raised an astonishing £400k in around four weeks, but at the time was not a legal entity, so asked MMCLT to become the owners. The group has since become a charitable trust in its own right (sites.google.com/idea.eu/highleasowes/home). The three fields are managed as hay meadows, and since acquisition meadow seed has been broadcast, hedgerows gapped up, trees planted, a pond dug and access improved. The group has had grants from the SHLT and from other sources to allow the work to be undertaken.

The original concept of MMCLT was to acquire sites that currently had relatively little conservation value, but were considered to have potential for greater wildlife value through appropriate management. However, the most recently acquired site, **Minsterley Meadows**, and the **White Grit Meadows** mentioned above, are already designated as SSSIs. Minsterley Meadows has a large colony of green-winged orchids (*Anacamptis morio*): perhaps 90% of Shropshire's green-winged orchids are in the two meadows at this site. A National Heritage Lottery Fund award has allowed the appointment of a part-time (three days a month) project manager and will also fund infrastructure and community engagement.

As well as the awards mentioned above, MMCLT has accessed various sources of income either directly or indirectly; shareholders contribute a minimum of £50 and (in theory!) up to £100,000 and have a vote at the AGM. Donations (including public appeals) have been very important, especially as Gift Aid can be claimed. MMCLT has also had funding via the National Trust's Stepping Stones project. Once land has been acquired its management can attract funding such as grazing licences and Countryside Stewardship agreements.

There are of course challenges. As the number of sites increases so do the time and resources needed for management, even when local groups take on the day-to-day running. By focusing on Shropshire and neighbouring areas of Powys there is a danger of donor fatigue, although MMCLT is fortunate that its area attracts wildlife enthusiasts, some of them retired with spare income. MMCLT's Board has recently been strengthened by a lawyer, a land agent (replacing a previous one) and an accountant – all vital skills along with the conservationists and other professionals on the Board. Their enthusiasm has taken MMCLT a long way in a few years, and in 2024 MMCLT received the 'What a Wonderful World' award from the Community Land Trust Network!



Minsterley Meadows. Credit: Lucy Gaze.



High Leasowes. Credit: Caroline Windley.

Site Name	Location	Formal Status	Area (ha)	Funding for Purchase & Management	Principal Habitat	Managers
Cudwell Meadow	Southern Church Stretton	None	1.2	Local appeal raised £25k	Wet meadow	MMCLT & Stretton Area Community Wildlife Group
Norbury Hill	Between the Stiperstones and the Long Mynd	Initially none, now part of the Stiperstones Landscape NNR	19.5	Local appeal raised £45k, plus interest-free loan of £80k	Acid hill grassland	MMCLT
High Leasowes	Northern Church Stretton	None	6.5	Local appeal raised £400k	Lowland grassland	The High Leasowes Trust
Minsterley Meadows	Minsterley	SSSI and now part of the Stiperstones Landscape NNR	5.5	Local appeal raised £152k, plus National Lottery Heritage Fund award of £224k	Lowland meadow	MMCLT & Marches Meadow Group
White Grit Meadows	White Grit	SSSI	2.0	Local appeal on-going, target £45k	Lowland meadow	MMCLT

CMA AWARD WINNERS 2025

We are delighted to announce the winners of our two awards, the Gordon Miller Award and the new George Mist Award.

The Gordon Miller Award is given to the most deserving project, initiative or innovative practice that has made or is making an outstanding contribution to countryside/urban greenspace management. This year's recipient is the National Trust's Stablecroft project, at Moseley Old Hall, West Midlands.

The George Mist Award for Woodland Magic is given to the most deserving project, initiative or innovative practice that has made or is making an outstanding contribution to the conservation, management or community/educational use of woodland. The first recipient of this award is the National Trust's Lydford Gorge, Devon, in partnership with Plantlife.

Congratulations to both worthy winners

The Stablecroft Project – winner of the Gordon Miller Award 2025

The Stablecroft Project is a pioneering environmental and community initiative that has transformed a once-neglected, inaccessible urban meadow into a vibrant and inclusive green space – a sanctuary for both people and wildlife. At its heart, the project set out to reconnect individuals from all demographics with the natural world while promoting physical and mental wellbeing. What began as a vision to restore a forgotten landscape has evolved into a model for nature-based community regeneration.

A major component of the transformation was the planting of more than 4,000 native trees, alongside extensive wildflower enhancements and the creation of new accessible pathways. The project brought together over 350 volunteers from local schools, colleges, community groups and businesses, giving participants the opportunity to connect with nature, improve their wellbeing and gain hands-on experience in environmental stewardship. For many, it was their first chance to contribute directly to conservation efforts and to learn how they can help protect natural spaces for future generations.

Accessibility was central to the project's design. Previously challenging terrain is now navigable thanks to fully accessible pathways that allow individuals with mobility challenges, additional learning needs or mental health conditions to safely and confidently experience the outdoors – often for the very first time. An accessible boardwalk installed across the pond has opened up a vital blue-space habitat, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the calming presence of water. A 'bee's-eye view' mound – an earth sculpture covered in wildflowers – lets visitors observe pollinators at work from different eye levels, making the natural world more engaging and inclusive.



The ecological impact has been remarkable. In addition to the thousands of trees, native wildflower plantings have dramatically increased local biodiversity, creating a thriving urban wildlife corridor. Pollinator numbers have surged, and species not previously recorded – along with dragonflies, toads, frogs and larger birds of prey – now call Stablecroft home. Newly planted woodland species and a native hedgerow help improve air quality, strengthen soil health and form essential habitat links. The addition of 40 heritage fruit trees offers visitors the opportunity to pick their own fruit while helping preserve traditional varieties for generations to come. Environmental interpretation throughout the site encourages visitors to learn, reflect and feel empowered to take action, providing ideas they can replicate in their own gardens using recycled materials such as pallet bug hotels and dead hedges.

Natural play features inspired by the history of Moseley Old Hall were introduced to engage the next generation of nature lovers. Designed to be fully accessible, these play areas support physical development, imaginative learning and sensory exploration, ensuring that children with special educational needs and disabilities can enjoy meaningful outdoor experiences alongside friends and family.

Community engagement sits at the core of the project's success. Many volunteers planted their first tree, creating a powerful sense of pride and lasting connection to the landscape. The project became a platform for education, empowerment and healing, uniting people of all ages and backgrounds in a shared mission of environmental care and community wellbeing as well as a sense of pride and belonging.



Lydford Gorge, Devon – winner of the George Mist Award for Woodland Magic 2025

The lichen recovery project funded by Plantlife delivered an ambitious and transformative programme of conservation work across Devon and Cornwall, with Lydford Gorge standing out as one of the most significant sites. This remarkable stretch of temperate rainforest – rich in lichens, mosses and liverworts – has long been threatened by invasive non-native species. Over the past year, the project made major strides in restoring the gorge's delicate ecological balance and giving its rare lichen communities the conditions they need to flourish.

Much of the practical work focused on tackling dense stands of rhododendron and cherry laurel that had spread through several woodland compartments. These invasive species had heavily shaded the understory, reducing light levels and preventing lichens from thriving on the trunks and branches of native trees. Specialist contractors with rope-access expertise were brought in to operate safely along the gorge's steepest slopes, cutting and removing thick vegetation from areas that would otherwise be inaccessible. Using a system of ropes and winches, the team hauled the removed plant material up out of the gorge to designated sites where the debris could be burned, preventing regrowth and reducing the risk of further spread.

In addition to clearing invasive shrubs, targeted tree management formed a key part of the restoration effort. In the southern end of the gorge, contractors carried out veteranisation



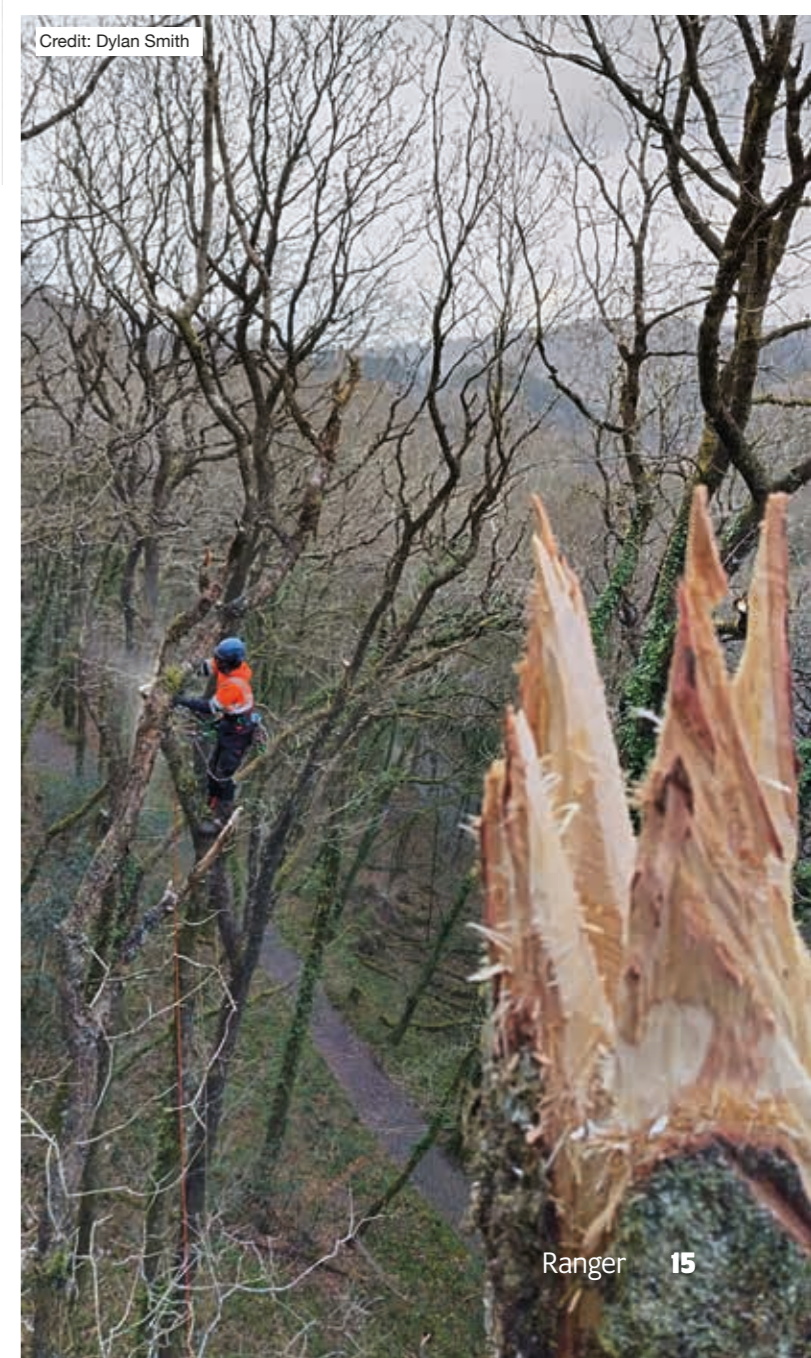
– techniques designed to mimic natural ageing processes and create new microhabitats. Selected trees were given features such as coronet cuts, ripped or partially removed limbs, light haloing and occasional ringbarking to introduce standing deadwood. These interventions increase structural diversity in the woodland, offering niches for a wide range of species while also allowing more light to reach lichen-rich branches and trunks.

The orchard within the gorge also received careful attention. New apple trees were planted to broaden the age range of the fruit trees and provide future habitat for specialist species, including *Heterodermia obscurata*, one of Plantlife's priority lichens and already present on at least one existing orchard tree. By establishing the next generation of orchard trees, the project helps safeguard long-term continuity for these sensitive organisms.

In total, around eight hectares of woodland have been enhanced for lichen conservation, with benefits extending far beyond lichens themselves. Restoring light, reducing invasive cover and increasing structural complexity will support a wide array of plants, invertebrates and woodland wildlife, strengthening the gorge's overall ecological resilience.

The initiative represents an important step forward in protecting one of Dartmoor's rare temperate rainforest fragments – habitats that are globally scarce and exceptionally rich in biodiversity. By addressing the spread of invasive species and improving woodland conditions, the project helps secure the future of these ancient, moisture-loving communities, making it a worthy winner of the 'Woodland Magic' award.

Delivery of the programme relied on a collaborative effort involving the National Trust, Plantlife, three specialist contracting teams, volunteers and site staff. Plantlife's lichen specialists played a crucial role by surveying the gorge, recording its most significant species, and advising on how best to safeguard them. Thanks to this partnership and the funding provided, essential groundwork has now been laid to ensure Lydford Gorge remains a stronghold for rare and threatened lichens for years to come.



This article was first published online at countryside-jobs.com.

Balancing Nature and Nurture



Kit helping out with botany identification (Tracey Youngusband)

Flora Haynes and Tracey Youngusband work together as senior ecologists at South East Ecology (www.southeastecology.co.uk). Flora is mum to a three-year-old daughter (Rori) and Tracey is mum to two boys, aged 11 (Rowan) and nine (Kit). They both work part time and manage family life alongside providing ecological consultancy services. Tracey also works part time as an ecology teacher at a local school.

Being a working parent in this industry is not an easy feat, however there are a great deal of golden moments and we can't imagine working elsewhere. Our children love the fact that we don't have 'normal jobs' and they're very proud of our wildlife knowledge. Children have a special affinity with nature and teaching our children the wonder of the natural world is a fantastic way to share our work with our families.

Coming back to the workplace after such a life-changing event as having a baby can be daunting and worrying. Priorities have changed and it can be difficult to split yourself between work and parenting roles. In addition, there is often pressure to keep a career progressing alongside a new pressure to be a good parent. However, coming back to the workplace can remind you of who you are other than a parent, gives you headspace (we often joke we come to work for a break!) and for those of us that are lucky enough to work in the outdoors we benefit from being in nature. 'Forest bathing' can be the perfect antidote to a sleepless night.

Roles with rigid timetables and limited flexibility are unlikely to work but we believe the employer rather than the job role is key to being a happy working parent. Some employers like their established routine and structure and may struggle to accommodate care givers, although in these situations it's important to remember this has no reflection on your abilities. A good manager will be adaptable and able to open up a dialogue with you. If you decide a different role would suit you better as a parent then we would advise researching a company and asking direct questions about key issues during an interview. It is also useful to ask if any other employees are working parents.

There are many milestones ahead with raising children, from first steps, first day at school to first botanical survey! Trying not to rush the early years could be something to factor in when considering your return to work. A little planning can make returning to work as a parent an enjoyable experience. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' standard role for a parent returning to the workplace but take a look at these tips that we have learnt over the years.



Tips for employers (and colleagues)

Flexible working – childcare is restrictive (and often costly) so working parents value flexibility. Identify tasks and deadlines together then try to allow flexibility to complete those tasks. Parents are excellent at getting things done (remember they run not only their own life but their child's too).

Communication – be informed and encourage employees to discuss what will work in terms of hours and job roles for their family life both now and as their family grows.

CPD – consider using kit days during parental leave for CPD so your employee can return to work with a refreshed skill set and up-to-date knowledge.

Unique skillset – returning to work, employees may need to catch up on some changes to the business etc., but parenting has given them extra training in adaptability, resilience, determination and multitasking.

TOIL – collecting fieldwork data is generally a seasonal role, and a working pattern of accruing time off in lieu to take as blocks of leave during school holidays can be a successful policy to offer parents.

Plan – try to be mindful of important parenting events like a child starting school and offer rescheduling of your employees work diary for these days. Ask the employee to put these events in their diary so you are forewarned.

Job share – if your employee has an inflexible role then consider job or project sharing to allow for backup in childcare emergencies.

Empathy – juggling work and family life can be challenging, and a small amount of empathy can go a long way. A cup of coffee for someone who's been up in the night with a poorly child can make all the difference.

Tips for employees

Increasing hours gradually over the years allows for milestones to be seen and immune systems to improve!

Consider a combination of longer and shorter workdays that suit your childcare options.

Evening survey work can be very tricky in the early years with logistics of breastfeeding and bedtime routines. This will change and can be adjusted as your child grows.

Aim to manage your own calendar so you can book in field days and office days that suit you.

Time is precious and working from home when possible to cut out the commute is a big help. If this isn't possible, consider asking for a laptop so you can work more flexibly.

If you expect flexibility from your employer they will likely expect it from you too. Communication is key to make flexibility work for everyone.

Tell your partner/co-parent/support network if you have important work dates (courses, meetings, etc.) that mean they will need to do backup childcare in the event of illness and ask them to do the same.

Don't expect colleagues to know when school holidays are. Put holiday dates in your diary and forewarn colleagues if you plan to take leave or work different hours.

Tracey

I was lucky that from the age of 16 I knew I wanted to work in conservation, I worked as a ranger for many years, then as an ecologist. When I fell pregnant with my first child I was in a corporate role with a manager that had limited flexibility and so I knew for the early years, I would need a job that was a better fit. Although a bold move, I moved to freelancing and a small relevant part-time role during my maternity. This was out of necessity, as I knew I did not want the unnecessary stress of work pervading family life. I am someone that always trusts their instincts and the only advice I ever give any new mum is exactly that. You are the expert in your family dynamic, setup and personalities, trusting instincts on parenting styles to working patterns is key.



Rowan on a dormouse survey (Tracey Younghusband)

As for many in the ecological industry, our roles are our identities, so once my children were settled in primary school, I took the decision to immerse myself in the ecology industry again.

There are many moments to cherish when working in a role such as this and having kids, there are also some challenges! School holidays clashing with prime survey season in a role that can be largely outdoor based can be tricky, especially as my partner also works outdoors. My eldest is significantly neurodivergent and so holiday clubs are not an option for us. Therefore having a set diary through holidays, changing work patterns and mutual flexibility are all crucial factors in surviving school holidays.

The golden moments far outweigh the logistical challenges however. My eldest has been on very exclusive voluntary hibernation bat survey at Dover Castle, both boys have attended numerous surveys (when appropriate) and when little, been wheel-barrowed around the long walks on surveys. The boys love having a passionate geek as a mother and love the fact that I am cripplingly terrified of balloons, but love all insects, reptiles, birds, mammals, plants and am more than happy to be out alone after dark.

Although entirely a personal preference and due to teaching ecology part time, I do a lot of voluntary work at my children's school using my teaching knowledge and skills. We recreate wildflower areas, have re-lined the school pond, run pond-dipping sessions and bug hunts. This community work is an area I miss from my rangers days, so helping out a very under-resourced school with more outdoor learning and inspiring next generations – as I was inspired – is a huge win for me. I love being the school community's go-to person for species identification and cool, sometimes inappropriate wildlife facts!

Flora

Returning to work, my priorities had changed hugely and I knew that to be a successful working parent I needed a role where family comes first. I'd also become more determined to build my career than before, so that I can support my family, which is something I hadn't expected to come from being a parent. I am fortunate to work at a company where flexibility is possible and my manager is approachable and willing to discuss my ever-changing family dynamics. I've previously held roles as a ranger for a countryside partnership, as a forest school leader and as a field ecologist, all of which with the right employer could suit family life.

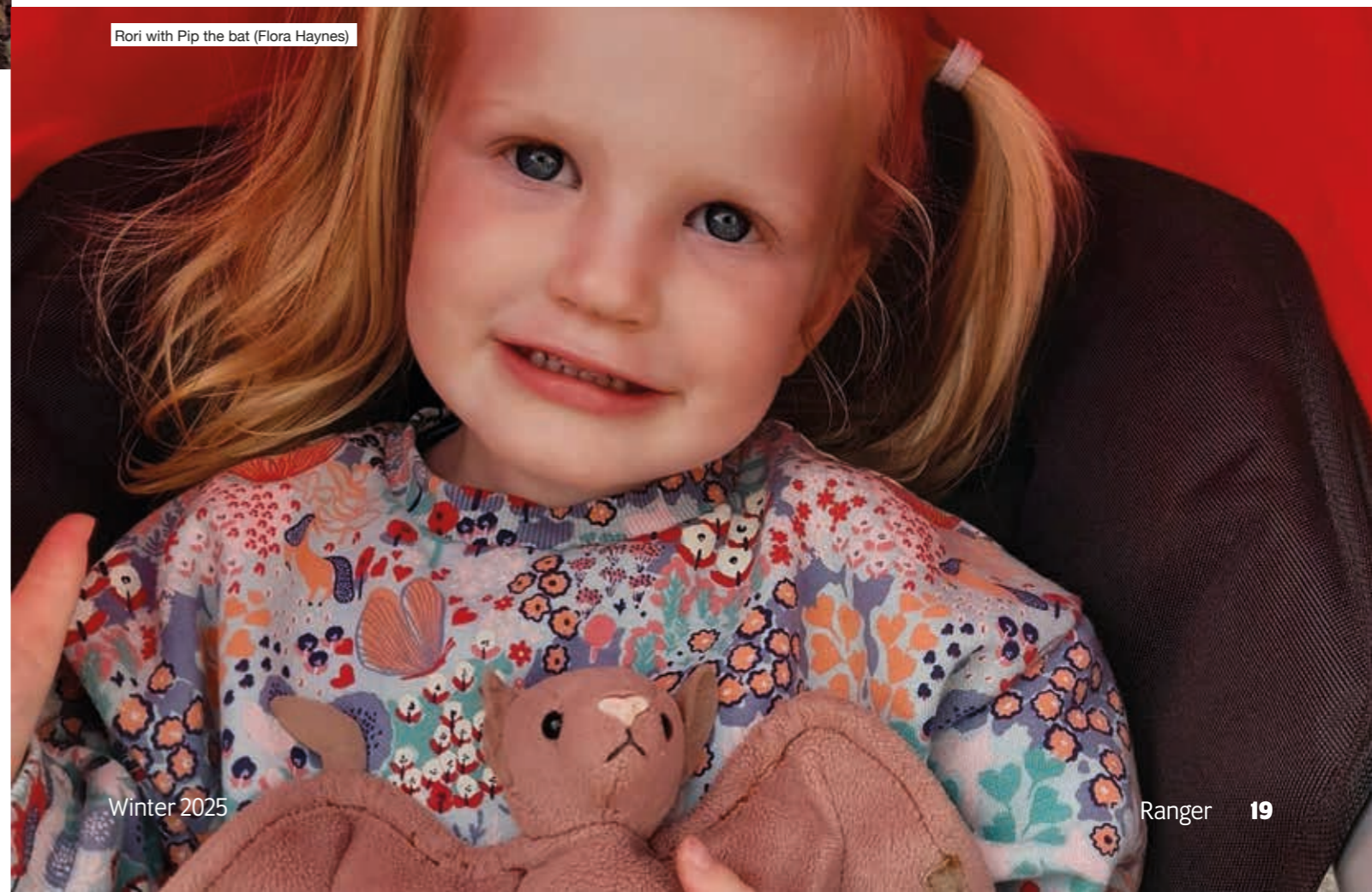
To make juggling work and parenting a success there needs to be flexibility on both sides and I'm conscious to be flexible to accommodate work where I can, such as working extra weekend hours to get projects completed and arranging childcare to attend courses on non-work days. Early discussions with my employer about my expectations of working hours has really helped both of us to plan for the future.

I do find it harder as a parent to fit in voluntary work such as dormouse monitoring and bat hibernation surveys, not just childcare issues but also managing burnout. I know that will get easier as Rori grows and as soon as she's old enough she can come along, which is something I very much look forward to sharing with her. We also manage to do things together in our own time like bat surveys around our village and sneaking in a bit of botany while walking the dog. I am proud of the influence my job has on Rori's love of nature – she asks what the different trees are called, makes up endless stories about all the different wild animals she knows live nearby, and her favourite teddy is a bat called Pip, who often, at Rori's insistence, comes on bat surveys with me.



Rori pretending to do some ECoW work (Flora Haynes)

Rori with Pip the bat (Flora Haynes)



PROTECTING NATURE AND CONNECTING PEOPLE

6TH EUROPEAN RANGER CONGRESS, ROMANIA

The European Ranger Federation covers a vast area from Greenland in the west to the Pacific east coast of Russia, south to Israel and north to Iceland. There are currently 51 member countries and the membership is growing year by year. Events such as the European Ranger Congress are a fantastic way to bring the ranger family to life and create tangible benefits.

The event attracted some high-profile attention from within Romania including Diana Buzoianu, Minister for Environment of Romania, who stated, “Rangers are the bridge between nature and communities, we need an economic model based on natural resources that protect them.”

Read more about the event here:
europeanrangers.org/6th-erc-networking-inspiring-and-enabling-rangers

Chloe Bradbrooke
CMA International Coordinator

Wild, wet, windy and incredibly welcoming, the latest European Ranger Congress was a joy to attend alongside 20 other colleagues from the UK. The weather was a challenge but we still saw some inspirational projects, amazing habitats and up-close signs of the incredible fauna – bear pool!

Beyond the presentations, workshops and visits, simply socialising is of immense value and it's at the dinner table, bar or dancefloor where new bonds are made and the seeds of new cross-border ventures are sown. A highlight for me was meeting some of our Georgian twinning partners in person and strengthening our ties.

Adam Hick, Ranger, the Broads National Park



Working in a lowland wetland, I'm used to big skies and flat horizons, so I was especially looking forward to the mountain views at my first European Ranger Congress in the Carpathian Mountains. After landing in Braşov in the dark, I was excited to wake up to spectacular scenery only to find thick fog and rain that lingered for three days! Thankfully, when the clouds finally lifted, they revealed the dramatic peaks and forests I'd been hoping for, making the wait well worth it.

The 6th European Ranger Congress brought together rangers, conservationists and educators from across Europe in this stunning setting. It was both inspiring and humbling to be part of such a passionate and dedicated community. Despite coming from different countries and landscapes, everyone shared the same sense of purpose – protecting nature and connecting people with the wild places around them.

As a first-time attendee, I was immediately impressed by the warmth and camaraderie within the ranger network. Conversations flowed easily, whether about the challenges of managing visitors, restoring habitats or engaging local communities. It was also fantastic to connect with fellow CMA members and the Scottish Ranger Association, sharing experiences from our own work while learning from colleagues across Europe. It truly felt like joining a European family bound by shared values and experiences.

Two moments stood out most during the week: a workshop on Junior Ranger schemes and a field trip in the Făgăraş Mountains, where an ambitious rewilding and forest restoration project is underway.

The Junior Ranger workshop was a real highlight. Delegates from across Europe shared how they engage young people in conservation – from weekend ranger clubs and summer camps to school programmes and international exchanges. The enthusiasm in the room was infectious. One of the coordinators

had started out as a Junior Ranger herself and is now a professional ranger, helping to inspire the next generation. Her story perfectly captured the spirit of the whole movement: how early experiences in nature can shape a lifelong passion for conservation.

The discussions were honest and practical, touching on the challenges of maintaining long-term engagement and securing funding. But there was a shared sense of optimism – a recognition that these programmes are about more than teaching environmental awareness; they build confidence, teamwork and a sense of belonging. I came away with lots of ideas and renewed motivation to strengthen youth involvement at home.

The field trip took us into the Făgăraş Mountains, a spectacular area being restored with the hope of becoming Romania's next national park. Once managed for commercial forestry, it's now being rewilded through the planting of native tree species grown in local nurseries, helping to create a richer and more resilient woodland.

A highlight of the project is the reintroduction of the European bison (rewilding-romania.com). Although we didn't see the animals themselves, we spotted tracks, grazed vegetation and tree rubs, clear signs that they're helping to shape the forest once more. The bison's return is a powerful symbol of recovery, showing how nature can bounce back when given the chance.

As I left the Carpathians, finally able to see their full beauty, I felt grateful and inspired. My first European Ranger Congress reminded me that conservation is about connection, between people, wildlife, landscapes and colleagues alike. Whether nurturing young rangers, restoring wild forests or exchanging ideas with fellow CMA members and SCRA, we are all working together to grow a wilder, more hopeful future for Europe's natural heritage.



Charlotte Eley, Area Ranger, Woolbeding Reimagined, National Trust CMA bursary recipient



Anton Marius



Anton Marius

Thank you to the CMA for offering me the grant to attend the European Rangers Congress 2025 in Romania. It was so generous and I'm very grateful for the opportunity. My experience at the congress was a mixture of great things, I would like to share them with you.

Firstly, Romania feels like such an underappreciated country. Not many people talk about Romania in the UK, and I have no idea why. The scenery is outstanding, the wildlife is diverse and the beer is top class. I might be preaching to the converted, but my expectations were totally exceeded. I fell in love with the country, and I can't wait to go back.

It was enlightening to learn about the varying roles and responsibilities of rangers across Europe. The differences between our jobs can be minimal – Swiss rangers fight the same battles keeping dogs on leads around ground-nesting birds. Often, however, the difference is dramatic. In some cases, law enforcement is a ranger's day-to-day. Over dinner, Cypriot and Georgian rangers shared unbelievable stories about their interactions with criminals and how they brought them to justice. I felt a sense of pride as I learnt about their courage and bravery. Simultaneously, I felt a sense of sadness. Wildlife crime in the UK does not seem to elicit the same response as in other European nations. Nevertheless, it was a privilege to meet these people, and I was content to know they exist.

The speakers and guests alike were motivational. I feel like I have a renewed sense of duty to connect my local community to nature and promote long-term engagement between people and nature recovery. We learnt of projects in Romania where the rangers are working collaboratively with their local community to educate and inspire residents living within or close to a designated space for nature. There were so many uplifting stories of rangers describing their trials, tribulations and their accomplishments. Making milestones by turning disgruntled and stubborn residents into champions of their nature conservation projects.

IT IS SO IMPORTANT FOR US TO CONNECT PEOPLE WITH NATURE, NOW MORE THAN EVER.

Lastly, and most importantly, the experience was joyful. I have always liked meeting new people and this event was such a wonderful opportunity to network. The weather was not on our side the entire time, however the fog did not dampen our moods. Merriment, laughter, kindness and generosity was felt in abundance at the conference hall, on the hikes and at the hotel restaurant. The leaving party on the last night was particularly excellent. We were honoured with an organised performance of traditional Romanian music and dance, delivered by a group of young male and female dancers. They were very impressive, and it was an unexpected bonus to the trip. As their show ended, they invited the rangers onto the dance floor and chaos broke out. It was a blast. I danced joyfully with the Romanian dancers and the rangers from the Czech Republic, France, Poland, Germany, Romania, Austria, Scotland and many other countries. Not many people can say that.

This leads me onto my last point – so many people turned up. Two hundred and sixty rangers! It made me feel as though I was part of a much bigger movement. A united family across the continent and the world, dedicating their lives to the conservation of nature. There was something very special about that, and I am very thankful to have met some of those people and formed some lovely friendships.

COMMENTS FROM OUR GEORGIAN COLLEAGUES

Maia Tsignadze
Chairperson of the Georgian Ranger Association

Thanks to the funding from the Rotary International fund and the Tana and Tedzami Protected Landscape Management Agency we were able to secure funding for two representatives from Georgia to attend the European Ranger Congress. This was a great opportunity for our newly established park representatives to meet colleagues, visit the parks in Romania and build international links. I would like to say a huge thanks to the Countryside Management Association and our fellow rangers for the wonderful gifts for our Georgian colleagues. We appreciate your support and friendship very much.

Lasha Khalishvili
Head of the Tana and Tedzami Protected Landscape Department

I had the privilege of attending the 6th Congress of European Rangers in Romania. This was an amazing opportunity to connect with rangers from across Europe and hear directly about the challenges they face in their work.

During a field trip with representatives from various European countries, we visited the host nation's Piatra Craiului National Park in Romania to learn about ranger work in the Carpathians. It was my first visit outside Georgia and an extremely important and fruitful experience. I would like to extend our heartfelt

gratitude to our British colleague rangers from the Countryside Management Association for their generous donation of essential field equipment. We deeply appreciate your friendship and solidarity. You are always welcome in Georgia!

Zaur Rostomashvili
Acting Director of the Gori Municipality Development and Tana and Tedzami Protected Landscape Management Agency

The Congress was exceptionally interesting and informative. This event is of great importance in terms of the professional development of rangers, deepening international cooperation and improving the management practices of protected areas. On behalf of the Tana and Tedzami Protected Landscape Team, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the organisers of the Congress for realising the event at such a high level. We also wish to extend our special thanks to colleagues from the Countryside Management Association and their entire team for the heartfelt attention, technical support and the wonderful gifts they provided to our team. The technical support, together with the knowledge-sharing and the presents from our British colleague rangers, is very important.

I believe that this meeting will further strengthen international cooperation and promote the sharing of experience among European colleagues.

By Jo Hanik, Wirral Country Park Manager

THE LEGACY OF JOHN TRACEY



Wirral Country Park, 1969/1970.



John Tracey on the Wirral Way.



Wirral Country Park, 1969/1970.

A few weeks ago we were contacted by the family of one of the very first countryside rangers in Britain, John Tracey who had recently passed away. John's family wanted us to know that he was considered a 'pioneer' when he came to work as a countryside ranger at Wirral Country Park back in 1969. A year previously, plans for a Wirral Country Park had been accepted and part funded by the new Countryside Commission under the Countryside Act of 1968. The act allowed local authorities to create country parks to take pressure off the national parks and to provide facilities such as picnic areas and camping sites closer to urban areas. Funding was also available for staff and John was appointed as part of the first cohort of Wirral countryside rangers under Head Ranger Major Frank White.

John's family wrote to us to say: "John patrolled the walkways for decades, frequently with his family in tow – often dressed in green to look the part. In the early days, the men met at their headquarters in Thurstaston for their briefing, then with military precision set out to walk, monitor, assist and protect. The first uniform was formal and distinguished. They wore green waxed jackets, jodhpurs and a be-feathered hat."

These new 'countryside rangers' were expected to undertake every part of the park management from patrolling and litter picking, habitat and infrastructure management, leading guided walks, working with school and other groups and assisting the public in their enjoyment of the countryside.

"John took a great interest in the development of the park. He was there when the anti-aircraft battery site and landfill waste site at Thurstaston were cleared and grassed over. He watched the renovation of station buildings, the surfacing of the railway track and the building of a new visitor centre and car park. He was delighted to see improved access and very much enjoyed encouraging visitors to cross the big pond using the wooden stepping stones."

Thanks to John and his colleagues who were the first countryside rangers and who, with the formation of the Countryside Management Association, set a standard for rangers and other countryside professionals that is still the same today – to be proud, committed and passionate about their vocation and compassionate towards nature and the people they interact with.

"John treated all park users with great civility and enjoyed every minute walking the park and felt privileged to be a part of it, never more so when standing across from the Welsh Hills, bathed in a glorious sunset. He very much appreciated the current rangers' kindness to him on a recent visit, when they pulled up old photographs from their archives. We thank Josef Hanik, the park's manager, for his kind words of condolence, and encourage everyone to walk the tracks."

It was a pleasure to correspond with John's family and to share both their memories and to write this short article, reminding us that these first countryside rangers really were pioneers and that they were the role models for future rangers in Britain and who are at the forefront of nature conservation. Fortunately today jodhpurs and a be-feathered hat are no longer a uniform requirement!

FROM PRACTITIONER TO PRINCIPAL MEMBER- MY CMA MEMBERSHIP JOURNEY

I'm Steven Lyons. I've been a CMA member for 23 years and in July was awarded Principal membership status by the CMA board after applying to move to it from being a Practitioner member.

I've been working in land management for over 25 years, from farming and forestry to recreation and conservation to more recently grounds and street care. I've worked for Somerset County Council, the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency, and volunteered with the United States Forest Service as a trails ranger for 18 months. While in America, I qualified as and was an initial attack wildland wildfire fighter. I've been self-employed in farming, undertaking conservation work, dabbled in construction work at different times, then in 2002 I became a countryside ranger for Hart District Council in Hampshire, moving up to senior ranger, countryside operations manager and now green spaces manager for the Council.

For a significant part of my time in the industry I've been a CMA member and during that time I've completed my CPD (continuous personal development) record annually. I've always found it a great way to reflect on a year gone by in terms of personal and professional development. I've utilised it for work personal development reviews and to identify areas that I need to know more about or work on. The CPD form helps you structure and evolve your professional development and over time has evolved itself for the better.

Having been a Practitioner member for some time I've had a desire to step up a level but didn't get round to it for a number of reasons. Setting it as a personal goal for a work development review focused me towards completing the application and applying. It really made me think as you have to be quite concise yet informative on the application which led to further questioning at an interview. I had to ask my line manager, who I've worked with for a long time, to write a supporting statement as well. Overall, it was a good process and highlighted a lot of great work I'd done over the years.

There is a long list of things I've achieved but highlights include getting Odiham Common Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) into a favourable condition while site ranger; being part of the team that won



an Institute of Civil Engineers Environmental Project Award for restoration works to Fleet pond; creating and opening a large site of alternative natural green space (SANG) from a collection of farmers' fields in six months, Bramshot Farm Country Park; and building a bike park area that is extremely popular at Edenbrook Country Park.

I am a Green Flag award judge and enjoy assessing sites I've not been to before, meeting the folks behind the great work, learning from them and passing on knowledge as part of the process – putting back something into land management. As a result of being a Principal member it gives me a bit more backing as a judge and to put back into the CMA while also giving status among peers and those I work with from development companies and the wider world. Whilst I've mentored several staff over the years, some of whom now work abroad in the industry, I am keen to help others within the CMA as they progress through their careers.

Badger sett closures

By John Holt, PCMA, Pioneer Habitat Management Ltd

Badgers, pipelines and the art of ecological mitigation

Two weeks ago, I found myself on a steep embankment in North Wales, wrestling with chain-link fencing and wooden stakes while trying not to slide into a ditch. Beside me was Christopher Dean, one of the UK's foremost badger mitigation experts, calmly explaining how to secure a one-way gate over a sett entrance. It wasn't your average day at the office, but then again, ecological mitigation rarely is.

As a Principal member of the Countryside Management Association, I was proud to be representing our organisation on this project. The site is part of a major new underground carbon dioxide (CO₂) pipeline running from Cheshire, England to Flintshire, Wales. With Above Ground Installations (AGIs) and Block Valve Stations (BVSs) along the way, the scheme is classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). It received its Development Consent Order under the Planning Act 2008 from the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. In short: this is a big deal for the UK's energy future. But big projects often mean big challenges for wildlife.

Fifteen setts, fifteen challenges

Surveys along the pipeline route revealed 15 badger setts, each in varying states of activity. None were 'main setts', so building artificial replacements wasn't required. Still, the law is clear: badgers are protected, and their homes cannot simply be bulldozed. A licence from Natural Resources Wales was needed before any work could begin. When it finally arrived on Friday 24 October, the clock started ticking, we had just two weeks to close the setts and monitor them before construction could proceed.

Gates, chain-link and ingenuity

That's where Chris, myself and two very knowledgeable ecologists from RSK Biocensus came in. Together, we supervised the workforce tasked with the delicate job of closing the setts. The method is simple in theory but fiddly in practice: steel one-way gates are fixed over each entrance, allowing badgers to leave but not return. To prevent them from digging back in, galvanised steel chain-link is pegged and pinned firmly around the gates.

Of course, nature rarely makes things easy. Some entrances were tucked under tree roots, others perched precariously on steep banks. One particularly memorable challenge involved a sett beneath an old shipping container. The solution? Build a wooden frame around the entrance, drive stakes into the ground, and attach chain-link like a skirt. It was part engineering, part improvisation and wholly satisfying when it worked.

Learning on the job

The work teams were quick studies. Under our guidance and with the expertise of RSK Biocensus, they soon mastered the process. We were able to split into two teams, doubling our efficiency without sacrificing care. Watching the crews gain confidence was one of the most rewarding aspects of the project. Ecological mitigation may sound technical, but at its heart it's about people working together to protect wildlife while enabling progress.

Success before the deadline

By the end of the two weeks, all 15 setts were securely closed. The badgers, with plenty of adjacent countryside available, had ample opportunity to relocate naturally. It was a textbook example of mitigation done right: infrastructure advancing, wildlife safeguarded and legislation respected.

Why it matters

For me, the project was more than just a job. It was a reminder of why the Countryside Management Association exists: to support professionals who bridge the gap between development and conservation. Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects will continue to shape the UK's future, but they must be delivered responsibly. Ecological mitigation ensures that progress doesn't come at the expense of biodiversity.

Pioneer Habitats is proud to have been called in to supervise this work, and I am proud to have represented the CMA. It was challenging, occasionally muddy and sometimes downright inventive but above all, it was proof that with the right expertise, collaboration and determination, we can build for the future while respecting the natural world.

SPOTLIGHT

Sadly, the CMA is hearing of rangers being made redundant in different places around the country. The CMA would argue that such moves are almost inevitably a false economy in that an employer loses those experienced, knowledgeable and committed staff who are that crucial link between the employer and local communities, inspiring visitors and children, directly enhancing biodiversity through practical action on the ground; indeed showcasing the positive work of their employer.

Whilst the CMA is not in a position to influence employer decisions, members of the Board will have experienced this situation at some point during their own careers, one way or another, and I for one am very happy to offer a listening ear. Receiving such news can be shocking, dent your confidence, make you question yourself, your abilities and cause deep concern about the future. Please try and be assured that external, financial forces alone would have been at work, resulting in difficult decisions being made. Don't stay isolated or despondent; pick up the phone: phone Linda on 07377 701271

If you have been released from your role, the CMA would like to keep you supported through ongoing contact with our bulletins, up to date news, the Ranger magazine and further support you can gain through maintaining contact with the ranger community here in England and Wales and the wider ranger family in Europe and further afield.

If you are an individual member, you can receive a further year's membership from your normal renewal date, for a flat rate of £15, irrespective of your membership category.

If your membership is currently through the corporate membership of your employer, you can also receive a year's individual membership for £15. Please

contact admin@countysidemangement.org.uk to have this arranged.

George Mist, Hon Fellow

I hope you will have noticed that we now have a 'Magical Woodlands' trophy donated by retired member George Mist. George spent most of his working life as a ranger working within woodlands, inspiring adults and youngsters alike to appreciate the wonder and 'magic' of woodlands and he remains passionate about them. I was honoured to meet George a couple of months ago when he came to our office in Wiltshire, to donate a second trophy! This one will be awarded, starting next year, to the winning project that is focused on

Ancient Woodland. Thank you so very much George! Hugely appreciated by us all.

CMA Ambassadors

The CMA currently has three Ambassadors who are actively spreading the word about the CMA both through their day-to-day work and via social media. We will be organising a regular catch-up between Ambassadors very soon to swap ideas on encouraging new members and learn from each other's experiences. Anyone who might like to join us and act as a CMA Ambassador, just let admin@countysidemangement.org.uk know.



Graphic Designer
for print and digital

Ranger magazine designer

Call to chat about your design needs, including posters, banners, leaflets, magazines and digital content for charities, local authorities and not-for-profits.

[Lorraine Grist](#)
[pink_salt_design](#)

Lorraine Grist
M: 07747626260
E: studio@pinksaltdesign.co.uk

NEW MEMBERS

The CMA is pleased to welcome the following new members*:

EAST MIDLANDS:

Mark Small – Member
Sam Mostyn-Willis – Student Member
Holly Street – Student Member
Jo Summers – Student Member

GREATER LONDON:

Lily Daponte – Student Member

NORTH EAST:

Hayley Cook – Member
John Jameson – Member
Brian Nyantika – Student Member

NORTH WEST:

Laura Ruxton – Member
Craig Starkey – Member
Graeme Watson – Member
Talia Hasid – Student Member
Theo Langley – Student Member
Tom Prescott – Student Member

SOUTH EAST:

Gemma Clinch – Member
Luke Farnsworth – Member
Kav Ring – Member
Daniel Gorrie – Supporter Member
Sarah Cunningham – Student Member
Will Dickins – Student Member
Graham Johnston – Student Member

SOUTH WEST:

Rosie Bennett – Member
Oscar Cullara – Member
Megan Whatty – Member
Lisette Barden – Student Member
Sally Batchelor – Student Member
Ethan Starmer-Jones – Student Member
Evie Walker – Student Member

WALES:

Edmundo Ferreira-Rocha – Member
Edward Hughes – Student Member
Hannah Johnson – Student Member

YORKSHIRE & HUMBERSIDE:

Geoffrey Guy – Member

The CMA would also like to welcome back:

Anna Waite (Member, West Midlands)
Emma Goodwin (Member, South East)
Jason Goodwin (Supporter Member, South East)

Congratulations to the following members on achieving their accreditation:

Gemma Clinch PrCMA
Lewis Goldwater PrCMA
Daisy Cameron ACMA

The CMA extends a warm welcome to its new corporate members:
Hart District Council
Wild Intrigue CIC

*Membership applications processed by 27 November 2025



CJS - The original, the biggest and the best in the field, THE countryside specialists since 1994

Countryside Jobs Service®
CJS is an ethical business working in harmony with professionals to conserve the British countryside and natural world.

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CJS is proud to be endorsed by the Countryside Management Association

CONTACT THE CMA



The Countryside Management Association supports countryside management professionals throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Board

board@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

Chair: Linda Nunn

chairman@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

Secretary: Mark Baker

secretary@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

Treasurer: vacant

Board members

Chris Harris

chris@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

Steve Peach

steve@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

Regional committee members

Greater London: Colin Houston

london@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

East of England: vacant

North East England: vacant

North West England: vacant

South East England: Richard Westwood

southeast@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

South West: Steve Edmonds

southwest@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

East Midlands: vacant

West Midlands: vacant

Yorkshire and Humber: David L. Preston

yorkandhumber@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

Northern Ireland: Toby Edwards

nireland@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

Wales: Howard Sutcliffe

wales@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

International coordinator: Chloe Bradbrooke

international@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

Advocacy adviser: Lynn Crowe

chairman@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

CMA administration, membership information and training coordinator: Rachel Limb

admin@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

Patron: Chris Baines

Honorary Vice President: Roger Cole

RANGER

Editor: Liz Bourne

ranger@countrysidemanagement.org.uk

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