



# Green ideas

**Rufus Bellamy, BH&HPA National Adviser on conservation and environmental management, highlights 19 inspirational award-winning projects**

In 2008, David Bellamy launched a new Award of Special Distinction for parks participating in the Conservation Award Scheme. Parks are nominated by the Scheme's assessors for these Awards, designed to highlight particularly good ideas or examples of best practice that show the way forward. The following projects won the Award in 2010 and provide many ideas for any parks looking for ways to improve their environmental performance and become better neighbours to their local communities.

## A ranger you can carry with you

While many parks have had great success providing environmental activities led by a park ranger, not many have worked out how to provide a similar experience to those who would prefer to go it alone. One park that has cracked this challenge is Ardgartan Caravan and Camping Site in Dunbartonshire.

Visitors to Ardgartan can pick up an 'iRanger' audio guide that provides a recorded tour of the park's wildlife. The iRanger is the brainchild of the park's General Manager, Juliette Bell and was inspired by the audio guides used in museums. *'Our park rangers come up with the narrative, which I record,'* Juliette explains. *'The iRanger leads visitors around a numbered trail through the park and explains what can be seen. It also provides lots of interesting facts about the plants and animals that live in the park and even adds in a bit of fascinating local history.'*

Juliette finds that the iRanger gives her visitors a desire to find out more and many go on to look at the reference books at the park's information point or to join one of the park's many other wildlife activities.

**Ardgartan Caravan and Camping Site**



## Going car free for the countryside

One of the complaints that is sometimes levelled at the caravan industry by environmentalists is that it encourages people to drive their cars. Clipesby Hall in Norfolk has taken an innovative step to offset such criticism. Staff encourage visitors to pledge to spend car-free days while staying at the park. Those that do get a native tree planted in their name, or, if they pledge to go 'car free' for more than one day, a bird box put up on the park.

*'We promote this through word of mouth at reception, or when people sign up for cycle or canoe hire,'* says park owner, John Lindsay. *'This year we had around 300 people sign up.'* According to John, it is the children who are the keenest to go car free – they pester their parents to sign up saying, *'let's have another car free day!'*

**Clipesby Hall**



## Water saving on a massive scale

Water conservation offers parks a way to make considerable savings. Relatively simple actions, such as checking for leaks and fitting water-saving taps, can reduce utility bills by a significant amount.

Vauxhall Holiday Park in Great Yarmouth has taken a really 'big picture' approach to the water-saving challenge and is achieving 'big' savings as a result. It has fitted over 500 of its chalets and suites with water-saving devices. These include water and energy-saving showerheads and around 300 tap aerators/flow regulators. It has carried out the same wide-ranging water conservation programme in its kitchens and public areas.

The whole project amounts to a large-scale retrofit water-saving project that has been rolled out across the entire facility. According to park spokesperson, James McDonald, savings made by the project repaid the cost of the initial investment within five weeks. Overall, the project could result in cost savings on utility bills of over £1 million over a ten-year period.

**Vauxhall Holiday Park**

# with distinction



## The home-grown taste of success

Nothing tastes better than home-grown organic food and that is why Ross Park in Devon has created a wonderful walled organic vegetable garden from what was a weedy wilderness area that had limited wildlife value. *'It's something we have wanted to do for a long time as we are keen on good food,'* says park owner, Helen Lowe. She explains that the newly refurbished garden is able to supply the park restaurant with seasonal vegetables, salad and soft fruits. If there is a surplus, park customers can take their pick from the crop - in return for a small donation.

The brains for the garden's renaissance came from horticultural expert Ella Bowles who is passionate about wildlife. For this reason, biodiversity in the garden has been enhanced with the addition of open compost heaps. These have already been adopted by grass snakes for basking and breeding. Mature ivy has also been retained on the garden's high walls as invertebrate and bat refuges. Many of the crops, such as beans and peas, also provide an additional source of nectar for bees.

As well as being a source of food, the garden is also used as a nursery for propagating and nurturing bedding and shrub stock. This is used for filling in around the park.

**Ross Park**



## Deers on the doorstep

Creating and managing habitat for wildlife is probably the most important thing a park can do for the environment. The great thing is that parks can capitalise on this work by making wildlife watching an integral part of their visitors' holiday experience. One park that has done just this is Highfields Country Holiday Fishing Retreat in Lincolnshire.

*'We've thinned out a viewing area in our woodland, put up brush piles to provide cover for animals and installed hanging-log bird feeders and salt blocks for deer,'* says the park's Director, Chris Ashley. *'We've also set up a viewing hide and created a corridor through the trees to allow people to get to the viewing area without disturbing wildlife.'* According to Chris, nine people can get inside the viewing hide and, although it was only installed recently, the wildlife-spotting book inside is already full of observations - everything from Muntjac deers to woodpeckers. *'Customers come into reception really excited about what they have seen,'* says Chris. *'It really adds to their holiday experience.'*

The park has also turned about 60 acres of poor-quality arable land into a wildlife-rich grassland area. This means that the number and variety of flowering plants on the park is increasing. This work, coupled with careful woodland management, means that every time people go for a walk round the park they are bound to see something of interest.

**Highfields Country Holiday Fishing Retreat**



## Schools on red alert for squirrels thanks to new hide

Whitefield Forest Touring Park on the Isle of Wight has combined habitat management with wildlife watching. The management of the park's woodland is being implemented using a five-year management plan drawn up with the Forestry Commission. This plan aims to thin out non-native species slowly, while keeping the woodland looking good. An important part of this conservation work is a new woodland trail that has been designed to blend in with the woodland surroundings.

*'We're a relatively new park, but from the outset we have focused on helping people to see the wildlife on the park as we think this is a real selling point,'* says park owner Simon Glover. Whitefield's nature trail is made from chippings and edged with logs (both sourced from the park). The trail includes a number of site-specific information panels (all handmade from the park's timber). Simon has also installed a variety of nesting boxes around the walk and has built his own squirrel hide, which looks out over a feeding station. The feeding station is well stocked with nuts and seeds to guarantee that all guests will catch a glimpse of the red squirrels and birds (including nesting woodpeckers).

Simon and his family have taken an extra step and opened the park up to the local school. The pupils now make use of the nature walk (especially the squirrel hide) as an open classroom. This allows the young people to understand the importance of the squirrels on the park and to learn about the conservation work the park is doing.

**Whitefield Forest Touring Park**

continued...



## Celebrating 'Earth Day'

Many parks show what can be done for the environment by the way they manage their grounds or the green technology they invest in. However, Deepdale has gone one better and established an annual 'Earth Day' event at which exhibitors from all over the country come to display their green ideas and products.

The event, which has been run for the past three years, takes place on 22 April at Deepdale Backpackers and Camping in North Norfolk. *'This year we had about 150 stalls and over 10,000 people came to visit,'* says park owner Andrea Bramhall. Among the exhibitors in 2010 were solar panel manufacturers, organic farmers and even Green Party candidates.

*'The idea came from our wish to increase awareness of all the green technologies out there,'* says Andrea. *'Once we started, the thing just snowballed. One of the innovations for 2010 was a challenge that we gave local artists. This was to make something from rubbish to inspire local children to help the environment. The winner was called "Colin the Contemplator", a sculpture made out of half a rusted barrel, an old wireless and a scooter.'*

The project looks set to continue for the foreseeable future and, as the park's David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme (DBCAS) assessor notes, *'it shows how a park can make a really valuable contribution to the promotion of sustainable living.'*

**Deepdale Backpackers and Camping**



## Celebrating the taste of Somerset

One of the most important things a park can do to support the rural way of life is to promote and sell local products. The Old Oaks Touring Park in Somerset is doing just that in its shop, which sells local products such as milk, cheeses, cider and sausages. *'We know that people like high-quality, locally-produced food and that people who are coming to Somerset like to experience all the local specialities,'* says park owner James White. *'The only challenge is finding companies that can supply a small shop such as ours.'*

To highlight the local provenance of much of what they sell, The Old Oaks' new park guide includes a section about how it tries to source produce from local suppliers wherever possible. It also contains a list of items and their specific food miles - the distance that the produce has travelled to get to the park. The 'winners' are definitely the home-reared beef and lamb and the home-baked cakes and free-range eggs - all of which have come 'zero miles'.

The park also promotes local beers and the park owners have negotiated discounts with some local businesses such as taxi and car hire companies, gardens, pubs and restaurants.

**The Old Oaks Touring Park**



## Reducing flood risk and helping nature

One of the challenges facing many parks is dealing with the run-off water from roads and paved areas. Broadway Park in Worcestershire has come up with an ingenious solution. *'As we have developed our park and put down concrete and tarmac we have increased potential run-off,'* explains park and estate Director Ashton Hall. *'We therefore needed to do something as there have been flooding problems in the past in our local brook, where our run-off ends up.'*

To come up with a solution the park consulted with the Environment Agency. The system they devised involves a series of oversized pipes, which act as a reservoir. All of the units on the park have eight-inch gravel channels around their concrete bases, which are linked to the reservoir pipes. The system reduces the risk of flooding by storing rainwater that has run-off and releasing it slowly into the local brook. It also includes a dedicated headwall between the pipes and the brook, so the system can be shut off if necessary.

Not only will the scheme benefit the park and help reduce flood risk, but it should also go some way towards protecting the wildlife in the brook.

**Broadway Park**



## Opening up the countryside for all

One of the challenges facing parks that are committed to environmental improvement is making sure that everyone can enjoy getting close to the natural world. One park that has grasped this 'access' nettle firmly is Cofton Country Holidays in Devon. The park, which has a well-developed series of fishing lakes, is working to help ensure that everybody can enjoy this beautiful bit of the countryside.

*'We are committed to ensuring that everyone can enjoy our park,'* says park Director Chris Jeffrey. The park is doing everything it can to ensure that the fishing lakes are universally accessible to all.

Chris explains that in the past year a number of special wooden (FSC certified), wheelchair-friendly platforms have been installed near the entrance to the lakes area. This means everyone can enjoy peaceful recreation in this wildlife-rich area. These platforms were designed using guidelines from the British Disabled Angling Association. They feature a flat deck and guardrails and a 'stopper' to make sure that wheelchairs don't roll into the water.

Another six platforms are now planned to allow access to all corners of the park's fishing lakes.

**Cofton  
Country Holidays**



## The power of waste vegetable oil

Kelling Heath in Norfolk is always looking for new and innovative ways to save resources. This year, the park management has invested £2,000 in a processor to turn waste vegetable oil from the park's restaurant and bars into bio-diesel. This fuel is then used in four of the park's tractors and its diesel maintenance van.

*'In the past, the vegetable oil was filtered and then taken away and processed by a contractor off-site,'* says Kelling Heath's Environmental Officer Nicola Badley. *'So this was a waste stream that was dealt with properly, but it was also one that we were not benefitting from.'* To address this challenge, Nicola researched options online and discovered the processor technology that has been operational on the park since April.

The processor produces about 100 litres of bio-diesel a week, which is a little more than the park can actually use. The technology has the potential to save Kelling Heath money as the bio-diesel costs about 21p per litre to produce. The red diesel it replaces cost about 40p per litre.

Nicola is now looking at ways to take this idea forward. *'I am speaking with engineers at the moment about the possibility of replacing the old diesel boilers in our leisure centre with a combined heat and power plant,'* she says. *'Such a plant could use bio-diesel.'* According to Nicola, the approach taken by Kelling Heath could be adopted by any park that has waste vegetable oil to deal with, as the processor units come in a wide range of sizes that can process different volumes of waste.

**Kelling  
Heath**



## No hedging of bets when it comes to conservation

Wildlife needs food and shelter if it is to thrive on a park and one great way to provide these is to plant hedges. A leading park in the hedging stakes is Tyddyn Isaf Caravan Park in North Wales. Over the years, this park has planted some 40,000 native trees and shrubs in an extensive network of hedges that now provides a valuable wildlife corridor. This is particularly impressive given that nothing was there before the park was established.

*'We tried to make the park feel as a farm would have looked in the past,'* says park owner Arthur Mount, explaining his inspiration for undertaking this mammoth planting project. *'We have roughly followed the old field boundaries in our work and have put in over 20 different varieties of plants to create really rich and diverse hedges.'* Among the species that have been established around Tyddyn Isaf Caravan and Camping Site are blackthorn, hawthorn, crab apple and walnut. Some exotics, such as buddleia, have also been chosen as nectar plants to attract butterflies and other insects.

According to Arthur, his visitors love it, especially the dog walkers; but to ensure that people don't miss out on the natural wonders that the park's hedges contain, Arthur has created three straw sheep – Hazel, Daisy and Blossom. These are placed in different places around the park and everyone is challenged to go and find out where they are!

**Tyddyn Isaf Caravan  
and Camping Site**



## Sustainability and ecology going hand-in-hand

One of the hallmarks of a park that is committed to environmental excellence is the fact that it embraces best practice in both conservation and sustainability. Hurley Riverside Park in Berkshire proves this point. Over the past few years, it has made three major investments that have improved its performance significantly in both of these key areas.

In terms of sustainability, the park has invested in two different renewable energy systems in its shower block. Water is heated using solar panels and an air source heat pump. *'We feel it has been a good investment,'* says park owner Richard Burfitt, who is particularly pleased with the heat pump given its relatively small initial cost. The park has also proved its commitment to sustainability by purchasing commercial machinery to enable it to recycle all of the wood waste produced on the park. This material is now used as mulch for hedges and elsewhere around the park.

On the ecological side, the park has not only carefully managed its habitat areas with biodiversity in mind, but has also invested in a self-guided nature trail. This has ten display boards and an accompanying leaflet and quiz. The trail is accessible and Hurley is considering how to improve it in future. *'If you are quiet you can see lots of wildlife as you walk the trail,'* says Richard. *'The only problem is that the children using the trail are so excited that they make too much noise and scare away the birds and other animals!'*

**Hurley  
Riverside Park**



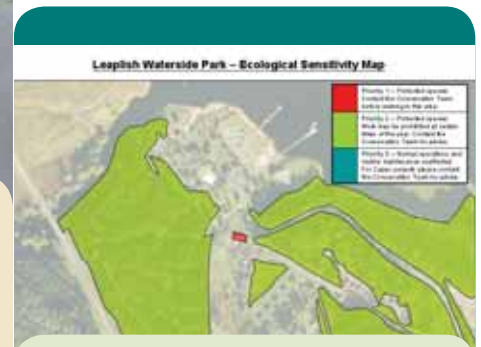
## Using partnership to educate and entertain

Many parks are pushed for resources when it comes to running environmental activities. One way forward is to work with other groups who can supply the expertise needed, and that's just what's been done at Osea Leisure Park in Essex. Here, the management has introduced a 'Wild Kids Club' in partnership with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The children who joined up took part in activities such as beach-combing and mini-beast hunts.

*'The majority of our customers are from the East End of London, so we are keen to introduce them to the countryside'* says the park's General Manager, Colin Downie. *'The project started from an open day we held when we invited local businesses and charities (including the RSPB) to visit the park.'* Colin explains that the RSPB put together a fantastic learning package for children and the park subsidised the cost of producing this resource.

This year, the project ran once a week for eight weeks during the school holidays (and is set to run again in 2011). The RSPB team set up a tent, which acted as a base for the children's work and took them out round the park's fields, looking at hedges and other habitats. They also went down to the nearby Blackwater Estuary to look at waders and other birds. According to Colin, this meant that both the children and the adults on the park could learn about - and have fun with - nature.

**Osea  
Leisure Park**



## A map to show the way for ecological management

Over the last year, the conservation team at Leaplish Waterside Park in Northumbria has worked with the Northumberland Wildlife Trust to carry out an assessment of all areas within the park complex. This fascinating work has allowed them to map the presence of protected species and priority habitats.

*'The map was something we did to get everything down in black and white. It allows us to look at the ecological impact of park management activities,'* says Tonia Reeve, the park's Operations Manager. *'The "Ecological Sensitivity Map" means that all contractors, managers and users can have quick access to environmental information about species or habitats. The map highlights areas where special care must be taken and also provides simple advice regarding contacts and appropriate actions,'* she explains.

The park's DBCAS assessor highlighted the map because, although a lot of background work went into its production, it presents important information in a manner that is accessible to anyone, including those with little or no ecological expertise. As he says, *'it is a programme that could be applied to any park and is an idea that can lead to enhancements as well as preventing potential problems.'*

**Leaplish  
Waterside Park**



## Using nature to add to a park's appeal

One of the undoubted bonuses of boosting biodiversity is that it can really add to the look of a park and boost its appeal to visitors. At Argyll Caravan Park near Inveraray, the park manager, Jim McCulloch, has used willow to screen the park's boatyard with great success.

*'I have never seen anything take off so well,'* says Jim, who currently trims his willow wall with a saw to keep it at about 7-8 foot tall. Jim has also used native shrubs and trees to camouflage a large area of banking on his park. Not only has this planting improved the look of the bank, it has also provided the location for two 'owl barrels' that have been well used in the past year. Another wildlife project that the park has recently installed has also enhanced its visual appeal. This is a beautiful wildlife pond that was established on the advice of the park's DBCAS assessor, Russell Nisbet. This pond has an active fountain aerating the water. Its aquatic vegetation is now maturing, and the pond is full of life including hundreds of damsel and dragonflies.

**Argyll Caravan Park**



## Wildlife pond becomes TV star

Ponds are a fantastic way to encourage wildlife on a park, but it's not every park pond that has been a TV star. However, that's exactly what has happened to the pond at Home Farm Caravan Park on the Isle of Anglesey, which featured on the BBC's 'One Show'.

The pond, which is home to a wide variety of wildlife including newts and dragonflies, was put in to add to the biodiversity on the park, which also boasts a beautifully-managed wild flower meadow. It sits in what was a boggy area surrounded by the meadow. It is lined with clay and fed by a natural spring that drains from adjoining fields.

*'The wildlife in the pond has colonised it naturally,'* says park owner Gwyn Jones. *'We took advice from the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) on how best to make a wildlife pond, so we did not stock it with fish. It is there for people to enjoy and to help them get that bit closer to nature.'*

**Home Farm Caravan Park**

## Boosting park's biodiversity

Many parks have nationally important habitat areas to manage and this gives their conservation work added importance. Silver Trees Holiday Park in Staffordshire shows how this important work should be done. Much of the park is a Site of Special Scientific Interest woodland, which is managed with advice from English Nature and the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. Because of the park's careful approach, it is rich in wildlife, particularly deer.

*'Managing the park for wildlife gives us a direction in which to head,'* says park owner Trevor Barber, who explains that they work hard to boost biodiversity across the park. For example, standing and fallen dead timber is left, while a small stream has a cascade of dams to create wetland for amphibians. A hibernaculum for amphibians has also been constructed and the park boasts a variety of nest boxes, bat boxes and well-stocked feeding stations. The park's latest project is a newly constructed butterfly garden. This has been planted with appropriate nectar bearing species. It has also been fenced off to protect it from deer.

*'We look at ourselves as a quiet park and our customers enjoy sitting quietly and looking at the wildlife,'* says Trevor. *'Encouraging wildlife is our ethos.'*

**Silver Trees Holiday Park**

continued...

## David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme 2010 Facts and figures

**Total parks in Scheme - 630.**



A breakdown of this figure is detailed below:

### Number of parks within each Award category



**Gold 445**



**Silver 142**



**Bronze 40**

### Number of years holding Gold Award



**5yrs Gold 38**



**10yrs Gold 35**



**15yrs Gold 8**

In addition, for 2010, 19 parks have received a Special Distinction Award from Professor Bellamy (see preceding article).



### Creating a wildlife-rich woodland

Managing a woodland to maximise its wildlife potential needs real commitment. Herons Mead Touring Park near Skegness has shown what can be done. When the park was purchased, it contained an unmanaged plantation of about five-and-a-half-acres. A lot of work was needed to transform the wood from this dark, uniform plantation into a bio-diverse woodland. The park therefore undertook a substantial management programme that included tree-thinning, coppicing, ride creation, footpath establishment and the creation of sunny glades and dead-wood features.

*'Over the last five years it has been a matter of steadily improving the wood,'* says park owner Simon Hazeldeane, who has done all the work himself with his two sons. Among the features he is most proud of is a tawny owl box (which has been used successfully) and the fact that the park has seen sparrowhawks nesting. *'You can see what we've done and the habitats we have created, it is really satisfying work and, while it makes for good marketing, it's my belief that you should give something back to nature.'*

The woodland now exhibits a fantastic range of woodland flowers and a wide variety of native trees such as limes, dogwoods, ash and cherry. ●

