

CONSERVATION MARKETING MAGIC



Rufus Bellamy, BH&HPA National Adviser on conservation and environmental management, offers advice on how parks can benefit from their green credentials

It would be a brave person who would predict exactly how the current financial crisis will play out in terms of bookings and sales in the coming months. One thing is certain - everyone in the industry will be working extra hard to make sure that they get their share of the much vaunted surge in 'stay-in-the-UK' tourism that all the newspapers have been predicting. This means that everyone will be looking for that extra something to make their marketing stand out from the crowd. For over 650 parks across the country that extra something could well be their David Bellamy Conservation Award, which is not only an acknowledgement of what a park has been doing for the environment, but is also a way of letting potential customers know that the park has something special to offer.

'If we put aside the fact that the Award Scheme is all about good works,' says the BH&HPA PR Adviser Jon Boston, 'then it is clear that it has another important role as a marketing tool.' Jon explains that, in his experience, one of the key marketing benefits of the Awards is the fact that it gives a park a high-profile endorsement. *'Ever wondered how much it costs some manufacturers to get a famous personality to endorse their products?'* he asks (and he is someone who knows just how much these things do cost). According to Jon, the answer is thousands - and more often tens of thousands - of pounds. *'A park's David Bellamy Award has cost a tiny fraction of that,'* he says, *'yet the park is able to use his Award's endorsement in their advertising.'*

The great thing about the Award is that it is an instantly recognisable name that is linked in the public mind to environmental excellence. Jon Boston sums up the value of this aspect of the Award Scheme: *'Even if a customer is not environmentally aware, he or she will recognise David Bellamy's name as a well-known personality. And it's this famous figure who is recommending a park as a great place to live or stay.'*

Better yet, an Award-winning park can use the implicit endorsement that comes with their Award in a number of

different ways according to the message it wants to put across. If it's the beautiful countryside and away-from-it-all aspects that a park wants to promote, David Bellamy is an instantly recognisable ambassador for unspoiled rural life. He is widely known to younger people as a friendly and approachable figure with a bubbly and eccentric personality. So if it's families that a park is wanting to attract, his thumbs-up will also make this audience sit up and take notice.

An Award also gives a park automatic inclusion in the David Bellamy Awards section on www.ukparks.com and in the annual Green Parks Directory that is cover mounted on 'Practical Caravan' - free publicity of the best kind!

To gauge the impact and importance of the David Bellamy Conservation Awards, a quick Google search will show that many parks get good press coverage because of their Awards. 'Park wins Gold Award', 'David Bellamy Salutes Park' and 'Holiday Parks are Tops' are just three recent examples of headlines in newspapers (and on websites) because they have achieved success in the Scheme.

'Any park that makes the relatively small effort to get a press release out will, in all likelihood, get press coverage,' says Jon Boston, noting that any press coverage can be used effectively on a park's website. He is also bullish about the importance of getting coverage of a park's Award online. *'If a story is put online by a newspaper then this increases the coverage of the park and can take the story to a national and even international audience,'* he says. Jon cites the case of Skelwith Fold in Cumbria, which highlighted its Gold Award in the Scheme when it let the media know what it was doing to help red squirrels. The park's press release got them a story on the BBC international news website headlined: *'Staff at a Lake District holiday park are claiming victory in their two-year battle to establish a population of red squirrels on the site.'* *continued...*





Photographs feature Tree Tops Caravan Park

One other recent example of a park that has got its name into the papers thanks to the work it is doing for the environment is Tom's Field near Swanage. The park is relatively small, taking only tents and motorhomes, yet thanks to a press release that highlighted the fact that it had won a David Bellamy Conservation Award, the park got a mention in the 'Bournemouth Echo'. Online coverage of the park's green activities also announced: *'Tom's Field Campsite in Swanage has been recognised as a shining example of sustainable tourism by David Bellamy, the conservationist. It received a distinction for a solar-powered hot water system to supply the site's showers and washing-up facilities.'*

Although it is still early in the season, and so difficult to determine if the Award and press coverage has made a significant difference to the number of visitors, the owners of Tom's Field are convinced that the Award does make a difference. *'People are always interested in the environmental and conservation work we do and we inform them fully about the David Bellamy Scheme,'* says Sarah Wootton. *'We have the certificate displayed on the park and we will be preparing a page on our website about the Scheme and the Award giving a link to the BH&HPA.'*

Another park that is sold on the idea of using the Awards to market itself is Ballyness Caravan Park in Bushmills, Northern Ireland. *'The Bellamy Award is great,'* says park manager Olive Dunlop, who explains that, unlike other Awards, they find it much easier to make a news story out of their David Bellamy Gold. *'With the David Bellamy Awards, you can actually say what you are doing and what people can see,'* explains Olive. *'For example, we have Irish hares on the park, so we can let people know that they'll see them if they come and visit.'* The park, which in the past has received a lot of press coverage as Northern Ireland's first winner, will be using the Awards as part of a big marketing push in 2009. The management also think that the Award itself, with or without press coverage, is a good thing. *'We get a lot of people who come onto the park who recognise the Award and it does encourage them to return,'* says Olive.

The importance of the David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme as a marketing tool can only grow: more and more holiday decisions are being made with regard to their environmental impact. In fact, the emerging boom in UK holidays this year is being attributed in part to people's desire to reduce their carbon footprint by not travelling overseas. If a

park gets one of the Awards, it is counted among the growing number of holiday providers that are doing something positive about the environment and the natural world. An Award can therefore only increase a park's competitive edge in the growing 'green tourism' market.

Getting a park in the papers

If BH&HPA members run a park with an Award and they want to get their park in the news, they need to let the local media (and that includes newspapers, TV and radio) know what they have achieved. At the end of this section is an example of a press release which has been prepared by Jon Boston. By simply substituting the park's details for the fictitious park mentioned, members will have an instant press release ready to send out to local media. It's that simple!

When writing a press release, do feel free to elaborate on aspects of the park which are relevant to the Award, and to add any additional comments - but try not to make the main text much longer than 50% of the example. Jon suggests retaining the single-spaced section entitled 'Note to Editors' which appears after the end of the text for publication. This gives journalists more information with which to elaborate the story if they wish, and could save a phone call to the park.

The press release should be typed on the park's own letterheading, double spaced, without block letters, italics or underlining in the main text, and then despatched (by email, fax or post) to local editors. It should be sent to all media (press, radio and television) which cover the area where the park is based (details of media contacts can be obtained from Jon). Please remember that the press release should contain the park's full address and telephone number - plus the name of someone at the park who will be able to provide additional information if required.

There are a number of additional ways in which park owners and managers can publicise their park's David Bellamy Conservation Award throughout 2009. For example, they can make any 'green' initiatives on the park - such as a wildlife-friendly garden competition, the restoration of a pond or the erection of bat boxes - a newsworthy story. In such situations, why not invite the press along to photograph the competition winner or official 'opening' of the project? Their interest will



be increased if the park can create a good photo opportunity - perhaps by asking along a well-known local community or political figure to perform the ceremony.

Children, of course, are always good photo-subjects for the press - and BH&HPA members needn't wait until there's a particular event before involving them and the press. For example, they could invite children from a local nursery or primary school to make their park the subject of a conservation project. Or the local Guide or Scout leader might welcome an invitation for his/her troop to be shown around the grounds, perhaps as part of badge-work. Either way, the press may well see this as a good photo-story.

According to Jon, the most important message here is not to hold back until getting 'a really good story'. *'The bread and butter of regional daily and weekly press is small news items about what's going on in the area,'* he says. *'Just a short three-paragraph item about (for example) the success of recycling bins will keep attention focused on the park.'*

Letting people know about the Award

If a park has won a David Bellamy Award, it makes sense to spread the news of the Award as far and as wide as possible - and one of the most important tools for this purpose is the park's customer database, comprising both previous visitors, and those making (or who have made) enquiries.

Send a letter announcing the Award to customers. The letter can be sent out either by itself - by email or post - or as part of a mailing, which may also include the park's current brochure. The purpose of the letter should be to encourage repeat visits (in the case of touring and letting customers), and to let present customers (including holiday home owners) share in the park's pride at having achieved this accolade. Stress what this Award means to them as holidaymakers or residents, i.e. recognition that 'their' park is amongst an elite in the UK where visitors can enjoy an exciting extra dimension to their stays.

If the park offers special deals as part of their marketing policy (perhaps in the shoulder seasons), then the announcement of the Award is an excellent justification for making a special offer in spring or autumn. What's more, if the park's Award is featured in the local press, a copy of or quotation

from the article is also an excellent enclosure to make with the letter. Again, this is an ideal item to reproduce in any newsletters the park sends out.

Potential customers who have made enquiries - and received a brochure but not yet booked a holiday or bought a holiday home - should also be alerted to the park's good news. If they have not yet chosen their holiday destination for 2009 (or park for a holiday home), this mailing will remind them of the park's existence and give them another good reason for coming.

If the park offers something special for children (such as a nature trail, a pond for dipping or just the chance to make new wildlife discoveries), the Award is a perfect chance to play up these opportunities - and to emphasise the 'outdoor classroom' elements of a park holiday. Learning more about the countryside is a fun and valuable experience, and families may well value this additional dimension to their stay.

For residential park owners, current residents should receive the news first, and be thanked for their part in helping the park to gain the Award (if appropriate!). Many parks attribute new business to recommendations from existing residents - and this accolade will make everyone even prouder of where they live. With this in mind, the Award will also provide a reason to contact people who have expressed an interest in purchasing a holiday home, telling them of the Award and inviting them to visit again.

Use every trick in the book

There are many other opportunities to promote the park's Award, and to indicate to buyers that the park has been selected by David Bellamy for an important national accolade which ranks the business amongst an elite of residential parks in the UK. These include:

- **Advertising:** even if the park limits advertising to a directory-style entry in a guide, the Award (and include its logo) can still be mentioned.

- **Letterheadings:** the Award symbol can be incorporated at the top or bottom with a short description of what it means.

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■ **Property lists** etc: don't ignore any item of print as an opportunity to post a reminder about the Award.

■ **Brochure:** there may well be a chance to give the Award a separate section here. The text could also incorporate copies of any press clippings.

■ **Website:** park owners and managers might dedicate a special page to their conservation work which is updated regularly with the park's latest initiatives.

■ **Voice mail:** why not? *'Thank you for calling the Beeches, a David Bellamy Conservation Award residential park. If you would like a copy of our brochure...'*

■ **Park noticeboard:** try and keep it updated with the park's latest conservation and wildlife news, but retain a strong presence for details of the Award and copies of press clippings, photographs of the park owners with David Bellamy receiving the Award, a copy (or original) of the certificate etc.

How BH&HPA promotes the Awards

Throughout 2009, BH&HPA will be running a publicity campaign to heighten public awareness of the Bellamy Awards. This campaign will be stressing that visitors and residents on Award-winning parks will not only be supporting the environmental efforts of these parks, but will also be able to enjoy an extra 'natural' dimension to the park experience.

BH&HPA will be issuing news stories about the 2008/9 Awards to property and tourism editors on national daily and Sunday newspapers, regional daily newspapers and monthly publications. BH&HPA will then embark on a rolling programme of PR work covering all the different media areas mentioned so far. This will include feature articles syndicated to regional press and magazines, plus the issue of information packs to relevant writers.

For the past few years, BH&HPA has used local radio as a powerful and successful medium on behalf of awarded holiday parks. In 2009 BH&HPA will be alerting them to the many interesting stories which lie behind the Awards - and the parks which have achieved them.

BH&HPA's press office is in daily contact with journalists throughout the UK, and every opportunity is taken to ensure that the Awards are mentioned in the context of relevant property articles in regional and national media. When possible, the Association will bring individual parks to the attention of writers when, for example, a particular region of the country is being covered in a feature or article.

Get help for the park

To receive individual help with Award publicity contact the Association's PR consultants, Jon J Boston Associates. The consultancy undertakes a wide range of tasks, from helping to draft website and advertising copy to ensuring TV, radio and press coverage of a park's Award event. If BH&HPA members would like help with a specific task, please call Jon Boston on 01768 895225. There is no cost to BH&HPA members for this service.



Sample press release

(Your letterheading)

PRESS RELEASE from Beeches Holiday Park: November 2009
Newton Road, Portland, Countyshire. Telephone 0117 956567

PORTLAND PARK SCOOPS TOP GREEN ACCOLADE

Professor David Bellamy has named Beeches Holiday Park in Portland as one of the UK's greenest holiday spots - and awarded it a special accolade for protecting and enhancing the natural world.

Set in 23 acres of Countyshire countryside, Beeches Holiday Park provides 70 luxury holiday homes for hire, and also has facilities for touring caravans and tents.

Over the past 10 years, owners Jack and Wendy Jones have planted hundreds of indigenous trees on the park, creating a natural haven for deer, red squirrels, badgers and other wildlife.

The carefully managed pond is also a focus for many rare bird species, and was recently discovered to be a breeding ground for the threatened Parmesian Crested Newt.

Jack and Wendy's efforts have now won them a David Bellamy Conservation Award, described by Professor Bellamy as the 'Green Olympics' for holiday parks.

David Bellamy said he was '*absolutely amazed*' when he discovered just how much was being done by holiday parks to protect and enhance the environment.

'Many parks like this have created wildlife wonderlands, and I think it's time they were given deserved recognition for their big commitment,' said Professor Bellamy.

Beeches' Award was made following a detailed audit of the park's environmental policies, supported by comments made by holidaymakers.

Jack and Wendy's future plans for Beeches Holiday Park include the reintroduction of species of wild flowers once common in the area, including the protected Marsh Orchid.

The park is a member of the British Holiday & Home Parks Association, the park industry's official body, which is assisting Professor Bellamy with the Conservation Awards project.

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More press information from Jack or Wendy Jones on 0117 956563

NOTE TO EDITORS

More than 600 holiday parks have earned Gold, Silver or Bronze accolades in this year's David Bellamy Conservation Awards.

'Britain's parks are bursting with biodiversity!' says Professor Bellamy. *'They are the nation's favourite get-away-from-it-all locations, and also a major point of contact between people and the countryside. They are therefore very important centres of education, and a wonderful place to go and experience wrap-around nature. That's why these Awards play an important role in helping parks to keep the green flag flying!'* he added.

Parks wishing to enter for a Bellamy Award must first complete a detailed questionnaire covering different aspects of their environmental policies, and describing what positive conservation steps they have taken. Next, the park must receive an independent assessment from a local wildlife or conservation body which is familiar with the area.

The conservation audit of parks covers many environmental issues - ranging from aspects such as the care of hedgerows and wild flowers, to the siting of bird boxes and the development and protection of reed beds and wildlife ponds. Professor Bellamy has also looked at aspects of park management which do not directly effect the immediate environment, but which are important in overall conservation terms - such as the use of unbleached paper for holiday brochures, installing long-life light bulbs and recycling waste.

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