



Special Distinction Awards

BH&HPA National Adviser on conservation and environmental management, Rufus Bellamy, discusses the twelve projects nominated in 2016

Every year, the David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme (DBCAS) Assessors nominate park wildlife conservation projects of particular note for a Special Distinction Award.

Below, inspirational schemes from small-scale bee conservation to ambitious habitat creation are discussed.



Habitat creation

Widemouth Bay Caravan Park, Bude, has turned a large area that was only growing corn into a wonderful wild area and habitat for bees, butterflies and other insects and animals.

'At the beginning of the year the area was strimmed and cut, leaving its gorse bushes to further grow,' said Phil Parkin, Widemouth Bay's General Manager. 'Now that there is higher grass, the additional shelter has attracted mice, voles and other small animals. The guests like it and, because it is beside the walk to our nature trail, they can stop to look at the grassland and see and hear the wildlife.'

Also praised for its habitat creation, **Silver Trees Holiday Park**, Rugeley, has been improving and creating wildlife features for the last ten years. One of its most innovative pieces of work has been creating underground animal setts linked to cameras, allowing guests to view animals in situ.

The park used piping and recycled flagstones to form the entrances, passageways and chambers of the setts. Around ten tonnes of soil, recovered from work preparing a new pitch, covered each construction and turf was used to help blend them into the landscape.

'We have four Bushnell trail cameras around the park and have recorded hours of video of tiny fawns, the fallow deer rut, many species of



birds, fox, badger and several small mammals, including voles,' Park Owner Trevor Barber explained. 'We have also been able to record a pair of tawny owls that nested in one of our boxes using a camera mounted on a tree opposite.'

Putting up the cameras has brought Silver Trees significant publicity. Kate MacRae, who has appeared on 'Springwatch' and other wildlife programmes, is Bushnell's UK Ambassador and lives close to Silver Trees. Kate has written several blogs about the wildlife on the park and, thanks to her, Silver Trees has been visited several times by BBC film crews.

'Improving our biodiversity is good, but being able to let people see the wealth of wildlife we have is even better,' added Trevor. 'Our guests think it is wonderful and enjoy the images from the trail cameras displayed on our office monitor along with images and video we upload onto our website. The cooperation and involvement of local and national wildlife bodies highlights the profile of the park.'



Mercia Marina's Mr Buzz



Save Our Bees volunteers staff a stall at Mercia Marina



The cottage garden at Mercia Marina

Honey Bee Pledge

One of the exciting developments in the DBCAS over the last few years has been the introduction of the Honey Bee Pledge, which has encouraged parks to do their part to help protect Britain's bees.

At Gainsborough Park in St Austell, the park team's bee-friendly work caught their Assessor's eye. The family-run business, whose team includes Malcolm and Pam Lee, Jo and Simon Allen and Carol Syms, installed seven hives (each home to around 30,000 bees) in the park's grounds.

'We were inspired to bring in the hives after spotting an advertisement for a beekeeping course in the local press,' said Carol. 'We completed the course, downloaded a set of hive drawings and set Malcolm the task of constructing the hives from wood that we sourced locally.'

According to Carol, everyone was delighted to see that the honey bees settled in quickly and that they started to forage on the park's flowers. *'It has encouraged many park residents to plant more bee-friendly plants in their gardens,' she said.*

The park has received great support from the local beekeepers association and members of the team have taken the basic national exam on beekeeping to extend their knowledge. Carol has also visited a local primary school with the bees in an observation hive to explain their role and the threats they face.

'Credit also must go to our park residents for the way they've rallied round to keep Gainsborough bee-friendly,' added Carol.

Mercia Marina in Willington also amazed its Assessor by involving its holidaymakers so centrally in its bee conservation.

'An article on bees in the BH&HPA Journal focused my attention,' said Robert Neill, Mercia Marina's General Manager. 'However, the real magic happened when I was chatting to two of our resident boaters who were talking about how much they missed their garden. I mentioned the Honey Bee Pledge, and suddenly one, Jane Wakeham, became our Queen Bee.'

Jane set up a group of volunteers, Save Our Bees, which started growing small patches of wildflowers. It then quickly grew to involve the production of bee costumes and t-shirts, running races and stalls, developing a cottage garden and much more.

'The real benefit has been seeing our park community working together,' added Robert. 'The guests love being involved in the project and the flowerbeds and gardens. We facilitate, encourage and support the project, but it is the volunteers who actually make it happen.'

A smaller-scale approach to bee conservation impressed at **Arrow Bank Holiday Park** in Leominster. The park has initiated an Adopt-a-Bee-Box scheme in which guests can adopt or buy a planter (made from recycled wood) filled with bee-friendly species, including catmint, verbena and eryngium.

'The idea for the scheme came from our meeting with our Assessor,' said Park Owner Glenn Jones. 'We displayed a planted-up tub outside reception and offered it for sale.'

According to Glenn, guests loved the idea, although uptake was slow at first. *'We had too big a tub, which pushed the costs up,' he explained. 'However, the scheme was still a success as a number of guests were inspired by the project to go away and do their own thing.'*

'Hopefully it's something we can build on for next year,' Glenn said, adding that the scheme has not only helped improve the wildlife value of Arrow Bank, but also provides a 'themed' look around the park.

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The queen bee (marked) and pollen stores at Gainsborough Park





Wild education

Noteworthy Farm Holiday Park both encourages wildlife and educates its guests on what they can see. The park hosts monthly social spinning and knitting groups, using wool from the 70 British Angora goats they breed and show.

Due to the popularity of these events, the park decided to renovate an old barn to create a workshop space. This also provided an opportunity to develop a corner for wildlife information and the barn is now a focus for their wildlife work.

'Getting visitors involved in bat, bird and butterfly counts, bug collection hunts and pond-dipping adventures has had a real impact,' said owner Julieann Snook-Bevis. *'One family's little boy was not keen on bugs but after a holiday here, he got over his fear. His mother told me she can't believe how he has changed.'*

The barn renovation was also done in a very environmentally-friendly way. *'We were offered pallet boxes from people working in the area and used these to re-clad the outside of the barn. We had to sort and break the boxes and make them fit for purpose. We also went on the internet for old double-glazed doors and windows.'*

Haw Wood Farm Caravan Park in Saxmundham has also sought to educate through nature. It has developed a unique and innovative bird-viewing area by cutting and pinning trees, creating a window through which guests can observe birds using a range of feeders.

'Our aim was to create a wildlife area that would be sustainable and preserve the traditional agricultural landscape,' explained the park management team, Daniel Brousson and Georgina Harrison. *'We are fortunate to have a team that has the ingenuity and practical skills to make use of all available materials.'*

In addition, Haw Wood has developed a 'nature hotel' out of old pallets, waste packaging and other reused materials. The team has also planted five acres of wild bird food and a further five acres of nectar and pollen mixes around the park, which provide a great habitat for a wide variety of species.

To encourage as many birds to the viewing area as possible the park consulted with wild bird food suppliers Vine House Farm, who provided an appropriate selection of feed mixes, feeders and advice on attracting species.

The area makes an ideal discovery zone for children. *'As part of our welcome pack, each child is given a discovery sheet to tick off a variety of wildlife that they might find in and around the park,'* added Daniel and Georgina. *'A completed sheet is rewarded with a lollipop. We even have some adults keen to claim their prize!'*

'From a commercial point of view, any feature on a park that encourages people to stay longer, or come back sooner, rewards the business,' said Daniel and Georgina. *'We will never be able to directly quantify the value of each feature to our business but happy children make happy parents, who make happy customers, who make happy staff, which all makes for good business.'*

It is an even greater challenge to persuade guests to explore the environment of the park. To help guests discover nearby Dartmoor National Park, **Langstone Manor Holiday Park** in Tavistock have mounted bespoke maps (one of which is almost floor-to-ceiling in height) to put the park in its local context. The maps also highlight all the transport links (foot/cycling/public transport), local attractions and natural features.

'We have always had a map of the local area, partly due to the scheme and also to enhance our visitors' holiday experience,' said the park's owner, Jane Kellett. *'We were lucky to make contact with a local graphic designer, Steve Carreck, who knew and loved Dartmoor and the surrounding area and, once he was given an idea of what we wanted, he was able to put the maps together.'*

According to Jane, the production process was surprisingly straightforward: *'We used OS maps and only had to pay and have permission to use them for ourselves,'* she said. *'Our own local knowledge of the area and its walks and cycle rides was the key resource needed.'*

'We have the maps and signs on the outside walls of our reception and there are often guests looking at them,' Jane added. *'It is great to know that we are promoting our local area, including Tavistock and Dartmoor.'*

Creature camp at Haw Wood



Advice

'If any park has unused land that is sheltered and south-facing, they should look to develop this area to encourage more wildlife. This is a great way to provide an area of natural beauty for guests to enjoy.'

Phil Parkin

'Any park considering installing setts and cameras should prepare fully beforehand and consult as many like-minded people and wildlife organisations as possible.'

Trevor Barber

'Parks thinking of working with their guests on a project should think of themselves as being in partnership with them. Don't be afraid of relinquishing control. Identify some good leaders and work with them. The benefits will far outweigh the costs.'

Robert Ne

'Make sure you carry out plenty of research and know the local wildlife inside out. Ensure you think of exciting, engaging activities for guests that will provide them with a fun experience. Provide a creative learning environment indoors and outdoors so guests can take information in and leave the park with new skills.'

Kevin Broster

'Awards schemes are fantastic and it gives a real focus to your environmental work. Just remember it has to be at the heart of what you are doing.'

Brian O'Brien



Nature Rockz at Berwick Holiday Park © Bourne Leisure

Nature Rockz at Craig Tara Holiday Park © Bourne Leisure