



Waking up to Wildlife

A fortnight of festivities on Local Nature Reserves – from 16 to 31 July

Thousands of people will be celebrating their Local Nature Reserves this summer. From July 16 to 31, LNRs around the country will be the settings for a host of events to encourage more people to explore and enjoy these special sites – and to show them how getting close to wildlife can be good for both your physical and mental well-being.

Last year – the first time the celebrations had been organised – more than 300 special events were organised on Local Nature Reserves to celebrate their unique importance as valuable community greenspaces. This year we hope to build on this success by involving even more sites in the celebrations and it's hoped it will now become an annual event.

The fortnight of festivities will be launched at Shire Brook Valley LNR in Sheffield on Sunday, July 17. Fitness guru Mr Motivator will lead a Wild Workout on the reserve before leading a healthy walk around the site.

Details of all of the events being held around the country during these celebrations can be found on English Nature's website at www.english-nature.org.uk.

Visitors will also be able to join TV presenter Nick Baker, of The Really Wild Show, for a wildlife safari where they will be able to get hands-on experience of some of the reserve's creatures. There will also be a chance for children and adults to take part in sporting activities, arts and crafts.



Barnham Cross Common LNR event 2004
Photo by Norfolk County Council

Inspiring people, improving places

Real Sustainable Communities – a BTCV and English Nature conference being held this autumn – will be a significant event for anyone involved in community development.

The conference will draw on the experience of BTCV's People's Places Awards and English Nature's Wildspace!, programme and will offer first-rate speakers a range of workshops, an exhibition and innovative use of technology.

community regeneration and sustainable communities; the local environment, liveability, antisocial behaviour and crime prevention; social cohesion and diversity, and effective targeting and delivery of funding.

The conference, at the Hotel Russell in London on November 18, will cover

To find out more or to book, please call 020 7607 5680 or visit www.btcv.org/conference



Wildspace!

the newsletter of the english nature wildspace! grant programme

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Rethinking interpretation the willow way



Visitors collecting materials from the Lawrence Weston Moor NNR to use in the day centre's workshops
Photo by Sally Oldfield

Signs and information boards aren't the only ways to help people discover their local reserves.

A little creative, lateral thinking can work wonders – and bring benefits for health and wellbeing too by getting people working outdoors – as Bristol's Sally Oldfield reports

Lawrence Weston Moor is a low-lying wetland reserve on the edge of a large Bristol housing estate. The Local Nature Reserve has meadows, reedbeds, ponds and pollarded willows, and is teeming with watery wildlife.

But, being situated in a deprived area of Bristol, Lawrence Weston Moor suffers from vandalism – as do many other urban sites. Interpretation boards installed at the

entrances some years ago were soon destroyed and have never been replaced. Rather than see more signs suffer the same fate, there had to be other ways of making sure the community could find out about the LNR and its treasures.

LNR Officer Sally Oldfield got in touch with Re-think, a local charity offering support for people living with severe mental illness.

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"This is like a forgotten piece of land; a place that time forgot. It feels magical. I'd no idea there was such a wonderful place here."

The Wildspace! team

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We look forward to hearing from you!

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Editorial

Improving Health and Wellbeing

There is a growing body of evidence showing how good quality greenspace can have a positive effect on our general health and wellbeing. Local Nature Reserves form a unique network of such places that are readily accessible to the communities that they serve. In this issue of the Wildspace! newsletter we have asked our grantees to send in their experiences of how LNRs have helped to improve the health and wellbeing of their local communities.

Several people describe how the therapeutic properties of the great outdoors has helped people suffering from mental health problems to improve their confidence, motivation and self esteem. Others discuss the growing trend of healthy walking initiatives which offers an alternative form of exercise to help improve people's physical health. Some Local Nature Reserves have developed on old industrial sites that formerly had detrimental effects on people's health due to the pollution that they caused.

After the success of last years LNR celebrations, we have asked our grantees to hold more events this year between 16 and 31 July. The general theme of this years celebrations is to encourage new audiences to visit LNRs and to find out how their health and wellbeing can be improved.

Trudie Mills
Wildspace! Editor

Trudie
Mills pic
to come



Willow bed planted in the centre's garden. Right: A willow planter in the making

Photos by Sally Oldfield

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Rethinking interpretation the willow way

Patients are referred to Re-think's day centre by their doctor.

Working with Helen Adshead, a willow artist from Avon Wildlife Trust, Sally invited a group of patients and care workers from Re-think to visit Lawrence Weston Moor. There, the visitors learnt about willow, its historical role in farming and rural crafts and traditional ways of managing willow trees. They then cut some willow from the reserve to take back to the day centre.

"People were thrilled by their visit to the nature reserve," says Sally. "Although everyone in the group lived within walking distance of the site, none of them had been there before." Back at the day centre, there were



willow workshops, creating stars, hearts, wreaths and planters. The group was so enthusiastic, they even planted a willow bed in the centre's garden so that the organisation could run its own willow-working classes in future years.

"I have a real problem with motivation," said one member of the group. "I've been in hospital for five months and I find it difficult to concentrate on things because of my medication, but I am really into this."

A exhibition of Re-think's willow work goes on display at the local library this month [June]. And it's hoped it will inspire more people living locally to discover the delights of Lawrence Weston Moor.

Young people get fit for the future

Families, adults wanting to return to work, young people and children have all been involved in volunteering activities at the LNRs overseen by Forest Heath District Council.

Young volunteers especially have gained enormous benefits – at the same time as making a real difference.

Students from Mildenhall College of Technology, for example, spent time at Barton Mills LNR, building bird and bat boxes, learning to weave willow, installing signs and seating, and planting daffodils to brighten up the area.

They developed a sense of pride in their local area, which means they – and the people they come into contact with – tend to care more about their environment and want to help protect the reserve.

The students also take a healthy walk when they come to volunteer, because it's right next door to the school. Because the school doesn't need to organise and pay for transport,



Crime concern volunteers digging a pond at Aspal Close LNR

Photo by Cyd Worden

volunteering schemes are more sustainable too.

Other young people have come to work on the reserve through Crime Concern. One volunteer described her experience when she was invited to an

event in London, in the presence of Princess Anne. There, she vividly chronicled how she had worked hard to improve access in her local area and the LNR – and wanted to carry on volunteering even after her period of reparation was over.

Working together for health in the countryside

The outdoors can offer rewarding experiences that people enjoy, is mostly free to use and often easy to get to - a growing body of evidence shows that the outdoors also contributes to good health and wellbeing.

Findings of research into the health benefits of the countryside were launched at a conference in London, at which five key organisations signed up to a 'Health Concordat'.

This concordat, between English Nature, the Countryside Agency, the Forestry Commission, Sport

England and the Association of National Park Authorities, pledges to make the outdoors accessible and more available to people for their physical and mental wellbeing.

The five organisations want to encourage and motivate more people, especially children and those socially excluded, to have more contact with and get greater enjoyment from the outdoors.

Copies of the concordat are available from English Nature's enquiry service at www.english-nature.org.uk



Making short work of long grass

Archie becomes Harlow's working mascot

Harlow residents are proud of their green corridors – they are part of the town's heritage and very important for wildlife. But mowing these grassy areas very short has a negative effect on the variety of wildflowers, insects, birds and animals..

Enter Helen Abel – a Wildspace! officer with the job of involving the community in developing hay meadows and improving biodiversity across the town.

Helen began work this February, co-ordinating the Harlow Hay Meadow Project and creating community and educational opportunities.

“Leaving grass long encourages meadows rich in flora, bees, butterflies, insects, birds and small mammals,” she explains. “This year's grassland surveys have just been completed by local volunteers and will measure change in future years. The return of wildflowers was instant and rare bee orchids can be seen across town.”



Bee orchid
Photo by Peter Wakely/English Nature

Local residents have been surveying long grass, assessing its wildlife value and creating management plans. Local volunteers and businesses carry out practical conservation and Archie attracts new members because

The town park's pets corner agreed to offer a home to Archie, a Suffolk punch horse, who will play a big part in traditional meadow management and haymaking demonstrations. Helen now hopes to enlist Archie's help for coppicing Harlow's newly declared LNR woodlands in an environmentally sensitive way.

Archie in the meadow where he will play a big part in meadow management by grazing and haymaking demonstrations

Photo by Helen Abel



working alongside him is more fun than working with machinery. Using Archie means less mowing, which saves residents money. There are fewer than 300 Suffolk Punches in the world, so Harlow is also encouraging others to put working horses back into traditional practice and protect the breed.

New way-markers have been designed by a local artist to identify meadows as carefully managed habitats rather than neglected open spaces. The way-markers also link to Harlow's Wildspace! website for people to find out more.

Through increasing publicity, more

residents are volunteering and joining the Biodiversity Partnership. A new friends group receive updates on projects and events such as haymaking, moth nights, guided walks, painting and woodland crafts.

“The project proves that innovation and environmental improvement can still prove economically viable to the council,” says Helen. “Although residents often see long grass as neglected, traditional methods, publicity and interpretation has had a very positive impact. Residents with little environmental appreciation are interested in Archie's work, so they learn more about their local environment.”

Young volunteers make magic at Witches Pond

The Prince's Trust Team 51, run by the Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service and supported by Lancashire Constabulary, helps young people aged between 16 and 25 to realise their potential. It is the first time the Trust has helped on the LNR project, but I am certain it won't be the last. Here's our story.

It was agreed that the team would clean out and return Witches Pond at Highercroft Woods to its former glory – a project with visible end results that would benefit both wildlife and the local community.

The site had once been renovated and a dipping platform installed to enable it to be used for environmental education. Ironically, it was the Prince's Trust Team 21, some years previously, that had helped to create it. Sadly, though, the area had been subjected to years of vandalism and neglect and the platform needed to be removed for safety reasons.

It was February and the weather was cold – and set to get worse. But the team didn't give in. They were provided with saws, waders, litter-pickers, waterproofs, spades, forks and plenty of gloves, a skip kindly donated by the Council and life jackets, just in case anyone decided to take a dip. They set to work cleaning up the area, taking out the platform – which was a huge job in itself – and damming up the pond to ensure a constant water level.

Each time I went, I was amazed at the



Top: Before work started and below the result of restoration at Witches Pond Highercroft Woods
Photos by Margaret Keighley

transformation that had taken place. From being an uninviting, untidy area, the pond had become a beauty spot that any LNR would be proud to have. The team was triumphant.

Volunteers are the unsung heroes of much of our conservation work and volunteering is such a rewarding and worthwhile use of spare time. To Team 51 – and their leader Rachel and project support worker Wes – we applaud you and your outstanding efforts. Thank you for your enthusiasm, time and determination. You really did make a difference.

Margaret Keighley, Local Nature Reserves Officer, Blackburn with Darwen

Planners meet crocodiles on healthy walk

A healthier body and mind is one of the aims of all walking initiatives, but there are other positive spin-offs in Greenwich



Charlton the Sandpit c1905

The Wildspace! officers have been supporting the Green Chain Walk Officer, who is responsible for a 40-mile network that links some of the finest landscapes in south-east London.

A healthy walks programme for the Council's second proposed Local Nature Reserve, Maryon Wilson Park and Gilbert's Pit (SSSI), comes with one major difference. A brief stop on the walk allows Nick Pond, one of the Wildspace! officers, to enthuse about one of London's least understood geological gems, Gilbert's Pit.

The lunch-break audience is made up of employees of Greenwich Council's Directorate of Strategic Planning – the very people the team needs to influence to safeguard our heritage.

The Pit is the last of a group of disused chalk and sandpits that was worked for the fine Thanet sands. The sands were used mainly for glass-making, but also as moulding sand for the Woolwich Arsenal.

Walkers hear how, in this area, geology has shaped human cultural and economic development because of the ample sand and gravel, and because of the Thames as a strategic transport link. Gilbert's Pit, though, has a much older history too – a complete sequence of rocks and fossils deposited 60 to 55 million years ago in conditions only seen today in more tropical climates. There would have been sharks and crocodiles living here 56 million years ago!



Nick Pond explaining the unique geology.

Left: Council employees enjoying a healthy walk

Photos by Nick Pond

Busy at Bramford

Projects improve access for wheelchairs

Good things have been happening down at Bramford Meadows LNR – thanks to the Wildspace! Project and the Gipping Valley Countryside Project.

On national Make a Difference Day, nine willing volunteers from the Ipswich Volunteer Bureau had the mission of constructing two wooden platforms on the riverbank so that wheelchair users could fish or simply sit and enjoy this idyllic stretch of the River Gipping.

After seven hours of strenuous digging, drilling and hauling very heavy chunks of oak around, both platforms were more or less complete. The finishing touches were made by Gipping Valley Countryside Project volunteers the following week.

“Building these access platforms along the river will enable people in wheelchairs to get a view of the river they are unable to at the moment,” said Wildspace! Project Officer Ann Havard from Suffolk County Council. “There are fish to watch, birds to listen to, dragonflies buzzing about



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Left: The foundations of the platforms being put in place and right the finished platforms

Photos by Ann Havard

overhead in the summer, and wildflowers that change with the changing seasons. One of our Countryside Service wardens recently spotted an otter under Bushman's Bridge.”

To improve access for wheelchair users in the Gipping Valley, local contractors Brooks and Wood Ltd carried out the next stage – extending the path from Bushman's Bridge at the north end of the Meadows a further 155 metres downstream.

“We hope to raise enough funding this year for the completion of this high quality footpath,” said Nick Dickson, Officer for the Gipping Valley Countryside Project. “The eventual aim is to enable those with mobility problems easier access to the countryside. The work we are doing, in conjunction with Bramford's proximity to Ipswich, will hopefully encourage new visitors to come and enjoy this lovely area.”

The grassland here is rich in wildlife, including some rather rare grasshoppers and plants. It is hoped that traditional



cattle grazing will soon make a comeback, replacing the current grass cutting system and giving the Meadows a more traditional feel. Grazing will also create a mixture of short and tall vegetation providing more habitats for a greater variety of insects, which will in turn, provide a much better food source for birds and bats.

The presence of cattle in the landscape should also increase awareness of local, traditional farming methods – as well as being a good way of interesting children in country life.

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Sometimes, a chance meeting can lead to great new things

Serendipity

Soon after Chris Smith joined Sheffield City Council as the new Community Liaison Officer for the Shire Brook Valley LNR, she bumped into a member of staff at the local day centre for people with learning disabilities. They hatched a plan and soon, two new groups were visiting the nature reserve each week.

Many of the visitors took several weeks to settle into their new environment – the visitor centre providing a great day base and the reserve a place to explore. By the end of the first summer, everyone was enthusiastic and getting involved in the activities.

One group has developed into a walking club – starting with short walks around the centre. They now walk around the whole reserve and have designed a set of maps for their favourites. The other group has focused on nature study, with

Exploring a wildflower meadow and observing the wildlife. Photo by Chris Smith



activities on trees, birds, mini-beasts and the weather.

This year, following the success of projects to make bird feeders and nest boxes, some members of the group have been carrying out practical conservation tasks on the Trans Pennine Trail. If this trial is successful, it could lead to an Open College Network course next year.

Opening the nature reserve and visitor centre up to local people with disabilities has also opened up all sorts of opportunities for the individuals and their families. It has also shown the wider community how accessible the reserve is for those with disabilities.

And the enthusiasm of those taking part is great to see!

The conservation team after clearing a horse hop on the Trans Pennine Trail. Photo by Chris Smith

at Shire Brook

People thrive alongside the wildlife

Darlington's Wildspace! project has worked over the past two years to provide as many opportunities as possible for local people to get involved in their LNRs and help wildlife to thrive in an urban environment.

And people are thriving too. Awareness of the benefits of nature for people's health and wellbeing is growing all the time. In partnership with local residents, steering groups and North East Community Forests,

the project is seeing real benefits for local people who visit the reserves more often, who work in them and who enjoy themselves in the outdoors.

A group of mental health outpatients works on the project for half a day a week, sharing the tasks with people from a broad background and redeveloping their social skills away from an institutional situation. Some members of the group feel so comfortable, they come back to put in extra hours – some even work with the

Work on the construction of footpaths by volunteers

Photos by Malcolm Thompson



team every day! Activities include tasks such as constructing steps, stiles, fences and gates – jobs that involve plenty of physical effort and cardiovascular exercise. They also get a great sense of wellbeing from knowing that their work is benefiting wildlife and the community, and from completing a major construction project, such as a pond-dipping platform and a 60- metre surfaced footpath.

The group's occupational therapist, who works alongside them, reports that people have been seen to improve

their stamina, mood, communication skills and self esteem. "I value the opportunity to work with North East Community Forests Land Services on the LNRs. It provides an environment for people to improve their mental and physical health through engaging in purposeful activity, which also benefits their local community."

This is just the start of how Wildspace! in Darlington is forging close links with local people and groups with the aim of bringing health benefits for everyone.



Farnley Fishpond LNR was a venue for relaxing exercise and new discoveries at the end of last year

Entertaining demonstration of Tai Chi

Photo by Jenny Barr

Tai Chi by the fishpond

Wildspace! teamed up with the West Leeds Healthy Living Network and Neighbourhood Action to hold a Health and Heritage Day for groups from the three community centres in the area.

People from gentle exercise groups, walking clubs and volunteers from the centre turned up to see a fascinating Tai Chi demonstration and to discover the pond and bird life in the natural setting for the event.

Afterwards a healthy lunch was provided for everyone at St. Michael's Church Hall, where there was also a display of Farnley through the ages put on by the local history group.

Around 55 people came along. Many had never visited the site or hadn't been there since they were children. Several said they felt inspired to visit again, to incorporate it as part of their walking routes or even to take up Tai Chi.

Clearing the pond



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From purple people to wildlife haven Community action pays off



Blackleach after the landscaping Photo by Nick Harrison

Until 30 years ago, the smell of marzipan in the air was a sure sign that the Thorpe Chemical Works was in operation. The factory was also responsible for accidental discharges of chemicals that coloured local houses, workers and dogs a bright purple.

Marzipan was not the only distinctive smell around Blackleach. The waste site was known locally as 'stink bomb hill', because of the smell of rotten eggs. Breathing in the fumes was reputed to cure whooping cough and many local children were brought to Blackleach to gain the benefits!

When the site closed, the area was heavily polluted and soon became derelict. Yet, despite the neglected state of the site and its industrial legacy, it had become a valuable local wildlife site and fishing venue. Happily, local people had the vision to see past the decay and appreciate it as the wildlife haven it has become.

When, in 1987, the site was threatened by development, local people formed an action group to campaign against the proposal. Blackleach Country Park has now become Salford's first Local Nature Reserve after many years of pressure

from the local community. The Action Group worked hard to put together a report which detailed the outstanding importance of the reservoir to the Salford area because of its history, its wildlife and its recreational and educational potential.

Once the planning battle had been won, the task of transforming a derelict and polluted site into a safe and accessible area began. This started in 1994 and involved extensive engineering and landscaping work. Once the bulldozers had completed their job, it was the turn of local schoolchildren, volunteers and community groups. They helped to plant many of the trees and wildflowers on Blackleach and construct bridges and fishing platforms. In 1989, Blackleach was finally named a Country Park.

A task group still meets regularly every week at Blackleach to carry out projects; the visitor centre is currently staffed by two committed volunteers and one full time ranger, and many of the original campaign members still sit on the committee.

Jo Regan, Community Liaison Officer, and Senior Ranger Annie Surtees

Sunderland volunteers spread the word

Volunteers have become the cornerstone of reserve management in Sunderland – not only completing valuable work such as waymarking, tree coppicing and wildflower surveys, but spreading the word that the countryside is fun and can get you fit too.

“Learning new skills and using a variety of hand tools has been a great experience. It has enabled me to meet new people and enjoy being outdoors.”

Chris, Wildspace! volunteer

Sunderland's Wildspace! project began in July 2003 and, two months later, four new Local Nature Reserves were launched to protect endangered plants and animals, including the bee orchid, song thrush, water vole and great-crested newt. The project also aimed to enhance nationally rare habitats such as magnesian limestone grasslands at Fulwell Quarry LNR and Tunstall Hills LNR.

The other main aim of the project is to support friends groups and encourage local people to use and care for their

LNRs by setting up volunteer groups. In January 2004, Community Wildspace! Officer Sandra Dobigny ran the first volunteer task. Today, the Wildspace! volunteers are making a real impact.

Many volunteers also wanted to share their love of Sunderland's countryside with others, so Sandra trained her volunteers in environmental games and activities for children and ensured they were CRB-checked. This has meant they can help at public events, giving children a feel for nature and

an understanding of why LNRs are special places.

Other community groups involved in reserve management include two teams from European Services for People with Autism (ESPA). Each group works on site every week and carries out tasks such as meadow raking, tree pruning and coppicing, and restoring bird hides. Without their help, the

Wildspace! officer would not have had the time or resources to undertake so much habitat management.

“Some of the people who use our service find the physical work stimulating, while others seem to enjoy visiting different sites or being in peaceful surroundings,” says Frank Berney, ESPA leader. “Self

esteem and self confidence can increase as tasks are completed and the results of their work are seen. Most tasks also involve considerable physical effort and are therefore a good form of exercise.”

And, as Sandra says: “In eighteen months, the project has involved local communities in site management and helped achieve our aims of making Local Nature Reserves places for local people and local wildlife.”

“We joined the Wildspace! volunteers following environmental studies at university. We really enjoy coming out at weekends and undertaking practical tasks.

We are also involved in family events and have great fun doing activities with kids.”

Paul and Becca, Wildspace! volunteers



CLO, Sandra Dobigny displaying Sunderland's wildlife

Photos by Sandra Dobigny



Local volunteers tree coppicing