

# New Special Distinction Award springboards fresh ideas



**Rufus Bellamy, BH&HPA National Adviser on conservation and environmental management, highlights 15 award-winning projects to inspire BH&HPA members**

In 2008, David Bellamy launched a new Award of Special Distinction for parks participating in the Conservation Award Scheme. Parks were 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 projects that won show the impressive innovation and environmental commitment of parks in BH&HPA membership. They also provide a lot of inspiration for any park looking for projects to try in 2009.

It is time for all parks that are interested to sign up for this year's Conservation Award Scheme.

To find out about the Award and how to join please visit the members' website at [www.bhhpa.org.uk](http://www.bhhpa.org.uk), where the Scheme registration form and 'Advice to Park Owners and Managers' guidance is available to download.

Alternatively call Caroline Beard or Gill Thirlwell at BH&HPA central office on 01452 526911. Visit David Bellamy's new website at [www.bellamyparks.co.uk](http://www.bellamyparks.co.uk) for additional information.



## Allendale Caravan Park - putting it all down in writing

Good environmental management requires planning and one park that has taken this idea to heart - and benefitted from doing it well - is Allendale Caravan Park in the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Every year the owners of this small park take the time to produce an Environmental Assessment, which is used to measure progress, to record events and to set out an Environmental Management Plan for the forthcoming year.

*'My background is in the electrical industry, where I worked for 14 years', says owner Verona Woodhouse, explaining the motivation behind the park's environmental management efforts. 'As part of my work, I saw an environmental management plan for improving a power station. It was such a fantastic document that when I got my own business I tried to create my own version.'*

The most recent edition of the park's Assessment sets out in detail the past year's environmental achievements and details plans for how they will be built upon. It also catalogues all the wildlife that has been spotted on the park - the ecological benchmark against which the Woodhouses gauge their success.

*'We update the plan in the spring and make any necessary changes to its format', says Verona. 'For example, last year we restructured it to meet the new criteria of the David Bellamy Conservation Awards. We also try to have a key project every year. In 2008 we had children making bee hotels and put them up in the park; we also put in a pond.'*

According to Verona, although putting the plan together does take time, it has two main benefits: first, it allows the park to see what has been achieved and secondly, it allows the park team to see what resources they will need for the year ahead and to plan accordingly. *'We have planted almost 80 new trees and it is great to see how things build up', says Verona. 'Putting what we do down in black and white gives us the spur to keep improving.'*

## Castlerigg Hall Caravan and Camping Park - heat pump heroes

Alternative energy is a current buzzword, however many options are expensive and parks are understandably hesitant to 'take the plunge'. Castlerigg Hall Caravan and Camping Park in the Lake District is one park that has put its money where its mouth is. Here, after rigorously researching the options, the park has invested around £23,000 in a ground-source system to heat its refurbished toilet and shower building.

*'We wanted a system that emphasised our commitment to the environment and which would reduce our fuel bills in the long term,'* says park owner and manager David Jackson, who explains that he got the idea to install a heat pump when he read about systems used in Scandinavia and Canada. *'I realised it wasn't new technology and with such large sums potentially involved I wanted an environmentally sustainable energy source that had been proven to work over a long period of time.'*

Castlerigg's system uses a network of pipes buried under part of its tent field. This picks up the warmth from the soil and, using a heat pump, runs an underfloor heating system and heats water for showers and taps. *'We have yet to have a full test of the system,'* says David. *'But based on the sections of the building that were open last season it has worked very well so far. The building was always warm and the amount of heating oil that we used fell by approximately 70%.'*

The system was installed along with a range of energy and water-saving devices (these included movement sensor taps and push-button shower controls coupled with low-water-usage shower heads). The installer of all these gizmos suggested an 8-10 year payback period and this looks likely to be an accurate assessment. For the park, other benefits include the fact that the system keeps mould at bay, as it is possible to heat the building in the winter with what is basically free energy.

Not surprisingly, the park now intends to let everyone know what it is doing for the environment by putting up an interpretation panel on the building and also running a feature in its newsletter.

## Devon Cliffs Holiday Park - lending a helping hand

Being a good neighbour can mean many things, but one park that has really reached out to its surrounding community is Devon Cliffs, near Littleham in Devon. Littleham is one of the more deprived communities in the region and one of the park managers, John Ball, met with the local police, social services, youth clubs and Community Action Group to see if the park could do anything to help.

Together they initiated the 'Clean up Littleham Campaign' whereby teams (John and staff from Devon Cliffs and members of the youth clubs) went through the village, cleared gardens of rubbish (including sofas, fridges, etc.), tidied and sorted the gardens.

Following this, the local young people have been given the incentive of attending the youth clubs for a certain number of weeks in order to receive a free day's use of the amenities at Devon Cliffs. John's involvement has helped to clean up Littleham, which presents the first impression visitors get of the area before they arrive at Devon Cliffs. It has also created long-term relationships with the young people immediately next to the park, with a view to nurturing a future pool of employees. The scheme has fostered good relations with the local community and thereby played a part in reducing antisocial behaviour.

Although it is early days, this initiative could have a profoundly positive effect on the local young people. It has already helped promote understanding and appreciation of the natural assets of the local area.

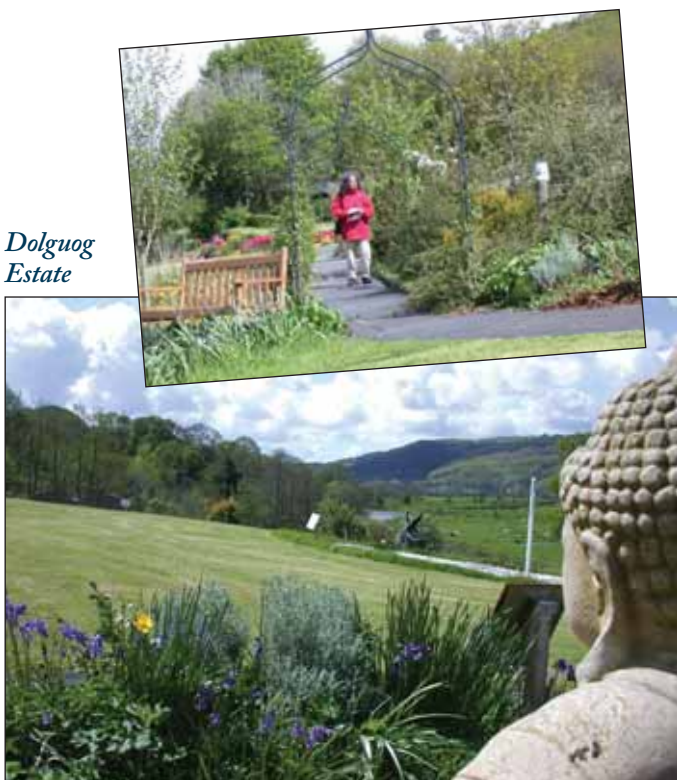
## Dolguog Estate - a garden of peace and nature

**Biodiversity is not only beautiful, it can also stir the senses and that is something that is highlighted at Dolguog Estate in Machynlleth, Powys. This park and hotel is situated in the heart of the Dyfi Valley and is set amid woodlands filled with specimen trees and beautiful gardens. Dolguog is rich in wild flowers and sustains an abundance of wildlife.**

One of the highlights is 'Grandma's Garden', which was designed by the park's owner Diana Rhodes in 2004 and is open to park residents and the public. It contains seven mini-gardens which stimulate the five senses. Every corner of each mini-garden is full of natural wonders and beautiful sculptures, for example, 14 rose arches lead on from a Buddha statue and a viewing 'eye' through which visitors can see the surrounding landscape. It is a delight to walk round the garden and many find it a place of great peace and calm.

*'The gardens are about nature, healing and linking cultures,'* says Diana, who has created corners of the gardens for people with different disabilities and health problems and has strived to make the gardens sanctuaries for wildlife as well. The gardens also support causes in the community and admission money is given to local charities, such as the RNLI, and to people who need specific medical help. The gardens are continually evolving and a large labyrinth ringed by azaleas, potentillas and buddleias is the latest addition and ensures an inundation of butterflies in the summer. *continued...*

Dolguog Estate



## Elm Cottage Touring Park - introducing the ultimate convenience

One of the most exciting developments in the battle to reduce the environmental impact of parks is the 'green' facilities block. One park that is leading the way here is Elm Cottage Touring Park, which is situated in the beautiful Vale Royal, right at the heart of mid-Cheshire.

The park's recently refurbished block incorporates a wide variety of environmental technologies and ideas. It is heated by a geothermal system that takes the heat from the surrounding ground, is fitted with all the latest in water-conservation technology and is constructed using attractive sustainably-produced timber by local contractors. It is fully adapted for people with special needs.

*'We moved to the park about seven years ago and it had a small toilet block which we knew we wanted to replace using as much green technology as we could afford'*, says park owner Chris Buss, explaining how the project started. Chris found that solar panels were too expensive for his budget, so these were discounted in favour of the heat pump system.

This system, which comprises five 80-metre loops of pipe filled with a brine solution was a good bet as the park had plenty of land under which to bury it. A heat exchanger takes the heat the pipes pick up from the ground to provide hot water for taps and showers. The system also directly supplies an underfloor heating system. *'We opened the system on the first May bank holiday 2008'*, says Chris. *'We had a gas burner as a backup, we used this the first weekend and haven't had to use it again'*. To meet Chris' financial targets, the system needs to pay for itself in 10 years. He is quietly confident. *'The way fuel prices are going, I think that yes it will. It also gives us a system that will make the park easier to sell on'*, he adds.

## Finlake Holiday Park - cleaning up for wildlife

Often an environmental eyesore can be an environmental opportunity in disguise. This was the case at Finlake Holiday Park in Devon. Here, an area that was previously a dumping ground and a 4x4 driving area has been turned into a natural haven, complete with a series of wildlife ponds.

*'The project was done on the advice of local ecologist Peter Beale who suggested that the park put in a couple of ponds and let it go back to nature'*, says James Gourlay, the Area Manager. *'We did a lot of tidying up because it was an eyesore. The wildlife is now flourishing. I was up there walking with my children and saw deer and many other animals.'*

The project is an example of striking while the iron is hot: when the project was suggested, the park was having some other development done, so the right machinery was on hand to do the digging (at minimal cost thanks to the support of the contractor). To get the best habitat for wildlife large, shallow ponds were dug in the clay soil.

*'The flora that has emerged around the ponds is most interesting'*, says Peter Beale, who is particularly excited about the fact that some unusual and rare plants, such as the Penny Royal, have bloomed, their seeds probably brought in by birds. He explains that the new area is already floristically rich and is a habitat for a range of wildlife, in particular amphibians, dragonflies, butterflies and other invertebrates. *'This summer I am going to go up and count the dragonflies'*, he says.

## Holgates Caravan Park - managing a special environment

Many parks are set in particularly beautiful landscapes and must therefore go that extra mile to manage their land with the environment in mind. One park which shows just how it should be done is Holgates Park in Silverdale, Lancashire, close to the Lake District.

Holgates is in a designated area of stunning beauty and is close to a particularly important and protected limestone habitat. In keeping with its surroundings, the landscaping of the park is outstanding; from the outside, and even within the park, a visitor is completely unaware of the number of caravans and holiday homes on the park. There is wonderful use of local stone in the buildings and boundaries as well as around holiday homes to make sure that everything blends in.

Native habitat, the majority of which is mature woodland, screens the park, with each holiday home carefully placed into a series of glades. The colour and design of each home is sensitive to the landscape and all the amenity blocks and facilities are of the highest environmental quality with excellent use of limestone and timber.

Managing the park woodlands is an ongoing process and the park works with a local landscape expert, Roger Cartwright, to ensure that their work maximises the biodiversity of the park. This work involves careful coppicing and hedge-laying. The aim is to allow regeneration of the woodland understorey. Orchids are just one of the interesting species that have flowered because of this ongoing work.

*'We've been here for 50 odd years as a family, so we could take it for granted'*, says Frank Holgate, whose family owns the park, *'but we don't'*.

*Kelling Heath*



## Kelling Heath Holiday Park - harvesting rainwater and the sun

Water and energy are the two key 'sustainability challenges' facing parks and Kelling Heath Holiday Park has tackled both in the refurbishment of one of its amenity blocks. The North Norfolk park has invested £180,000 installing environmentally-friendly equipment which will harness the power of solar energy and save the equivalent of six-and-a-half touring caravans full of water every year.

Kelling Heath is already internationally recognised for its contribution to environmentally-friendly tourism, thanks to initiatives that include its successful red squirrel breeding programme and the management of its rare habitats. It is, however, not a park to rest on its laurels. *'With green tourism and environmental awareness at the top of everyone's agenda, we thought it was time to see what we might also do to manage our resources in a more effective and environmentally sustainable way'*, says park Manager Mark Durrant. *'This is the first time we have incorporated this type of sustainable technology, and we will be monitoring its success to see if it is something we could be applying in other areas - such as the health club, or the main lounge areas.'*

The new facility block boasts three environmentally-friendly features - rainwater harvesting, solar water heating, and a ground source air exchange that uses a system of air-filled underground pipes and a heat exchanger to provide either heating or air conditioning as required.

*'Rainwater is collected from the roof via the guttering and then directed into a 6,000 litre holding tank underground'*, said Mr Durrant. *'From there it can be supplied through to all the toilets and urinals.'* The collection and use of rainwater is expected to save 119,600 litres of water a year. It is estimated that the solar heating for the showers could save enough electricity to prevent 5,739kg of carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere annually.

## Oakdown Touring and Holiday Caravan Park - bringing a golf course to life

Wild flower meadows are one of the delights of parks that are doing their bit for the environment and at Oakdown Touring and Holiday Caravan Park in Devon, the park's team has surpassed itself.

The golf course at Oakdown, originally opened by David Bellamy, is a rolling landscape of mown and long grass with impressive swathes of wild flowers. A clay-lined pond has been created which swarms with swallows and dragonflies. Nearby, a dew pond has also been dug out and a 'Victorian' reed bed has been planted, which helps deal with the park's sewage. This reed bed is overlooked by a large bird hide, which is well stocked with posters and identification books. From the hide, a path connects through to the tranquil walkway of the neighbouring donkey sanctuary so that visitors can have a delightful circular walk.

The brains behind the golf course wild flower meadow and the rest of the habitat creation, is park owner Doreen Franks. Mrs Franks ensured that everything was done to accommodate wildlife as the course was created. She introduced a range of wild flowers herself, but also says that she has had a helping hand or two. *'People come and walk around and love the flowers and then come back with a handful of seeds or a root from some wild native plant from their gardens for me to try.'*

The management of the golf course is done to promote the blossoming of as much biodiversity as possible. The rough and semi-rough are cut once a year, along with the wild flower meadow. This gives lots of cover and food for insects and other animals. All clippings are also removed from the wild flower areas so that the nutrient levels in the soil are reduced (too many nutrients would allow weeds and grasses to choke the wild flowers).

The payback for the park is the fact that not only do they get lots of wildlife visiting, they also gets lots of repeat bookings as people come back to see the beauty that is Oakdown, again and again. *continued...*

Oakdown Touring and  
Holiday Caravan Park



## Sandy Balls Holiday Centre - leading the way in woodland management

Boosting biodiversity is what the David Bellamy Conservation Awards are all about and one park that has invested heavily in doing just that is Sandy Balls Holiday Centre, a park nestled in 120 acres of glorious woods and parkland in the New Forest.

The park is investing approximately £30,000 per year to turn a former plantation into a wooded valley full of native trees. The park's team has worked closely with the Forestry Commission to ensure that this restoration project has the maximum benefit for wildlife. However, as the work involves significant felling, they have had to absorb some inevitable criticism from those who dislike tree felling whatever the reason.

*'Many guests were used to seeing a thick forest of pines and they thought that this was healthy, but it was pretty dead from an ecological point of view'*, says Brett Turner, the park's Operations Director. He explains that the project has involved taking out a lot of non-native trees and most of the rhododendrons which had taken over the forest. To get guests 'onside', the park has conducted guided walks to explain what is being done and why.

After just two years, the project is now paying off. *'We have started to see native trees such as oaks, beech and birch all coming through and there are also patches of heath land plants'*, says Brett. *'Butterflies are now coming back into the woodland, as is the bird life.'* Plans for the regeneration project include more replanting with native trees grown by the park in nurseries in surrounding fields.

This project shows the importance of well-planned management and the need for a long-term view and strategy when it comes to wildlife conservation.

## Sandwich Leisure Park - helping everyone enjoy the countryside

The David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme is committed to making sure that everyone can enjoy the great British countryside. That's why disability access is one of the criteria that are used to judge parks and why Sandwich Leisure Park in Kent have been given an Award of Special Distinction for its scheme to provide specialist accessibility.

To kick-start the project an area of the park has been adapted to give wheelchair access to a custom-made holiday home designed for users with limited mobility in mind. This is a groundbreaking initiative in partnership with the holiday home manufacturer Pemberton.

The two-bedroom home is built to the highest standards and has been designed to be easy to get around for wheelchair users. For example, there is easy access via a ramp through double doors and the spacious shower room and toilet areas have been adapted for easy use. The extra large shower base is recessed into the floor to provide level access and a folding shower seat and lift-up toilet rail are fitted in addition to the essential fixed support and grab rails. It is hoped to expand this scheme once it is established and if it proves a success, another area of the park has been set aside with this intention.

The special holiday home isn't the only thing the park has done to assist those with disabilities. Its new play area has been designed for visitors with limited mobility in mind, as has its toilet block, which is part of the RADAR key access scheme and boasts ample easy-access facilities with showers and toilets for those with limited mobility.

## Thorney Lakes and Caravan Park - a good neighbour

The rural economy needs all the help it can get these days and parks can play a vital role in providing much-needed employment and custom for local businesses and people. One park that has gone the extra mile to be a 'good neighbour' is Thorney Lakes, a camping and caravanning park situated near Muchelney on the Somerset Levels.

The owners, Richard and Ann England, have worked for years to involve local people and to invite them onto their land to enjoy it with them. They support local charities and environmental groups and host a 'green festival', which attracts about 1,000 people on to their park. Their 'bridge-building' approach is backed up in a practical way by their determination to support the local economy. They use local tradespeople around their park - for example, they used local thatchers to refurbish a small information point, even though this was a far more expensive option than using modern roofing material. They were promoting local food and drink long before 'eat local' became a mainstream concern and they keep building new links with suppliers each year. For example, in 2008 they invited a mobile butcher who supplies local meat to visit their park once a week.

Perhaps, most impressively, Thorney Lakes is also part of a local tourism network. Thanks to this network, the village of Muchelney produces an annual leaflet that promotes 18 local businesses and visitor attractions such as food suppliers, a pottery, the visitor centre and the nearby abbey.

*'This helps us all with our businesses,'* says Ann England, who explains that it also gives her visitors a richer holiday experience. *'Unless people know what is in the area, they aren't going to have the best holiday they can,'* she explains.



Sandy Balls Holiday Centre

## Tom's Field Campsite and Shop - a DIY approach to sustainability

When it comes to alternative energy Tom's Field, a park situated amongst the beautiful Purbeck Hills, shows that a bit of lateral thinking and a do-it-yourself approach can go a long way towards helping the planet. Here, the owner John Wootton has turned an old Nissen hut into a unique solar water heater. *'We've had the campsite for over 15 years', explains John. 'We inherited this dilapidated Nissen hut and used to joke that when it rained you got wetter inside than out. But once it was refurbished, the shiny corrugated iron made me think I could turn it into a solar system.'*

To make his dream a reality, John painted the iron sheets and ran a garden hose along the corrugations of about three quarters of the building (which now houses an activity room and workshop). The system was completed with four copper storage cylinders and a series of thermostat gauges and pumps that control it. It now acts as a heating system for the adjacent shower block and has cut the park's use of gas cylinders by half.

Although John has an engineering background, the project was a first for him - he got the information to do it from a book he picked up at the Centre for Alternative Technology at Machynlleth in Wales.

The project hasn't just saved Tom's Field money, it has also pleased its visitors: *'Our guests are very interested in what we have done', says John. 'Most of them, like us, are very concerned about the environment.'*

## Trevella Park - celebrating its anniversary naturally

It's not surprising that Trevella Park in Cornwall has chosen to celebrate its 50th anniversary by unveiling a project to help the environment. The park has been an award winner in the David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme for 10 years and has been working continuously during this time to improve its environment for wildlife.

To mark its anniversary year, visitors are being asked to donate £10 to buy from a list of suitable trees and shrubs selected by the Cornwall Wildlife Trust. This is a two-year project and, as the trees are purchased, they will be planted around the park. The Wildlife Trust will also benefit financially from this scheme, as all monies raised (less 15% administration) will go to help fund its projects.

*'Basically what we are trying to do is to create corridors using tree avenues and hedges. We are also trying to fill in areas by planting new trees',* says park Manager Barry Templeman, who explains that the project will enhance the park for holiday visitors and wildlife alike. *'We are giving people a certificate so that they can have a sense of ownership of the project as a whole',* he adds.

The next step in the project is to get a local garden centre to make labels for the trees so that people know where to find the tree that they asked to be planted.

This is a splendid example of involving visitors with their environment, enhancing the local environment and enabling other environmental projects to be undertaken. It is also a great way to celebrate a birthday!

*Trevella Park*



## White Acres Holiday Park - helping children to understand the environment

Getting people switched on to the environment is one of the most important things a park can do for conservation and one park that is getting the next generation in touch with nature in an imaginative way is White Acres Holiday Park in Cornwall.

This park has created a vegetable and fruit garden to enable youngsters to get involved in food production and to make the link between the food in the ground and the food on their plates.

*'The project started with a polytunnel at the back of our offices and then expanded',* says Jo the park's entertainments manager, who explains that the scheme allows children to be involved at every stage of the growing process, from planting through to harvesting. Once children have picked the peppers and tomatoes and other foodstuffs that the garden grows, they can then go over to the park's restaurant and use them to create delicious pizzas and other food.

The park runs two or three sessions for children in the garden every week - these sessions can attract anything up to 30 children at a time.

*'The garden is open all the time and children can come in to do weeding and to help themselves to vegetables when they are ready',* Jo explains. *'The children love it and get nice and grubby. It is amazing how few children come from homes with a vegetable garden and how many don't realise that food comes out of the ground.'*

The project really makes children aware of where their food comes from, the work involved in producing it and how a meal is produced from the raw materials. The park also does a range of other environmental activities for children, including nature rambles and bug hunts. ●

*Tom's Field Campsite and Shop*

