

# *Epping Forest Countrycare*

23rd Annual Report  
Summary  
2008 – 2009



## Epping Forest Countrycare 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Report

**Introduction.** Epping Forest Countrycare is Epping Forest District Council's Countryside Management Service. Based within the Policy and Environment section of the Directorate of Planning and Economic Development, Countrycare is fully funded by the District Council and is the key resource for advice, information and practical assistance on countryside and nature conservation issues. Since its establishment in 1986, Countrycare has developed a credible and proven track record for delivering quality projects. This in turn has developed strong community support and trust, which staff have been able to harness to good affect. The obvious public enthusiasm and desire of people to make a difference is reflected in Countrycare's ability to recruit and keep a wide volunteer base.

Operating across the entire Epping Forest District, Countrycare undertakes a wide variety of community-based activities and coordinates a regular programme of practical conservation work. The ability of Countrycare to engage and involve the local community in "hands on" practical conservation work remains its key strength. As one of the Council's primary "enablers" Countrycare involves people of all ages and abilities in every aspect of its work. The Service has five key objectives which are:

- To conserve and promote the biodiversity of the district and implement the goals of the Epping Forest Biodiversity Action Plan.
- To promote public access to the countryside and provide for informal recreation.
- To promote a greater understanding and respect for the countryside.
- To involve local communities in all aspects of the Service's work.
- To implement the goals of the Council's Community Plan.

Examples of Countrycare's core activities over the last year include;

- **Habitat management and creation** – managing 32 sites across the District including ponds, grassland, woodland and hedgerows.
- **Access improvements** – Work on the public rights of way network and access improvement works to public green spaces.
- **Educational activities** – work with schools, coordinating the district Tree Warden Scheme, organising guided walks and events.

Through 2008/09, Countrycare had 4 permanent staff complemented by volunteers, student work placements and temporary staff.

Personnel	Role	Dates
Paul Hewitt	Countryside Manager	
Andrew Vaughan	Assistant Countryside Manager	
Jordan Thomas	Assistant Countryside Manager	
David Roddick	Countryside Assistant	
Abigail Oldham	Veteran Tree Hunt Project Officer	8 January 2008

**Principle Achievements for 2008/09.** This is just a summary of the Service's work for the year. A full report giving details of all the Service's work is available to download from [www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/countrycare](http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/countrycare).

The Service's principal achievements of 2008/09 can be summarised as follows:

- 931 volunteer days (5586 hours) given on 105 practical tasks organised this year. Equates in to £34,912 @ £6.25 per hour.
- Organised and attended 41 walks, talks and educational events,
- Spent 39 project days working on the District's 9 Local Nature Reserves. Involving 3,008 hours of staff and volunteer time.
- Spent 19 project days on access projects involving 234 staff hours and 736 volunteer hours.
- Spent 70 project days dedicated to improving biodiversity across 32 sites including 13 Local Wildlife Sites. Involved 1312 staff hours and 4544 volunteer days.
- Generating a total income of £25,863 for the Council.
- Continuation of the Epping Forest Veteran Tree Hunt. Total number of trees recorded now stands at 2,500 trees.

**Major projects in 2008/09.** Enhancement of biodiversity across the district continues to be one of the Service's key aims. A great deal of staff time and effort has been spent improving sites and liaising with private landowners and other nature conservation bodies across the district. In 2008/09 management work has been undertaken on 32 sites, the majority of which the District Council either owns or to which Countrycare has had a long-term commitment. In total 70 project days were organised to enhance biodiversity involving 5,856 hours of staff and volunteer time. This included work on 3 sites of special scientific interest, 13 Wildlife Sites and 9 Local Nature Reserves. For a third year, Chigwell Row Wood LNR was again received the most attention and been a major focus for the Services project work. With its population of 360 veteran trees, associated rare insects and heathland the site has received good funding and volunteer work. In all 11 volunteer projects days were held on the LNR with over 1,200 hours of staff, contractor and volunteer time given. The restoration of the heathland has proved to be highly successful with heather and 200 rosettes of the uncommon Lousewort recorded in the spring 2009.

**Working with the Community.** In addition to the regular Thursday Volunteer Group which is coordinated by staff each week, staff also worked with a range of other community groups and volunteers. We have again worked closely with Capel Manor College in Enfield. Students have assisted with a number of practical days over a range of sites. Staff continue to work with a number of Friends Groups in Chigwell Row and at Swaines Green as well as other conservation volunteer groups such as the Epping Forest Conservation Volunteers, BTCV, the Woodland Trust and the Essex Wildlife Trust. In total 931 adult volunteer days were given and 544 children were involved in practical conservation work. By using a figure provided by Natural England, the Government's statutory agency for nature conservation, of £6.25 per hour, it is possible to put a financial value on the adult volunteer's time of just under £35,000. This figure equates to around a quarter of Countrycare's net expenditure. As ever a massive thank you goes out to all the dedicated volunteers who have given so much of their time.

**Working with young people.** This year the Service worked with a range of youth groups and 8 schools from across the District. Over 500 young people were involved in practical conservation work or a Countrycare event. In February 2009, the “Green Team” was resurrected in partnership with EFDC Community Development Team aimed at involving 11 to 16 year olds in practical conservation projects.

**Guided walks, talks and events.** This year staff organised a total of 41 walks, talks and events aimed at increasing people's knowledge and understanding of the countryside. A total audience of just under 1,500 people attended.

### Projects for 2009/10

Key objectives include:

Projects	Comments/Objectives
<b>The Epping Forest Veteran Tree Hunt</b> - Continue veteran tree survey of the District. Record a further 1,000 trees. (Baseline – Feb 09 = 1934 trees)	Undertake a veteran tree survey of the District on a Parish basis. Complete parish surveys in Chigwell and Ongar.
<b>Local Nature Reserves.</b>	Continue to work towards the designation of Norton Heath Common, High Ongar as a Local Nature Reserve. Investigate the possibility of Hallsford Bridge Meadow being included.
<b>Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) Part 1</b> Co-ordinate a review of LoWS (to form part of Local Development Framework Evidence Base).	Being undertaken by Essex Ecological Services in summer 2009. Countrycare staff to assist.
<b>Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) Part 2</b> Work towards the achieving the targets of NI 197 improving biodiversity of LoWS.	Staff need to work with private landowners to secure positive conservation management of 20 LoWS in 2009/10
<b>Epping Forest Biodiversity Action Plan</b>	Continue to coordinate and implement the Biodiversity Action Plan for the district in partnership with EFDC's Environmental Coordinator and Steering Group.
<b>Bobbingworth Former Landfill site.</b> Continue to assist with the creation of a pocket park on this Former Landfill site.	Staff to work with EFDC Land Drainage Section and main contractor Veolia.