

Centre News

The Woodland Education Centre, Offwell, Honiton, Devon EX14 9SW. Tel 01404 831373



Centre Director's Report - October 2007

Centre Lottery Grant of £47,200

Wildlife at the Woodland Education Centre is to get a substantial boost from local helping hands, thanks to a grant of £47,200 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The grant is for a project entitled 'Action for Biodiversity'. It will enable Offwell Woodland & Wildlife Trust (the charity which runs the Centre) to employ a Community Officer.

This new member of staff will promote the project and support volunteers in helping to conserve the wonderful natural heritage at the Centre. This will involve local people in helping with practical conservation tasks and/or recording and surveying wildlife at the Centre.

The Trust is really delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has made this project possible. It is a terrific opportunity for people to play an active role in helping their local wildlife and to gain a wide range of new skills and knowledge, while at the same time enjoying the social benefits of being an integral part of a like-minded team.

Funding support from Offwell Environment Link, as well as the Offwell Fundraising Group, was instrumental in helping to attract the HLF grant, with all its attendant benefits. Each organisation donated £750 towards the project, for which the Trust is extremely grateful. It represents a lot of hard work and fundraising efforts on the part of many people. This practical support played a vital role in securing the HLF grant because it demonstrated local support for the project in a very tangible way.

Offwell Woodland & Wildlife Trust



Wood-cricket, a nationally scarce species found at the Centre.

For anybody out there wondering what the term 'biodiversity' in the project title actually means, it is simply a shorthand way of referring to 'the wonderful variety of life in all its forms'. This is very apt when applied to the Centre which contains well over a thousand different species.

A number of the species found at the Centre are of national, as well as local and regional conservation importance. Nine of the species, including Dormice and Otters, are of national conservation concern and have their own national Species Action Plans. These plans co-ordinate countrywide efforts to improve the chances of survival of individual species. Wood-crickets (pictured above) are another nationally scarce species found at the Centre. The main centres of Wood-cricket population are the Isle of Wight, the New Forest and a few sites in Devon, including the the Heathland Restoration Project area at the Centre.

It is one of the triumphs of habitat restoration at the Centre, that they are found on this area. Prior to restoration, it was covered in rhododendron and had very little wildlife value. The wonderful habitats and wildlife at the Centre are only there because of the management and practical conservation activities carried out on a regular basis. The continued presence of a wide range of species and habitats at the Centre is dependent on the required management being carried out. The project therefore offers a way for people to really make a difference to the environment and to help ensure the survival of important species in their local area.

JOB VACANCY



Heritage
LOTTERY FUNDED

Community
Officer

To be responsible for delivering the
'Action for Biodiversity' project at the
Woodland Education Centre, Offwell.

For more information see
www.countrysideinfo.co.uk

The launch of the Action for Biodiversity project is not the only exciting new development this quarter. The self-led, Woodland Discovery Trail (WDT) which has been developed at the Centre using GPS guided, hand-held Q3 Ranger computers, is about to be launched as a commercial product. The WDT is aimed at a school audience and with a certain amount of adaptation, is suitable for most other woodland areas. The WDT is endorsed by the International Tree Foundation.

This innovative use of computers to deliver quality outdoor interpretation where it matters (i.e. where people can actually see it happening right in front of them in the great outdoors) is undoubtedly the biggest advance in countryside interpretation within the last 20 years. These revolutionary advances at the Centre have not gone unnoticed and one of the computer hardware manufacturers is currently featuring the Centre as a case study on their website. Visit www.fourier-sys.com/newsletters/august2007/article3.html



Woodland Discovery Trail launch leaflet

Promotional material for the WDT is to be distributed at the annual conference of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM) in November. The Trust owns the copyright to the WDT content which is displayed by the Q3 Rangers. It will

benefit financially from the sale of this 'Sat Nav' guided education package to other organisations or businesses which also offer outdoor environmental education to school groups. This will be a significant advance because it will generate income which can be directed wherever it is most needed and which is not tied to a particular project or funding objectives.



The extension will go behind the cabin.

Other activities soon to be under way at the Centre include the log cabin extension project, which has been funded by Alcoa. This is currently in the planning phase. Once all the necessary prior notifications have been completed, building works will begin. Part of the extension will incorporate essential toilet facilities for the disabled, enabling the Trust to comply with current legislation. The winter is really the only time such construction activities can take place, because the flow of educational groups visiting the Centre slows down in line with the season. (People also tend to hibernate more in the winter, not just plants and animals!)

The winter is also the time when the majority of conservation work is carried out, because most species are fairly quiescent. So, if you are not quite ready to hibernate just yet and would welcome the opportunity to get out and appreciate wildlife a bit more, then your input to the 'Action for Biodiversity' project would be of great value.

The project application was supported by Devon's Biodiversity Officer, Craig Dixon and this is your chance to do something to make a really tangible environmental difference in Devon. Your efforts, if you decide to join in, will not only help wildlife at the Centre, but will also be contributing towards targets identified in Devon's own Biodiversity Action Plan. Find out more on the Trust's website (www.countryside.info) or alternatively, you can contact the Trust directly by telephone (01404 831373) or email (offwell1@aol.com).