

## Summary of Winning Projects

### 1) SITE AWARD:

#### **Winner: Pigney's Wood**

The Site Award is presented to the North Norfolk Community Woodland Trust, for its outstanding conservation and management work at Pigney's Wood in North Norfolk.

The site covers an area of 23.5 hectares and combines a diverse mosaic of wildlife-attractive habitats, including broad-leaved woodland, newly-planted woodland, grassland, hedges, a small scrape and dykes/waterways. Over the past ten years, the North Norfolk Community Woodland Trust has planted more than 20,000 trees comprising 40 different species. Seating has been provided at viewpoints and picnic places, and a small hide has also been constructed.

Interpretation boards have been erected, providing information on wildflowers, butterflies, trees and birds. The group has also created a display in a small, open barn. The site is open to the public at all times, and there is an extensive network of pathways and routes, some of which have been specially designed to be wheelchair accessible.

All the work to acquire, enhance and manage the site has been done by community volunteers of all ages.

The group is currently applying for permission and funding to further enhance the site with a larger scrape, improved access and additional interpretation. The group has also set a goal of increasing the size of the site and undertaking further woodland planting.

#### **Highly Commended: "Westies" Wood**

Kevin West is "Highly Commended" for the creation of extensive native woodlands and orchards at "Westies Wood".

This is a magnificent new woodland, which has transformed 150 acres of arable land (much of it on the former Old Buckenham airfield) into a site of considerable biodiversity value. In addition to mixed deciduous woodland, the site also includes a wet woodland and six complete collections of Norfolk's traditional fruit varieties.

Other biodiversity work has also been undertaken, including pond restoration, successful re-pollarding of old hornbeam and field maple, and hedge and field margin work. A sluice has been built to help retain wetland habitats. Extensive monitoring of wildlife - notably birds - is carried out by the local community.

## **2) EDUCATION AWARD:**

### **Winner: Forest Schools - East**

The Education Award is presented to Forest Schools-East, for its outstanding work to support the creation of Forest Schools in the East of England region.

The Forest School initiative originated in Scandinavia in the 1950s, with the aim of encouraging children to learn social, physical and educational skills while developing an appreciation and understanding of the environment. Forest Schools provide an excellent opportunity to bring learning to life, allowing children, young people and adults to explore and learn in a constructive way. This inspirational process increases self-confidence and self-esteem, improves individuals' ability to work co-operatively and enhances motivation. Forest Schools allow participants to grow and discover their abilities without fear of criticism or failure.

The Forest School is a secure area of woodland, which acts as an outdoor classroom where people can explore, investigate and discover the natural environment. Sessions are organised and run by Qualified Forest School Leaders. Although leaders will have planned a range of potential activities (which might include shelter construction, bridge building, mapping or artwork with natural materials), it is the participants themselves who determine the range and scope of the activities.

Forest Schools provide a valuable teaching tool for a wide range of curriculum subjects, and are an excellent way to support and enrich the National Curriculum. A non-classroom environment gives children increased stimulation and encourages greater learning potential.

Forest Schools-East is an exciting partnership between the Forestry Commission and the Green Light Trust, which supports the creation of Forest Schools in the East of England. Over the past three years, Forest Schools-East has funded training and infrastructure for 13 Forest Schools in Norfolk through a Forestry Commission Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) Challenge Fund - three of which were strategic, ie, encouraging multiple school uptake. The initiative has benefited school children, youth groups, excluded children, special schools, transition groups (pupils who are identified as requiring extra support to prepare for Secondary School) and children with Special Educational Needs.

For more information, please visit: [www.forest-schools-east.org/](http://www.forest-schools-east.org/)

### **Highly Commended: Education Category: Erpingham VC Primary School**

Erpingham Primary School is "Highly Commended" for the creation of an outstanding pond and woodland area on the school grounds.

In 2006, the school started looking into the possibility of managing a formerly abandoned large pond and woodland area within the school grounds to enhance biodiversity and create a useable area to be enjoyed by pupils. An overall site enhancement and management plan was drawn up, which included:

- Dredging the pond to improve water quality and capacity;
- Removing deadwood from the water;
- Creating a timber pond dipping platform;
- Building a boardwalk;
- Installing safety gates and wheelchair access;
- Creating a seating circle;
- Building a bird hide;
- Thinning the woodland to create small clearings in which ground flora species could thrive;
- Removing overhanging branches from around the pond to allow more light to the water;
- Establishing a sustainable coppicing regime.

There has been much enthusiasm for the scheme from parents and local people keen to see the pond area brought back to a useable state as a healthy habitat. Parents frequently attend Forest School sessions to work with groups of children and have helped control nonnative species.

Other small local schools, including Marsham Primary, visit the site on a regular basis for their pupils to enjoy using the pond area as a learning resource. They participate in Forest School activities with their teachers.

Students studying their Forest School Level 1 and 3 qualification have used the site to practice their skills and work with groups of pupils as many of them do not have suitable habitat at their own schools.

For more information, please contact David Yates at Norfolk County Council ([david.yates@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:david.yates@norfolk.gov.uk))

### **3) LOCAL GROUP AWARD:**

#### **Winner: Friends of the Rosary Cemetery**

The Local Group Award is presented to the Friends of the Rosary Cemetery for their outstanding conservation, management and interpretation work at Rosary Cemetery in Norwich.

The Rosary Cemetery is of great historical and biological interest. As a result of the hard work of the Friends, the cemetery is a rich wildlife area, and a spectacular place for local people to visit and enjoy nature – such as the stunning display of wildflowers during the spring (include the rare meadow saxifrage).

Since the group has been active, there have been observable increases in less common plant species in the cemetery, including greater wood-rush and meadow saxifrage. The active management of scrub and sycamore has also prevented the loss of many of the areas within the cemetery that contain good numbers of grassland and woodland flora.

Recently, the group has carried out the following activities:

- Planted native wildflower bulbs;
- Set up a recording and monitoring programme for the wildlife on the site;
- Successfully lobbied for more eco-friendly management, including a reduction in herbicide usage with the cemetery;
- Produced and implemented an annual programme of guided walks and other events;
- Installed interpretation boards;
- Produced a regular newsletter;
- Developed a series of leaflets and a guidebook on the cemetery;
- Actively removed sycamore and cut back bramble, both to safeguard monuments and to prevent more vulnerable flora being crowded out.

### **Highly Commended: Friends of Open Green Spaces (FrOGS)**

The Friends of Open Green Spaces are “Highly Commended” for their conservation work at Spout Hills – a valuable wildlife site on the fringe of Holt.

The site comprises grassland and scrub with some mature woodland. The rich fen meadows fringing the stream are fed by calcareous flushes from the springs on the valley sides. The stream is a tributary of the River Glaven.

Since March 2006, members of FrOGS have worked on the last Saturday of each month at Spout Hills. The group is open to anybody from Holt (and the locality) who enjoys the environment and working outdoors. The group works to an agreed monthly programme to improve and enhance the biodiversity of the site. The number of volunteers and workdays over the last two years has meant that far more has been achieved than ever before. It is a site that many people feel keen to work on, as they have known it for many years.

The site has been in management for 15-20 years with the County Council carrying outworks on behalf of the Town Council. Since FrOGS has been set up, the amount of workcarried out by the group has increased and the County Council’s role has turned into moreof an advisory one. The formation of this local group for their local area will ensure the long term management of the site and ensure that works to be carried out under the CountrysideStewardship Scheme are achieved.

The site is an 'Open Access' site as it is a registered common. There is a public right of way across the common and a permissive path link to the south of the site on the disusedrailway line, which creates an off-road link back into the town.

**Highly Commended: BTCV Green Gym (Norwich)** The BTCV Green Gym (Norwich) is “Highly Commended” for its conservation activities at multiple sites around Norwich and its active involvement of volunteers from the community.

From June 2008 (when the project began in Norwich) up to February 2009, 68 Green Gym volunteers have worked on improving biodiversity at 26 different sites in Norwich, comprising a wide array of habitats including lowland heathland, dry acid grassland, lowland mixed deciduous woodland, wet woodland and eutrophic standing waters. The project is also helping to grow on native black poplar cuttings from Norfolk trees, to replant in the county. So far, over 550 volunteer-sessions have been recorded: the vast majority of the participants are new to volunteering, with only a handful having done conservation work before.

Work to tackle invasive species has included Himalayan balsam pulling along the Wensum, felling laurels in Lion Wood, and bracken bashing on Mousehold Heath. The project has also tackled a lot of sycamore and brambles (!), and planted mixed native hedges at two allotment sites. All work is carried out in partnership with site managers and contributes to their long-term management plans. Many of the sites on which the project works form vital links in the green corridors which run into the heart of the city (e.g. Marriott's Way). In addition to habitat improvements, the project has worked hard to improve access to nature for local people, by maintaining appropriate pathways on publicly owned open space (e.g. at Netherwood Green where an attractive walkway has been opened up).

As well as improving biodiversity, Green Gym is a health Initiative, improving the physical health and mental wellbeing of participants by getting people active in local green spaces:

"Since coming to Green Gym, I haven't seen my doctor for a couple of months...I am more relaxed, I am more positive, I am more optimistic about the future. I enjoy learning new skills...I want you to know that Green Gym has transformed my life."

"Having attended the Green Gym, it is clear to me that it provides not only a worthwhile service maintaining and improving various open areas and wildlife habitats that would otherwise not be funded under any other government umbrella, but that it also has health benefits for the individual providing both physical exercise and mental stimulus."

For more information, please contact BTCV on 01603-767300.

#### **4) INDIVIDUAL AWARD:**

##### **Winner: Liz Howarth**

The Individual Award is presented to Liz Howarth, in recognition of her enthusiastic and inspiring contributions to the BTCV's Green Gym and Action Team.

Liz has actively participated in over 40 practical conservation tasks with BTCV since October 2008. She continues to volunteer with the Green Gym, but has also started working with the Action Team on full day projects. She is highly enthusiastic about conservation work: as well as working hard, she never stops recruiting extra volunteers, and is happy to help new participants as they learn new tasks. She is also extremely keen to learn more about wildlife and share her knowledge: she has recently been to training courses to learn hedgelaying, winter tree identification and butterfly surveying.

##### **Highly Commended: Charles Cornish**

Charles Cornish is "Highly Commended" for his role in the creation of a large community woodland in North Walsham – one of the first to be planted in the county.

The site consists of a new, broad-leaved woodland. New copses, a new arboretum and hedges have also been established. An interpretation board has been installed in the wood. There is open access to the community woodland.

The arboretum contains a range of different oak species, as well as other trees. It has been specially designed as a resource to help identify those trees which might prove useful in the face of climate change. Charles Cornish has also tagged 40 mature oak trees which are being monitored for long-term changes such as oak die-back.