

Centre News

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www.offwell.info

National Grid for Learning

Centre Director's Report - Summer 2003

Education, Education, Education!



Over 50 classes visited during the summer term.

10 other groups visited the Centre. Most of the schools are local primary schools. However there were also visits from secondary schools and from further afield. Gable Hall School from Essex visited to learn about biological sampling techniques as did local students from colleges such as Exeter and Woodroffe. Sampling techniques was also the theme of the course run by Bristol University at the Centre. This particular group was largely made up of conservation professionals who were brushing up on their freshwater sampling skills. The acquired knowledge allows them to assess the condition of any stream or river. Interestingly the course very much builds upon the knowledge and principles which even the youngest pupils learn when they are studying pond life at the Centre.



Bristol University ran a course on freshwater sampling techniques.

"I did not want to go home."

"Offwell was very interesting and fun and I will come again but bring my Mum and Dad."

"Pond dipping was brilliant."

"Thank you for a memorable day which the children thoroughly enjoyed."

"I really enjoyed seeing all the creatures that we found."

"I learnt that animals like Greater Waterboatman, foxes, spiders and many other animals are carnivores and animals like deer, minibeasts, butterflies and other animals are herbivores."

"What a success you made of our outing to Offwell. It was so well organised and interesting." These are just a few of the comments from visiting pupils and teachers.

Once again the Centre has been inundated with schools and groups. There were 53 available days for schools to visit in this summer term and no less than 51 classes and

Of the 10 non school groups who came to the Centre special mention must be made of the two visits from DYAC.

This organisation supports people with disabilities throughout Devon. DYAC are involving people with both learning and physical disabilities in conservation projects. They came to Offwell to find out more about the natural world around them, through hands-on practical activities.

The DYAC Adult Service Co-ordinator, Diana O'Dell wrote to say that "We believe that our conservation project field trips provide an excellent platform for co-operation between ourselves and other organisations to raise awareness of disability and the need for facilities to allow people in wheelchairs to enjoy the same environment as their able-bodied peers. Your education program and facilities are exactly what we envisaged".



A Common Blue butterfly, one of the many butterflies at the Centre.



A visitor from DYAC inspects the contents of a sweep net.



Braunton Burrows, a biosphere reserve.

In addition to the education work at the Centre, time has also been found to attend the launch of the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership.

This flagship event was held by East Devon District Council at Sidbury Manor courtesy of Sir Charles Cave. The speakers included the regional director of the Countryside Agency as well as the Council's newly appointed AONB Officer, Chris Woodruff. The launch of this partnership together with the production of a strategy by April 2004, is intended to raise the profile of the area and to deliver real benefits. It was clear from Chris Woodruff's speech that this new initiative can only be judged a success if results are actually delivered.



Sidbury Manor, the venue for the launch of the AONB partnership.

The website continues to grow and there have been many new additions since the last newsletter. As a result visitors can now make an online donation via a secure server. Other improvements included more wildlife puzzles, together with more information on ecological sampling and pond life. National Moth Night was broadcast live over the net and a 48 hr Mothathon is being held on the weekend of 25th - 27th July. Since the

last newsletter the website has received over 1.5 million hits. Educational establishments from all over the world regularly use the website and UNESCO has asked the Trust to review a recent publication about biosphere reserves. As part of this review, a visit was made to the biosphere reserve of Braunton Burrows in north Devon. This reserve includes the largest sand dune system in England and contains a wonderful amount of plantlife. Clearly there is much practical work to do in order to retain its status. The review, together information about the reserve, will soon be published on the Trust's website. Many other additions are in the pipeline including much more information about the countryside of East Devon as well as its farming and wildlife.

The seemingly endless saga of Colwell Woods landfill site continues. This old landfill site is upstream of the Centre. Despite repeated warnings, the Centre has been inundated with material from the area of the tip, on no less than three occasions. At present a large hole has been washed out at the site and an area containing an estimated 15,000 tonnes has also subsided. This area is next to the stream which has very significantly eroded because of the operations on the site. The Environment Agency continue to monitor the situation.



The tip erodes as the Environment Agency monitors the situation.