

Epping Forest Countrycare

21st Annual Report
Summary
2006 – 2007



Introduction

Epping Forest Countrycare is Epping Forest District Council's Countryside Management Service. Based within the Forward Planning and Environment Section of Planning Services, 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.

Operating across the whole of the 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 landscape and wildlife habitats of the District.
- To improve 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.

Over twenty years the Service has developed a credible and proven track record for delivering quality projects that 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.

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

- Habitat management and creation – managing 30 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.

In 2006/07, Countrycare had between 4 and 5 permanent staff complemented by volunteers, student work placements and seasonal staff.

Epping Forest Countrycare staff 2006/07 were:

| Personnel | Role | |
|----------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Paul Hewitt | Countryside Manager | |
| Andrew Vaughan | Assistant Countryside Manager | |
| Zoë Freeman | Assistant Countryside Manager | Left 17/08/06 |
| Jordan Thomas | Countryside Assistant | Until 29/09/06 |
| Jordan Thomas | Assistant Countryside Manager | From 02/10/06 |
| Gareth Jones | Trainee Countryside Assistant | |
| Luke McKenzie | Work Placement Student | |

Principle Achievements for 2006/07

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.

The Service's principal achievements of 2006/07 can be summarised as follows:

- 1,167 volunteer days (7,002 hours) given on 115 practical tasks organised this year. Equates in £43,762 @ £6.25 per hour.
- Organised 42 walks and educational events,
- Work on the District's 9 Local Nature Reserves included 47 project days that involved 4,226 hours of staff and volunteer time.
- Work on access projects included 10 project days that involved 327 staff hours and 937 volunteer hours.
- Major access project completed at Linder's Field LNR.
- Generating a total income of £18,000 for the Council and other conservation bodies within the district.
- Successfully coordinating "The 50 Favourite Trees of the Epping Forest District Project". Securing National recognition through BBC2's "The Trees That Made Britain" Series.

Major projects in 2006/07

Again this year, much of the Service's efforts have gone into improving the District's biodiversity. Management work concentrated on 42 sites, which the District Council either owns or to which Countrycare has had a long-term commitment. In total 105 project days were organised involving nearly 8,000 hours of staff and volunteer time. This included work on 3 sites of special scientific interest, 19 Wildlife Sites and 9 Local Nature Reserves. Chigwell Row Wood LNR continues to be a major focus for the Services project work with a population of regionally significant trees and associated flora and fauna. In all 20 volunteer projects days were held on the LNR with 1,790 hours of staff and volunteer time given.

Working with the Community

For a 6th consecutive year more than 1,000 volunteer days were given to the service. Staff organised 115 practical days on 54 sites in 24 parishes across the District. In total 1,167 adult volunteer days were given and 979 children were involved in practical conservation work. By using a figure provided by English Nature, the Government's statutory agency for nature conservation, of £6.25 per hour, it is possible to put a financial value on the adult volunteers time of just under £43,762. 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

Again this year the Service worked with a range of organisations offering practical conservation activities for 11 to 16 year olds. The Service also worked with a range of youth groups and 6 schools from across the District. Nearly a thousand young people were involved in practical conservation work or a Countrycare event.

Guided walks, talks and events.

This year staff organised a total of 23 walks, talks and events aimed at increasing people's knowledge and understanding of the countryside. A total audience of 765 people attended the 23 events.

Projects for 2007/08

Key objectives include:

| Projects | Comments/Objectives |
|--|--|
| 50 Favourite Trees of the Epping Forest District. | Conclude the project with an exhibition to be held at the Waltham Abbey Museum in October 2007. |
| Epping Forest Veteran Tree Hunt | In partnership with the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Hunt undertake a veteran tree survey of the District on a Parish basis. Prioritise parishes of Stapleford Abbots, Lambourne, Ongar and Theydon Bois |
| Local Nature Reserves. | To work in partnership with Ongar Town Council to create a new nature reserve within the town beside the Cripsey Brook. Continue to investigate the designation of Norton Heath Common, High Ongar as a Local Nature Reserve. Continue to assist with the review of the management agreement for the Roding Valley Meadows LNR |
| Local Wildlife Site (LWS) Review. | Secure funding to enable a review of the LWS network that was first completed in 1991. |
| Site Management Plans and management agreements. | To complete reviews of the existing plans for Nazeing Triangle LNR and Weald Common LNR. Produce full new plans for Old Shire Lane, Waltham Abbey and Loughton Brook FSR. Investigate management agreements for All Saints Church, Berners Roding and Foster Street Burial ground. |
| Epping Forest Biodiversity Action Plan | Coordinate the production of Biodiversity Action Plan for the District in partnership with EFDC's Environmental Coordinator and Steering Group |