

Centre News

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

Centre Director's Report - Spring 2003

Busy Times



A Watch group from Devon Wildlife Trust enjoy a visit to the Centre

Maple Walk is now awash with a sea of white fluttering petals of Wood Anemones thanks to scrub clearance which took place over the winter. The work was funded by Devon Action. They have also paid for the refurbishment of a viewing hide and for some of the access tracks to be improved. The Devon Action grant scheme utilises Landfill Tax credits from Devon Waste Management. Offwell Environment Link, the Centre's support group, provided essential third party funding.

The exceptional warm spring weather has brought with it, large numbers of busy butterflies. Peacock, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Brimstone, Speckled Wood, Orange Tip and Holly Blue butterflies have all been present in good numbers.

In the sky high above the Centre, Buzzards glide gracefully in the warm spring thermals. At a moments notice, they then swoop down over a favoured part of the woodland with the characteristically heavy wing beats of territorial display. Nesting material is carried in the talons of the male as part of the bonding behaviour.

Elsewhere on the reserve, many songbirds are making busy preparations for the breeding season. Blue Tits and Great Tits are inspecting the bird boxes and a Grey wagtail is already sitting on eggs near one of the classrooms. Kingfishers have been seen over the lake where hundreds of fish bask in the sun just below the tranquil surface. No doubt



the kingfishers have, once again, found a suitable nest site close by. Last year two broods of kingfishers were successfully reared at the Centre.

The trees in the Centre's wooded valley are giving up their austere winter look in exchange for the delicate and subtle greens of spring.

School bookings are coming in thick and fast. Soon the Centre will be alive with the eager anticipation of excited pupils as they visit a world of fascination.

Any school or college wishing to visit on the day of their choice is strongly advised to book as soon as possible. Much of April, May and June is already booked.

Each visit is taken by Trust staff at a ratio of about one member of staff to 17 pupils. Any more than this, and the effectiveness of the educational value becomes compromised. Charges for this year are competitive at £4 per pupil for groups of up to 50 pupils and £5 per pupil for groups over 50. There is a minimum charge of £50. Obviously these charges do not pay for the running of the Centre but every bit helps!

Every school or college which visits the Centre receives a CD of information which is specific to their own educational requirements. It also contains a complete copy of the Trust's website.

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The Trust's website is now part of the National Grid for Learning.

The website is now officially part of the government's National Grid for Learning (NGfL). This is a national seal of approval and the website is now included in 'the largest collection of quality internet education resources in the UK'.

Websites are only accepted onto the NGfL portal if they meet strict quality criteria, which include following best practice on internet safety and ensuring that people with disabilities can access the same information.

Once a site shows that it meets these requirements, and contains material that could be used by teachers, students, parents or adult learners, it is allowed to display the NGfL badge. The Trust's website is also listed on the NGfL website as part of its promotion of quality sites.

The Trust's site, (www.offwell.info) offers educational resources on British wildlife, conservation and ecology for all ages, from primary school children to adults. The site, which has more than 60,000 keywords and topics, contains quizzes and reference material, as well as suggestions for activities. There is also information for schools planning to visit the Woodland Education Centre.

People visiting NGfL can access the Trust's site along with more than 900 other websites, featuring more than 750,000 pages.

The website is the result of years of work from a dedicated team of staff. Much of it is based on the practical conservation and educational work carried out at the Centre. Being on the National Grid for Learning will help the Trust to further increase its profile in the education community.

In giving the award, NGfL Content Manager Ceris Bergen said: "We are building up a mass of resources useful to everybody involved in learning, formal or informal, and the Offwell Woodland and Wildlife Trust website is a valuable addition to the fold. People in Devon can be proud that a local site is contributing to the nation's education."

The NGfL portal was launched in November 1998 as part of the Government's National Grid for Learning strategy, which aims to create a connected learning society.

NGfL is funded by the Department for Education and Skills and managed by the British Educational Communications and Technology agency (Becta).

Other educational establishments from around 116 different countries use the website regularly. For many students a visit to the Trust's website to access information, is now a mandatory part of their studies. The website is added to every week and attracts millions of hits every year.



The Young Rangers' Club receive support from the Lions Club.

A number of local organisations have recently made donations to the Young Rangers' Club. These include the Lions Club of Honiton, Bradfords Plc, Honiton Round Table and Honiton Rotary Club. Thanks to them, the club will enjoy a full spring programme.

Monument pond which is the uppermost of the ponds at the Centre has been cleaned out again. The source of the disaster rests with the solution to the problems upstream at an old landfill site. The Environment Agency seem quite unable to find a solution. In the meantime the threat to the Centre's aquatic habitats is real and significant.



Monument pond is dug out yet again.