

Centre News



Report from David Tilbury, Trustee - December 2008

Offwell Woodland & Wildlife Trust

New Trustee

The Trust is very pleased to report that Dr. Linda Johnston has accepted an invitation to become a Trustee.

Linda studied Biology at Stirling University for her first degree. She was particularly interested in physiology (the study of processes within living organisms; usually relating to structure and function) especially of aquatic organisms. Studies also included Earth and Environmental Science as well as Mathematics. She moved to Cardiff to study for her doctorate in the regulation of prolactin (a hormone) in fish. Post-doctorate research included work in transdermal drug delivery (this is now common-place, often being used to deliver heart-regulating drugs).



Dr. Linda Johnston

For the past 19 years Linda has concentrated on home-educating her children; Sarah and Tim, and it is in this guise she will best be known to supporters of the Woodland Education Centre. Despite the two hour journey involved, Linda and husband James, together with the family, have paid regular visits to the Centre for many years both for the wide diversity of habitats which gives it such great educational merit and because of its sheer beauty and charm. Linda's strong technical background, her knowledge of educational requirements, not least those of home educators, together with her friendly and common-sense approach will be a real asset to the Trust in the challenging times ahead.

Supporters will know that we were awarded funding from the Alcoa Foundation for the construction of an extension to the Log Cabin. This included the provision of a new "all user" toilet which would enable us to provide better facilities for wheel chair users and people with special needs.

It is incredible the amount of work, time and cost that has been involved in obtaining all the necessary approvals before we could actually commence work on this project, but at last we were able to begin in the autumn. Dodging the worst of the weather, we have now completed all the ground-works including installation of the septic tank, soak-away and foundations and we managed to get the main shell constructed and roof on just before Christmas. We anticipate completing the project well before Easter.

We are now half-way through the HLF scheme "Action for Biodiversity". This is proving to be very successful, not least because of the knowledge, dedication and enthusiasm of Lucy Morton who leads the project for us. We also owe a big "Thank-you" to the many volunteers who have come forward to carry out so many activities.

It is a somewhat scary thought to realise that the Trust now has no regular income. In the past, the core of our funding has been an annual grant from the Forestry Commission. For the past few years we have seen substantial cuts in this grant and from this year it has ceased altogether. We are indebted to the Forestry Commission for the support given in the past.

For the future we will have to rely on income generated from activities such as school visits, donations from supporters, fundraising and on volunteers willing to give their time and skills on a range of tasks. During 2009 we will be looking for a Team Leader to organise volunteers on maintenance tasks, Secretarial support to help with spreadsheets and post, a Volunteer to lead school groups and a Fundraiser. If you think you can help in anyway - it really is needed! - please contact Lucy Morton or myself (My e-mail address is dwtilbury@tiscali.co.uk and 'phone 01404 831143.)

Action for Biodiversity

Project Officer: Lucy Morton



There was a successful half term activity day in October with 20 children and 9 adults attending, looking for fungi and mini beasts in the woods. Unfortunately the autumnal weather got the better of us on Sunday 23rd November when the walk scheduled to show people the progress of the Action for Biodiversity project had to be abandoned!! Lucy Morton optimistically sat in a very wet and windy car park but it came as no surprise that no one was mad enough to turn up. An hour later the sun was out and it became a beautiful day! (The walk will be rescheduled in the spring).



Group enjoys searching for fungi!



One of the many finds!

December saw work starting on the stream and leat bank-side clearance which is part of work included in the Action for Biodiversity project. This involves volunteers donning their wellies and standing in the leat trimming back the small trees, bramble and rhododendron re-growth that has sprouted up over the last few years. Some vegetation on the banks is vital but if there is too much the waterway becomes deprived of light and this affects the amount of life in the water; giving a knock on effect for the other insects and mammals that rely on freshwater invertebrates for food. To help with this task we were very grateful to have a group come out from the Environment Agency based in Exeter. They worked very hard on the stretch of leat from the Log Cabin down to cabin rise and were rewarded by seeing a beautiful brimstone butterfly flying up and down the track. The brimstone over-winters as an adult butterfly, so if we are lucky enough to have some warm, sunny days over the next few months you may well see this flash of yellow flying around the hedgerows.

Rhododendron clearance is steaming ahead, with a number of volunteers doing fine work at the bottom of the wet woodland. This block is now all cut down ready for burning up in the next couple of weeks.

In January/February we are planning two events which will be of interest - A 2 day charcoal burning demonstration and a Coppicing event. Actual times and dates of these are still being fixed so please contact Lucy for more information and to book as spaces will be limited.

For more information about events or to find out how you can help by volunteering at the Woodland Education Centre please contact Lucy Morton, Community Officer, Mon - Wed on 01404 831881.